Dickson
BIBLICAL RESEARCH LIBRARY

Master Volume
IV

Dickson
Biblical Research Library

Master Volume IV

Roger E. Dickson

www.africainternational.org
Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa
BRL Master Volume IV
2022
Copyrights of Bible text:
International King James Version
(Africa International Missions 1987 - NT, 2011 - OT)

CONTENTS

BOOK 32
MAKING DISCIPLES IN A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

	Introduction	Page 12
Chapter 1	**Social Globalization**	Page 13
Chapter 2	**Religion In A Global Culture**	Page 16
Chapter 3	**Anticipating The Future**	Page 25
Chapter 4	**Transitions In Church History**	Page 28
Chapter 5	**Rediscovering Our First Love**	Page 34
Chapter 6	**Vision For The Future**	Page 39
Chapter 7	**A Home For The Refugee**	Page 43
Chapter 8	**Riches For The Poor**	Page 47
Chapter 9	**High Demands Of Faith**	Page 49

BOOK 33
21ST CENTURY RESTORATION

	Introduction	Page 56
Chapter 1	**Observations**	Page 57
Chapter 2	**The Awakening**	Page 58

BOOK 34
RESTORATION!

	Introduction	Page 70
Chapter 1	**Restoration Of A Christ-Centered Life**	Page 72
Chapter 2	**Why The Need For Restoration?**	Page 73
Chapter 3	**The Restoration Has Begun**	Page 75
Chapter 4	**Retorational Attitudes**	Page 76
Chapter 5	**Restoration Or Reformation**	Page 77
Chapter 6	**A Biblical Restoration Principle**	Page 78
Chapter 7	**A Foundation For Restoration**	Page 79
Chapter 8	**The Task Of Restoration**	Page 81
Chapter 9	**Restoring The Authority Of King Jesus**	Page 83
Chapter 10	**Restoring The Apostles To Their "Thrones"**	Page 84
Chapter 11	**Jesus' Words Produce Unity**	Page 85
Chapter 12	**The Urgency Of Restoration**	Page 86
Chapter 13	**What Is The First Step**	Page 87

BOOK 35
WORSHIP GOD

	Introduction	Page 90
Chapter 1	**Words On Worship**	Page 91
Chapter 2	**The Focus Of Our Worship**	Page 96
Chapter 3	**In Search Of True Worshipers** (Part 1)	Page 97
Chapter 4	**In Search Of True Worshipers** (Part 2)	Page 100
Chapter 5	**Wayward Worship**	Page 102
Chapter 6	**Walking With True Worshipers**	Page 107
Chapter 7	**Worship Anywhere And Anytime**	Page 111

BOOK 36
WORSHIP FREELY

	Introduction	Page 113
Chapter 1	**Look Before You Leap**	Page 114
Chapter 2	**So Here We Are**	Page 116
Chapter 3	**Origin Of Protestant Assembliology**	Page 117
Chapter 4	**From Worship To Concerts**	Page 120
Chapter 5	**Mutual Edification Through Love**	Page 121
Chapter 6	**Life-Style Christianity**	Page 124
Chapter 7	**Continuing The Heritage**	Page 125
Chapter 8	**Known By Our Assemblies**	Page 128

BOOK 37
ONE LORD WITH ALL AUTHORITY OVER ALL THINGS

	Introduction	Page 133
Chapter 1	**Organize For Success**	Page 134
Chapter 2	**What Is The Ekklesia?**	Page 135
Chapter 3	**The Ekklesia: A Community Of Free People**	Page 137
Chapter 4	**Free Men Seek To Be Free**	Page 139
Chapter 5	**Let Us Walk In Fear And Trembling**	Page 141
Chapter 6	**Franchised Christianity**	Page 142
Chapter 7	**Held Together By Authority**	Page 143
Chapter 8	**A Foundation For Slavery**	Page 144
Chapter 9	**Jesus Claimed Authority**	Page 145
Chapter 10	**Jesus Claimed All Authority**	Page 146
Chapter 11	**Jesus Has All Authority In His Absence**	Page 147
Chapter 12	**Jesus Rules Through His Word**	Page 148
Chapter 13	**Leaders Are Responsible Stewards**	Page 149
Chapter 14	**The Apostles Were Messengers**	Page 151
Chapter 15	**Using Our "Bible Dictionary"**	Page 151
Chapter 16	**Elders Are Servants To Whom We Submit**	Page 154
Chapter 17	**Shepherds Serve The Flock**	Page 156
Chapter 18	**Submit To Loving Service**	Page 157
Chapter 19	**Effective Leadership Is Based On Submission**	Page 159
Chapter 20	**Pastors Serve As A Group With Church Consent**	Page 160
Chapter 21	**Designation Assumes Decision-Making**	Page 162
Chapter 22	**Unity Exists Without Lords And Masters**	Page 163
Chapter 23	**Responsibility In The Absence Of Lords**	Page 165
Chapter 24	**We Have Only One Lord**	Page 166
Chapter 25	**Do Not Minimize The Lordship Of Jesus**	Page 167
Chapter 26	**Anointed Or Appointed**	Page 168
Chapter 27	**Cry For An Earthly "King"**	Page 169
Chapter 28	**Designating Leadership**	Page 170
Chapter 29	**The Need For Servants**	Page 170
Chapter 30	**Little Catholic Churches**	Page 171

BOOK 38
THE CHRIST-CENTERED FAITH

	Introduction	Page 173
Chapter 1	**Knowing Who We Are**	Page 173
Chapter 2	**Man-Made Religiosity**	Page 175
Chapter 3	**Focusing On The Eternality Of Christ**	Page 181

Chapter 4	**The Preexistent And Eternal Son**	Page 182
Chapter 5	**Jesus Is Deity**	Page 183
Chapter 6	**Was The Son Created?**	Page 186
Chapter 7	**God Is More Than Jesus**	Page 188
Chapter 8	**Beginning And Continuing With Jesus**	Page 191

BOOK 39
THE LORD'S SUPPER

	Introduction	Page 195
Chapter 1	**Falling In Love Again**	Page 198
Chapter 2	**Memorial Covenants**	Page 200
Chapter 3	**The Passover Foundation**	Page 202
Chapter 4	**Back To The Future**	Page 204
Chapter 5	**Covenants And Celebrations**	Page 206
Chapter 6	**The Break Of Life**	Page 208
Chapter 7	**Feast Or Famine**	Page 210
Chapter 8	**Evangelistic Feasts**	Page 214
Chapter 9	**The Corinthian Ordeal**	Page 218
Chapter 10	**The Bread**	Page 225
Chapter 11	**The Fruit Of The Vine**	Page 227
Chapter 12	**Containers And Contents**	Page 229
Chapter 13	**The Lord's Deipnon**	Page 230
Chapter 14	**Fellowship In Breaking Bread**	Page 235
Chapter 15	**Disappearance Of The Meal**	Page 237
Chapter 16	**Cheating Ourselves**	Page 239
Chapter 17	**First Day Of The Week**	Page 242
Chapter 18	**The Real World**	Page 245

BOOK 40
FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGES

	Introduction	Page 249
Chapter 1	**The One God**	Page 249
Chapter 2	**Jesus: The Incarnate Opportunity For Salvation**	Page 251
Chapter 3	**Living With The Holy Spirit**	Page 253
Chapter 4	**The Bible: God's Message To Man**	Page 255
Chapter 5	**The New Testament Of Jesus**	Page 257
Chapter 6	**God Worked And Continues To Work**	Page 259
Chapter 7	**The Grace Of God**	Page 261
Chapter 8	**The Gospel**	Page 263
Chapter 9	**Obedience To The Gospel Through Baptism**	Page 264
Chapter 10	**King Jesus**	Page 266
Chapter 11	**The Church**	Page 268
Chapter 12	**Christians Only**	Page 271

BOOK 41
OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

	Introduction	Page 273
Chapter 1	**Obedience To The Gospel**	Page 274
Chapter 2	**What Is The Gospel?**	Page 275
Chapter 3	**How Can One Obey The Gospel?**	Page 277
Chapter 4	**Baptized Into Christ**	Page 279

BOOK 42
THE MUSIC OF THE CHURCH

	Introduction	Page 281
Chapter 1	**Music In The Old Testament**	Page 282
Chapter 2	**Acappella In The New Testament**	Page 283
Chapter 3	**The Beauty Of Acappella Music**	Page 286
Chapter 4	**Worship In Song**	Page 290

BOOK 43
EXERCISING SOBRIETY AND SELF-CONTROL

	Introduction	Page 292
Chapter 1	**Key Words And Concepts**	Page 293
Chapter 2	**Thinking Soberly**	Page 294
Chapter 3	**The Demeanor Of The Christian Life**	Page 295
Chapter 4	**Sobriety In Action**	Page 296
Chapter 5	**Signs Of Moral Degradation**	Page 297
Chapter 6	**Control In All Matters Of Life**	Page 297

BOOK 44
EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION VS WORD-BASED FAITH

	Introduction	Page 299
Chapter 1	**Knowing Who We Are**	Page 300
Chapter 2	**An Experiential Philosophy Of Religion**	Page 304
Chapter 3	**The Rise Of Religion**	Page 306
Chapter 4	**God's Work For Us**	Page 307
Chapter 5	**Compelled By Love**	Page 309
Chapter 6	**Justification**	Page 311
Chapter 7	**Experiences Versus Truth**	Page 313
Chapter 8	**Objectivism Versus Subjectivism**	Page 315
Chapter 9	**"Spiritual" Phenomena**	Page 319
Chapter 10	**Speaking In Languages**	Page 324
Chapter 11	**Passing Of The Gift Of Tongues**	Page 328
Chapter 12	**"Miracle" Based Religiosity**	Page 332
Chapter 13	**Jesus Saw It Coming**	Page 334
Chapter 14	**"Lord, Lord" Churches**	Page 338
Chapter 15	**Jeremiah 23**	Page 340

BOOK 45
GRACE RESPONSE VS TITHING BY LAW

	Introduction	Page 343
Chapter 1	**The Tithe**	Page 344
Chapter 2	**The Free-Will Offering**	Page 346

BOOK 46
THE RELIGIOUS SECTARIAN

	Introduction	Page 349
Chapter 1	**The Organic Unity Of The Body**	Page 350
Chapter 2	**Disunity Among The Early Disciples**	Page 353
Chapter 3	**Identity Of The Sectarian Spirit**	Page 358

BOOK 47
FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY OF THE ORGANIC BODY

	Introduction	Page 368
Chapter 1	**The Curse Of Circle Drawing**	Page 369
Chapter 2	**A Sharing Partnership In Christ**	Page 371
Chapter 3	**Bible Basis For Fellowship**	Page 372
Chapter 4	**Organic Fellowship**	Page 375
Chapter 5	**Fellowship Assumes Oneness**	Page 377
Chapter 6	**Walking Away From The Covenant**	Page 380
Chapter 7	**Opinionated Opinions**	Page 382
Chapter 8	**Receive One Another**	Page 389
Chapter 9	**Free In Christ**	Page 390
Chapter 10	**Fellowship Versus Ecumenism**	Page 392
Chapter 11	**The Rise Of The Party**	Page 394
Chapter 12	**Avoiding Popes**	Page 396
Chapter 13	**Detoured From Unity To Union**	Page 399
Chapter 14	**Inclusive**	Page 403

THE CROSS-CENTERED FAITH

	A Metaphorical Hypothesis	Page 406
Chapter 1	**Nothing But The Cross**	Page 408
Chapter 2	**The God Revealed At The Cross**	Page 412
Chapter 3	**Restoring The Appeal Of The Cross**	Page 416
Chapter 4	**Metaphors Of The Cross**	Page 418
Chapter 5	**The Redeemer Of The Cross**	Page 419
Chapter 6	**The Ransom Paid At The Cross**	Page 421
Chapter 7	**The Sacrificial Offering On The Cross**	Page 422
Chapter 8	**The Suffering Servant On The Cross**	Page 424
Chapter 9	**Reconciliation At The Cross**	Page 426
Chapter 10	**Justification At The Cross**	Page 428
Chapter 11	**Crucified With Him On The Cross**	Page 431
Chapter 12	**Refocusing On The Cross**	Page 433
	A Metaphorical Epilogue	Page 435

BOOK 49
ESCAPE FROM BONDAGE

	Introduction	Page 436
Chapter 1	**Greetings, The Other Gospel, Direct Revelation From God**	Page 436
Chapter 2	**Visit To Jerusalem, Impossibility Of Justification By Works**	Page 439
Chapter 3	**Law And The Curse**	Page 441
Chapter 4	**Hagar And Sarah**	Page 443
Chapter 5	**Set Free, Stay Free, The Flesh And The Spirit**	Page 445
Chapter 6	**Obedient Faith**	Page 447

BOOK 50
PERCEPTIONS AND POSTULATIONS

	Introduction	Page 449
Chapter 1	**“Doctrinal Christianity”**	Page 450
Chapter 2	**Ceremonial Christianity**	Page 451
Chapter 3	**Cuffed-Hand Christianity**	Page 453
Chapter 4	**Introverted Churches**	Page 554
Chapter 5	**End Of The Building Obsession**	Page 455

Chapter 6	**Training Leadership**	Page 456
Chapter 7	**The Ministry Of Teaching**	Page 461
Chapter 8	**A Language Bridge**	Page 462
Chapter 9	**All Things To All Men**	Page 464
Chapter 10	**Money And Missions**	Page 467
Chapter 11	**Confident Churches**	Page 468
Chapter 12	**The Rise Of Leadership**	Page 470
Chapter 13	**Refugee Missions**	Page 473
Chapter 14	**The Misunderstood Continent**	Page 473
Chapter 15	**A Continent Of Opportunity**	Page 475

BOOK 51
OUR FAITH – OUR SALVATION

	Introduction	Page 480
Chapter 1	**Rescuing Our Faith Our Of Theological Jargon**	Page 481
Chapter 2	**False Starts And Erroneous Conclusions**	Page 484
Chapter 3	**The Necessity Of Faith**	Page 487
Chapter 4	**A Theology Of Elimination**	Page 490
Chapter 5	**The Fear Of The Lord**	Page 493
Chapter 6	**Lost In Belief**	Page 495
Chapter 7	**Failure To Fulfill All Righteousness**	Page 497

BOOK 52
HIS GRACE – OUR FAITH

	Introduction	Page 500
Chapter 1	**Grace: The Misunderstood Simplicity**	Page 501
Chapter 2	**The Grace Of God**	Page 502
Chapter 3	**Examples Of Grace**	Page 504
Chapter 4	**Graces Comes With An Instruction Manual**	Page 506
Chapter 5	**Grace Freely Offered And Conditionally Accepted**	Page 508
Chapter 6	**The Grace That Teaches**	Page 511
Chapter 7	**Grace Versus Law**	Page 513
Chapter 8	**The New Covenant And A New Law**	Page 517
Chapter 9	**Christians Under Law**	Page 519
Chapter 10	**The Purpose Of Law**	Page 520
Chapter 11	**Walking With Romans Through Grace And Faith**	Page 523

BOOK 53
THE LIVING SACRIFICE

	Introduction	Page 533
Chapter 1	**Prophecy Of The Committed Servant**	Page 534
Chapter 2	**The Mind Of The Committed**	Page 537
Chapter 3	**Christ's Example Of The Committed Life**	Page 538
Chapter 4	**Committed To Cross-Bearing**	Page 539
Chapter 5	**The Focus Of Commitment**	Page 542
Chapter 6	**Committed Personally**	Page 545
Chapter 7	**Committed To The Truth**	Page 547
Chapter 8	**Committed To Bible Study**	Page 549
Chapter 9	**Committed To One Another And The Lost World**	Page 550

BOOK 54
GOSPEL EVANGELISM

	Introduction	Page 553
Chapter 1	**Israel's Lost Opportunity**	Page 551
Chapter 2	**The Reluctant Evangelist**	Page 557
Chapter 3	**The Willing Evangelist**	Page 559
Chapter 4	**Open Doors**	Page 561
Chapter 5	**The Only Door**	Page 563
Chapter 6	**Command From The King**	Page 566
Chapter 7	**We Would Be Militant**	Page 571
Chapter 8	**Why Did It Work?**	Page 574
Chapter 9	**Seizing The Opportunities**	Page 577
Chapter 10	**How It Is Done**	Page 580
Chapter 11	**The Curse Of Indifference**	Page 583
Chapter 12	**Wrong Man's Job**	Page 585
Chapter 13	**Being Fruitful**	Page 587

BOOK 55
ORGANIC FUNCTION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

	Introduction	Page 594
Chapter 1	**Getting Our Bearings Straight**	Page 595
Chapter 2	**Late Observers Of The Functioning Body**	Page 597
Chapter 3	**Foundational Understanding Of The Organic Body**	Page 599
Chapter 4	**Organic Connectivity**	Page 601
Chapter 5	**The Oneness Of The Scattered**	Page 603
Chapter 6	**All Things In Common**	Page 607
Chapter 7	**The Whole Multitude**	Page 609
Chapter 8	**From Jerusalem And Beyond**	Page 611
Chapter 9	**Go Tell The Brethren**	Page 613
Chapter 10	**Self-Healng Of The Body**	Page 614
Chapter 11	**"See Our Brethren"**	Page 616
Chapter 12	**Blueprint For Starting An Independent Church**	Page 618
Chapter 13	**Ekklesia In The Epistles**	Page 620
Chapter 14	**Deal With Lords, Don't Attack Body**	Page 625
Chapter 15	**All As One In Rome**	Page 630
Chapter 16	**Organic Function Of Gifted Parts**	Page 632
Chapter 17	**The Guarantee Of Freedom**	Page 636
Chapter 18	**Universal, Not Ecumenism**	Page 638

BOOK 56
THE WORLD AS IT IS

	Introduction	Page 640
Chapter 1	**World View Without A World**	Page 641
Chapter 2	**The Right Place For Now**	Page 642
Chapter 3	**We Are Here For There**	Page 644
Chapter 4	**We Would Prognosticate**	Page 646
Chapter 5	**The Nonstop God**	Page 648
Chapter 6	**God Purposefully Works**	Page 649
Chapter 7	**A Road Map Of God's Work**	Page 651
Chapter 8	**World Views In Conflict**	Page 654
Chapter 9	**A Freedom-Based Society**	Page 657
Chapter 10	**Early Beginnings of Islam**	Page 661

Chapter 11	**History Welcomes A New Ideology**	Page 664
Chapter 12	**The World Of Islam**	Page 668
Chapter 13	**The Perpetual Conflict**	Page 674
Chapter 14	**A Blueprint For Order**	Page 679
Chapter 15	**Qur'an Concepts**	Page 681
Chapter 16	**The Rise Of A New World**	Page 688

BOOK 57
THE GODLY GIVER

	Introduction	Page 695
Chapter 1	**Old Testament Giving**	Page 696
Chapter 2	**The Happy Steward**	Page 700
Chapter 3	**A Journey Of Discovery**	Page 702
Chapter 4	**Taking Ownership Of One's Own Load**	Page 704
Chapter 5	**The Joy Of Financial Functionality**	Page 706
Chapter 6	**Taking Ownership Of The Gospel**	Page 708
Chapter 7	**Have We No Rights?**	Page 710
Chapter 8	**Individual Commitment To Financial Fellowship**	Page 712
Chapter 9	**Financial Fellowship Of The Organic Body**	Page 715
Chapter 10	**Emulating The Nature Of God**	Page 718
Chapter 11	**Stopping Church Thieves**	Page 721
Chapter 12	**Balaamite Preachers**	Page 723
Chapter 13	**The Sin Of Covetousness**	Page 725
Chapter 14	**Well-Doing Discipleship**	Page 729
Chapter 15	**Giving With Purpose**	Page 731
Chapter 16	**Special Responsibilities**	Page 735

BOOK 58
THIRSTING FOR WORD FROM GOD

	Introduction	Page 736
Chapter 1	**"Burn The Book"**	Page 738
Chapter 2	**Gone Astray From His Word**	Page 740
Chapter 3	**Bible Obsession Versus Itching Ears**	Page 742
Chapter 4	**Seeking To Be "Biblical"**	Page 744
Chapter 5	**In Search Of Authority**	Page 745
Chapter 6	**Finding God's Authority**	Page 748
Chapter 7	**Legally Led Astray**	Page 750
Chapter 8	**We Yearn For The Word**	Page 752
Chapter 9	**Let God In**	Page 754

BOOK 59
FOLLOWING JESUS INTO GLORY

	Introduction	Page 757
Chapter 1	**The Theft Of A Disciple**	Page 757
Chapter 2	**The Holy Disciple**	Page 760
Chapter 3	**The Disciple's Tongue**	Page 763
Chapter 4	**The Patient Disciple**	Page 765
Chapter 5	**The Victorious Disciple**	Page 770
Chapter 6	**The Submissive Disciple**	Page 771
Chapter 7	**The Goal-Minded Disciple**	Page 773
Chapter 8	**The Determined Disciple**	Page 776
Chapter 9	**The Lighthouse Disciple**	Page 780

Chapter 10 **The Struggling Disciple** Page 783
Chapter 11 **The Courageous Disciple** Page 784

BOOK 60
THE SEVEN FLICKERING FLAMES OF ASIA

Introduction Page 787
Chapter 1 **Message To The Ephesian Disciples** Page 792
Chapter 2 **Message To The Smyrna Disciples** Page 797
Chapter 2 **Message To The Pergamum Disciples** Page 802
Chapter 4 **Message To The Thyatira Disciples** Page 805
Chapter 5 **Message To The Sardis Disciples** Page 809
Chapter 6 **Message To The Philadelphia Disciples** Page 815
Chapter 7 **Message To The Laodicea Disciples** Page 820

Book 32

Making Disciples In A Global Community

We live in a world that constantly presents new challenges as society perpetually transitions from one global community to another. Societies change when bombarded with new information. And we live in the information century. No longer is the world citizen confined to ignorance. With the click of a mouse on a computer, even the most remote villager is launched into this new world order. The world has suddenly become a neighborhood that transcends national borders. With these changing times, come tremendous opportunities for those who can flow with the current of ever changing civilizations. As disciples of Jesus, it is incumbent upon us to seek for new and better opportunities to preach the gospel. Change, therefore, must not be seen as the loss of something, but the emergence of new possibilities to reach the souls of men. Because of our spirit of adventure for the future, we do not wail over the past, but seek with vision ways to take the gospel into a world that is destined to end. In our quest for opportunity, we are thus not enslaved to relics of the past that have run their course. On the contrary, we are excited about taking the fundamentals of the faith to a new world that has presented to us new and exciting open doors for world evangelism. If we would be productive servants of our Lord, therefore, we must continually bring ourselves in tune with the changing world in which we live. Only by doing this will we be able to produce the most fruit possible to the glory of God.

When Jesus said to go into all the world in Matthew 28:19, He actually used the Greek word *ta ethne*, the word from which we derive the English word "ethnic." He did not use the Greek word *cosmos* (world). Because He did not use the word *cosmos*, His meaning was specific. He wanted His disciples to go to every ethnic group of all the world. His mandate was to go to people (*ta ethne*), not simply cross national borders in order to enter nations.

In the first century, the disciples lived in a world where no visas were required. It was a global world produced by the expansion of the Roman Empire. Going was not complicated by national borders, and thus, the going was not beset by endless lines (queues) at an immigration office. Though the world evangelist is burdened today with such legalities, and often rejected from entry into a particular country, our world today is again becoming a global community. Borders still exist on maps, but they are becoming dim as the world is struggling to unite in trade and communication. It is as if God is doing in this century what He accomplished through the Roman Empire in the first century. He is laying the foundation upon which the mandate of Matthew 28:19 can once again reach a zenith in fulfillment.

Even in Africa a new U.S.A. is developing. Several years ago I joked with some Malawian preachers about the letters U.S.A. that I saw on the hat of one of the preachers. I asked everyone what the letters meant. They responded, "United States of America." I said, "No." Of course they were puzzled at my response. I said the letters stood for "United States of Africa." They laughed. Not long ago, however, the government leaders of Africa started talking about the possibility of a United States of Africa. The European Union has given them a concept for the future. Though it will be many decades in the future, there is the desire among young African government leaders to work toward a United States of Africa. Regardless of how long it will take, they have the dream because they see the sense in such unions as the European Union. Will God move the African continent faster to this U.S.A. than we think in order to freely move evangelists from one area to another on a continent that is as diverse as Africa?

The rapid expansion of Christianity in the first century happened because of easy travel and immigration from one end of the Roman Empire to the other. Today, however, there is a vast difference between the world in which we live and the world that was the background upon which the early church was born and grew. The church was born out of "the Jew first," and then the

Gentiles. There was a common historical culture that was the religious foundational culture upon which early evangelists moved from one synagogue to another throughout the Roman Empire. Add to this the fact that the Gentile culture of the Roman Empire offered some continuity for the travel and work of the evangelists. At least Paul on more than one occasion resorted to his Roman citizenship rights that were common throughout an Empire that reached from western India in the east, to Spain in the west, to England in the north, and to north Africa in the south. Luke's recorded history of the expansion of the church in the first century explains that the growth of the church was based regionally on Jewish culture. But eventually it was into Gentile culture "into all the world" within the limits of the Roman Empire.

Today, it is somewhat different, but times are changing. There is no longer any common religion as Judaism was to use as a springboard for world evangelism. There is no "whole world" government to maintain common legal rights for world citizens and traveling evangelists. We must acquire visas to cross borders. We live in a complex world that is far more diverse than the world into which the early church was born. It is in this world, therefore, that the disciple of Jesus is challenged to preach the gospel to *ta ethne*. It is in this world that the evangelist must pass through the enormity of legal, civil, religious and ethnic barriers in order to reach the hearts of men.

Nevertheless, I see the emergence of a new world wherein global communication of the gospel will penetrate restrictive borders. It is imperative, therefore, that we understand this new world in order to capture the opportunities that are presented to us for the preaching of the gospel.

Since we live in a world where evangelists can be sent from one government (nation) to another and from one culture (*ta ethne*) to another, it is imperative that sending churches and going evangelists better understand the world to which they are going. This world is constantly changing under the influence of a flow of information that has never before existed in the world. This flow of information is producing another common world culture as was characteristic of the Roman Empire. If God used the commonality of the Roman economic, government and culture to expedite world evangelism in the first century, then He can be doing the same today. If He is—and I firmly believe He is—then it is a time for the global church to arise and educate itself for the opportunities that are arising over the cultural horizon of the world. It is a time when the church must not divide itself into autonomous bits and pieces, but work as one universal organism in order to take the gospel to a door that God is opening for evangelism.

If I were a prophet, I would say that God is doing something for us to populate heaven enormously before the end of time. If we fail to realize this opportunity, we will be held accountable. However, if we are perceptive to the work of God in present world events, we will have eternity to rejoice because we were wise enough to take advantage of the work of God to save souls.

Chapter 1

SOCIAL GLOBALIZATION

Because of an accelerated information flow,
we are transitioning into a new world,
a world of citizens who will sacrifice the past
for the sake of the future.

A society of people determines for themselves the course of their own history. No foreign society has the right to establish either the destiny or the principles by which other societies must live in the present or determine their direction for the future. Social change is always a group decision from within. Therefore, the politic of one cultural group cannot become the standard by which every world group must be measured. At least in theory, this is true. But we are now moving into the next world, a world that is increasingly networked into a global community by the communication of information.

We now live at the brink of another historical direction. Global communication, and subsequently, the flow of information that has been made possible by the mass electronic transfer of information, has changed everything. There now exists a strong global electronic community that is networked by the click of a mouse. It is a community that is developing its own culture. It is a

culture that is presently running parallel to the individual societies of nations and often in conflict with the regional dynamics that determine provincial communities. Nevertheless, this global electronic and business oriented culture is taking the world into a new dimension. This is not an era for mourning over the past, but a time of wondering concerning the future.

In the future, social globalization will follow on the back of economic globalism. The Internet society that is based on the international flow of information will produce a world citizen who is not confined to the norms of either local or regional customs and culture. The new world citizen seeks to be a part of a global community that meets at a Starbucks coffee shop for a sip of the new world order. He or she is a world citizen who can identify an international corporation by the insignia of a swoosh and the jingle of an advertisement.

Throughout two centuries of history, Africa has illustrated a continental example of social globalization and cultural transition. Africa was, and in many African countries still is, a mixture of tribal cultures that were and are represented by over three thousand languages and dialects. However, when colonial powers in the past drew lines across the African continent, borders were formed and nations were born that were destined to emerge from millennia of tribal separation and conflict. Though in the beginning this movement was at a snail's pace, tribalism is now amalgamating into nationalism as new generations move from rural to an urban setting. The transformation is now in hyper drive. Not only is a renaissance happening in Africa in reference to this amalgamated mosaic of culture and economics, a new continental society is rising, which society seeks to be a part of the new global community. It is this new postmodern African who will take Africa out of the isolation of the past and into the community of world fellowship. This new urban generation has learned the skill of change in order to become and remain a part of the new world.

Social globalism often frustrates local and regional social structures. The postmodern African generation is light years away from their village parents. When a forty-year-old African business person returns to the village to visit parents and grandparents, he brings his computer along with enough battery life to last only a few hours. When the battery on the computer is dead, it is time to return to the city. There is no time for long hours around the fire, no time for extended visits with relatives. The urban renaissance African has lost contact with his or her roots. He or she has become a part of a global urban community that has new desires and visions for the future. There is no desire to go back to the village, back to a life that is often fatalistically locked into an economic and social time warp. The new urban world has broken the traditions, dispelled with the voodoo dolls, and become a member of a scientific age that has given birth to a technological heritage for their children.

This is one reason why the old mission methodology of going to the cities in order to evangelize a nation no longer works. The global citizen of Nairobi, Kenya is not going back to the village, back to tradition, superstition and tribalism. His visit there on weekends is only "battery life" in duration before he wants to return to his new world civilization in the city.

Only indirectly will churches in the cities evangelize rural settings. They may seek to support financially a "missionary" in rural settings. But we must relegate to the archives this notion that a first or second generation individual in the city will sell his computer and townhouse in order to return to the village of his grandparents. This will not happen. Discard those old 19th century books on mission methods that taught we will evangelize a nation by evangelizing the cities.

Our thinking on the methodology of sending a national postmodern urban evangelist to a rural setting must be revisited. This methodology does not happen in the West, and neither does it happen in the developing world. The difference between the urban and rural settings of developing countries is more extreme than the Western context. There is a McDonalds in Dallas and also one within a short driving distance of middle rural America. One can buy petrol in Los Angeles, but also in Stafford, Kansas, a village of 1,500 people. But in China and Africa, it is 97 octane in Beijing or Nairobi, but lamp oil in most interior villages. It's a Whirlpool washing machine in Cape Town, but a river bank in a Transkei village. The difference between rural and urban environments in developing countries demands that we change our thinking about sending an urbanite evangelist from Accra to an interior village by the river. Developing world urbanite Christians are not going to pick up their families and move to the village. The proof of the argument is in the fact that this supposed migration does not happen.

It is this new developing world urban social order that will take us into the future. What is exciting about this new urban social engine is that it is not driving us forward with a culture that is slow and comfortable. We are in hyperdrive. We are accelerating beyond the transition speed of normal social change simply because the youth want a university education in order to have a greater piece of the economic pie. And herein is a source of advantage, as well as much conflict and discomfort. The old wineskin culture that is often filled with a rural setting is being burst with an urban postmodern generation that will never go back to the village. The informa-

tion highway has sculptured a new generation to accept rapid change as a way of life. New web pages of information are only new opportunities to learn more, and thus, remain ahead of a competition that is online at thousands of megabytes in download speed. In a globalized economy, the 2.6 gigahertz computer will survive over the 2.4. And the urban postmodern business person knows this. He must, therefore, change in order to beat the competition. He must change business practices, change market strategy, and if necessary, change his business culture. He has adapted to change, but the village culture of his roots will not accommodate this new world of a rapidly changing urban life. It is for this reason that he will not make the transition from urban to rural life.

One of the principal cultural cues of the postmodern generation, and thus the citizen of the new world, is change, rapid change. The easier it is for one to change, the better he or she will survive and the better economic gain there will be. The better one's business assimilates new information into the operational function of business, the more successful one will be. It is no longer a world of traditions that cannot be sacrificed. It is a world of transitions. And thus traditionals and transitionalists are in conflict. Postmodern and moderns (the older generation) will never solve this issue. They do not have to. As moderns relinquish life in the next twenty years or so, the postmoderns will usher in a new world. As urban postmoderns become the norm for establishing the generations to come, the Third World will never be the same again.

And it shouldn't. We are always fascinated by those anthropologists who seek to guard and save some existing primitive culture of a former century. One such South African zealot lived for six months with the Himbas in the northwestern part of Namibia. Her book chastised the modern world for violating the homogenous culture of these people whose life-style had not changed for centuries. But we would ask, When a Himba baby becomes sick, must the body die. Must a baby have the opportunity to receive an antibiotic for the sickness from the modern world? Our answer to the question is that if the First World antibiotic will save the baby, bring the Himbas into the First World hospital and into the 21st century. The Himbas also have a right to a better and easier way of life. They have a right to a radio and a pair of First World shoes to put on their feet in order to walk across the sun-scorched sands of the Namib Desert. What gives us the right to have, but at the same time, deprive others to the "have nots"? What selfish humbugs we often become in the cocoons of our own luxury. I think some anthropologist simply want to keep some cultures in a zoo for historical studies.

If you are afraid of change, you are probably screaming and yelling at the change that is now taking place in the world. Your world possibly seems as if it is coming apart. It is. But this is world history in the making. The rate of change is much faster than it was in the past. It is much faster because the flow of information in our telecommunicative world travels at light speed, not by the pounding of signals on a drum. We must not let this upset us. It is a part of nature to change. How fast changes are made is determined by the amount of new information that is communicated and assimilated into society. The greater the emphasis on education, the faster the change.

The only problem with some is that the existing cultures of today are being transformed so quickly. The older generation is thus in culture shock. Acculturation is difficult for the young. When we place it in the world of the old, it is often very unsettling. But I would remind our older developing world citizens that our children and grandchildren cannot be stopped. They are taking the world into another global society wherein nationalism is turning to globalism. Our children and grandchildren want to be citizens of the world, not just Nigerians, or Ghanaians, or Indians, or even Americans. If you are still hung up on tribalism, or even nationalism, you are light-years removed from the new urban postmodern generation of the world that is being born out of this present generation.

As global citizens, the next generations will deal with international conflict in different ways. The 21st century citizen will not be in conflict over the ideologies of nation against nation. It will be a conflict of one global culture against another. An example that illustrates this is the invasion of Latin American culture into the western culture of the United States. For the past several decades legal restrictions have sought to stop the migration of Latin Americans from coming across the southern border of America, but to no avail. Resistance to this cultural flow has waned to the point that legalized "illegals" have now become a part of the American legal system. A resignation to the new social future has become a way of life.

The same has been happening in South Africa since the early 90s. The South African culture has been bombarded with millions of illegal immigrants from the northern countries of the continent. It is not just the "new" South Africa in a political realm, but a new cultural South Africa has developed by the influx and saturation of the cultures that millions have brought with them from the northern countries. And this is good. Every country is blessed by immigrants. They are blessed because the immigrant brings hope for a better life, while

the resident too often has taken for granted what he has. There is a greater work ethic among immigrants, for they are a culture of survival.

What is globally happening with many nations is historical and natural. Cultures simply cannot remain isolated in their own time capsule. They change, adapt and modify. Outside cultures force us to adapt and change. From now and into the future of the rest of the history of the world, we will be living in nations that are constantly invaded by "foreign" cultures. We may seek to stop this new wave of immigration at the borders, but there are no visas needed to access the Internet. This is the new way of life. During these invasions of ideology there will always be cultural conflict. Sometimes severe conflict will occur, as in the battle lines between the Islamically defined cultures of the middle East and the Christian defined cultures of the West. But regardless of the conflicts, the invasions will continue. It is best, therefore, to learn how to be acculturated and accommodated as we are invaded with cultures from outside our cocoons. We must accept this, for this is the way of the new world community.

It is inevitable that social globalization will continually generate cultural conflict. As the postmodern generation takes us into a different global culture, a new global society will continue to emerge. It is not what this society will be, but how it will continue to develop. Built within the culture itself are mechanisms for change. And thus, as a culture of change it will never be stagnant in order to be identified by a specific name. We are only in the beginning of a series of new world cultures. There will be many more "new" worlds to come simply because culture has now developed the ability to rapidly change with little pain.

But we can be sure of one thing. Conflict between parallel cultures will supplant ideological conflict. Or at least, parallel cultural conflict will be the main driving force that will determine ideology. Out of this conflict will develop new cultural world views. We have already identified a new cultural ideology. It is the culture of political/religious terrorism that we identify as fundamentalism. There will be more to come as the world becomes a smaller neighborhood where different, but parallel cultures, will seek to impose the norms of their existence on others.

I would surmise that the desire of the postmodern generation and its ancestral offspring generations will sacrifice ideology for conformity. The desire to be community moves into second place the desire to stand for idiosyncrasies in ideologies. Ideologies will be "whatever," while culture will be determined by a Western competitive arena wherein global business people will seek to economically better themselves in a free-market that has globalized many businesses. Ideology will be sacrificed on the altar of a better way of life. So buckle up. Here we go.

Chapter 2

RELIGION IN A GLOBAL CULTURE

Faith that is truly global
and able to produce a better world citizen,
is a faith that originates
from the omnipresent God of all.

From a strictly philosophical and apologetical point of view, religion must make better adherents. True religion must direct God-created individuals to live together in peaceful coexistence. If the elemental principles of two coexisting religions do not produce this, then either one or both are maintaining principles that are not in tune with God. One or both are false, and thus religions that have been created by the adherents.

Humanity is the creation of God. We correctly assume, therefore, that our Creator would not relegate us to our own devices to sort out our own beliefs and behavior. Only a cruel god would deistically create man, and then subjugate his creation to the confusion of depraved minds and sorted ways as He took a vacation in some far off galaxy.

An elementary study of religious history proves one very clear point. Man is totally unable to direct his own paths. From the Crusades to the suicide bomber, men have only proved that they are inept authors of their religious behavior and destiny. We seek too much to create a god after our own imagination and a religion that conforms to our carnal desires. We are masters at the art of idolatry.

Without a constant standard to guide our ways, there-

fore, we are always changing our ways. If the new world that we are developing is a world wherein we seek oneness for the sake of economic development and a mutual share of the material pie, then will our religion pay the price? Will our culture of change also constantly change our religion?

Many in the postmodern generation are spiritually sterile, and thus are very amoral and nonreligious in culture. There are millions who have said "whatever" to any cultural norms that may have religious inclinations. However, I would presume that there is also within this new global culture the emergence of the primal instinct that is innate within every God-created human. We cannot escape our religious roots. It is the way God made us. And for this reason we will create some god or some religion, though it may be orchestrated after our own desires. We must have our religions, even though it may be environmentalism, or animal rights, or politics or whatever.

And herein is the curse of an idolatrous people. In all our distortion to create new religions, and thus we distort our ability to coexist. We culturally construct religions that will pacify our consciences when we seek to bring destruction upon another culture that has developed its own unique religion. How else can a young person strap on a bomb and blow himself and innocent people into a million pieces in the name of religion?

It used to be that the terrorist sought to bring sympathy to his cause by the death of a few examples in an opposing group. He sought to terrorize the few in order to affect the many. But he was wrong. Terrorism of innocent people can never be right. It can never be right because it is a cancer of a society wherein individuals make the innocent pay the price for their own political agendas. Nevertheless, terrorists in times of peace are seeking to either impose their beliefs or free themselves from those who seek to impose on them.

We have now moved into a new era of terrorism. We have a new breed of terrorist. He no longer seeks to kill a few. He seeks to simply kill as many as possible in order to promote his religious/political agenda. The Islamic terrorist is not content with a few examples. He is at war with a society he believes is against him. In order to do this, he wants as many Westerners as possible dead. Period.

The Islamic terrorist—you might want to call him a fundamentalist—has created a god after his own agenda. The Islamic world has even given him another name. He is an Islamist. He can thus have links with his mother religion, Islam, and also go about with his hideous work without judgment from his mother.

Since he, the Islamist, is religious, he must formulate a religion that conforms to the hideousness of his goals. And in doing this, he has proved that his religion is false. Any religion that would cause a lack of harmony between God's created beings cannot be from God. It can only be demonic, earthly and totally of human origin. How can any religion that generates hate against the "unbeliever" ever claim to be from a God who is love?

Since the beginning of time, those who have forsaken a knowledge of God have always created social chaos. Such would only be expected from a humanity that has given itself over to itself, and thus allowed Satan to have the day. The world continues to manufacture twisted world views, and thus cultures are embedded with cues that move men away from God.

We are now living in a time when a new world culture is being manufactured after the desire of godless men. It is a world of technological cultures that are in a worldwide confrontation (competition) with one another. Nations are against one another in an effort "to develop," another word that means materialistic cravings must be satisfied. This international struggle of developing nations against one another is the foundation upon which five world views are promoted. These are the world views of Churchianity, secularism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. These world views are represented by billions of people in regional geographical locations on the planet. Secularism finds its heartland in Europe and a great deal of America. Churchianity now finds its seat in Africa, though originally from Europe via America to Africa. Islam is supposedly "contained" in the Middle East. Buddhism is represented by China and other Far Eastern nations. Hinduism has the motherland of India. These major religious world views represent the majority of the human race. They are the foundation upon which culture is controlled in their homelands, and thus, will be determining factors for the clash of global cultures in the future of human history. It is incumbent on the disciple of Jesus, therefore, to realize that his work to populate heaven is a struggle against the world views of these religions.

A. Churchianity:

In the remainder of the book, I have invented the term "Churchianity" to define those who have some resemblance to true Christianity, but have strayed from a biblical definition to create a religion after sources other than the Bible. Under this umbrella term I have cast all sorts of twisted groups whose understanding of the Bible and behaviors are certainly not characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus. The traditional term, "Protestant" will

not work in this discussion since a Protestant was one who originally protested against the Roman Catholic Church. But in a discussion concerning global world views, we must include also the world hierarchy of Catholicism under the umbrella of churchianity. I use the term Churchianity, therefore, to classify all those who in some way would recognize the Bible as a part of their religious library and Jesus as more than just a good teacher and man. But I would in no way assert that such a religion to be like true Christianity, since many who have claimed to be "Christian" have also distorted their share of the truth in order to create their beliefs after either their traditions, human generated emotional hysteria, thirst for power, or carnal desires to live according to the dictates of humanity. They are thus, churchian, not Christian after the true definition of a biblically defined Christian. Therefore, for lack of a better term, I will make my own term in order to globally classify even distant believers in Jesus and the Bible who hang on to a few relics of biblical truth in order to call themselves "Christian," but are not.

And now I must be more specific about what I call churchianity. My definition is simple. Churchianity is based on three erroneous views of Christianity. First, the power structure of churches of this system of religion is focused on man. From the congregational level (local independent church), to the national level (traditional denominationalism), and to the international level (Catholicism, Anglicanism), power structures are found somewhere at the top from which control originates and church law and orders are passed down to the adherents. The more one climbs the ladder of power to the top in these religions, the more power he or she has to pass down orders and law to the adherents of the group. Though Jesus said that such structures would not exist among His disciples (Mk 10:42-45), the churchian seeks to establish either heads or bodies of authority on earth in competition with Jesus who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Second, professionalism among the leadership of these churches upholds the power structures. Contributions of the churchian religion are not primarily for benevolence or evangelism, but to support the professionals who in some way maintain the power structures of the organized institutional church. The budgets of churchian groups clearly manifest that the greater amount of the contribution goes to the religious professionals, whereas the least of the budget goes toward benevolence and evangelism. It is the "mission" of the professionals, therefore, to promote the budget in order that their existence as the leaders of the group continue.

Third, some physical manifestation is emphasized to identify the existence or uniqueness of the churchian group. This physical identity is usually accomplished through the construction of a facility ("plant") that signals to the community the existence of the churchian religion. The greater and more elaborate the structure, the more the adherents feel their statement of belief and presence is made in the community. The structure thus becomes the temple of identity for the existence of the churchian disciples. Though Jesus said that His people would not be identified by worship in a specific temple or on a particular mountain (Jn 4:21), the churchian is a very zealous believer in the existence of his faith being identified by either a physical structure or prominent location on main street.

Now the rest of the world views churchianity as the religion of the West. The world has no understanding of the biblically defined church of Christ, nor a correct understanding of what a true Christian is. The world classifies all Western "Christian" religions as one religion. They do this with all the misunderstandings of true Christianity that we would expect from an uninformed world.

Even within the realm of Protestant faiths this misunderstanding prevails. For example, it is often stated that a good person in the community is a "Christian." This biblical term is commonly used to refer to anyone who would live a good moral life in a "Christian" society. However, what people often fail to understand is that a Christian is biblically defined as one who has obeyed the gospel, and thus is in a covenant relationship with God. He is Christian in behavior because he is moved with thanksgiving for the grace of God that was revealed through the cross.

The truth is that one is not "Christian" because he is good, or even does good works. He is a Christian because the will of the Father is done on earth through him as it is done in heaven. Directly speaking, a Christian is a disciple who has been baptized for the remission of his sins, and thus added to the universal family of God because of his obedience to the gospel through baptism.

The typical Buddhist or Muslim has no concept that there are true Christians among the many churchians in Western religion. We might complain within the churchian culture of the West that we are true Christians, and thus, do not want to be identified with the churchianity of Western culture, but as true Christians. However, our complaints fall on deaf ears to those outside our Western religious box. Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, and the host of other non-Christian religions of the world, do not separate true Christians from those who are churchian in practice. In fact, they have no understanding of what a true biblically defined Christian is. Therefore, in the confrontation between world

cultures and the religions of these cultures, we must keep in mind that the religious world will always misunderstand the church, and thus never understand the nature of a true disciple of Jesus.

For the Christian, this is quite frustrating. In religious literature and public discussions in world forums, the terms "Christianity" and "Christian" are thrown around by those who have little or no understanding of the Bible. Disciples of Jesus and the church are just thrown in the religious pot, and thus confused with the host of other faiths that in some way claim Jesus and the Bible, but have little respect for biblical authority.

If you are in the box of Western culture, you will probably not understand this point. But I assure you, as a Western inhabitant, you will always be misunderstood. I presently live on a continent and in a city where Islam is a very dominant religion. In my personal discussions with Muslims, it is very difficult for them to separate me from the churchian religion that prevails throughout my area. There is generally no problem when we confront the "denominations." We can argue with denominational churchians about names and doctrines in the Bible in our efforts to convert one another. But when we are dealing with the clash of world religious cultures, the rest of the religious world stereotypes all "Christian" religions that have been traditionally associated with the West.

And so, churchianity is a paradox to the nonchurchian world. I have never discussed the Bible with a person who has little understanding of the Bible, who does not also misunderstand the definition of a true Christian. The great Islamic debaters classify all Protestant/Catholic denominations together, and thus, their arguments become true against a greatly divided "Christian" religion. They argue that the one true and living God would never create such religious chaos in the world. Their proof that the Christian "god" is a false god is in the fact that the churchian believer promotes a god who has created religious chaos. The typical churchian is content with the religious confusion that prevails among those who believe in Jesus, and to some extent, the existence of the Bible as the word of God. But because of this belief that religious chaos under the disguise of "christianity" is God-ordained, I have never found a churchian debater who can adequately respond to the Muslim's argument. If the true God of heaven is the author of such religious confusion, then certainly He is not God. He is only a god the churchian has created after his misguided beliefs, and thus, to the Muslim, the churchian is an infidel.

As long as the churchian justifies such religious confusion and division in the name of Jesus, then he cannot expect the non-Christian world to see a witness for his faith in his behavior. Every churchian debater with a Muslim always brings shame on the name of Jesus since his very practice in religious confusion denies that which he seeks to argue.

Churchianity, with its bits of Bible and Jesus, have molded the Western world view. In the promotion of institutional churchianity over Jesus, Bible moral values, nevertheless, have penetrated the culture of the West, and thus these principles have affected the thinking of the West. If the civil governments of the West have been influenced by religion in the past—and they have—then certainly no one would doubt that churchianity has been the primary religion of the West. Europe, North and South America have to a great extent developed their cultures for centuries on the foundation of churchian faith. To ignore this fact is not to understand Western culture.

We must give credit to some of the basic principles of the Bible for the development of the West, even though the principles have been promoted by those who do not have a clear understanding of the nature of the church. Basic principles as honoring one's fellow man, freedom of choice, reverence for God to whom all must give account, humanitarianism, and a host of other principles and values have been long-held concepts of the Western world view that have guided cultural and economic development. This is not to say that the Bible is a textbook that produces democracy. It is that democracy thrives on the foundation of a world view that highly promotes the teaching of freedom, a central teaching of the New Testament.

It is this fact that the Islamic world cannot understand. The Islamist views the West as "Christian" as he views the Middle East as Muslim. There is, or should be, no difference between state and religion in the eyes of the Muslim. On the other hand, the West seeks to maintain a separation between church and state. The European seeks to eradicate religion from government, and thus maintain truly secular states. All such thinking is confusing to the fundamental Muslim. He views such efforts to be the irreligious behavior of an infidel.

This confused understanding by the Islamic world of Western churchianity is illustrated by the existence of the nation of Israel. Suppose you are a Muslim living in Saudi Arabia or Baghdad. You pick up any "Christian" religious book of the West and read about Jesus supposedly coming to the earth again to reign on earth for one thousand years. It is taught that not only will Jesus reign for a thousand years after He has conquered all His enemies, He will reign on earth in Jerusalem. All Muslims, all Hindus, all Buddhists and all religious

enemies of Jesus and governments of the world will be brought under this supposed earthly reign of Jesus from Jerusalem. During this reign, the Jews will be restored to the land of Palestine, and then there will be peace on earth for a thousand years under the totalitarian reign of Jesus.

If you were a Muslim viewing the West, now what would you think of the political motives of the West that supports a churchian faith that upholds the existence of Israel in anticipation of the coming millennial reign of Jesus? Since the eschatology of churchianity maintains this premillennial view of the coming of Jesus, then the church will always be misunderstood as it is lumped with the churchian religions of the rest of the world who believe in the one thousand year reign of Jesus.

On a global scale, therefore, there will always be a misunderstanding between the West and the East. Since religion is the driving force in any world view, the West will always be understood by the churchianity by which its citizens are identified. In the clash between governments and economies, the West will always be viewed by the Muslim to be promoting his Western churchianity through his military ventures, since the expansionism of the Islamic world was historically through military conflict and economic takeovers.

I would like to add here that churchianity has failed both Europe and America. The first signals of this failure was seen when Cassius Clay changed his name to Mohammed Ali. Why did he become Muslim and not "Christian"? The ineptitude of the churchian religion to fulfill the needs of a great segment of the societies of America and Europe have led to many turning to Islam and other Eastern religions. We must never forget that this same scenario existed in North Africa when Christianity became churchian, and subsequently was wiped off northern Africa by Islam in one hundred years after the death of Mohammed in 622.

When a society becomes truly secular, ignoring the spiritual part of man, then every invention of religion will eventually invade that society. Today, it is not uncommon to find Buddhist temples and Moslem mosques throughout America and Europe, lands that at one time were the heartlands of Christianity, and lands from which came thousands of missionaries to evangelize the world. The existence of these temples and mosques is the prophecy of nations losing their Christian origins. Such is also the evidence that churchianity has greatly failed the West. If the churchian view of Christianity penetrates Sub-Saharan Africa and India where the church now thrives, the same will happen. If we do not recognize this historical truth, our children and grandchildren are doomed to live in a non-Christian world that will move them off the remainder of the continent of Africa as Islam did the church in North Africa after the death of Mohammed.

B. Secularism:

As we marched through the 20st century and into the 21st, Europe, and specifically France, sought to remove any outward religious expressions from government and civil life. The word "God" was deleted from the European Union's constitution. France banned dominant religious symbols in public schools. Political parties deleted "Christian" from their letterheads. The argument for doing such was to promote and maintain a truly secular government, one that is not associated with any religion. Government was to be truly secular in that it could not promote any religious belief.

Turkey has had a difficult time finding its way into the European Union because it seeks to carry with it Islamic oriented beliefs and practices. The rest of Europe has simply said to Turkey, government must be secular and not driven by religious inclinations. No religion must use the power of the sword to promote its beliefs.

There is some truth to this move since faith must be expressed from within, not forced upon one from without. This would thus perpetually put the secular state at odds with Islamic religions, since truly behaved Islam is theocratic. Islam is the civil government, and thus the laws of the Quran can never be implemented in a democratic system. Quran laws are asserted to be from God, and thus how can a secular democratic government ever change the law for the needs of the people. For this reason, Islam will always be contrary to the emergence of democracies throughout the world.

A secular government does not seek to banish religion from the lives of its citizens. They seek to guarantee that no one religion should dominate the citizens of the government. For this reason, civil government should be sterile of religion in the sense of not enforcing religion upon its citizens. It is simply not the duty of government, especially democratic government, to determine the faith of the citizens of a country.

It is for the above reason that Islamic nations will never truly be a part of the global community. While the West seeks to be democratic and secular, the Islamic theocratic governments of the Middle East will never view governmental decisions apart from Quranic regulation. Even in their own backyards, Islamic nations have tried to usher in secular government that is not regulated by the law of the Quran. As a result, nations as Algeria and Egypt have been plagued with internal conflict. Fundamental Islamists within such nations will

never be content with secular governments.

Those governments that are Islamic will never be at home with secular governments. It is for this reason that the future will continue to be cursed with conflict between Islamic oriented nations and those nations that are controlled by secular democratic governments. As long as secular governments represent the vast majority of nations of the world, and Islamic controlled nations are "contained," there will be freedom of religion in the realm of democratic governments. However, if this changes in the future—which is the desire of the Islamist—there will be a global persecution against other religious faiths that the world has never known. This persecution will be targeted specifically against those nations that promote churchianity.

So herein is the clear and present danger of the disciple of Jesus. Democratic governments of the West seek to accommodate theocratic religions as Islam. It may be that the accommodation of Islam in a democratic government is politically correct in order for politicians to secure the votes of the majority in such a system. But when the majority vote of the democratic governments throughout the world becomes Islam, there will be a major change in world order. Christians will be challenged to be Christians in this new world order.

The evidence of persecution of the Christian in the future is manifested in the present intolerance of Islamic governments toward Christianity today. While Western democratic governments seek to present social freedom for the practice of different religions, Islamic governments are very intolerant toward any religion that is not Islamic. This is the hypocrisy of the Islamic governments. And this is the weakness of the democratic system that may eventually lead to its fall through the aggressiveness of the Islamic movement throughout the world.

C. Islam:

True Islam is locked into a time warp. It was a faith that was born out of an era of cultural and political conflict in the 7th and 8th centuries. Christianity at that time had become a foreign religion in the land of its birth. Control, catechism and belief had been shifted to Rome. Arabs had no religious heritage or history as did the Jews. They had no identity with the "Christianity" they viewed as a foreign religion in the land of the Arabs. The time was thus right for Mohammed to give birth to a religion that outwardly appealed to the Arabic culture. From the time of Mohammed's death in 622 to the time when the Muslim armies were defeated in their invasion of Europe in 722, Islam exploded into human history, and has since grown to over 1.2 billion people throughout the world.

Where Islam is dominant, however, there seems to be a stagnation of both social and economic development. People remain in poverty. What seems to be one of the curious natures of true Islamic culture is that few great personalities are allowed to arise. Few Michelangelos, Shakespeares, Beethovens or Longfellows have arisen in middle eastern cultures where the clerics of true Islam seek to discourage development outside the control of the clerics. This is not a generic interpretation, just one that seems to manifest itself in those countries where strict adherence to Islamic practices is enforced.

Economic development has been slow and painful in those nations wherein Quranic law has played a dominant part in molding the culture. Modernity is the problem of the Islamic nations of the world. To modernize seems contradictory to the total sacrificial life-style that is promoted by the Islamic citizen. Bin Laden found Afghanistan the best of all possible nations in the 20th century for the practice of true Islam. It was poor, tribal and divided. It, as Somolia, was a warlord country that was divided between different clans. Islam was the common denominator by which the Taliban thus took a nation back to the dark ages. If 9/11 had never happened, the West would have kept on ignoring the plight of this oppressed nation.

It would be untrue to state that poverty is either unique with Islamic societies, or that poverty exists only in Islamic nations. If the lack of modernity in Islamic beliefs hinders financial development in those countries that are predominately Islam, we could argue that Islam has not helped nations as Afganistan and Somolia. Rich oil reserves have injected billions of dollars of capital into sparsely populated countries as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Dubai and Yemen. But if it were not for the oil, we would wonder if these nations would have ever developed any industry to promote jobs and international cooperation with the outside world. In fact, their richness in oil may have been the only reason for these nations to reach outside themselves in order to work in partnership with the rest of the world. If there were no oil reserves under the sands of the Arabian Desert, would the true Islamist have ever shaken hands with an infidel in an international business deal to establish a Western manufacturing business in an Islamic country? Probably not.

Poverty is a worldwide phenomenon. In 1976, I read a *Time Magazine* study concerning the existence of poverty in the world. The feature article of that issue had an impact on me at the time because I was living in Sao

Paulo, Brazil. I was touched by the poor every day in Brazil as children came by our house and begged for food. Families slept on the streets and mothers routinely gathered outside restaurants to rummage through garbage cans for scraps of food to feed their children. The prediction of the *Time* research at the time was that by the year 2000, world conflict would exist around struggles between the rich and the poor. It seems that the prediction has come true.

To a great extent, this is at the heart of the Middle Eastern Islamic struggle against the West. Since the world view of the Islamist hinders him from shaking hands with the infidel in a business deal that would generate jobs and development, the Islamist seeks to bring down symbols of capitalistic development as the World Trade Center. Of course no Islamist would ever confess that is his motive. Nevertheless, his actions reveal his world view, that this is against those who lead people away from the religious fatalism of dictatorial clerics.

The Islamist, who has nothing, has nothing to lose when he blows his body into a million pieces in the midst of a crowd of innocent victims. If a state or system of government seems to be the oppressor of the poor, then the call to rally around those who would announce jihad against the rich oppressor seems appealing. The Islamist, who presumes to represent the materially oppressed of the world, has heralded himself as the savior of the poor.

It is for this reason that there will never be peace between Palestinians and Israel. It is the poor (Palestinians) against the rich (Israel). Not all Palestinians are Islamic. However, it is the Islamic part of the Palestinians who are called to jihad against the supposedly rich land-grabbing Jews, who in reality are only one people in a series of civilizations who have lived in Palestine since the beginning of time. One culture (the Palestinians) is locked into poverty. The other (Israel) seems to survive regardless of holocaust oppressions. There is an economic and cultural jealousy here that will never be resolved simply because the two peoples are arguing from opposing world views. Unless the Islamic Palestinians give a right to another civilization to exist, there will be no peace. The conflict is not over land. It is over the right of a people to exist in this world as a nation with the right to determine their own future.

What is interesting in this conflict, however, is that no Palestinian Christian has answered the call to be a suicide bomber. The fact that they have not manifests the difference between the world views of Christianity and Islam. Christianity is proved to be of divine origin because it seeks peaceful negotiation. Islam is proved to be man-originated and maintained because of its mandate to die for the possession of land. Any religion that promotes material reward in the afterlife in order to accomplish material goals in the present life cannot be from God who is spirit.

In our efforts as Christians to evangelize the world, there is a significant difference between the system of evangelism of the Christian than the system that is used by the Muslim. Christians evangelize in reference to changing the beliefs of the people to whom they go. Muslims, on the other hand, evangelize in reference to economic opportunities. While we seek to convince people that Jesus is the Son of God, and thus urge obedience to the gospel, the Muslim is in town buying up businesses and shops in order to corner the job market.

In the 80s and early 90s, I did campaign work in Thohoyandou in the Venda region of South Africa. There were few Muslims in the city of Thohoyandou at that time. However, by the year 2000, the majority of the businesses had been bought out by Muslims. If one wanted a job, he or she had to work for a Muslim. After a friend of mine was on the job for a Muslim for about two months, he was asked to become a Muslim. This is subtle economic evangelism. Islam uses the capitalistic system of a free market nation in order to evangelize the nation. In this way, the Muslim who has learned to modernize his beliefs is able to exploit the capitalistic system of a nation in order to propagate his religion. What else would explain the rise to over six million Muslims in the capitalistic free market economy of America? One day, America will be as Thohoyandou. The former South African ambassador to Pakistan once visited Thohoyandou a few years ago and asked the Venda people, "Don't you see what they [the Muslims] are doing?" That's a good question for America.

D. Hinduism:

India is seeking to be a world economic power. Though strapped with a population that is mired down with poverty, there is an economic elite in India that is driving the nation forward. If history is a textbook for the future, strong economic countries have strong cultural influence on the world. And herein India will preach its religious faith to the world.

India has been the geographical bastion of Hinduism. The government of India is linked to Hindu faith, and thus cannot be viewed as a truly secular government. This has historically placed India in conflict with Pakistan and other Islamic countries. In fact, within India itself there is a growing tension between the emerging Islamic faith and the dominant Hindu government. Though I believe Hinduism will always remain the domi-

nant religious world view of the country, Hinduism, because of its pacifist nature, will always be threatened by more radical religions.

Not only is Islam growing in India, but also the Christian faith. It is for this reason that the government has made some restrictions on the foreign influence of religious workers. But it is too late for such legal maneuvers since the seeds of other faiths have already been firmly planted in Indian culture. The church and churchianity have firmly been planted in the hearts of millions among the one billion plus population. Christians will continue to expand in this nation simply because the typical Indian seeks to better himself in a free-market world. The typical Indian has viewed the West to be economically strong because of its roots in biblical principles. They have reasoned that if these principles can make a nation economically strong as America, then they are willing to incorporate these principles into their faith, or even convert entirely to Jesus.

Hinduism has been known for being tolerant of other faiths. But for its survival, this may change. Whenever a faith feels threatened it will often seek state and government to come to its rescue, especially when a faith is tied closely to state and government. Hinduism, however, is a faith that seems to always be looking for another god. It is for this reason that many Hindus have simply grafted Jesus into their beliefs, and thus developed a "Christianized Hinduism."

Regardless of the futile efforts to hinder outside influence from the Christian community, the church will continue to permeate this culture in which it is believed the apostle Thomas spent his last years. India and Africa are and will continue to be the geographical center of the church. India will have the most disciples as a nation simply because of its population. Africa will have the most disciples as a continent simply because of its size.

Pakistan exists today because of an inability of the world views of Islam and Hinduism to bring a society together into peaceful coexistence. Since both faiths seek to be linked to state, it was inevitable that two states would eventually form after Indian independence in 1947. As long as these religions use the power of government to maintain their dominance, there will never be peaceful coexistence between either state. Since secular states do not pose a problem, or become competitive in reference to religion, India will have harmony with the West, but will always be suspicious of Islamic states. It is for this reason that the West should always shake hands with India in the global economic world. The Christian, however, must make every effort to manifest a spirit of love to all men, regardless of their religious beliefs.

E. Buddhism:

Buddhism represents over one billion people of the world. As with churchianity, Islam and Hinduism, Buddhism will continue to be a major player in the forming of future cultures. As China continues to emerge and become a strong financial participant in the global economy, Buddhist China indirectly will influence secular societies that have largely given up Christianity and become very secular. This is manifested in the New Age Movement as it continues to grow in the West. The New Age Movement is Buddhist religion, though called after a different name.

As the West craves cheap goods from the cheap labor of China, a monetary transfer will bring China into being the top global economy in the near future. As America bought Japanese products for fifty years after World War II, and subsequently made Japan a world economic force, so it will happen with China. The only difference is that China has a population that is measured in a billion plus, not in millions as Japan.

China, as it is under a communist regime, will become increasingly secular. After years of atheistic communistic teaching, it has become a nation of people who have no religion. As far as economics is concerned, a class of the rich has already developed. Porsches and Mercedes are already being driven down streets in Beijing, passing donkey-pulled carts of a lower economic class who can never seem to get a piece of the pie.

It will be the emerging rich of China who will challenge the secular West in the future. As China contents itself with a tremendous gap between the rich and poor, the rich of China will have an economic source that gives it an economic advantage over the West. This advantage will be built on the backs of the cheap labor force of the masses of the unskilled. The West will not be able to compete with this economic strategy. As long as there is a driving class of the privileged in China who ride on the backs of the poor, and because of the materialistic thirst of the West to obtain cheap China goods, capital flow from the West to China will build an economic giant in the Far East with which the West will eventually have to compete.

I believe one thing is certain. China, with its passive religion of Buddhism, and atheistic moral culture, will become a strong world power. It will become such simply because of its massive labor force that is willing to work for meager salaries in comparison to anyone else in the world. This force that is used by an intelligentsia which feels comfortable with the exploitation of the poor, will drive China to the forefront of world economic influence. Its Far East economics and culture is

ready to eclipse the economic giants of the world.

The problem with the emergence of China is that there are no trade unions to rally the poor to a better life. While the West must deal with trade unions that take care of labor, a laborer in China is simply set aside for twenty or thirty other laborers who want the same job. However, there is grumbling in China, especially among the rural poor. But it will take another generation or more for an economically strong class of workers to change the government. When only a few people enjoy the blessings of economic growth, human rights for the masses can be easily ignored. The economic elite in China know this. They also know that the masses can arise to change government. In preparation for any such repetition in history as the cultural revolution that was initiated in 1948, China has built a million-man army in order to keep its own population in check.

The ruling elite of China will never forget what was expressed at Tienamen Square. A suppressed class of young people sought to give birth to greater freedoms. Unfortunately, the government at that time harshly squashed the efforts of this group, but the day will come when those who marched in Tienamen Square will be ruling the country. We must pray that they will not forget that for which many of their friends died.

Regardless of all the blessings and cursings of China's economic situation, Jesus is being preached among the masses of China. I once picked up a *Time Magazine* and read a two-page article that reported on the destruction of an almost completed church building in China. The government bulldozers moved in and completely destroyed the structure, while police beat some of the members. The article concluded that the China government is not concerned about "Christianity" that meets in homes in a seemingly disorganized manner. However, when churches get organized and gather great crowds of people into one place, then they are troubled.

When the early church began in the first century under the oppression of the Jews, and then the Roman State, the same persecution was launched against Christians. As a result, the church grew rapidly across the Roman Empire. So are we to be thankful to the China government for implementing the very thing that will cause the growth of the church in China? We will remain in small groups and seemingly "disorganized," for our Head is in heaven. We need no organized body on earth to take the place of our Head. In this manner China will continue to be evangelized.

In the year 2000, several house church leaders in China had a secret meeting. They estimated at that time that there were at least fifty million members of house churches throughout China. Are we to thank the oppression of the China government for this? It is ironic that those who promote churchianity in the West are the first to judge the actions of the China government against religion. But the church is not what the churchian would teach. It is not what the China government perceives it to be. True Christians are those who simply seek to live a better life to the glory of God, not build monuments to make a public statement, nor be represented by a professional clergy who would voice members' rights, while siphoning off the money of the poor in order to maintain their power structures.

I think one thing is true. If the Chinese government truly understood the biblical world view and behavior of a true Christian, it would be totally tolerant with true Christians. But as long as it perceives the churchian religion of the Western as a religious power base with professionals who maintain a Catholic role of control in world politics, Christians will be lumped in with the masses of churchianists in the minds of the China government. They will continue to oppress organized religion. But ironically, I see the government becoming more tolerant of those who want to be simply Christians and good citizens.

So is the Western disciple able to live and work in China, having been so influenced by the churchianity that is maintained in the West? When the Western church places so much emphasis on bands and buildings, how can disciples be trained to work with a meek and quiet spirit, in an environment where love, not physical structures or performances, is the means by which the heart of God is proclaimed to the masses?

A good friend of mine and his wife, with their young daughter, have been working in China for several years. They support themselves by teaching English. They quietly do the work as disciples of Jesus, teaching and gathering into their home a small group of Christians. It is a hard and often discouraging work. However, there are others throughout China doing the same and with great success.

I have often wondered why others are not called to do the same as my friend. Is China too far away? Does it speak a language that is too difficult to learn? Are the living conditions bad? Is it that no glowing reports can ever be made of one's work? Or, is the religious culture of the Western churchian so radically different from simple Christianity that Western disciples feel no "call" to go to where it is difficult? This is at least a question that must be seriously considered.

The is one thing about living the gospel, and that is that the gospel will move one into another tribal group, another country, or wherever the gospel needs to be preached.

Chapter 3

ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

Those who are able to change,
are those who are able to capture
opportunities that are offered by the future.

The winds of change always blow. For those who find it difficult to change, these winds always seem to be chilly winds that bring discomfort. John the apostle used the term "sea" in Revelation as a metaphor for the populations of the world. What better metaphor could be used to illustrate the constant change that besets civilizations throughout history? Nothing of this world ever stays the same. We are always held in anticipation for the next chapter of human history.

Because Africa was first tribal, it fought social change for centuries. But most Africans have relented, and thus are pushing forward to the next urban Africa culture, since over half of Africa now lives in urban centers. As nations seek to become part of the global community in order to have their piece of the economic pie, they must source information. They must go online, download the latest work manuals, business information, stock prices, and thus learn to keep up with the latest leading economic cultures of the world. This access to a wealth of information in order to generate wealth is the engine that is moving Africa and the world into the future.

Since information is the force that changes culture, change is inevitable in those nations that want to advance from Third to First World economics. Old ways will have to give way to new adventures as governments seek to bring their nations out of the doldrums of Third World despair. Development means change, and thus any country that would develop must teach its population to transition with the information that is necessary to build nations.

Sub-Saharan Africa illustrates the future of the struggling Third World that seeks to participate in the 21st century global economic family. It has been a continent with a cuffed hand that sought any means by which to pull itself out of centuries of underdevelopment or exploitation. With the Western demand for democracy, African countries are trying their best to emerge out of the "dark continent" syndrome in order to become a part of this democracy that seems to encourage self-initiative to better one's self in a competitive world.

For many years, however, Africa will remain economically cursed as it limps forward. The continent will remained cursed with regimes of government who are composed of corrupt, self-seeking politicians who feign a concern for the people, especially the poor, but inwardly are using their positions for possessions. On the bright side, however, this is a passing generation of "politicians" who have at least ushered in democracy in many African countries.

Before we become critical or cynical of African countries as they seek to bring themselves into the global community, we must not become hypocritical in our judgments. We must remember that America was only about one hundred years old when she elapsed into civil war. Most African countries are less than fifty years old. They are struggling democracies that are interpreting democracy according to African culture and history. Therefore, we must save our judgments of these nations for another fifty years if we would make any comparisons between them and the United States. I personally think they are a long way ahead of the time frame for political and economic development than America was at the same time in its historical development. I see great things coming out of Africa in the future.

But African's Achilles heel is the cuffed hand. She is a continent of nations that seems to thrive on foreign aid and foreign investment. What made America a strong economy that is based on a dynamic and very patriotic culture is that there were no sources for foreign aid investment in her early years of development to become an economic giant. Since it is a truism that economic development hinges on culture, then it was culture that drove America to where she is today. And since the principles of Christianity played the major role in determining the culture of early America, it is true that Christian principles as a way of life set the norms for Western development. This is opposed to those nations that succumbed to an Islamic world view in the 7th century. Could this be why the Islamic world is so jealous of American financial strength? Could this be the reason for the perpetual tension between the West and Middle East?

Jesus said that He came in order that we may have life, and subsequently have it more abundantly (Jn 10:10). I am sure that more was included in this promise than the mere fact that Jesus' principles would make

us more holy. His "abundant life" certainly included enjoyment of this life in a way that would bring one out of the despair of a satanic controlled world that keeps the masses in the grip of poverty.

This is not to say that Christianity is a means to wealth. It simply means that the moral life Jesus brought into the world was the best there was and is. The respect of the individual, the worth of life, the principles for good neighborhood, and the foundation of love are the best principles upon which world views are developed.

Christianity offers principles by which freedom and human dignity can develop and thrive. By living according to Bible principles the individual can develop for himself the best possible life. There is great power in the principle, "Love your neighbor as yourself." To a great extent, the God-fearing culture of America did just this in developing the humanitarian culture.

But for centuries Africa kept itself out of the current of human development by its beliefs in spooks and spirits. If any individual of the tribe economically excelled above the whole, he was conveniently cursed by the witch doctor, and subsequently brought into economic conformity with the rest of the tribe. It was the same hideous world mess that was produced by atheistic communism. The communist used a gun to maintain commonality. The African used fear of spooks and spirits. The result was the same. The masses were kept in abject poverty for the benefit of the privileged few. Until Africa frees herself from such superstitions, she will not emerge. But there is hope. The information highway is bringing to the continent a way out of ignorance. Biblical principles have been proclaimed on the continent for over two centuries. There is indeed a renaissance happening. No longer is a great part of the continent under the control of the witch doctor and ignorance that is fed by superstition. No longer is communism a major threat. There are grounds for great hope.

The United Bible Societies of Africa have played a major role in bringing Africa out of superstitious darkness. Bible printing by the Bible Society in Cape Town produces over one million Bibles annually. The Gideons produce hundreds of thousands every year. This tremendous amount of Bibles goes into the continent of Africa every year to bring the light of truth to a people who are seeking God. Through the distribution of the *Study New Testament* of the church, with the enclosed "teacher" of the *Encyclopedic Study Guide*, this "little missionary" is being sent to nations throughout the continent. These are efforts to bring light to a dark continent. I would say, therefore, that the single most important source of information that is bringing Africa into development is Bible information. The Bible has changed sub-Saharan African culture. It will continue to change the culture of Africa in the years to come if we continue to put the Bible into the hands of a people who are hungering and thirsting after the word of God.

We are now in an era of world history wherein it seems that those who have the greatest ability to change will be those who will economically develop the most. Accepting new ideas and strategies in a changing world gives one the edge over those who are steeped in unproductive systems that have locked them into the past, if not doomed them to underdevelopment and poverty. As the new economic world eclipses those economies and cultures that refuse to accept new means and measures for development, a tension will continue to develop between the haves and have nots. And herein is the curse of the Islamist who cannot modernize with the new world order.

If the Taliban's seizure of Afghanistan twenty years ago proves anything, it proves that an archaic world view can cripple an entire nation. It can take a nation backward a century and hold it in the grips of poverty and backwardness. The inability of fundamental Islam to cope with the developing world will for many years to come generate tension between the haves and the have nots. And since the Christian world view allows the liberated to develop economically, the Islamist will always view Christianity as the religion of the infidel. We can almost with certainty say that there will never be any armistice between fundamental Islam and Christianity since the fundamentalist of Islam would stymie economic development for the sake of a religious communism that makes all citizens poor and backward under the control of dictatorial clerics.

I would add another dimension to this sociological equation. Most people in America do not understand the widening rift that is developing between the United States and Europe. The American is certainly perceptive that there is a rift, especially since the events of the Iraq war. But I am wondering if the typical American understands the reason for this.

The European was a colonial. However, the American never formerly engaged in such with Middle Eastern countries and Africa. But it seems that the colonial past of European countries may now come back to haunt them. When the colonial countries were eventually given their independence from the mother countries of Europe, dual passports, and sometimes citizenship, were established between the colonized country and the European mother country. In the decades since independence of the now free colonized countries, a constant flow of immigrants have come out of the old colonial posses-

sions. This human flow of population has poured into Europe. And you guessed it. The colonialized countries of Europe were countries in North Africa, India, and the Middle East, countries that were to a great extent Islamic. And now, there is a vast **voting** population of Muslims in Europe who will determine the future of Europe. There is some irony in this. The colonials will eventually be overcome by those they colonized. Freedom in a democratic society will allow this to happen.

The West must keep in mind that fundamental Islam is not as Buddhism and Hinduism. There is a theology of tolerance and liberty in Buddhism and Hinduism that allows religion and economy to exist. The adherents to both can coexist with the Christian without either seeking to blow up the Christian. However, the Islamist maintains a different view. Since Christianity is the religion of the infidel, he thus concludes that Christianity is a false religion that has launched centuries of attack against Islam and Islamic countries.

From an evangelical point of view, the Islamist is right. Christians have sought to vigorously convert the Muslim. Unfortunately, during the era of the Crusades, a counterfeit Christianity—churchianity—sought to use government military power to accomplish the goal of eradicating Islamic control of the Bible lands. In order to counter this threat, Islamists now seek to capture governments in order to make their stand against any invading "crusaders." To the fundamental Islamist, therefore, the Western invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq were crusades. Though the objective of the West was to free a people instead of some supposed holy shrines and holy city, the Islamist believed that the era of the Crusades was resurrected. His cry for jihad, therefore, is a cry to stop foreign influence in his holy lands. As long as the infidel occupies his "Quran lands," the Islamist will always feel that the "Christian" West is an occupying force that must be eradicated from his holy lands.

What extremists as Bin Laden have done is ignite the tension between the Christian and Islamic world views. The irrational terrorist has forced the hand of the West to avenge 9/11 with a holy war of justice called "war on terrorism." The Isalmists, however, have certainly revealed their contradictions by accusing the West with invasion into their own lands when they rejoiced over an invasion into the land of the infidel with jets flying into skyscrapers. The Islamists want the infidel out of holy lands such as Saudi Arabia, and now Iraq. But they have enraged the infidel by attacking his "holy land." In doing so, a tit-for-tat retaliation exists to snuff out those states who might be responsible for terrorist activity or harboring terrorists within their borders. The Islamic terrorist has never considered the fact that if he would have stayed out of America, America would have stayed out of the Middle East. But again, a terrorist is never a rational thinker. He or she is simply driven by obsessions and delusions of a religion that accommodates passions against the West.

In these winds of global change, the Christian is both hindered and helped. He is hindered in the fact that conflict between world governments and religions do not make it easy to move among the nations. Paul asked Timothy that prayers be made for kings in order that we live a quiet and peaceful life. It is in peaceful environments that evangelism is easier and the church grows. On the other hand, in times of conflict it is difficult for Christians to go into all nations, especially when nations shut their doors to the missionary.

Global conflict has helped the Christian cause in the sense that Christians have had to rethink their faith. They have been driven to recognize the differences between Christianity and religious faiths that are founded more on obsession than fact. If the rise of the war on terrorism has accomplished anything, it has awakened a Christian faith that was at a critical point of becoming stagnant and dead. Conflict has awakened the Christian to the fact that if his faith subsides, there is another faith that will gladly take over his land.

From the mid 1960s to the turn of the last century, Islam grew in America from an unknown religion to over six million. How could this have happened in a supposedly "Christian" nation? Did the Christian become so introverted that he lost sight of his mission?

I believe one of the primary causes for this growth of Islam in America was that the American became so enthralled in economic development and secular living that he forgot his faith. Those who were left behind in the development of America remained poor. A spiritual vacuum was formed among the poor in America. And this poor person was usually African-American. When Cassius Clay became Mohammed Ali, something changed. A new threat entered America with a new faith.

Has the war on terrorism stopped the conversion of America to Islam? We will not know for another decade or so. However, its growth from obscurity to six million should alert the West that pure secularism in a materialistic society does not work. We are religious creatures. If society seeks to suppress religion with things, fun and games, we will pay the price.

I believe the global conflict between the world views of Islam and Christianity have awakened the fundamentals in both faiths. Where we go from here will be determined by the dedication of both the Christian and the Muslim. Since the dedicated Christian is driven to be more evangelistic with his faith, the dedicated Muslim

will always be threatened with Christian zeal. The Islamist will continue to be defensive. And in being defensive, he will seek measures, any measures, by which to stem the evangelistic tide of the Christian. And since fundamental Islam is a theocratic system, the fundamental Islamist will always view Western governments as the vehicle that seeks to spread Christianity into all the world. It is for this reason that the war on terrorism will never have an end. There will never be an armistice signed by an Islamic terrorist who believes that his faith is under attack by a Western government.

We must keep in mind, therefore, that Christianity and true Islam can never have peaceful coexistence. One or the other must be modified in order to live together in the same society. This means that one must be false, and the other true. Only the one that is false can be modified. The world views of each are inherently opposed to one another. When the Muslim is in the minority in a democratic government, things are relatively under control. However, when the Muslim becomes the major voting citizen, things change. Europe and America will never again have the relationship they had in the past. World War II brought the American and European together, but it will be the power of the Muslim vote in Europe that will move them apart. It will move them apart because there will always be those Muslims who will not modernize. They will not modify their faith in order to coexist with other faiths. Islam is a theocracy, and as a theocracy all other faiths must be moved out of the way in order for true Islam to be practiced in any given society. Do those of the West understand this? I believe their indifference to religion will lead to their conversion to Islam. Neverthless, those who know the gospel understand that there is absolutely no compromise between the gospel and Islam. Islam is on the other end of the continuum.

Chapter 4

TRANSITIONS IN CHURCH HISTORY

A clear definition of fundamental truth will guard the disciples of Jesus from a wayward path for the future.

In a changing world, there will be changes in the behavioral traditions of the church. Leaders must understand that though truth does not change, our response to the truth may, depending on how godly disciples culturally respond to the will of God. As the church moves from one generation to another, there will always be changes in how the church carries out the commands of God. And in these changes there will be times of struggle, if not chaos. It is encumbent upon church leaders, therefore, to take the church through these times with a merciful and patient spirit.

Regardless of the challenges that any environment of the world presents, the church is under a mandate to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Challenges do not negate this mandate. We can never use difficulties and persecution as valid objections to accomplish our divine mission. Difficulties can be overcome. Persecution can be endured. After all, any cause that is not worth dying for can never be a cause worth living for. Since this world is not our home, then we must continually press on, knowing that we can either be sent home by our persecutors or called home by our Lord. In either case, we go to our eternal home.

In our work as His disciples, we seek to populate heaven through the proclamation of the gospel, knowing that no man has a right to hear the gospel twice when there is another who has not yet heard it once. We are driven with a mission to find others for Jesus because He found us.

We must be extremely dedicated to this mission. When we are, God will bring forth fruit from our labors. Now as disciples who are to be wise as serpents, we must evaluate our work in order to determine if it is a work of either wood, hay, stubble, or a work of gold, silver and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:9-15). I have been involved in both types of work in my global adventures. However, I can say this by looking back at past failures and victories. We can make a determination of failures and victories only by planning for the future with information we have learned from the past.

I have traveled to more countries than I can remember and lived on three continents. Since I launched into global living and became a global citizen in 1974, I have experienced a number of movements within the socio-religious structures of various cultures. I have experienced the church at several different stages of

growth in countries throughout the world. I thought that it would be good to share at least one scenario of the growth and decline that seems to be common in many places where the church has been planted. This particular scenario that is not uncommon is one that often produces churches of wood, hay, stubble. We must thus look back at these cases in order to prevent ourselves from repeating history. In looking back at past failures, we must learn the skill of planting churches that are gold, silver and precious stones.

I would thus like to point out some of the typical stages of development that some churches go through in the process of history as they grow from early establishment to second, third and fourth generation leadership. These same stages can be seen in the movement of the church in many situations throughout the world. As leaders, it is imperative that we recognize which state of development the church is in for the purpose of making adjustments for the future.

The time span of the following general case history is usually from twenty to forty years in any given culture. The history usually begins with evangelists who are sent in to initially establish the church. Throughout the history of growth, the newly established churches usually go through a series of transitions that take the church from birth to death, depending on the principles that were established in the initial year or two of church planting. The manifestation of church growth principles of the established churches usually begin to manifest themselves when the movement is between twenty to thirty years old. After twenty to thirty years of growth to stagnation, the first generation leaders, the pioneers of the movement, are usually in their fifties or sixties. These churches are usually functioning upon the foundation of the initial works of the early evangelists. However, it is during these times that some negative transitions begin to take place in the movement. It is at this time that the principles or methodologies that were embedded in the church in the early years of establishment begin to produce their fruit.

A. Stage 1: Transition to a new leadership:

When the typical church is twenty to thirty years old, a second generation of leadership has now moved into the leadership of the church. These preachers and leaders are in their twenties, or early thirties. They have not fought the battles of the first generation leaders, and therefore, have a different view of the nature of their work. Because they "grew up in the church," their perception of "church" is different than their pioneering fathers. They have been the product of the first generation leadership, and thus, some of the principles and methodologies of their fathers lingers in their beliefs and behavior. However, they begin to learn new things, and thus view the church from a different perspective.

The first generation leaders fought battles for survival. They fought the denominations. They fought half-converted brethren who in the early years of the establishment of the church brought into the church a host of churchian thinking and doctrine. These early leaders fought for the faith and defended the truth. They usually built the church on the strictness of a "proof text" concept of understanding the Scriptures, since their battles centered around first principles with those who denied such.

As a result of their intense debates with false teachings, their approach to understanding the Bible is legalistically oriented. In the struggles of the early years, doctrine was the primary motivation for learning the Bible rather than discovering and applying principles of holiness and focusing the minds of people on Jesus. Doctrine, not behavioral Christianity, became the emphasis of the movement. Church, not Jesus, became that which had to be defended. Obession with the body over the head, not only turned the thinking of the members upside down, it embedded within the membership an introverted mentality that focused first on man, not Jesus. In those years of debate, a legal oriented view of church was developed. The seeds for future discord were thus planted that would eventually lead to squabbles in the body over an assortment of issues.

In their defense against the forces of denominational error in order to establish the "true church," the early pioneers often developed a reactionary theology that was very legalistic. This legalistic approach to Bible teaching molded the attitude of the early pioners into developing a legalistic catechism of beliefs that were constructed in reaction to churchain doctrines. When the denominationalists said "faith only," a reactionary theology was developed that said "works only." When the churchianists promoted "grace only," those in the heart of the first battles unconsciously developed theologies of "legal obedience." When churchianists emphasized the work of the Spirit, we developed a deistic concept of God who is somewhere off in the universe. As a result of this reactionary foundation upon which our teaching was based, we too developed our own churchianity, a focus that is primarily focused on preserving the church rather than exalting the glory of Jesus as the head of the church and savior of the world.

The extent of this reversal of the body over the head could be illustrated by an experience I had in a class on

the scheme of redemption in the latter 60s. The instructor of the class was teaching the "plan of salvation." He wrote on the blackboard, "hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized." He looked at what he had written, and said, "Brethren this is the plan of salvation, but somehow we need to put more Jesus into our presentation of the plan." At the time he knew there was something wrong with "our plan." But neither he nor the rest of us could at the time figure out what was wrong. Now we have. The plan is Jesus. It is His death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. This was the gospel of God's scheme of redemption. "Hear-believe-repent-confess-baptism" was only the recorded response of people to the preaching of the gospel. What we were doing back in those days was emphasizing the response instead of the gospel, which was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We thus converted people to a legal code of obedience for which we had several passages of scripture. All of us have since repented of this, but the legacy that was left is a generation of people who were legally baptized, but were not added to the church by focusing first on Jesus and His cross and resurrection. The cross was presented to them only after we had preached "hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized."

Because of confrontational beginnings, legalism often became the the first generation leaders' approach to biblical teaching. Their hermeneutics became legalistic because of their struggle for existence among a host of religious errors that were promoted by churchianists. A balance was lost and a tendency to stand to the far right was developed. In a churchian environment of legalism, members were regimented to conform to those traditional shibboleths and interpretations that were constructed throughout the years of conflict. This was the "Christianity" that was handed to the children.

What happened in this first stage of church establishment was that the seeds of discord were planted for the destruction of the church in the generations to come. Whenever a legalistic approach to church is development, all is well as long as everyone agrees on both doctrine, opinions and traditions. When everyone is cloned after the same system of opinions and behavior, then there is peace and harmony. However, a new generation begins to think, "Is this what the Bible actually teaches?" Questioning matters of opinion or methodologies often brings discomfort and discord among those whose focus first on perserving a system of church (churchianity), rather than Jesus.

If legalistic thinking is embedded in a church in the first decade of its establishment, the seeds are planted for division in the decades to come. When legalistic Jews came into the initial establishment of the early church, it took two inspired letters from the Holy Spirit (Romans and Galatians) to solve the problem. It would be wise, therefore, to thoroughly engraft the principles of Romans and Galatians into the thinking of newly established churches in order to guard against division in the future.

In order not to implant negative seeds that will eventually grow into discord among the brethren, evangelists should initially preach Jesus and the cross. If we preach church instead of Jesus, a churchian religion will develop. Legal church doctrines will be embedded in the thinking of the early disciples that will not bring forth fruit until someone questions one of the "doctrines" that has no biblical foundation, but was actually the expressed opinion of one of the early pioneers of the church. When a new generation starts focusing on Jesus, churchians will say, "But doctrine is also important." It is. But the point is that Jesus has all authority. He is head of the church, King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is our high priest at the right hand of God, and the one into whom we must be immersed for remission of sins. This is the doctrine. If we try to go legally through the New Tetament to first seek doctrine, then we will never find Jesus, for in focusing on doctrine, we fail to fully see Jesus, because in our minds we keep ourselves away from Jesus. But if we first seek Jesus and the grace He brought through the cross, then our appreciation of what God has done for us through grace will bring freedom and an appreciation for our salvation.

B. Stage 2: Transition to different opinions:

In the initial establishment of the church in any area, some of the first generation leaders often develop a guardian attitude toward the movement they have begun. They are/were the pioneers, and thus, there is a self-appointment of themselves to make sure that the movement stays on their concept of a course of "sound doctrine." There is often an unconscious stealing of the church from Jesus and His word in order that their own opinions and dictates be observed.

A psychological mold for the history of the church is thus established. Around this mold emerging leadership has a very difficult time to think and act freely for itself without the intimidation of the older leadership. Self initiative in Bible study is stymied. Interpretations must be based on the Bible **and** in conformity with the opinions of those who have become standards of biblical interpretation. Basing one's study solely on the Scriptures becomes difficult because of the intimidation of unwritten interpretive opinions that hold the new

generation of Bible students in check. And since the thinking of the first generation of leaders was based on a legalistic view of Scripture, the second generation of leadership that grew up "in the church" must conform to opinions in interpretation and church behavior of the older generation. Because the first generation of leaders have a difficult time determining the difference between Bible and opinions, any change in opinion is viewed as a change in Bible teaching. The foundation is thus set for division.

In this environment, the second generation leadership struggles. These leaders too often over react to the intimidation of their fathers. The younger generation did not fight the early battles of the movement. They have been the product of the foundation of the early struggles in the movement. As a result, their perspective of the church is different. They are of a different nature. They see things differently because they are not the products of a reactionary theology. They often see some things from a different perspective because they approach Bible study not in an effort to answer denominational error or brotherhood apostasy. They want to enhance holiness rather than promote a confrontational argument with some denominationalist. They search the Scriptures, not to win battles, but to develop the spiritual growth of the now twenty to thirty year old churches that were built on the foundation of the early pioneers. Problems arise because they do not understand the nature of the pioneers of the movement and the pioneer leaders do not understand them. There is a generation gap.

Because of this lack of understanding on both sides, the church enters into an era of confrontation. Because of the often implanted legalistic thinking of the fathers in the development of their reactionary theology, the new leaders on the scene see that many sacredly held church practices are not Bible, but simply the behavior of an earlier generation of leaders who fought the initial battles that established the church. The new generation that "grew up in the church" did not fight these battles. They did not develop a reactionary theology. And thus, their objectivity is not clouded by the smoke of a heated battle with some religious error.

It is at this time in the history of a church that both the pioneer leaders and younger generation leaders must be cautious. The pioneers must not seek to steal the sheep of God. One steals sheep by becoming a lord over the flock. Peter saw this happening among some churches of the first century (1 Pt 5:1-6). It happens today when leaders seek to bind on the church their opinions, methodologies or ceremonies. Older leaders must be very cautious about binding those things that are only traditional, and thus not mentioned in the Scriptures.

Younger generation leaders must respect their elders. They must not become arrogant when they discover a point in belief or behavior that is not in the Scriptures. They too must guard themselves from reacting against the leadership of the church that was handed to them. They must remember the early struggles of their fathers who stood valiant against the wiles of the devil in all sorts of biblical ignorance in the churchian world. Younger leaders must always remember that in all discussions about belief, the Bible alone must be our final authority. Just because something is not in the Bible does not mean that it should be changed. It should only be recognized as a tradition, a tradition that is up for discussion between the older and younger generation leaders.

C. Stage 3: Transition into group tension:

Something almost tragic happens in some churches when they are twenty to thirty years old. Two generations of church leaders often come into conflict with one another. A contrast of opposites is set up in which Satan often does some of his best work in church division.

The second generation leaders seek change. This change is often a change from legalism to a more grace oriented faith. They also often seek a change in methods, not the message. However, the legalistic nature of the older first generation leaders reacts against the supposedly "liberal" nature of the second generation leaders. They react to change, assuming that any change is liberalism and an apostasy from the "truth." They confuse method and message, assuming that any change in method is a change in message. Any change usually threatens the icons of the older generation, and thus a sense of insecurity is developed in the minds of the older generation. Therefore, they assume that change must be liberal because that to which change is made is not how it has always been done or believed in the past.

The new generation of leaders wants to do things in different ways. However, the established way of doing things in the local church is now about twenty years old. Any change in the established behavioral manner of doing something obviously brings tension because the first generation leaders have by this time confused method and message. They have allowed the traditional way of doing something to be the only way it can be done, and thus a tradition has become a doctrine.

The first generation leadership has often led themselves to believe that they had a hedge on understanding the Bible because they won so many battles with the denominations. The truth they proclaimed was right and victorious. However, a subtle

attitude of arrogance crept in where they convinced themselves that there was nothing else to learn. When the second generation leadership entered the scholars' lounge, these leaders were often challenged for their new approach or emphasis. Because of their emphasis on other areas of biblical truth, and because they often expressed old truths in a different way, they are often accused of being "liberal." This is the beginning of an era of confrontation that often divides brethren because no forum was ever developed for open discussion. When lords rule, there are no round table discussions.

In an over reaction to the legal atmosphere of the first generation leadership, some second generation leaders fly right through Jerusalem. They go from one extreme to another. These leaders go "grace only" in reaction to legalistic works only. They lose their biblical center of reference. In reaction to hardline legalism and hierarchal control of some first generation leaders of the church, they lose their biblical perspective of the unique nature of the church. They often consign the church to being just another denomination. In fact, they sometimes join what they would consider to be just "another denomination" when some dispute arises in the church. They become truly "liberal" in theology, giving up the fundamental doctrines of the New Testament for the sake of peace. Because the initial establishment of the church was not built on love of the brethren, they are unable to agree to disagree for the sake of fellowship.

This is a time in the history of any church that the instructions of Titus 3:9-11 must be obeyed in every detail. Paul wrote that some want to generate "controversies, contentions and strivings." But he reminded Titus that such disagreements "are unprofitable and worthless." Those who would persist in contentions over insignificant matters are factious, and thus must be rejected. They must be rejected because contentious people are perverted, and thus sin. They are self-condemned because of their desire to argue over matters of opinion or things that are not significant in reference to one's salvational relationship with God. It is imperaive, therefore, that leaders *"not strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the believers"* (2 Tm 2:14). Once a leader perceives that a debate is about to insue over "words to no profit," he should *"avoid profane and empty babblings"* (2 Tm 2:16). This is a time not to show up at the meeting of one who is seeking to be contentious and controversial.

D. Stage 4: Transition into reactionism:

At about this time in the historical transition of the church, some of the first generation leaders also make a fatal mistake. Because they do not understand their own legal approach to Christianity they do not understand why some of these second generation leaders are reacting to some of their beliefs and behavior. They do not understand why some are leaving the church. In their failure to see their own legalism, they label as "liberal" everything and everyone who does not conform to their "position" on the issues. More tragically, they intensify the situation by establishing a "watchdog" mentality. Some make themselves the saviors of the church, often marching from this city to that church, from lectureship to gospel meeting in an effort to stamp out the rise of liberalism in the church. The emphasis of their preaching gradually turns from saving the lost to saving the saved. The nature of their spirit gradually turns to bitterness and mistrust in the younger generation of church leaders. They wake up one day and find themselves alone in a theological circle they have drawn so small that they alone are in it.

But there are those second generation leaders who have not gone off to the denominations as some of those who have lost their center of reference concerning the true nature of the church. This second generation of leaders also see the apostasy of those who have fallen away to religions that have been created after the traditons of men. However, they see the cause of this apostasy from a different perspective. They see the legalism of some of the first generation leaders who have pronounced themselves as guardians of the church. Christianity is viewed by this generation of leaders more from a Christ-gospel perspective rather than a "doctrine-argument" perspective. Because they do not close ranks with the first generation leaders who are in a legalistic manner reacting to an apostasy, they are considered with suspicion in the eyes of the first generation leaders.

The older, first generation leaders again react. They react with a religious nature of legalistic argumentation against those in the church who do not conform to their opinions. The brandishing about of terms as "liberal" or "doctrinally loose" is too often heard. Such slanderous labelling and name calling only intensifies the conflict and causes all involved to lose contact with the real issues. The issues are not over fundamental doctrine. They are over attitudes, opinions and methods. In the conflicts that ensue, there is a real loss of the fundamental doctrine of unity of the church and salvation of souls. Men too often violate the fundamental doctrine of church unity for the sake of propagating their own opinions. The weightier doctrine of unity is sacrificed for the traditions of men.

The second generation leaders too often carelessly throw about terms as "conservative" or "hard core" or

"legalistic" because they do not understand the nature of the older first generation leaders. The conflict between these two generations of church leaders is most unfortunate and too often severe. Fellowship among preachers is often lost. Fellowship among churches is lost. Good men's reputations are slandered by the slinging of labels and gossip. Men lose their direction by turning from evangelism to church politics. The inevitable result is the loss of souls, both in the church and outside the church, for evangelism ceases. Struggling Christians become disillusioned with the conflict of senseless battles which should never have been fought. The movement is now in a stage of self-destruction. It turns on itself.

Are there those among us who can find and maintain balance in times of conflict? Church unity is a fundamental doctrine. Would we violate a fundamental doctrine over squabbles in differences of opinion? Would we turn from evangelism of the lost by turning on ourselves?

I write these words because of a biblical teaching which is too often neglected in our preaching and teaching. It is the doctrine of the unity of the body. All Christians hold different opinions and interpretations. However, we must maintain unity that is based on fundamental doctrines. One evangelist in South Africa once said, "We are divided over opinions, but there is absolutely no difference of understanding over fundamental doctrines." Our problem is trying to move our opinions into the realm of fundamental doctrine. And in doing such we divide brethren. Do we know the Bible well enough to know what is not there? Do we have the same fear about binding where God has not bound as we do about loosing where God has not loosed?

E. Stage 5: Transition to a renewal for unity:

I was once in the country of Liberia immediately after the end of thirteen years of civil war. As I moved through the city of Monrovia, the capital, I observed the numerous bullet holes in houses and poles and every standing structure. The heat of the battles of the war were intense. A quarter of a million people died and a country was economically destroyed. Nothing was gained by power-hungry warlords who sought to control the minds of men with the support of diamonds. But one good thing came from the years of war. The people were totally disgusted with war. They could see what it had done to their country. Leaders were driven to the negotiating table in order to have peace instead of war. Countries that want true peace must come to this conclusion. Churches that want peace must also practice peace.

After civil war in the church in any area there is a refreshing breeze for unity and peace among those who are disgusted with the era of conflict that was perpetuated by those who sought to maintain either power, positions or purse. After years of conflict there rises within the new leadership a recognition of the foolish strifes of the past, and thus a yearning to be brethren in a church that is more interested in saving a lost world than slandering a good brother. This leadership looks forward to a time when members of the church are known for their love of one another and not for being baptized in vinegar in order to wage argument. In this stage of development, the church lives on, never wanting to go back to the days of slash and burn.

It is a normal sociological phenomenon. All societies go through times of social chaos. The chaos is generated because there are changes being made in beliefs and behavior of the people of the society. What is actually happening is that the society is struggling to give birth to a new generation. It is not enjoyable to go through these times of chaos. Old beliefs are being challenged. Old behavior is being changed. The older generation will always conclude that things are coming to ruin. In a way, an older generation is being lost in order to give way to a new. The generation gap surfaces with every generation, because in the chaos of change, the new generation is seeking to establish itself with beliefs and behavior that they have determined.

Throughout the years of social chaos, everyone must keep in mind that this is a time of change, a change to a new generation. In applying this principle to the disciples of Jesus, it is a time to restudy the Bible in order to reaffirm that we stand on the Scriptures and not on the traditions of the fathers. If the traditions of the fathers are allowed to carry the same weight as the Scriptures, then we are in trouble. Out of the chaos will come a new denomination, a new churchian movement that will lead itself further from God, and thus create a religion after the traditions of the fathers. However, if the new generation focuses on Jesus and His word, then the chaos will produce a new and exciting generation of disciples who know how to relate the gospel to their contemporaries. If they do not focus on the word of God, they are gone. The point is that a Christ-centered life is a word focused life. One cannot lead himself to believe that he is Christ-centered in his life if he is not into the word of Christ. One of Satan's greatest deceptions in these times is to lead people to believe that they are Christ-centered, and the same time be ignorant of the word of God.

Chapter 5

REDISCOVERING OUR FIRST LOVE

Visionary leadership will plan for the future by determining what to do in the present with their knowledge of the past.

This is not the most encouraging chapter of our life in leadership training. In fact, it could be quite depressing if we looked at it from a human viewpoint. The subject that follows is a burden upon the heart of all evangelists who are concerned about the spiritual strength of the church in any part of the world.

Those of us who work among many church groups must constantly prepare lessons and materials in order to challenge stagnate churches. God wants growth because He wants that which causes growth, the salvation of lost souls. When churches lose their mission, souls are not being saved. Churches subsequently cease to grow. Therefore, bear with me as I take you through this chapter. World evangelists deal with this situation every week because they seek to stir up love and good works among the disciples of Jesus.

When one is involved in conducting workshops, lectureships and seminars that are directed toward the edification of the church, there is a common purpose and challenge that must determine the nature of what is presented. Those who teach, must work as Paul said, *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ep 4:12). As evangelists, our work is to edify the church in order to cause growth in Christ (Ep 4:16). In order to promote this growth, we must first understand what causes stagnation or the death of churches.

When I approach an assembly of disciples for a seminar, there is a common problem that often plagues churches that are fifteen to twenty years old. This is the problem of non-growth. Because of non-growth, leaders and churches become discouraged. As discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes the leaders are the problem for the stagnation of a church. If they are, then it is time for repentance. And actually, whenever a church is stagnant, it is a problem with leadership.

The thoughts of this chapter are a scenario of "church growth" that seems to be common among many churches. It is a cycle of growth that leads to the destruction of hundreds of churches throughout the world, and thus it is imperative that church leaders understand this cycle of history through which many churches go in order that they not allow a church to go into stagnation.

In the 90s in south Africa, many of the churches in the country were already in their third decade of existence. Many of these churches had been started by missionaries from America. However, the missionaries had long since left. The older members still remembered the enthusiasm of the early beginnings of the church. But during the 90s they knew that they were "on the plateau" of the church growth cycle, that is, they were in a state of non-growth because of a lack of conversions.

There are no specific dates on the time line of this cycle. The problem is not the time but the fact that a church reaches a stage at which it does not grow, and subsequently moves into a stage of decline. How to get out of the slump is the challenge. However, reaching this plataeu of non-growth usually starts when a particular church is forty to fifty years old. I call this "**Table Mountain Church Growth**" after the shape of Table Mountain in Cape Town.

A. The cycle of stagnation:

The following are general trends that are often evidenced in the life of a group of disciples that is destined for stagnation and death. If our group is in a state of stagnation, we would do well to recognize where we are in this cycle in order to make some changes in our lives. Stagnation could be the result of our construction of a god after our own image and a religion after our desires. This god and religion may be taking our group of disciples on an unfortunate trip to death.

1. Stage 1: ***Climbing the mountain:*** The Plateau church begins with a rapid church growth in the first five to ten years of its existence. Enthusiasm is high. Many are being added to the Lord. Members are out every evening beating the doors of the unsaved and the evangelist is leading the way. The attendance rises dramatically because all have the spirit of reaching the lost in order to build the church. This typical church is on the upward slop of the mountain.

Keep in mind that the history of any group of disciples is usually embedded in the first generation of converts. What the fathers learn, they pass on to their

children and the next generation of converts. It is imperative, therefore, that positive growth principles be taught and practiced during the early beginnings of a particular church.

2. Stage 2: ***Reaching the plateau:*** At this stage something goes wrong. After initial growth, members of the Plateau church start settling into themselves. They lose their "first love" since they feel they have accomplished their goal of establishing a church. The sense of accomplishment is often enforced by the construction of a building that is thought to be an evangelistic outreach for the church. There is thus the feeling that the local disciples have arrived at their goal of accomplishing their mission. They thus nestle themselves into the "temple" they have constructed for themselves, thinking that the building will do the evangelism for them because it is now the advertisement for the church and the "method" of evangelism.

The evangelist of the group around whom the work has now centered itself, finds himself fighting the devil more in members than in the lost. If the group's growth is the result of a single evangelist, he finds himself dealing with a host of problems in the new converts. Since they need spiritual maintenance, he must give a great deal of his time to their care. His evangelistic outreach thus deteriorates and his example of non-evangelism begins to have its impact on those who follow him. Therefore, after about seven to fifteen years, the growth of the Plateau church begins to decline as the attendance reaches its plateau of about 75 to 125. There is some concern about the non-growth, though there is no repentance to change the now established pattern of stagnation.

3. Stage 3: ***Walking on the plateau:*** The Plateau church is now into a period in which it has constructed a religion after its own desires. Few people are now being added to the body because no one is out evangelizing the lost. Thus, no new energy is being brought into the group through conversions. Those who do come in are "cooled" after a few months and intimidated to sit on the pews as the rest of the church that has become evangelistically indifferent. Complacency sets in. The church group begins to accept its non-growth syndrome in which it is now being encased. Members start believing that they are in an "unreceptive area," and thus fatalistically sit back and ride out the end result of the plateau.

The Plateau church then takes on the nature of a social religious club and members show up for assemblies in order to keep their membership current. Evangelism passes out of the scene except for a handful of members who still hang on to the spirit of teaching the lost. The church group now unknowingly constructs a behavioral pattern that will keep its growth on the plateau for the next decade or two.

The following are some of those philosophies that lead churches to stagnation on the plateau, and keep them there until the decline begins. The members of the Plateau church have now adopted these beliefs in their construction of a religion that pleases the members' lifestyle.

a. ***Social-club churchianity:*** The Plateau church is into the middle of its second decade of existence. It huddles around itself in order to keep that for which much struggle was made in its first decade of growth. When growth ceases, the members seek to keep what they have. Christian fellowship digresses to church membership. The members of the Plateau church begin to view themselves as simply "members of the church" rather than in fellowship with one another because of a covenant relationship with God who brought them into membership with the universal body of Christ. Attendance and contribution become check blocks on a legal checklist that has now been constructed, and by which they judge themselves "faithful" after having checked off all "acts of worship" and requirements of the club.

There are few good works in this group. If the Plateau church exists in an economically strong environment, contribution checks take the place of personal involvement. Supported professionals become the medium through which work is accomplished.

Holiness becomes a secondary struggle because members find contentment in a fully completed checklist of outward legal club requirements. Church members become introverted with one another to the point of inadvertently making it difficult for outsiders to come into the group. Members die feeding off themselves. They become "spiritual" cannibals ineffectively listening week after week to preaching and teaching that does not get beyond the walls of the "sanctuary." They become as the Hebrew writer stated, "dull of hearing" (Hb 5:11). They have ears, but cannot hear. Their ears only itch for preaching that makes them feel comfortable in their indifference.

b. ***Introverted churchianity:*** The Plateau church is on the plateau and is now self-centered. Instead of seeking to grow in holiness inwardly by reaching outwardly, it changes to developing ministries that reach inwardly but can be checked off outwardly. They "test those who claim to be apostles, but are not" as a legal requirement (See Rv 2:2). The Plateau church begins to believe that it must first take care of its own needs before

it can reach out to others. Books, sermons and classes on **self**-help, **self**-esteem, **self**-evaluation, **self**-control, etc. become the common read among those who know something is wrong, but cannot discover why they are on the plateau.

Because the Plateau church members have no self esteem, they feel bad about themselves because they know what they should be doing. "Feel good" books in such churches become common bestsellers because members are seeking soothing for the lack of self esteem that has been brought on by their isolation from one another and the needs of humanity.

The Plateau church has constructed a churchianity that sees itself as an end within itself. The primary work of the Plateau church is now to instigate programs for the survival of the church. The term "ministries" becomes fashionable. Programs are constructed to generate activity. However, the definition changes from a biblical concept of serving the life-produced misfortunes of this world to entertainment of the body life. The Plateau church becomes secular. The teenage group is entertained. The concept of fellowship digresses to simply meaning food, drink and parties. A true churchian existence has now been established.

Plateau churches can often be identified by their assemblies. Because these churches have become introverted, the focus of their assemblies changes. Instead of coming together to stir up love and good works toward others, members come to assemblies in order to see what they can get. Instead of bringing worshipful spirits together to pour out worship to God, they seek to be entertained. Assemblies thus take on the behavior of a music concert in order to draw those who seek a "worship experience." Adherents go to the assemblies, therefore, for themselves, not for what they can give to others (love and good works) and God (worship).

c. ***Good works without eternity in mind:*** The Plateau church has now convinced itself that its purpose is to preserve itself. And in doing such, the church turns on itself with petty squabbles and senseless disputes about "genealogies" and other brotherhood issues the members feel might endanger the norm behavior and theology. Business meetings are consumed with talk about buildings and grounds, "fellowship meals," and who has not showed up lately in order to keep up their "membership" at the social club. Squabbles develop over the presentation of ceremonies during the assemblies. Dress codes and structures and ceremonies are fine tuned for appearance.

Shepherds who once smelled like sheep now start smelling like brick and mortar. Business meeting records which once recorded discussions about evangelistic efforts now contain scribbled notes on problems, projects and parties within the local club. Elders digress to being board members dictating assignments to a corporate church that has been organized into introverted committees and programs to take care of every need of a membership that has lost their direction toward the saving of the lost.

The good intentions of the Plateau brethren have changed in focus. Satan consumes the energy of the church to do good into doing those works that have no eternity in mind. The emphasis or goal of the works of the church are changed only a little in order to keep people working, but their minds off saving the lost. Members start seeing their purpose as saving the saved instead of saving the lost. Leaders see themselves as working among the flock instead of eyeballing sinners. The preacher becomes a clergyman who marries and buries members. The local function of the Plateau church changes to sustain the plateau instead of training evangelists, teachers, preachers and elders for world evangelism. This is churchianity in full bloom.

d. ***The loss of growth-oriented vision:*** The Plateau church begins hiring staff who are job-oriented. The church seeks a preacher to minister to its own needs instead of hiring someone to do the work of an evangelist, since at this stage the Plateau church has long lost its understanding of the work of an evangelist and the purpose of the church. The "evangelist" of the Plateau church sees himself in a job-oriented work instead of being a God-called man to do the work of an evangelist. It is usually at this time that the local religious group (the former Plateau church) has changed its understanding of the work of an evangelist and nature of the true church. The members want a "pastor" or "clergyman" to function among the members in holding hands and wiping the running noses of forty and fifty year old babies who should have by now learned commitment to Christ. The mission of this religion has changed from "go into all the world" to "come visit me." The lampstand has now been removed.

Stage 4: ***The backside of the mountain:*** The end of the Plateau church is inevitable. Those early members have now grown older or passed on. They have lost most of their children to the world because the parents lost their example by losing their first love. As the church group majority reaches their fifties and sixties, they start wondering why they have not grown for twenty years. They are still 75 to 125 after all these years and no growth is in sight.

As the churchian group nears the backside of the mountain they can look back and see that their attendance

was greater in the past than at the present. Unfortunately, it is usually by this time that they have already constructed a religion after their own desires and it is too late to turn from the back side of the mountain. Negative growth now sets in as members start dying off and a plummet to the bottom is certain.

While on the plateau a few were baptized to fill in the gaps. Some moved away. Some fell away. Some died away. However, after thirty or forty years of existence, even the gaps are not filled and the Plateau church is down in attendance and on its way out. The ship is now dead in the water and the current is taking it toward the rocks of destruction.

The problem is intensified by the fact that the churchian disciples do not think there is a problem. After thirty to forty years of existence, no one is alive who remembers the glory days when members were evangelistically reaching their neighbors.

Unreceptivity is not so much the result of changes in the community, but in the nature of the churchian development of the disciples. The churchian member excuses himself or herself from evangelistic outreach by describing his or her neighbors as unreceptive. The problem is not in unreceptive neighbors, but in churchians who seek to be accepted in their communities, and thus are afraid of causing any disturbance by "preaching their religion" to their neighbors. Everyone in the community is thus "Christian," and will somehow make it to heaven on their good works. Churchian speech can always be identified by those who say of those who have not obeyed the gospel, "He's a good Christian."

Now add to the preceding scenario the ownership of a church building by a dying membership. The original group was excited about their own church building after they had grown to the point of affording payments. They sat in a new building they thought would bring growth, but after a few years of nongrowth in the building, they discovered a startling fact. Their attendance on Sunday morning was diminishing as children grew up and moved away. The urban district in which the building was built started to change. It was no longer the district where most of the members were living. In some cases, it became the inner city, while most of the members moved to the suburbs. Most of the members simply migrated away from the building. The unfortunate thing about urban church buildings is that members often move away from the building, and it is left standing with only a few to maintain the building itself. Because there is such an emotional attachment to the building, the last remaining "charter members" hang on to either building payments or utilities in order to maintain the shrine. What sometimes happens is that a merger takes place with another church group that is also in a similar situation. A merger is thus accomplished, one building is sold and another is saved, and the new group is reaffirmed again for another thirty years until the same story starts to repeat itself. No one confesses up that a spirit of evangelism has been lost. There is no desire to repent and do the first works.

B. The Ephesian syndrome:

The preceding common history of the rise and decline of a local church should startle repentance into the hearts of church leaders. This cycle of church growth is happening to many churches throughout the world. If churches fail to see this historical pattern, they are doomed to live it. It is a common cycle of church history that naturally happens if disciples develop a churchian definition of Christianity.

The reality of this cycle is manifested in the life history of the Ephesus church. I call this the Ephesian Syndrome. It is a history of the rise and decline of a church, to the point that the lampstand was ready to be removed as they existed on the backside of the plateau.

In Acts 18 and 19 the Ephesian church was established with vibrant commitment and growth as people dramatically turned from mystic religions to the one true God. The date of this dynamic beginning was probably around A.D. 52 or 53.

After the initial explosion of growth, Paul revisited the leaders of the church a few years later. He warned them in Acts 20 about a "departure from the faith." He saw the departure coming, and thus warned them that it was in their future.

In A.D. 61 or 62, Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesian church, addressing their apparent misunderstandings concerning Christ and the nature of the true church. Their decline had already started because churchian theology was changing the way members thought about the church. It started with a misunderstanding of the nature of the church, which misunderstanding led them to distort true Christianity into something that was foreign to Scripture. Christianity was being transformed into churchianity.

By the time John wrote the book of Revelation, Jesus pronounced judgment on the Ephesian church in Revelation 2 by stating that they had become a legal oriented church that had lost its first love. The warning was that if they did not repent, their lampstand was going to be removed.

From the time of the events of Acts 18 and 19 to the pronouncements of Revelation 2 was about thirty-five to forty or fifty years, depending on when you think the book of Revelation was written. Is there a pattern of

growth, stagnation and death here about which we need to be cautioned? Is there a danger that should be recognized by the leaders of churches today? I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit used the history of the church in Ephesus as an example to caution us about a cycle of growth, decline and death that we should recognize. One thing is very clear from this case history. Even the presence of a Christ-sent apostle in the early beginnings of the Ephesian church was not a guarantee that the church would not move into an era of decline and death. If this was true of the Ephesian church, then certainly church leaders must be alert to the fact that such can happen today in a church.

It is important to remember that the seeds that are planted in the first year of the establishment of a church will affect that church for the next fifty years. If evangelists plant seeds that lead to stagnation, those seeds will eventually lead to the stagnation and death of a church. It is critically important, therefore, that evangelists know what they are doing. We must seek to plant churches that are based on solid growth principles. We must build churches on the foundation of Christ, constructed with spirits of gold, silver and precious stones that will endure the test of time.

However, being built on a solid foundation of biblical principles is no guarantee that a church will survive the onslaught of the religious culture in which it exists. The Ephesian church is a good example. What better foundation could a church have than being established by great people as Aquila, Priscilla and the apostle Paul. Add to this the fact that the Holy Spirit sent the inspired letter of Ephesians directly to the church. Though the Ephesian church had all the advantages, including an exciting beginning, all such advantages was no guarantee that its lampstand would not be removed. If this does not alert us to the fact that even great churches will suffer decline and death, then we are not good leaders of the flock of God. We must remember, if it happened to the church in Ephesus—and it did—then it can happen to us.

I have received numerous calls from church leaders who are tired of their existence on the plateau. They knew they are dead, but they want to change. They want to grow again. However, they often do not understand how they got to where they are, nor how to get growing again. But at least they have come to realize that they must start growing again. Unless a church takes ownership of its death, it will never start growing again.

Herein is the challenge of evangelists who work among the churches. There is a definite need for evangelists not only to be trained in the skills of establishing new churches, but also in the skills of resurrecting stagnate churches. It is my opinion that the latter is more difficult than the former. It is more difficult simply because a pattern of non-growth has been established in the minds of the disciples that will be difficult to change. Once churchianity has been established as the norm, it is almost impossible for churchians to start growing again by evangelistically reaching out to their communities. They are churchian simply because they think they are right. Nevertheless, there are a lot of churches out there who need the patient help of evangelists who can help them start growing again. Because Jesus called on the Ephesian church to repent and rediscover their first love assumes that He knew they could repent. There is always the possibility for repentance in the lives of those who have grown cold. We must never underestimate the power of Jesus in the lives of those who seek to repent.

So did the Ephesian church repent and restore the first works? Unfortunately, Revelation was the last inspired New Testament book that was written. We do have secular church history that records the continuation of the Ephesian church. However, second century records of the church paint a different picture of the Ephesian church than the picture of the church that is described in the New Testament. The point is, members keep on meeting as a "church" though the lampstand for representing Jesus in the community has already been removed. The world is full of such churchian denominations that have long lost their representation of God on earth. In this type of religious environment it is our challenge to search the Scriptures in order to discover how God would have us be as His flock. It is not our goal to clone an existing churchian institutional religious group. It is our goal to use God's directions in order to be as He would have us as His children.

If there is no desire to be obsessed with the word of God in directing our paths, then there is no hope of restoring the church as God would have it. This is the ever present danger of traditions. They make us feel comfortable in our religious institutionalism. And when we feel religiously comfortable, there is no desire to check the Scriptures just to make sure we are who we claim to be. There can be no restoration unless there is a revival in Bible study. We live in an era where there are many religious people who seek to fall under the umbrella of Christendom, but at the same time have created a "Christianity" after their own desires. We must remember that all Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians, even though they claim to be.

Chapter 6

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Leadership that is futuristic in thinking will always keep themselves alert for evangelistic opportunities that are produced by change.

One peaceful night I sat alone by the restless waves of the beaches of the country of Gabon in the armpit of Africa. Waves are the same everywhere. They remind one of the constant changing influences that torment the beaches of societies. Change is a way of nature and life. Those who would not adapt or rise to the occasion and take advantage of the opportunities that are produced by change will break with the traditional molds of yesteryear. Or they will miss the golden opportunities that are presented by change for the future. We are reminded of Paul's advice. *"See then that you walk carefully, not as fools* ***but as wise, making the most of the time*** *because the days are evil"* (Ep 5:15,16). No better advice could be given to Christians, especially the Christian leader.

We live in societies in the world that are going through the metamorphosis of cultural and political change. As the typical world citizen seeks to set himself free from past dictators and Marxists regimes that bankrupted his economy and robbed him of hope, he has proven to himself and others his resilience to survive in a harsh world. A peace accord is signed here, a past suppressive government is voted out there, a new civil war begins and concludes. There are those usual agonies that arise from power struggles and transfers, from the unleashing of past resentments and sociological baggage. However, if one can see past the nonsense of politics and palaces, he can prepare himself to recognize opportunities for evangelism. In this sociological emergence through change, God is working wondrously to open doors. Therefore, as leaders of the church, we would be wise in seizing the opportunities of the times.

A common slogan in Africa is TIA. It means "This Is Africa," a place of many social contradictions, chaos and injustices. It is generally a pessimistic statement because Africa is a place of struggle as a way of life. However, TIA is emerging into TIH, "There Is Hope." The emerging leadership generation in Africa is educated, and thus, it is a generation that wants to join the technological world in forming a new Africa. There is an emerging leadership in the world that is optimistic. It is a generation of young leaders who have a vision for the future. They want to give themselves birth out of the old confinements of the past in order to take advantage of new things in the future. These are truly exciting times for this new leadership.

From a spiritual perspective, there are some clear and present opportunities in this emerging world. As in many places of the world., the typical African is traditionally religious. There has never been and never will be in Africa a passing receptivity caused by the fall of a Berlin wall or the change of a political philosophy. The African has always been religious! He has kept himself isolated from the turmoils of what goes on in the oval offices of world palaces. Many in the world, and especially in Africa, are economically challenged. Many are often uneducated in what the affluent urban societies call "education." But the typical rural population of the world is deeply religious, though this religious nature is fulfilled with a host of distorted world views and false religions.

In the past one hundred years several countries of the world have survived beneath the flow of political changes from Animistic tribalism, to colonialism, to dictatorial communism, and then to dictatorial capitalism. However, those changes that have occurred in the palaces seem to have little affect on the world views of rural people. Changes in high places often bring freedoms that produce opportunities for evangelism. The changes have brought freedoms that have opened doors.

Political changes change society. This is especially true in urban areas. What happens with the death of oppressive governments and dictatorial leaders is that freedom is awaken which trickles down and permeates society. This new democratic freedom gives people a new sense of hope. Times are changing for the better as oppressive leaders of past generations are being set aside or just laid to rest. There are only a few dictators left and they are very old and unwanted. The new world order is not an order that will include the reigning dictator. As church leaders we must be wise in seeing opportunities as the winds of change sweep across the world.

In the 1990s, South Africa went through tremendous waves of change. In the times of chaos, anxiety gripped

the souls of the advantaged. They were afraid, not so much of the change—they knew it had to come—but of losing what they had. But such is the normal mentality of the rich and famous. It is this way everywhere in the world when men's possessions are threatened. Those on top always slap away and are afraid of the hands reaching up from the pits of poverty during times of change.

Every culture has its affluent societies and every person of every society wants more. Nevertheless, the materialism of the affluent separates them from the norm of society. In this "segregated" materialism, the affluent have convinced themselves that they have a right to the wealth of the society. What happens among the affluent is that everyone at the financial top develops a certain pride, a definite arrogance about what they have and who they are. Those on top develop an insular world with all its legal and political fences and safeguards. The arrogance of the affluent leads them to believe that no one else should tell them how to run their country and life. Their pride makes them think that they could go it alone without the rest of the world. This is only a delusion. So we are not so obssessed with the rich, that we forget the poor. James, Peter and John desired that Paul, in his mission to the world, remember the poor. *"They only desired that we remember the poor, which thing indeed I was eager to do"* (Gl 2:10).

In 1994—the year of the first free election in South Africa—the affluent South African was at first afraid of the New South Africa that would unfold in generations to come. Many were very apprehensive about the future. They knew that there must be change, but they were only willing for change to come in order to keep the stock market up and the foreign investment coming. Their willingness to change was not primarily for the benefit of the poor and oppressed.

Since 1994 South Africa has transitioned through great sociological and economic change. The change has been good, though it has taken two decades to mature. The younger generation of leadership has been molded by times of hope, and not by the struggles of the underprivileged or by the arrogance of the privileged. This new generation is representative of the New South Africa and the new African who wants to continue to change for the better. Such is typical of many nations of the world whose younger leadership seeks to lead their people to greater opportunities.

We were once in Zimbabwe in the latter 90's preaching and teaching. We met a twenty-year old South African youth there who had come up to Zimbabwe in order to live and learn from the Zimbabweans. He went to a rural village in order to live and eat with a rural Zimbabwean brother and sister. He said he wanted to be an evangelist, and thus, he wanted to better understand those of a rural culture. To the best of his ability, he wanted to experience the world of those who had few things, but possessed great faith. He wanted to come out of his separation from the urban materialistic culture in order to experience the realities of life in rural living. He was typical of many of the new South African young people who wanted to communicate and be with those from whom his forefathers had separated themselves through urban living. His example would suggest that urban church leaders would do well to come into contact again with rural opportunities. We have found that when people migrate to the cities, after two generations in the cities, they lose contact with their rural roots. They thus see evangelism only of the cities, and not in the receptivity of the rural culture from which they came.

The Arab Spring is not just for the Arab countries. Social media is changing the world. We are moving into a world paradigm shift that is making the world smaller. And with a smaller world comes many great opportunities to reach the lost. It is a truly wise leadership who takes advantage of social change. Instead of working against change, the wise leader will adapt, and see in the change opportunities to populate heaven. The wise leader will understand that social chaos in society is society looking for a new order. And when there is social chaos, the wise church leader will make Jesus the object of the new order for which many in a changing society may be looking.

A. Opportunities for evangelism:

So what should we as the church do in a changing world? First, we must adapt our thinking and methods of work and outreach to changing social environments. Old mission methods of years past will not work in a new urban world that has more self-esteem and confidence. Research mission books of past works in urban cultures are out of date for the evangelist to the changed society. For example, the old mission of houses and church buildings within a compound is no longer appropriate for most world evangelism. Also, the churchianity that is so prevalent in the Western religious culture is deficient in the urban setting of metropolitan cities throughout the world. The old system of "colonial" mission control must be reexamined as those of the social-media world seek to write their own mission textbooks. Evangelism by remote control never really working in the past, and certainly, in a confident world of the educated future, it will never work among those who seek to determine their own future.

Secondly, the mission church should rise to the

occasion. We must never forget that the basic nature of millions throughout the world is religious. We would urge the mission church not to ignore what is happening throughout the world. The supporting church has always been too fickle when it comes to supporting mission works. What makes headlines is too often what gets the mission emphasis. The church in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is now larger than in any other place of the world. There are more Christians in Africa because the receptivity of the continent continues to grow, especially in rural settings. Though sub-Saharan Africa produces few headlines, there is great receptivity among the rural people. This is also true of India. The church is growing in the rural areas far more than the urban centers.

Thirdly, with the fall of old governments and the emergence of new open doors, there are countless areas where evangelists must be going. Many world churches are now realizing that evangelism is not an American problem. However, the world church does want and need foreign church partnership. We must remember that the typical rural church is still economically challenged, and it often takes money to print Bibles and send evangelists into new regions. In establishing strong partnerships with rural churches who can do the work, the mission church would do well to encourage evangelism by partnering with local world churches.

However, we suggest the preceding with some caution. The Western church is greatly entrenched with the philosophy that he who pays the bills pulls the strings. This philosophy may work in the business world, but when it comes to brethren doing the work of the Lord in world evangelism, there are many complications. The worthy African or Indian evangelist needs to be educated to effectively do the work of the Lord, but he does not need to be some supporter's puppet. We have found that the more strings that are attached to the support of a qualified evangelist, the less effective the evangelist is in accomplishing his mission. After all, how can someone thousands of miles away correctly determine what must be done locally and in a different cultural setting? The world evangelist would thus call on the supporters to be very cautious and wise with the use of funds, but also be cautious about controlling the work of an evangelist who knows what he is doing.

Fourthly, we would suggest a major paradigm shift for urban evangelism. The majority of the membership of the church in developing world urban centers is financially challenged. At the same time, the real estate in the same centers is priced according to or above First World costs. Does this mean that the world urban church is doomed with the Western churchianity that is identified by the presence of some physical structure on the main streets of Nairobi or Accra? And in order to get to that structure to do the supposed performances of an imported religion the typical world father and husband must fork out a good amont of his weekly salary to buses and taxis just to get his family of six or eight to the place of meeting? If this is the scenario we have imposed on the urban world church, then the urban disciple in the developing world is doomed to sit continually with his cuffed hand out toward the First World in order to build a "plant" for worship and buy buses to get there.

We would suggest that the urban disciple in the developing urban city must be directed toward the first century and the houses in which the early Christians met. For the first three hundred years of the existence of the church, there were no purpose-built church houses as designated places of worship. Only when Caesar Constantine hijacked Christianity and planted the first seeds of churchianity, were church buildings erected in the Roman Empire with a professional clergy that was on state support.

If we can survive the intimidation of our religious communities that we must make a statement of our faith with a church building, then we will be able to realize greater growth in the urban settings of the developing world. We are not optimistic about this suggestion for two reasons. First, the churchianity that has been imported into the world religious scene from Europe and America for the past five hundred years has had its effect. Second, the effect of church-house oriented religion is strong in the religious world of Christendom. As the religions around us take pride in their cathedrals, local disciples are intimidated to build their own. They are thus humbled by meeting in houses, schools and under trees. In order to keep up with the nations around them, they are compelled to build. If they cannot build, they suffer with a low self esteem because they can never be as the religious nations around them. This should not be so.

If you cannot come up with two million dollars each to build hundreds of church buildings in urban centers in the developing world, then we should change our emphasis from a building-oriented religion to a living-room faith. We must remember that Christianity has always been a relational experience across a dinner table, and not in the eloquent performances of a high church assembly on Sunday morning.

B. The work of God:

These are exciting and challenging times for world evangelism. So many doors are opened that it befuddles our minds as to which one must be entered. However, we do not frustrate ourselves by trying to determine

which door we must personally enter. When we work as the apostles, great things can happen. When we allow God to use us in every way, He opens the doors. "Come over to Macedonia and help us" is a call that has reached the ears of many evangelists who have determined to give themselves to God (See At 16:6-10).

The apostles stayed in Jerusalem for at least fifteen years after the initial establishment of the church in A.D. 30. The reason was that every year there was the Jewish Passover/Pentecost feast to which Jews came from throughout the world. It was during the Passover/ Pentecost feast of A.D. 30 when the Spirit was initially poured out on the apostles in Acts 2. This was a unique event. On the A.D. 30 Passover/Pentecost feast the church was launched into existence with the baptism of about 3,000 on the first day. Many of these went back to their homes in order to urge those of the synagogues of their homelands to go to Jerusalem the next year (See Is 2:1-4). They did, and you know who was waiting in Jerusalem upon their arrival? The apostles thus evangelized the world by proxy. They evangelized the world through those who were converted in Jerusalem during the Passover/ Pentceost feasts that occurred every year after the A.D. 30 event. By A.D. 61/62, just over thirty years after the establishment of the church, Paul could write that the gospel had gone into all the world (Cl 1:23).

God has made it possible to reach any and all open doors throughout the world through the distance training of local church leaders and evangelists. The apostles did not have a worldwide postal system, but we do. This is the main reason why we have been so convinced throughout the years that distance training schools by use of the post office are necessary in world leadership training in order to reach the masses of the world. From the statement of Acts 2:42, we would add the fact of Short Term Schools. Those who came to Jerusalem on the Passover/Pentecost feast "continued in the apostles' teaching." They stayed long enough in Jerusalem to be instructed in the truth before they returned home to evangelize their local synagogues.

The reason for this is simple. We cannot simply concentrate on bringing evangelists together into classrooms for long periods of time in order to equip them for the task that is to be accomplished. God has given us a pen, press, stamps, envelopes and a postal service in order to take the "classroom" into all the world. He has given us the hospitality of Christian homes in order to receive and instruct those who travel from afar. Not only is this system cheaper than long-term resident schools, it allows the church the opportunity to reach to distant lands with teaching for faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

In Ephesians 4:11, God set different ministries of leadership in the church. The primary purpose for these ministries was "***for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ***" (Ep 4:12). Through distance training and Short Term Schools, we are able to equip the church for the work of ministry in distant lands.

Now try to visualize what is happening with the distance training schools. They are reaching out to thousands of church leaders who would never be able to attend a long-term resident training school. Through distant training courses and seminars that are conducted, mature leadership can touch the lives of thousands who must be equipped for world evangelism. There are prospective evangelists and church leaders scattered in countries throughout the world. So how can the church train its leaders in distant regions? The answer is in sending the teachers (the courses) to the students instead of trying to bring the students to the teachers. The "teachers" can be sent either by posting course materials, or in personally sending the teachers to teach in Short Term Schools. Either way, the training of faithful men in their environment is financially feasible to the church everywhere throughout the world. By working this way in leadership training, we can reach a tremendous number of people. God has opened a door of fantastic proportions through such efforts. Thousands are being equipped as God works exceedingly abundantly above all we can imagine.

The question with distance training is that we can never know exactly how many people are being equipped by mailing courses throughout the world. Courses of distance training schools are being used by thousands of preachers and teachers to teach classes and preach sermons to thousands of people. Students of these systems of training are using their courses for their own seminars and lectures in Short Term Schools. The impact of leadership training by distant training courses and Short Term Schools is the way of the future. This is especially true as the world goes online with the Internet and the use of computers. When we consider the vast population of the world, and the number of evangelists that are needed to get the job done, then our primary emphasis in leadership training must be on distance training courses or Short Term Schools. Only in this way can we train the mass number of evangelists who will be able to go into all the seven billion people of the world.

We must use every means available to accomplish the task of training leaders for world evangelism. The production of literature for distance training and Short Term Schools is crucial. Books for leaders is the power

of leadership training. God used Philip to help sort out the confusion that was facing the eunuch (At 16:26-40). Once the word was clearly explained to the confused eunuch, the preacher was caught away, and the eunuch went on his way to Ethiopia. The advantage of good books is that the eunuchs we cross in passing can be sent on their way with a "teacher." We do not know how long Philip stayed with the eunuch before the eunuch came to the conclusion that he had to obey the gospel. This may have been a "short" Short Term School. What is important to remember is that the eunuch accepted the teaching of the teacher, and then went forth. He did not stay around for two to three years of indoctrination. He was taught the basics, and then went on his way rejoicing.

In the context of training leaders in the word of God, we must add some thoughts which we must always keep in mind. Never in the early church was there emphasis placed on "graduating" from a Bible school. This is an invention of modern academics. It is an invention that often produces a professional leader who distances himself from the people. It is a practice that often produces arrogance on the part of the trained, and thus, they sometimes set themselves as official interpreters of the word of God. We should make every effort to refrain from such behavior. There are no qualifications for preaching the gospel. In the New Testament the only qualification we can find is that one should know and obey the gospel. There was no special clergy of "trained men" who preached the gospel to the world or taught the church. The early teachers received their knowledge of the word by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Since we have copies of the Bible in our hands, we need no miraculous impartation of the word of God. We can read and study the Bible every day. We are far more blessed with the complete written word of God than the early Christians were with the gift of knowledge (1 Co 13:8-10). All the knowledge that the Holy Spirit would impart is written for our learning (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). We have access to it in our homes and wherever we can carry a copy of the Scriptures. The traveling evangelist, therefore, goes forth with a copy of the Scriptures to validate his mission. No diploma from a school validates his mission. Every person who has a zeal to study is validated to preach the word of God.

The growth of the church will always exceed our opportunity to train leaders in a classroom setting. In fact, if we are confined in our thinking to the classroom training of leaders, we will bottle-neck the growth of the church. We will never be able to have enough classrooms to train the amount of leaders that must be trained to keep up with the growth of the church. For this reason, we must change our thinking when it comes to training those who will teach others. The local church has the responsibility to train its own leaders. If we can partner with churches who are seeking to do this, then great things will come. When the local church assumes her responsibility to train in the Bible those they would send forth into all the world, then we will have restored the work and vision of the early church (At 13:1-3). The point is that the local church of disciples must be so Bible oriented and focused that naturally out of their midst will come forth those who are so full of the word of God that they must go forth to tell others. Mission churches are always defined by the Bible-filled evangelists that go forth from their midst. Every assembly of local disciples, therefore, must be so Bible focused in study that they naturally give birth to those who go forth. Living churches, therefore, are not those who have exciting assemblies or warm fellowships. They are those churches that fill the members with so much Bible that they naturally give birth to evangelists who go forth into all the world. So when a church is not giving birth to world evangelists, then we could assume that it is dead. It has lost its first love. It is for this reason, that we must awaken the church with the word.

Chapter 7

A HOME FOR THE REFUGEE

Every Christian is a spiritual refugee,
with citizenship in heaven,
while living on earth.

Living in Latin America, the West Indies and Africa for over four decades has changed my thinking and my culture. I would no longer consider myself an American since I left the American culture in 1974 in order to sign up for world citizenship. This does not say that I have forsaken all cultural links to America. I have some

American baggage. It means, however, that both myself and America have since changed so much that I feel like a foreigner when I travel to America. One can never go home after being away from home for so long.

When I first left America for the rest of the world there were some things that were initially quite challenging to my American culture. One of those things was dealing with world poverty. The other was dealing with the refugee, a human phenomenon that was entirely foreign to my American culture. I have since come to better understand both, though I must confess that there is no fix to either situation.

So you can understand why I once sat stunned in Malawi, listening to my brother, my fellow Rwandan evangelist who had two weeks before fled in fear with his wife and three children from Kigali, Rwanda. Soldiers were walking down streets telling jokes while whacking the heads off everyone they could find. The beheadings turned into a relentless slaughter of men, women and children. The hundreds of dead in a few days turned into thousands. The thousands turned into tens of thousands, and then, hundreds of thousands. In less than two months over half a million people were butchered in a killing frenzy that had never happened before in modern times. Some have even estimated that almost one million died by the end of the slaughter.

Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans ran for their lives. Many fled to the Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, or any place where they could feel some safety. One teenage boy walked all the way to South Africa, over 1,500 miles to the south of Rwanda. These thousands joined the millions who were already refugees in Africa, people who for fear of death fled for life.

But then there were the refugees who fled because they did not want to take up arms to kill their fellow brothers. During the Congo wars, many young Congolese showed up in Cape Town. These were young men who had fled the war because they did not want to be forced into the conflict of the war. Most of these were religious people who, upon their arrival, started various churches throughout the city of Cape Town and other cities of South Africa. But they came into an environment of struggle. These, as all refugees, fled for survival.

For the refugee home often becomes a tree, a tent, or a simple gathering of tree limbs that have been shuffled together in a makeshift manner to block either searing heat or relentless rain from a baby's head. A mother shudders in the coolness of an African night, cuddling a small child who shivers uncontrollably. Words of comfort seem to bring little relief to those who have fled from their homes and for their lives into an unknown country that is not their home. These are refugees. They are the misery of situations beyond their control, and too often, beyond their understanding.

Africa is a continent of forced homelessness. It has been a continent of political struggle that is no different from Bosnia or Afghanistan or Cambodia. The refugee still suffers the same. Families are torn apart. Fathers killed. Mothers raped. Children left orphans. Scraps of families show up across some border in a waste land that is unprepared for their arrival, and often resents their presence. Food is scarce. Hunger is a relentless pain that reminds one that fate has dealt a terrible blow to the human spirit.

Warlords and power hungry rulers consider the refugee the price to pay in order to sit somewhere in a palace. The refugee is too often the result of the greedy who are struggling to control gold and diamond mines and oil fields. The unmerciful pompous princes involved in power struggles of this present time will most certainly eternally pay for the homelessness of millions of souls they have brought on humanity.

A refugee is who he is, not because he did something wrong, but because he is in a situation that has gone terribly wrong. He or she usually does not understand the endless chess games of the political world or the thirst for power of greedy warlords. A father or mother has simply heard shots and bombs in a distance, grabbed what could be carried on the backs of every family member, and fled. They are unwillingly homeless. Refugees have been forgotten by those who would rule over them.

A movie was once produced entitled *Blood Diamond*. It was a true representation of the problem with the riches of diamonds in some African countries. Another movie about African civil war was also produced that was entitled, *Lord of War.* It was also an accurate depiction of the diamond/civil war curse of Africa. Both movies had their setting in the the Liberian/Sierre Leone conflicts of the 90s. Diamonds became the monetary units that supported the warlords. Forced laborers mined the diamonds, and the diamonds bought the guns that killed hundreds of thousand of people. Little did a young bride-to-be in America or Europe know that when her finger was fitted with a beautiful diamond in order to build a family with a proposing husband that she with the purchase of that diamond may have destroyed a family in some world she did not know existed. So many "conflict diamonds" were sold throughout the world in 90s that no one really knows how many refugees were made by the black market selling of diamonds to buy guns.

Wars produce wearied refugee souls who flock

together in camps that are infested with disease and dysentery. Host countries often struggle to find locations in their own crowded lands for these often unwanted guests. Scorned by the locals, the refugee has a meager existence of living on token rations from foreign governments. Praise God for humanitarian governments who spill over their surpluses for these who have not willingly chosen this lot in life. Thank God for churches whose hearts bleed for those who are naked, and hungry, and destitute. Possibly, the refugee exists in order for God to test our Christianity. God bless America for her humanitarian nature and care for the world. If a nation could be saved for her works, surely America is at the top of the list.

A Christian friend ignorantly, but sincerely, questioned, "Why don't they get jobs." There are no classified ads circulated in refugee camps. There is nothing to do. No fields to tend. No cattle to feed. Nothing. Refugees arrive disillusioned, starved and destitute. Their arrival at camps is usually a last chance at life. If no food can be found, then that chance is lost. One simply lies down and dies.

While the haves heap food upon themselves in an environment of tremendous prosperity, would to God that they remembered the refugee. We often telecommunicatively witness the plight of the refugee via CNN or BBC. However, it is hard to feel the suffering of humanity through a television screen or radio speaker. While sumptuously eating dinner, we sit and watch the misery of others. While watching the starving we say, "Pass the potatoes." We moan a word or two of disgust, and then pass on to the next news event. All the while on the other end of the camera a mother, or a father, or a helpless child dies before the end of the evening news. Recent figures manifest that 75,000 people die each day because of malnutrition causes. During the Rwanda crisis, one thousand died each day in the Goma refugee camp alone.

People die *en masse* in famine areas throughout the world. Agony thrives in the bodies of those who unfortunately live in famine stricken refugee camps. It is a wretched death. Your muscles wither away because there is no more fat off which your body can feed. Flies relentlessly torment your mouth and eyes. You become so weak that walking becomes impossible. You simply stare into oblivion and waste away. Your stomach aches. Your flesh becomes as leather. Your eyes become sunken and glassy. You then die.

Famine is a merciless attack against the human being. Drought inflicts endless misery. Place the refugee in a famine situation and we have the most deplorable situation that life can deal to the human being. What is even more cruel about this is the fact that there is more than enough food in the world to prevent this. Our challenge is to first sensitize the haves to the tremendous need for food throughout the world. Secondly, we face the problem of getting the surplus of the haves to the hungry mouths of the have nots. This can be done. There are great and noble efforts and people out there who are doing something. We must fully support their efforts. We must not become dull of hearing their pleas for our help.

When one lives in the middle of Africa it is difficult to communicate needs to the rest of the world. But keep in mind that twice as many people died from starvation and civil war in Angola in the six months previous to April 1993 than in the war of Bosnia. But Bosnia was on TV news every day. People cried out. Governments were forced to do something. But no one was listening to the struggles of Angola. Is this racism in the press? As long as it happens in Africa I suppose it is no real problem. Nobody seems to know or care. TIA.

When refugees started coming over the border into Namibia from the Angolan war, I said to Martha that we must do something. The next day we received a fax that a church in Columbia, South Carolina had committed $1,000 to famine relief. God answers prayers. People do care. We simply need to be challenged to do something.

Adrian Blow, Kurt Platt from Swaziland, and I once made a 4,500 mile round trip up to the Namibia/Angola border to work with refugees out of Angola. During this trip I was touched by the reality of struggle and the plight of the refugee. Refugees had fled into Namibia to escape the harassment of soldiers who sought to raid and rape. We prayed for peace in Angola. If peace did not come, then tragedy would intensify. Peace has since come.

Over one million Mozambique refugees lingered in Malawi in makeshift huts during that twenty-year civil war. A quarter of a million Mozambique refugees were in South Africa. Thousands were in refugee camps from Somalia and other nations. In every camp and in every situation, the refugee camp is the same. Flies, dysentery, coughing children, malaria and a host of other human sufferings are common experiences of existence. Sickness and death are daily rituals to which inhabitants become desensitized because of their commonality.

We blame not God for allowing such human suffering to come upon humanity. We look to ourselves. Our thirst for power, our selfishness, our indifference and political games have caused us to lose contact with humanity. Yes, and even our desire for that diamond. The individual is lost in a global arena where national boundaries were drawn from commandos' quarters. The

plight of the poor is of no concern to those who lavish themselves with wine in diplomatic conclaves that are thousands of miles from the suffering of a refugee child who is about to breathe his last breath.

> "God, please have mercy on us because of our lack of sensitively to the plight of the refugee. Forgive us for our greed which often causes war to protect our 'interest' in some far off Third World country whose name we cannot recall."

We live in a crazy world. It is a mixed up world of rich and poor, power and poverty. For example, during the years of the Angolan civil war, both sides were indirectly supported by what the rest of the world consumed. The government maintained the rich oil fields, from which they sold oil to the rest of the world in order to buy their guns. UNITA, the opposition force, gained control of the diamond mines. They sold diamonds to the rest of the world in order to buy their guns. This is a wretched scenario, isn't it? We consume the goods that supports some senseless war.

In the struggle between forces, the refugee is born. The refugee camp is built. The refugee mother sits idly on a rock under the few limbs or boards she has thrown together for her children, wondering what it is all about. She knows nothing of the use of uranium. She wears no diamonds on her finger. She can never use copper or platinum. She has never heard of titanium. Many are as the Malawian preacher who asked me a question during a seminar session, "Brother Dickson, What is gold?" This innocent African resident, as others, often pays the great price for all these most precious things over which the industrial world goes to war.

The refugee is the result of sin at work in the world. Satan does his best work in governments that cause misery. Political treaties bring temporary peace. But the gospel is the only hope for a world that has gone astray with the direction of Satan. The gospel must go into all the world, not only to save man from eternal destruction, but also to save him from himself. The Christian is truly the salt of the earth; he is the only hope for a world going wrong with sin.

We would remember the words of Jesus.

> *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 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; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren,* ***you did it to Me.***

So what is the opportunity of the refugee for world evangelism? We must always keep in mind that God always turns Satan against himself. When Satan causes social chaos, God goes to work. It is an axiomatic truth of the spiritual warfare between good and evil that started with the beginning of time.

I have already mentioned how the Congolese refugees have blessed South Africa. These were those young men who did not want to take up a gun and kill their fellow Congolese. When they fled to South Africa they started churches throughout the country.

When a civil war is over, refugees must return to their country of origin. They lose their UN refugee status, and thus must return home. This reverse migration presents a great opportunity for evangelism. I was once in Addis Abba, Ethiopia where Behailu Abebe, an Ehiopian preacher, was working with Sudanese refugees. At the time we knew of no churches in Sudan. After baptizing several of these refugees, we concluded that the church was established in Sudan though the baptisms took place in Ethiopia. I am sure this is what took place in Jerusalem in Acts 2 after many of the 3,000, who were baptized on the day of Pentecost and the following weeks, returned to their homes of origin. Refugee camps are places to evangelize in hope of civil wars that will eventually come to an end.

Northern Mozambique was evangelized during the civil war there when over two million Mozambiqueans who were living in southern Malawi were evangelized by the Malawian church. The Malawian church preached the gospel among the refugees, and when the refugees returned home, they established the church in northern Mozambique. God uses the work of Satan to accomplish His mission to populate heaven. The plight of the refugee can thus be turned into a plan to evangelize a nation.

Chapter 8

RICHES FOR THE POOR

The richest person in the world
is the one who has total peace with God
while possessing nothing of this world.

Since the majority of the world lives in an economic environment that is radically different than that of those who send forth evangelists, it is imperative that sending brethren seek in some way to understand the environment of the poor. It is important to understand the plight of the poor in order to better communicate the gospel across cultures to those who have little economic hope. There is a tremendous receptivity among lower income people simply because their attention is not in bondage to that which wealth can buy. For this reason, therefore, a concerted effort must be made to preach the gospel of hope to those who are trapped in economically adverse conditions. Therefore, allow me in an inadequate literary manner, unfold to you the real poverty of this world. "Poverty is the open-mouth, relentless hell which yawns beneath civilized society." So said Henry George in *Progress and Poverty*. And so it is true today in much of the Third World.

The word "plight" according to Webster, is "a condition, state of affairs, or situation; especially now, a **dangerous or awkward** situation." And that's exactly the situation of the poverty stricken environment of many of our Third World brethren. Poverty is the plight of the poor. Milton expressed the predicament, "This miserable loathsome plight." Just ask anyone of those millions who scrounge each day for another morsel of food. That person will thoroughly agree that his plight is miserable and loathsome and awkward and dangerous.

Jesus did remind us that the poor are always with us. And how right He was. The poor, the materially destitute, have always been and always will be. I guess that's just life. And life can be so cruel.

But most of you who are reading this book will not be able to identify with what I am saying. And I can write about it but never really understand the plight myself. Poverty, real poverty, is only something materially wealthy people read about. And admittedly, it is difficult to even write about, even though one has seen and lived with the worst of poverty the world has to offer. And I have, both in Brazil and in the West Indies. But none of us have ever lived like the poverty stricken of the world today.

Not everyone who lives in a Third World country is poor. Let me explain. We must define what is biblically defined as poor. Paul said that as long as he had food and clothing, he was content (1 Tm 6:8). I would assume, therefore, that not having food and clothing is poverty. Not having a radio, television, vehicle or new pair of shoes is not in the biblical definition of poverty. Living in a grass hut is not poverty. Walking to school for ten kilometers is not poverty. Poverty is having no food to eat and no clothes to wear. Being in such a condition would possibly be the result of having no land to farm or no job by which to earn a salary. But having no land or job is not defined in the Bible as being poor. When one is without food and clothing, he or she is living in a relentless struggle for survival. This is poverty.

Breecher said, "Poverty is very good in poems but very bad in the house; very good in maxims and sermons but very hard in practical life." Yes, to some it may be easy to write and talk about. But poverty is still that "relentless hell which yawns beneath civilized society." In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton reminded us, "It is easy enough to tell the poor to accept their poverty as God's will when you yourself have warm clothes and plenty of food and medical care and a roof over your head and no worry about the rent. But if you want them to believe you, try to share some of their poverty, and see if you can accept it as God's will yourself!" I must agree that it is easy to write and preach about poverty, but perilous to practice it.

We all have our stories about how rough we had it in the "good ole days" when we were growing up. It seems that poverty is a condition you try to hide while you experience it, but brag about after you have experienced it. Someone once said, "I was once so poor I used to buy a pint of milk for breakfast and a loaf of bread for dinner, and eat them both for supper!" And then there was the good man who bragged, "I wasn't born in a log cabin, but my family moved into one as soon as they could afford it."

I guess there were some advantages to those days, those days when poverty was an allergy that made us unusually sensitive to paper money. It was an economic condition that kept us from going anywhere but in debt. After all, back then your income tax was so small you never had to borrow to pay it. And your car keys were never in your other pair of pants.

Why is it that we never recognize those blessings of poverty until after we have experienced the poverty? And

why it is that most people do not realize the deplorable situation of the poor of the world? Why is it that we have erected a barrier between ourselves and the reality of the poor of the world? Why is it that we feel threatened by the "have not" countries who supposedly are trying to "get our money"?

I spent four years living in Brazil where poverty was real and next door. I have visited other countries where it is even worse. The annual income per person in Brazil back in 1975 was $1,140. However, over thirty million in that country lived at the same time on an average income of $77.00 per year. Those two figures should give you some indication of the tremendous separation between the rich and the poor in Brazil. Ten percent of the people owned and controlled ninety percent of the wealth.

The world's produce, I am told, can support only twenty-five percent of the world's population on the standard of living as that enjoyed by the average American. And Americans are in that lucky twenty-five percent and enjoying all that which they feel is their right to have. But the have nots want a piece of the pie. They want to lift their badly fed bodies out of the pits of agonizing hunger. And who can blame them. If you had four or five hungry children at home, what would you want? What would you believe? What would you do? Desperation often moves fathers and mothers to do things they would not normally do.

Have you ever had the wretched experience of having a mother or father dig through your garbage can in order to find some potato peels to feed their children. I have ... several times. You just want to cry. Most of the time in the developed countries it is a dog or cat that upsets and digs through the garbage cans. In the conditions of many Third World countries, it's people, people with starved bodies. That was the poverty we experienced in Brazil.

In Brazil they were called *molecos*. These were those three to ten year old children who roamed the streets begging for food, many times having no home to which to return at night. Over 600,000 poverty-stricken people were living in houses of scraps of cardboard and tin when we were in Brazil. The rich shipped expensive things around in packing crates to put in their houses. The poor used the crates **for** their houses.

Most of us who lived in the "carpet world" want the poor to stay out there. We cry, "Don't bring us any more boat people." "Keep the wetbacks out." "They'll take our jobs." In South Africa it is erroneously called xenophobia, the fear of another race. The jobless South Africans have not been favorable to refugees from the north. However, it is not actually xenophobia. It is the fear of refugees taking jobs away from the jobless South Africans. It is a conflict of the poor against the poor.

I think some of us could care less about such situations because we understand less the plight of the poor. But "out there" is the real world. This is **our** real world, a world of relentless poverty. John Worral, a newsman in Africa, wrote back to his newspaper, "Millions sit idly outside mud huts, crushed by crop failures due to drought or floods, wondering when they can eat again." The next time we grumble about the high cost of food at the food store, let us thank God that we have a food store to grumble about. We must understand the ever present danger of subsistence farming during drought. When it does not rain, one cannot go to a food store to buy food. You have no money. When drought occurs, people simply starve. People fall victim to their environment.

I do not have any answers for the poor of the world. There will always be those who close themselves in the security of their homes with filled refrigerators in order to isolate the pleas of the desperate. On the other hand, there will always be those with tender hearts who will feel for the millions who live in malnutrition. May our concern move us to tears, to thanksgiving, to sharing and caring. I would urge the West to continually watch the weather, the world weather. When there is a drought there is a real need as poverty strikes subsistence farmers. There are no other jobs for fathers to feed their families. The World Food Program is a great work of the West. The humanitarian nature of the American culture has led the Americans to do wonders in coming to the needs of the poor. I have always thought it curious that America has been known for dishing out billions of dollars in food aid throughout the years, but oil rich Islamic nations are not known for such. Could this be the nature of the Christian-principled culture of the West as opposed to the Quranic-principled culture of Islamic countries. I do know that when nations are in trouble, they go first to those of whom they are often so critical, the West.

If we have food and clothing, I sincerely feel that we need to be constantly reminded that God has truly blessed us. We need to thank Him that we happened to be living in a blessed spot at this particular time in history. After all, I could have been born into the midst of a drought stricken area of the world, or in the slums of Calcutta, India. Seventy-five thousand people die each day because of either malnutrition, or malnutrition related causes. The same number died yesterday. Those of their friends and family will battle to find that next piece of bread, that next apple core or potato peeling that will allow their starved and swollen bodies to continue until tomorrow. Their whole purpose of life has dwindled to find that morsel of food that will get them through another day. And after today, maybe another.

In Africa, there is a drought going on somewhere at all times. Or, there is a political conflict with refugees scatter-

ing here and there. These situations must be in our prayers. For example, the tragedy of Darfur, Sudan was caused by senseless men in Khartoum, the capital, who did not care for those who were of a different religious faith in the south of the country. The tragedy of Darfur was inevitable. A country with an Islamic government in the north boycotted a Christian based culture in the south. The country should have done what former South African foreign minister Botha advised, "Just divide the country."

In order to understand the world we seek to evangelize, we must seek to understand the disadvantaged and the poor. There is great receptivity among the poor. The advantaged thus have a responsibility to share. The Christian leaders in Jerusalem encouraged Paul in his travels to always remember the poor. He told them that he was very eager to do such (Gl 2:10). In our world evangelism, therefore, we would do right to follow Paul's example, and thus be eager to remember the poor (See At 20:35).

Chapter 9

HIGH DEMANDS OF FAITH

Faith is an inner character
that must be developed
for the purpose of eternal dwelling.

The opportunities for evangelism in the world today are so great that we must have laborers of great faith to seek the challenge of world evangelism. We must call on those who through faith are willing to leave fathers and mothers, houses and lands for the salvation of the lost of the world. We need those with mountain-moving faith to uproot and reach out to a world that is hungering for truth.

Evangelists with roots in the West, and residents of the cocooned culture and affluent society, often glance into the face of faith and shudder because of their own self-sufficiency. The challenge we see in the world of have-nots always taxes our dependence on that which is possessed. When we contemplate faith's demand we struggle to sacrifice that which is always first to go when faith comes calling—the security of a world that demands little faith. The empirical walk we so often trust agonizes down the hall of faith.

There is always something unnerving about faith's call. It is a call to us in our secure culture to venture out into the unknown. This is not thinking outside the box. It is a call to live outside the cocoon of the material security we have created for ourselves. It is a challenging call only because our nerves and emotional constitution have been trained to walk on the crutches of the seen and known.

Nevertheless, we fight to allow ourselves the test of trusting the Almighty Unseen in the altogether unknown. I often wonder that if faith was a fortune at the end of a rainbow of supporting evidence, I might be the poorest of them all.

Any Western evangelist who manages to escape the isolated cocoon of Western materialism usually crashes with his cultural baggage on his voyage into the Third World. If he or she does not sense in this new and common world the absence of the affluency of his homeland, then the elevator has not yet reached the top floor. This is the real world, the world that exists everywhere and on every continent. It usually cannot be seen by the rich for the rich never look down, while the poor are always looking up. The poor see everyone at the top. But because the rich do not want to be reminded of them, they more often refuse to look down to the bottom.

Before one can accomplish acculturation, he or she must discover self. One is only truly aware of his surroundings when he is aware of himself. I have always wondered at the lack of self-awareness of those who live in the affluent societies of the world. They who are of that exclusive world class find it difficult to condescend to men of lower estate. They simply do not understand the poor, their plight and their problems. Third World thinking is such an ellusive concept to those of the First World.

Our self-realization of who we are and where we are from, however, often leads to frustration. Being one of the haves often separates us so far from the have-nots that we lose contact with this Third World mentality that we never had in the first place. We thus accuse the Third World resident for having no initiative or being lazy, backward, indifferent, etc. Our frustration is not knowing what to do with ourselves in the midst of those who have so little, or those we presume are desperate because they possess so little.

You say Jesus dealt with it by saying that the poor are always with us. He was not giving us an excuse. Neither was He excusing Himself. He was so often abased during His ministry, though He had food and clothing. The comparison of my sacrifices with His sacrifice of leaving heaven for earth, however, is no real comparison. His was extreme. Mine is too often only external. Remember, most of us presently have more now than Jesus owned in His entire lifetime.

So we compare. Was Jesus poor in relation to ourselves? Yea, verily. Thus comes a possible shocking reality we are usually not willing to live. Must we be as Him in order to understand and be able to say what He said about the poor without such a statement being either an excuse or justification for our own materialism? As a culturally born and reared materialist, we shudder at our conclusions to these dreadful postulations. If we are right, then we are wrong.

The face of faith is still there. It glows more now in these days and beckons more fervently than when I first met the poor. But you are afraid that I take you down this road of thought. You may be afraid to face faith. I am apprehensive about taking you there, for I know you will not understand, and if you do, we will turn around in the middle of the road. Nevertheless, we will venture on. There are too many souls to be saved to turn around in the road.

Would we be as Jesus in order to be able to say and do as Jesus? Must we become all things to all people in order to cross the cultural bridge of communication? And in order to communicate, must we be abased in order to abound in our cultural relationship with the lost? Our conclusion to these postulations wearies our souls and frightens our affluent cultural roots.

We must ask ourselves, Would we be as Jesus in order to be able to say and do as Jesus? Is the price tag too high for us to condescend to those of lower estate? How can we identify with the poor to whom Jesus went if we cannot identify with the poor to whom Jesus sends us? We might be irritated at such questions. They make us think. They make is look into our own cultural mirror, and when we look, we might see a man standing there we do not want to see.

So we rationalize. It's not wrong to be rich. Then we read, "They sold their possessions and goods." But we appreciate our multitude of clothes. Then we read, "I was naked and you did not clothe me." But we can be rich and spiritual. Then we read, "Few that are in high places are called" and "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." But we say we have a right to our material way of life. Then we read, "He emptied Himself and was made as a man." So this struggle of cultures continues within us. "I discipline my body," wrote Paul, "and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

Then we contemplate our fellow affluent cultural victims. Has our frustration level with our brethren become a measuring rule of their unrealized materialism? We would not so judge lest we fall into the sin of arrogant snobbery. Nevertheless, that frustration is there when we experience those of "home" who quibble over the color of cars and the fashion of the latest outrageously priced tennis shoes. We suppose that our experience outside that cultural "cell" has awakened our awareness of who we really were, and to some extent, still are. When one works in the "careless" societies of the affluent world, and at the same time among the barefoot poverty-stricken prisoners of the Third World, it is hard to feel sorry for someone with a full refrigerator. When we return to the world of games and things, it is hard to identify again with a world from which we came and a culture that lingers in our own being.

The problem with too much money is that one starts inventing how to keep the cash flow going through his hands in order to maintain a materialistic lifestyle. That cash flow, mind you, is through my hands and unto my desires. So I take up a sport and discover some new land to which I must travel. I buy another bicycle or car. Another pair of shoes won't hurt. I stop in at the shopping mall for a tube of toothpaste and end up at the counter with a full shopping cart of incidentals to stuff away in some cabinet at home. When I have purchased beyond my needs I discover flea-markets. I then buy trinkets to continue this self-centeredness, this cycle of money-out-things-in lifestyle. There's always enough money in hand to let it flow. However, I am unaware of a new psychology that is setting in.

The problem with materialism is that it reveals a low self esteem. The materialistis shouts, "Look at who I am because of what I have." The poor humbly say, "What you see in me is what you get. Nothing more."

The cash flow through the materialist's hands changes him into a new and different person. As the money goes out, things and activities come in. They all come his way. He has now set up an inward selfishness that makes him an extremely self-centered person. The more money he has the more things and activities that come his way. His psychology changes. He wants to maintain this selfish cycle. He fights to keep it happening because it has become his culture. Those in his world have all adopted the same lifestyle. He excludes those who threaten his culture and becomes agitated with

anything or anyone who would disrupt this selfish cycle. Presidents are cursed for recession and missionaries are shunned because they keep disrupting his cycle of self by asking for his money. They keep reminding him of who he is and what he must give in order to accomplish the mission of his Christian profession. Whether or not he realizes it – usually he does not – he has now become a part of that way of life which dictionaries refer to as materialism.

But we must not be mistaken in our definitions. My Third World brethren define materialism in a much different way. The affluent society glances over the word. Those who are victims of a cultural deformity too often become oblivious to the handicap. But by Third World comparison, lives exist in an environment that is on the other side of the continuum. To the poor man, materialism is living or being any place than where there is continual sickness, poverty, death, starvation and war. In his environment he has never set up the psychology of selfishness, for he has never had the opportunity to buy toys and activies to enjoy. Giving to others does not threaten him, for his hostile environment has continually extracted from him since the day of his birth.

I have always wondered why it was easier for the widow to give her mites than the rich man to give his surplus thousands. The poor have never had enough money to start this vicious cycle of materialism. People always want more. I would say that in a sense all people have greed, both rich and poor. However, the poor have never had enough to allow their wants to digress to a psychology of materialism.

One advantage the less financially advantaged have is that they do not give out of their surplus. In other words, sacrificial giving brings joy because one has given that which he could have used to better his own life. If one gives only of his surplus, his life does not change when he gives. He can maintain his lifestyle regardless of his contribution. On the other hand, the one who gives that which could have been used to improve one's life, is blessed with joy for he has given sacrifically. He has sacrificed a better life for the sake of giving to another.

It is always easier for the poor man to share what he has than for the rich man to do the same. Requests for help do not disrupt any selfish cycle of materialism in the society of the poor. You can be assured that the rich man will give. But you can also be assured that he will not so give as to disrupt his cycle of materialism. He will continue to play his games and buy his things. What he gives will often simply be the surplus of what he does not need to maintain his lifestyle. You see, giving to the point of sacrifice is a personal infringement upon his psychology; it is against his materialistic culture. The poor are usually never offended when they are asked to give. That is one reason why there is such great receptivity for the gospel message among the poor. The nature of the Christian life fits the nature of the financially disadvantaged. Jesus said, "Freely receive, freely give." Because they have not been fashioned according to the nature of materialism, it is easy for those who are not materialistic to freely give. That is why the Philippians, who were in deep poverty, begged Paul to take their contribution for the famine victims in Judea (2 Co 8:1-4).

Are you angry with me because I point these things out in our lives? There are so many poor in the world. They are so receptive to the gospel. Citizens of the West live in the top two percent of the wealth of the world. How can those of this materialistic cocoon come out of this top two percent and identify with the other ninety-eight percent in order to preach the gospel to the poor? This is certainly the challenge for the Western missionary. But while considering this challenge, remember that when John sent messengers to Jesus to question if He was the Messiah, Jesus responded that the gospel was being preached to the poor (Mt 11:5). If preaching the gospel to the poor was one of the evidences that Jesus was the Messiah, then it must be the same evidence of true Christianity today. If we do not preach the gospel to the poor, then we have developed another form of churchianity after our own materialistic isolationism.

We must keep in mind that there is a "bright" side to poverty. It does produce receptivity. Africa is thus a place of great receptivity. It is so because it is a place of poverty.

Africa and India will be receptive for many decades to come. Why? They will be receptive simply because they will be economically challenged for a long time to come. It is ironic. The center of Christianity has moved to the poorest nations of the world. Jesus was right. Few who are in high places will hear. His message to comfort John in prison was that the poor had the gospel preached to them. That focus in evangelism still brings comfort. The poor have the gospel preached to them because they are the ones who receive it the most. It is simply true that the One who impoverished Himself of all that He had in heaven in order to come and deliver us from this world, is the One with whom the poor can identify. The incarnate Son of God does not appeal to the rich as He does to the poor. A good text to read on this matter is Philippians 2:5-8. And then read Paul's response in his life to what the incarnate Son of God did for him (Ph 3:8).

Epilogue

Now how do we accomplish our divine mandate in a world that is so complex and changing? Understanding the world in which we live will always be a challenge. The world is as John's sea that ever changes and places challenges before the world evangelist. But this is not the greatest task we face. The greatest task is ourselves. We have in many cases digressed into a churchianity that is ineffective. We must therefore repent and restore the first works. We must remember who we are as the children of God, and then get on with the task that Jesus set before us.

There are no magic formulas for repentance and restoration in this matter. I have no sociological or pyschological paradigm to which we must turn and implement in our lives. We have only the Bible. There is no magic methodology that will programme our lives into an effective ministry to the lost. But we do have the Bible. And I might add that it takes no Bible scholar to reach into the Scriptures and discover what must be done. The Holy Spirit offers a New Testament textbook of what to do, as well has several case histories of how common people successfully followed the textbook, and subseqently turned the world upside down in the first century. Therefore, in your personal studies of the textbook, see if the following concepts were implemented in the lives of the early disciples in order to take the gospel to the world:

A. Restore our ministry of prayer and fasting.

In the initial years of the existence of the Antioch church in Acts 13, the prophets and teachers continually ministered and fasted (At 13:1). It was not that the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas, and then they fasted. The text reads that as disciples they ministered and fasted as a behavior of life in their work of preaching and teaching. When leadership restores ministry and fasting, then God knows the qualified men He can call into a greater world ministry.

After the leaders qualified themselves through ministry and fasting, it was then the Holy Spirit who asked that Paul and Barnabas be separated unto a greater ministry. And you know the rest of this story.

If we are to get into the world as Jesus would have us, then we must qualifiy ourselves through ministry and fasting. I have found that there is not so much a problem with the ministry, but with the regular fasting. In discussing this matter with church leaders I have had some leaders even argue that fasting is not a command, and thus for them it cannot be a part of their Christian life. And herein is the problem. The truth is that fasting is not a command. However, Jesus said that in His kingdom His disciples would fast (Mt 9:14,15). It is not that there must be a command for fasting. It is as the prophets and teachers in Antioch. When sincere and passionate men are serious about the commission to take the gospel to the world, fasting and prayer is a way of life.

When leaders start fasting about the work, things start happening. What we often try to do is get by with a cheap prayer. But sometimes words of prayer are just that, just words. But when the action of fasting is linked with prayer, then God knows that we are serious. And it takes serious people to be called by the Holy Spirit to move on to a greater ministry. Therefore, unless our prayers are linked with fasting, the Spirit cannot find passionate leaders to get the job done. I believe that the lack of fasting in churches will continue to greatly hinder the potential of what can be done by any particular church. On the other hand, if a church starts fasting, look out. The Spirit will start working abundantly above all that we can imagine.

B. Restore our search of the word of God.

The correct translation of 2 Timothy 2:15 is, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* Diligent preachers and teachers will be diligently into the word of God. The problem with the religious culture of the churchian world is that adherents give a religious performance for God that is directed by professional clergymen, but the adherents do not know the Bible. Churchians are often so busy in their secular life that they have no time for serious Bible study.

If we do not believe that people will be saved by their good works, then we will have no desire for evangelistic outreach to these "good people." And thus, we have no passion for the word. We now live in an extremely biblically ignorant churchian world. Because of this ignorance of the word of God, the foundation is laid for the development of numerous religious movements that direct the minds of men away from God. What is more scary is that many churches assume that the preacher is the one who is to be the authority in the word, and thus they have given themselves over to what little knowledge he has of the word. This behavior sets

the foundation upon which preachers can lead religious groups wherever their desires so choose.

Any disciple who seeks to do what God wants him to do will seek to let God continually communicate to him through the written word. In prayer we talk to God. But God cannot do something with a child who will not listen to Him. Because of laziness in Bible study, what people have done in order to find a message from God is to place great emphasis on dreams or experiences. I often hear the statement, "God spoke to me." In all these humanistic adventures, people are trying to get a cheap message from God. But what God has instructed is that diligent disciples diligently get into the word of God. There is no easy way to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Through long hours of study we will know the will of God. With a knowledge of the word of God we will guard ourselves from being led astray by the theologies of men, and more importantly, by our own misguided behavior. When Christians are truly into the word of God, they are diligently into all the world because they want to teach others what God has taught them through His word. For this reason, therefore, we must repent and restore diligent Bible study in the family of God.

C. Restore personal relationships with one another.

The New Testament is saturated with passages that encourage relationships. These are called "one another" passages. There are simply hundreds of such passages that teach Christians to pray for one another, sing to one another, give to one another, consider one another, encourage one another, watch out for one another, bear one another's burdens, etc. Christianity is relationships, and if one would seek to spiritually grow, he or she must establish a close relationship with fellow disciples.

Relationships prepare us for heaven. Relationships prepare our characters for eternal dwelling because our close contact with other people helps us to fine tune our own personalities. We learn to dwell with others, and thus we discover different qualities in our own personality that may need more attention in order to cohabit with others. The better our relationship is with others, the better we understand ourselves.

Churches that seek to establish close relationships between Christians are usually those churches that are seeking to serve the needs of others. They are churches that have members who know how to work together in accomplishing ministies that touch the lives of other people.

We live in a world with religions that are sustained by traditional ceremonies that identify their existence among other man-made religions. These groups are often cold and very impersonal. They are built around the function of a pastor or clergy that is viewed as the sustainer of the group or organization of churches. But people want more than attendance at a religious ceremony. They want people. If the church is what it should be, there will be a natural appeal to the hearts of others who are seeking friends. They will thus be drawn by our love of one another, not by our doctrinal correctness, nor by our ceremonies.

And this is exactly what Jesus said would be the signal of our identity. We should be known by our love (relationships). Churches that would be successful in world evangelism, therefore, are churches that are built on loving relationships that draw people to them. This brings us to the true identity of the church.

D. Restore our love experience.

Everyone knows Jesus' mandate that we be identified by our love of one another (Jn 13:34,35). It is this love that moves us to do what Paul said in Philippians 2:4. *"Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."* When a group of Christians start doing this, then their love is manifested toward others. Slaves seek others to serve. But when a church becomes introverted, they are not seeking to serve, but to be served.

When love is truly practiced by disciples, they gather together in order to find someone unto whom they can express their love. The serendipity of the gathering of those who seek to serve, therefore, is that one is exhorted by being served. We do not come together in order to see what we can get out of our assemblies. We come together to find someone to love. By this we are identified as true disciples of Jesus.

In order to do this, look at the preceding verse to Philippians 2:4. Paul wrote, *"Let nothing be done through rivalry or empty conceit, but in humility of mind let each esteem others better than themselves"* (Ph 2:3). In order to develop a group that is loving in relationships, each member of that group must learn how to "esteem others" better than himself. Those who do this will continually seek to serve others. And this is the magic of evangelism. People usually first come to Jesus because of our love of one another. Once drawn, then they are taught the truth in order that they obey the gospel.

Now consider this. Do you think others will be drawn to loving groups of disciples? Will others who are wounded and hurting come for rescue where there is a family of disciples who are seeking to care for them? This is church. It is a relational environment that draws those who seek help and friendships. Unless churches

restore this type of environment among the members, they have no appeal to those who need help.

The primary reason why people are drawn to the church is not because it has the right doctrine. They come for loving friendships. If churches can restore such among the members, then the church will grow numerically because those who come will grow to know Jesus through the behavior of the members. This was what Jesus wanted the fallen Ephesian church to do. If they would restore their first love, then others would be drawn to Jesus. But if there is no love, then the lampstand of light has gone out.

E. Restore good works:

Paul exhorted Titus to remind the brethren to *"be careful to maintain good works"* (Ti 3:8). Because of the warning, we must assume that there is always the possibility of apostasy away from maintaining good works in our lives as disciples of Jesus. The reason for this is that we often take for granted the fact that we were bought with the price of Jesus' sacrificial offering on the cross. We thus forget to be thankful with a response of good works (See 2 Cor 4:15).

When the church in any area moves into the generation of disciples who have grown up in the church, there is a tendency for members to take for granted who they are and what they have. As stated in previous chapters, when the church moves into the second and third generation, they often become unevangelistic because they exist on the evangelistic work of their forefathers. They become unevangelistic because the church is composed of those who have grown up in the church, and thus they have forgotten the chaotic religious confusion out of which their fathers were converted. Good works cease because there is not appreciation for the freedom that was gained in Christ through obedience to the gospel.

This is one of the reasons why the Hebrew writer exhorted the older disciples to whom he was writing to not forsake the assemblying of Christians together in order to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). Those who are not careful to maintain good works will not show up at assemblies that promote love and works. This is usually what happens to churches in their second and third generation of existence.

In order to get growing again, it is absolutely imperative that stagnant churches repent and restore their first works. There is no alternative to this. Members may be willing to do good works when the works present themselves to be done. But this is not the problem. If their is no initiative to go to work by implementing plans to accomplish work goals, a church is dead. If there is a supposed faith that is not expressed by work, the church is dead. When members stop coming to assemblies wherein good works are identified, the church is dead. Repentance that is manifested by fruit is the only escape from this death. As Jesus exhorted the Ephesian church, we must remember from where we have fallen and repent in order to restore the first works (Rv 2:5).

F. Restore an evangelistic outreach.

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men ..." (2 Cor 5:11). In order to restore our desire to persuade men through the preaching of the gospel, there must be a restoration in our lives of the fear of God, not only for what God will do to those who do not obey the gospel, but also to us for not preaching the gospel.

Every Christian must be evangelistic. If one would disagree with this statement, then the spiritual death of that person is identified. If we bring together an entire group of disciples who agree with the one who disagrees with the statement, we have the answer to why churches stagnate and die out of existence. Unevangelistic churches have created a religion after their own desires, and thus the entire group of members who are part of that church ushers themselves together into death.

If churches believe that they can start growing again without the entire body of members becoming evangelistic, then they have deceived themselves into believing that an unevangelistic disciple is acceptable to God. Every member must be evangelistic. No one can sit idly by and allow others to do all the work. If those who idly sit by become the majority of the group, then death has set in.

The curse of fulltime preachers who stay with a specific church is that the church who pays their salary often hands over to them their evangelistic responsibility. This is not something that I am teaching of my own opinion. This is an axiomatic truth, that is, a truth that is self-evident. When churches become financially rich, they seek to hire their work to be done for them. Members then sit idly by when the fulltime evangelist does the work. You know this is true.

It is difficult to convince one who is obsessed with a successful secular job that he cannot buy his way out of personal involvement with a paycheck to a fulltime preacher. The problem is not in the preacher, but in the one who thinks he can be obsessed with his work in worldly things while someone else assumes his responsibility in being personally involved in good works and evangelistic outreach.

Though it is almost impossible to restore rich churches who have hired a staff to do their "spiritual business," there is always hope. But the hope lies only in the repentance of those who have chosen to sit on a bench during the "hour of worship" while someone else becomes personally involved. Only repentance will salvage a church house full of such people. By repentance I mean that every member must make a commitment to become personally involved in what Jesus would have every disciple do. This was what Paul exhorted Timothy to tell the rich. *"Command those who are rich ... that they be rich in good works."* (1 Tm 6:17,19).

G. Restore daily discipleship.

We have created a religion that naturally dies once it has reached the end of its life. Now think about this. We have now the "hour of worship." This is not a New Testament concept. It is the result of an industrial/ business culture that seeks to departmentalize every aspect of the life of a disciple. We reason that since work is departmentalized between 8:00^{AM} and 5:00^{PM}, then certainly "religious time" can also be departmentalized. In order to enforce this concept, the departmentalized "hour of worship" is boxed in between an "opening prayer" and "closing prayer." Fulfilling one's personal duties as a Christian is thus confined to an assembled "hour of worship," outside which, one is on his own time and free from any responsibilities to fulfill one's service to God. This is the belief and behavior of the dead church. It is true churchian doctrine at its best.

Acts 5:42 is a record of the behavior of the early church. *"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."* There was a daily obedience in the lives of the early disciples because they realized the urgency of their calling. As priests of God who never ceased doing the responsibilities of priesthood, they were daily into the work of God to preach the gospel to the lost and teach the disciples. There is no such thing in the New Testament as an "hour of worship." There were no opening or closing prayers. Discipleship was a lifetime, all-the-time commitment to serve. Anything different in belief is an apostasy from the truth. Anything different in behavior is an apostasy to a religion that we have created after our own desire to shirk our duties and separate ourselves from personal involvement in the lives of others.

In order to start growing again, we must restore in our lives daily discipleship. We must be daily priests of God who minister the word of God to the world. When we once again become excited about sowing the seed of the kingdom because we are excited about the need of preaching the gospel to the world, we will start growing. We will have more conversions only when we grow in the conviction that every disciple must become involved daily in preaching the gospel to the world. Nothing else will keep the church growing into all the world.

Book 33

21st Century Restoration

The world of Christendom is changing. Some see the change as a threat to past heritages that should be preserved at any cost. Others see the changes as an opportunity for world evangelism. Since no culture passes through time without change, then we should never miss opportunities to preach the unchanging gospel to new generations that come over the horizon of time. If we are not adaptable to change, we will miss some very precious opportunities to reach people with a message that not only brings them into a covenant relationship with God, but also helps the individual to better cope with a world that has gone wrong with sin. We should not fight change in a changing world, but seek for open doors that the change has produced. Those who struggle against change miss some of the most exciting opportunities to reach people with a gospel that never changes. It is the gospel in which we stand, and thus those who are struggling in a moving society need the firm foundation of the gospel. In order to deal with changing times, therefore, every disciple must be a thorough student of the Bible. Those disciples who are the most disturbed by change are those who know the Bible the least. They cannot determine what is simply tradition, and what are the unchangeable truths of God's word. The most essential tool with which to face a changing world, therefore, is a knowledge of the word of God. Those who are grounded in a knowledge of the word of God, and thus can separate tradition from truth, will never fear what is so natural about society ... that is change.

Something wonderful is happening. It is happening in the religious world of Christendom. There is a sincere desire in a new generation of truth seekers who are morphing out of a restricting cocoon of institutional religiosity into a new paradigm of servant word warriors. This is a yet to be identified army of those who are seeking the simplicity of New Testament Christianity in the midst of a divided religious world that has failed humanity. This spontaneous emergence of believers seek to be delivered from a churchianity that brought itself into bondage by religious authorities and an encyclopedia of religious traditions that are without number. Religious chaos now prevails in a world of Christendom where the traditional "church" has in many ways failed. And from this chaos in the past few decades, a new generation of believers is emerging to change the course of Christendom.

The millions who are a part of and are witnessing this worldwide phenomenon are calling it the "2nd Reformation." When we look from today 400 years back into our past, we can understand this reference. Roman Catholicism, and the ignorance that prevailed during the Dark Ages, kept people in bondage for centuries before the beginning of the Protestant Reformation Movement. However, in the Protestant Reformation Movement, people sought to satisfy the unquenchable human yearning for freedom. As a result, a few brave men stood up with translations of the Scriptures in the local vernacular of the people. Some of these word warriors were excommunicated from the fellowship of the heritage of religiosity that they had received from their fathers. Some fled into hiding. Others were murdered by being burned at the stake in the town square. However, regardless of the oppression of the Reformation leaders, and the attempted suppression of their followers who cried freedom, the paradigm shift was made over a period of 100 years. Historians now refer to that morphing from the institutional religiosity of the past into a new paradigm of Christendom as the Reformation Movement.

But today, there is another religious paradigm shift from the Reformation Movement itself. When those of the Protestant Reformation took sides against one another, they created a socio/religious dynamic that would inevitably deny the individual's quest for freedom in Christ, and a direct relationship with Jesus through His word. What is happening today was predictable.

People seek relationships. Religious people seek relationships that are based on Jesus, the One who died

for them in order to establish eternal bonds of fellowship. When the restrictions of institutional churchianity began to choke those who sought to be free and in fellowship with one another, the mold was cast for history to repeat itself.

So it is happening again. However, there is something different with this "2nd Reformation." It is not an attempt to reform an old structure. Reformation movements, unfortunately, seek only to reform existing institutions. Baggage of the past is always carried over into the new movement. Reformation churches naturally embed within their orders and organizations dictates that will eventually call for another reformation, a reformation from themselves.

The same is often true of proclaimed restoration movements. Most restoration movements simply salvage baggage out of worn out reformation movements. They often collect scriptures to justify themselves as "biblical," but practice and behave according to the reformation heritages from which they fled. They too embed within their orders and organization dictates that will eventually lead them back to that from which they fled. There is nothing more blinding than a reformation that has disguised itself as a restoration. The adherents to such movements are often too arrogant to confess that they hid behind their backs the baggage of former reformations. In doing so, they also set the stage for other restorations, restorations from themselves.

But what we are experiencing in Christendom today is something different. It is a strenuous effort to break out of the confining wineskins of old restricting traditions and a religious paradigm that has long since lost contact with the physical and spiritual needs of humanity. It is a generation that is simply bored with ceremonial assemblies while attendees are orchestrated through the acts of a playwright (worship leader). It is a generation that seeks the source from which faith is derived, the word of God, and an opportunity to express its principles in daily living. This generation knows enough about the Bible to understand that the assembly-oriented religiosity that was characteristic with the typical religious group of their heritage is sterile and foreign to the cultural instincts of a Facebook generation.

In the true definition of the phrase, the global paradigm shift in Christendom that we are witnessing in this century is in many ways a true "restoration movement." It is not a restoration movement as many of those restorations that have taken place at various times and places after the 2nd century apostasy, which restorations doomed themselves to failure because they were only disguised reformations. Those restoration movements often brought with them institutional baggage that condemned them to return eventually to that from which they originally fled. Embedded doctrines, hermeneutics and ceremonial traditions destined them to become the source from which others would eventually also have to escape in order to search for the ancient order of primitive Christianity.

This new restoration, the 21st Century Restoration Movement, will eventually be written in history books as the movement that changed Christendom. It will be such because it is not an effort to remodel old norms. It is not an attempt to refocus twisted scriptures. It is not an effort to rehash cloned interpretations that were actually formulated through the maze of past bondage theologies. This new movement is defining itself to be far different from all "reformations" and "restorations" that have taken place since the 1st century.

Chapter 1

OBSERVATIONS

What is exciting about this 21st Century Restoration Movement is that it is driven by faith and obedience. It is a change of direction in Christendom for many for which there are no history books from which to determine its course. Those who are on this journey often do not know where they are going, other than with their faith that will direct them with God. They find it exhilarating to walk again by faith, being directed only by His word. They have stepped outside the box of orthodoxy and sought to walk by faith according to the word of God.

Observation 1
ORIGINS OF CHAOS

Social changes in any society always spill over into the religious behavior of citizens. In some ways, therefore, some sociological changes in the world in which we live have been the impetus to what we are experiencing in Protestant churches throughout the world today. However, the primary impetus that has sparked this paradigm shift in Christendom originated from the religious world of Christendom itself. The change in the sociological networking of nations, combined with challenges in the world of Christendom, have together germinated the restoration that we are experiencing today. Because there has been an explosion in religion throughout the world, we are moved to an explosion in restoration.

Consider the following brief review of socio/religious changes that have been the engine that has driven the 21st Century Restoration Movement:

A. Denominational separation:

Christendom is reacting to 400 years of separation between Protestant groups throughout the world. Specifically, traditional denominations have developed the foundation upon which a new generation has reacted. Denominational religiosity took people so far from one another that it was only predictable that they would seek to come back together. Traditional churches will continue to exist in the future, but they have been the spring board from which millions are leaping in order to find a new way. Those who first ran from traditional churches started forming "community churches," but now they have discovered that the community churches have to a great extent become that from which they fled. Even those who thought that they had a patent on restoration have also succumbed to the exodus from denominational power structures and traditions.

When churches are in decline, it is not always the result of an unreceptive society. As the members of any particular church grow old, they often age out of contact with succeeding generations. They culturally take the church with them into being a church culture that is disconnected with succeeding generations. And when restorational churches, who believe that they have had a copyright on truth and behavior, age, they too will grow out of touch with the generations that follow if they are unable to separate Baal from Bible. What is unfortunate in such situations is that restoration churches have a difficult time separating culture from truth, and thus they see the younger generation as rebellious to "the truth." This lends them to cry out condemnation of supposed change agents and strawmen they have created after their own imagination.

B. Heritage of traditions:

As the traditional protestant denominations aged, so did their traditions and their churches. As restoration churches began to crystallize into a church that serviced only the generation that gave them birth, they too developed a heritage of traditionally-linked truth that had little appeal to the 21st century citizen. The religious heritage of traditions that was formulated by the past no longer filled the needs of a generation that seeks connectivity. We live in a "YouTube/Facebook" century that is wearied with a heritage of traditions that have separated believers from one another. The traditions of the past not only failed to meet the needs of this new generation, they have also become symbols of separation in Christendom. Though the traditions were not inherently wrong, they were to a great extent traditions that the succeeding generation relegated to the past in order that they define and determine their own future.

C. Legalistic religiosity:

Traditional institutional denominations are propped up and promoted by systematic theologies that have traditionally identified each particular group of the Protestant Reformation. In order for any particular denomination to continue to exist, there had to be a legalistic approach to the identity of the heritage for each group to continue. Those who aligned themselves with a "proof text" theology were not innocent in this matter. Proof texts were legalistically interpreted and applied, and thus become the standard by which identity of the faithful was determined. Traditions, combined with a legal approach to theology, crystallized each group, and thus separated them from one another to the extent that neighbors could not commune with one another lest they be seen to have compromised their beliefs. This became so divisive in society that it was commonly stated, "Do not talk to your neighbor about politics and religion." What should have been so natural for a disciple of Jesus to do—talk about "religion"—was banned.

D. Judgmental theologies:

The natural result of legalistic religiosity was the development of beliefs (theologies) that became the foundation upon which one neighbor judged another to be either in or out of the kingdom. A century of debate over theological issues has led to a denominational separation in which there is little communication. When Christendom forgot the simplicity of Christianity, a heritage of categorizing judgmental opinions became the theology of each particular denominated group.

When adherents to particular religious groups lost their Christ-centeredness, they sought to judge one another more in reference to traditions and doctrine, than their love for one another. This has led to a Christendom that is greatly divided, since outside fundamental teaching, people without love have a difficult time in getting along with one another in their differences over opinions and traditions.

E. Power, people and programs:

Jesus said that there would be no lords or authorities

among His disciples (Mk 10:42,43). However, denominational separation and traditions were sustained by a clergy, or eldership, who have assumed authority and lordship over each particular autonomous group. Authority was assumed to be the foundation upon which a particular denomination existed, and thus the center of reference for the attention of the membership. Permission from a central system of authority had to be granted before individual adherents could respond to the grace of God to do good works. In order to enforce authority, organizational structures were established from which permission had to be sought and granted before any individual member of the organized religion could act. Whether from a preacher/pastor, or an eldership, the assumption of a percentage of authority from the all authority that Jesus has on earth led to a generation of freedom-seeking people who wanted deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

F. Church-building Christianity:

What solidified the Protestant Reformation into a divided world of crystallized religious groups was the exaltation of a sanctuary into which dominated adherents could be brought in order to maintain the identity of each particular group. Church buildings, therefore, became more than convenient places to meet on Sunday morning. They became landmarks of identity in each community into which the "faithful" had to meet in order to be identified with each autonomous/denominated group. They thus became symbols of tradition, heritage, separation, and the location where authority-thirsty people could be reaffirmed on a weekly basis. If adherents were not present in these monuments on Sunday, they were deemed unfaithful, and subsequently, the target of a leadership that claimed them as their sheep. Attendance in the building, therefore, became the signal that one was loyal, either to the primary leader of the group, or submissive to the powers that existed.

It is the basic nature of man to be free. It is the way God made every human being that has been born into this world. The preceding heritage that has been handed the world today seeks to rob the individual of that basic desire for freedom. What has happened, therefore, is that we are living in an era of men and women who seek to cross the Red Sea. They have no idea where they are going. But they know that a desert wherein faith must be exercised is better than the taskmasters and bondage of a religious world from which they are escaping. Their reason for leaving bondage may be basically for negative reasons. However, a world that has been burdened with those things that are so contrary to basic human nature, has moved them to break forth into freedom. Religious people want to be free, free indeed. It is only natural. It is the nature of the God-created human spirit.

Observation 2
CHRISTENDOM IN CHAOS

I was once reading the book *Pagan Christianity* (Frank Viola & George Barna) in an isolated coffee shop in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. After enjoying my coffee for about thirty minutes of reading, a lady came over and said, "I saw you reading that book. My mother is reading the same book. Should I read it?"

My answer was "yes." She then explained what she and her mother had decided to do. "We have decided to awake every morning, read the Bible, and pray for the day. Is this OK?"

This young lady and her mother were not connected with any traditional church, and did not want to be. They were "religiously unchurched." They had no desire to step inside a church building and express their faith. But they did want to connect with God. She and her mother illustrate millions throughout the world who are driving past church buildings every day in search of a relationship with God in order to deal with the problems of life. Are they "unchurched" because they want nothing to do with the "church" from which many are fleeing because they feel no need to be drawn to cold cathedrals and calculated ceremonial assemblies? These two people represent a religiously unchurched generation. So if the traditional church does not appeal to them, what shall they do? More important, what will the traditional church do to go after these religiously unchurched seekers?

I was once sitting in another coffee shop in middle America—I do like coffee—with a millionaire many times over. He said that before he obeyed the gospel, he drove by church buildings that had no appeal to him. "The religion that was represented by the building," he said, "had no appeal to me and my needs."

The historian must determine why there are millions of people in the world who are now driving by existing symbols of faith in order to discover a personal faith and relationship with God. We indeed live in a new world order wherein faith seeks to be expressed through relational experiences with fellow human beings, rather than the traditional symbols of faith as magnificent meeting houses and entertaining assemblies. There are millions of truth seekers who are moving from the religiosity of one paradigm into one with which they can identify one another in a relational encounter. They are de-

fining the new paradigm of Christianity. And in doing so, they are in many situations supplanting the past by redefining simple Christianity. What any good disciple would do in this situation is what Paul said two thousand years ago. *"I have become all things to all men, so that I might by all means save some"* (1 Co 9:22). As all foreign evangelists, Paul, in his travels, moved from one religious/cultural paradigm to another by crossing a border. Unlike those who are for their lifetime confined to only monocultural experiences, the traveling evangelist sees and understands different social and cultural environments wherein the simplicity of Christianity can be applied. What the monoculturalist sees as apostasy, the multiculturalist sees as an opportunity for Jesus.

When a monocultural society begins to change, social chaos arises within various sections of the society, which chaos is often unnerving to those who are monoculturally ethnocentric. This is happening in the religious framework of many First World urban cultures today. And when something happens in the traveling and internationally active culture of the First World, it is eventually distributed throughout the world. If you are not experiencing the existing change in your particular area of Christendom, then hang on to your seat. It is coming your way, especially to those who live in urban centers throughout the world. What is happening today will take a century to play out in the history of mankind, and thus it will eventually come your way.

There is a global paradigm shift that is happening in the world of Christendom. Only those who are isolated in remote villages, or remote thinking, would deny this. When people see change, however, they often build religious forts. The more they are frightened by the change, the greater the resistance against change, and thus the walls of the fort are built higher. Fear is usually generated when cultures and traditions are in a state of transformation.

We are creatures of habit, and thus do not like to change from our past. This is particularly true of older people. However, we must as Paul have no fear of changing, for he knew the skill of becoming all things to all men for the sake of evangelism simply by walking into a new cultural paradigm. And such should be the character, or skill, of the Christian. God's word never changes, but people do. Christians, therefore, should never fear changes that take place in the societies in which they live. They should look out and see the opportunities that are being created by the changes. When social chaos occurs within a culture—and all cultures go through periods of social chaos—we must understand that society is groaning in order to produce something new. Thinking Christians perceive these changes. They then go to work as Paul in order to see how they can "become all things to all men" in order to preach the simplicity of the gospel to the new generation that will come out on the other side of the social chaos. Instead of fearing change, therefore, Christians should rejoice over the change as an opportunity for evangelism. Since the world is now experiencing a religious paradigm shift that it has not experienced for centuries, we should be excited about the new opportunities that lie ahead. Faith, not fear, should be our foundation that will drive us to take advantage of the receptivity of new opportunities.

It is our mandate, therefore, to identify the new sociological paradigm to which the past is giving birth. This is always exciting, for we never know what society will produce when it goes through the natural process of change that the world is presently experiencing. And in these times, the changes that are happening are affecting the way people relate to God. The following observations are a few of the exciting things that are laying the foundation upon which we have some great opportunities to reach others with the simple gospel of Jesus.

Observation 3
FLIGHT FROM POWER STRUCTURES

We live in a world where the Third World is becoming more educated, and more in touch with the economies that bring a better life. In the last fifty years there has been a tremendous surge of education in Third World countries. With education comes change, a new leadership and a desire to connect, not isolate. The explosion in Internet communication through digital inventions as Facebook and YouTube should alert us to the fact that there is a generation out there that craves some relationship with others, even if it is only digital. There is a Twitter generation out there crying out for connectivity. But with education, as well as opportunities for electronic communication, also come a desire to be free, truly free. We are experiencing a generation that seeks free communication with fellow citizens of the world.

On the African continent there has been a concerted effort in the last fifty years to educate the masses. As the educated become a functioning part of society, they naturally throw off the ignorant and unlearned leadership of the past. A generational divide subsequently occurs between the educated and the uneducated, both in society and in religion. The educated are no longer satisfied with the traditions of the past. They have learned something new, and thus seek to implement their knowledge into real life experiences and productivity. Churches have not escaped this change. Churches are no longer satisfied with a leadership that is crippled by

the traditional past. They are seeking a new and vibrant leadership that has new ideas and new dreams. If the traditional leadership does not give way to an educated generation, then what comes next is only inevitable. The new leadership breaks away from the past in order to lead fellow believers who are university educated. They seek to meet the challenges of their own generation of educated citizens.

The same yearning of a Twitter generation has driven the religiously unchurched out of the confines of their particular denomination/autonomous group to search for others who are also searching. These are finding one another, but feel confined by a past system of religion that was resistent to both change and communication with others of faith. While autonomous religious groups of the past sought only to communicate within their own denominated cocoon, this new generation can click a computer mouse and communicate with the world.

In the political world, we live in a time where the new leadership in the Third World must submit to the democratic vote of the educated. The politically power hungry boss of the past is no longer able to rule in a democratic government. Illiterate leaders of the past in the Third World are being replaced by university educated leaders who want to lead their people to freedom of thought and behavior, and primarily, to a better standard of living. With this social change comes change in the old structures of religious institutions. Religious people, too, seek to be set free from Diotrephes led churches that imposed bondage, rather than the freedom that comes through the grace of God (See Gl 5:1,2).

Ignorance too often lends one to be submissive to those who are more dominant. The problem with illiterate societies is that they are often led by those who seek to dominate or control for selfish reasons. But when Christians learn that they have direct access to the One who has all authority, then they realize that submission to authorities and lords in religion on earth rob them of their freedom to serve the Lord directly. An ignorant people can never be a free people, whether in the political or religious world.

In the 21st Restoration Movement we must not discount those the First World has often ignored as Third World. Though driven by different sociological engines, both worlds are moving in a similar direction in reference to their faith. Both worlds have become the seed bed that is giving rise to a new world of citizens who seek change. Christendom is not escaping the influence of this change. Old traditional churches with legalistic theologies are dying. They represent the past and a generation of denomination and domination that reeked with the thirst for power by those who have patterned their leadership after the chiefs and dictators who suppress the people. But this is all changing. University diplomas have signal a massive change in the Third World. Those who hold the diplomas are no longer satisfied with sitting in an assembly that is led by a leader who has had no formal education, and even worse, who can neither read nor write.

Observation 4
THE FLIGHT TO FREEDOM

The desire for freedom in the political world has spilled over into the religious world. People seek freedom from the restrictions of religious organizationalism. They want freedom from institutional religions that have for centuries duped them into following that which led them away from God and one another. They seek freedom from the confining religious structures of the past that did not allow the individual to grow, to serve from the heart needs that present themselves in the daily Christian life.

When educated people seek freedom, they do so, not as rebels or anarchist, but as people who want to guarantee their freedom by submission to the will of God. Those who fear freedom usually interpret those who are seeking freedom as people rebelling against law. But such is not the case with those who seek to be truly free. Law guarantees freedom from the dominance of personalities and those who would impose traditions and opinions. Law guarantees freedom from the preeminence of popes. Freedom in Christendom must always be directed by the word of God, lest those who seek the freedom again return to that from which they fled. It is for this reason, that the truly free are led to freedom by law.

The unchanging law of God guarantees that traditions never encumber His people. The truly free know this. Traditions, religious organizations, heritage interpretations, and religious social clubs always lead one from the freedom that is guaranteed by the word of God. Therefore, those who would be truly free must rise up and identify the religious cultural heritage of their fathers. They then must go for the simplicity of those things that God said would never change. God's simple message for His people is their protection from the traditional heritages of the fathers.

In the case of the believer who is seeking freedom in this present world, he is finding his way out of the labyrinth of institutional religiosity by going to the word of God. And this is exciting. It is exciting to discover that what our Father requires is less complicated than what our fathers required.

People have tried to be free by simply rebelling against the fathers. Jesus did not encourage this because of our respect that we must have for our fathers. However, when it came to our fathers handing us something that was not required by our Father, then Jesus had something different to say. *"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (Jn 8:32). Truth sets us free because it is the compass that directs us out of the confining religious structures that our fathers are often so eager to bind on the generation that follows. Tradition always misdirects us simply because tradition is of our own invention. Jesus came with a compass, a compass of truth. And if we follow that compass, we will be free indeed. *"Therefore, if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed"* (Jn 8:36).

What is now happening in many places of the world today is that the search of religious people for freedom has driven them to the word of God. People have simply sensed that there was something wrong about existing religious structures that was wrong, so against the freedom that is natural to the human spirit. What more could those who know the truth ask? People are tired of "pastor-driven" churches. They are exhausted with hyper assemblies that leave one emotionally drained after the closing prayer, and with no relationship with fellow believers. They are stressed out with organizationalism, programs and projects that have stymied spontaneity and structured "faith" after some highly organized corporation. They have been browbeat by the domination of so many pastor/preachers that they yearn to be delivered in order to serve Jesus. They cry freedom in a world of religious bondage. They are looking for a divided Red Sea. Thinking leaders, therefore, should be on the eastside shores of the Red Sea, waiting with open arms to receive the freed.

What millions are doing is simply going to their Bibles. They know that Jesus promised freedom, and now they seek that freedom through His word. And they are finding it. They are stripping away the traditions, the organizational structures, the programs, and meeting with their mothers for prayer and reading the Bible in their homes. They are doing so just to be free. In many cases, they see no opportunity for spiritual growth in the existing structures of the traditional church. They will thus never darken the church-house door. The traditional church thus rights them off as "unchurched," then carries on with a religiosity that is out of touch with some real opportunities. Those who are out there searching are the "religiously unchurched." They have not given up on God. They have given up on "church" what long ago moved away from the simple ekklesia that we read about in Sacred Literature. It has come to the point that the word "church" has so much human baggage, that its use in conversation brings a dim response to the religiously unchurched. But watch them. If you say the name "Jesus," watch their eyes light up.

Religious symbols and words that were once a part of the heritage of the "churched" generation are often now viewed as obstacles to the freedom of those who seek Jesus alone. They will drive by these obstacles because they represent bondage. They will not seek the leaders of institutional religions because they see them as popes of bondage. They see them as recruiters who seek to bring adherents into a structure that must be supported by money and existing power structures. There is almost a mistrust of those who promote "church" before Jesus. And they are right. "Church" is the serendipity of Jesus, not the means to the end. We connect to one another when we first find Jesus. It is not the other way around.

We now have a generation of institutionalized adherents who crave freedom from a heritage that cheated them of a direct and personal relationship with God. This generation became more fearful of the guardians of the institution, than the God of creation. They now cry out that the prison doors be swung open. And as all institutionally minded people, they are fearful of what lies outside the prison, but they know that they do not want to return to that from which they are being released. Many of these who have been freed go astray, misdirected again by false leaders and their own lack of knowledge of God's will. But those who are educated in the strictures of freedom, the simple truths of God for His people, know that they must have a guide. Therefore, millions are arising from their beds in the morning, getting on their knees, asking for wisdom, and then reading their guide books on freedom, the word of God. *"The truth will set you free."*

Observation 5
SEEKING A NEW LEADERSHIP

Now what would the present leadership of the church do? Please keep in mind that the old evangelism methods of the past that are often culturally linked, may not work. We must keep in mind that methods are from man, but the message of the simple gospel is from God. It never changes. For this reason, it would certainly be our first step to sort through the catalog of traditions and traditional interpretations of Scripture in order to discover the simplicity of the message of the gospel. This would be our first method, and possibly the most difficult. It is easy to move in the direction of culturally linked methods of function and evangelism, but very

difficult to scrap worn out structures and malfunctioning methods.

The preceding will be challenging if the heritage of your church has been historically legalistic in theology and function. If it has been, then your "method" of evangelism will certainly not work. This generation of the world cannot be evangelized by seeking to recruit people from one legalistic church to another legalistic church, from one institutional social structure to another. I have had Africans ask me why many of their converts have returned to their former denomination within a few months after their "conversion." The answer is obvious. If our method of "evangelism" is to convert from one social and legal group of people to another, the appeal of the past friends of the new convert in the group of origin will be too strong. The new convert will succumb to his or her yearning for former lifelong friends, and subsequently return to his or her former social club.

Legalistic presentations of the truth have little effect on an educated generation that can see through legalistic interpretations of Scripture. The legal appeal of "another gospel" may have been effective in the past to convert an uneducated generation to "five steps" and "five acts," but that day is long gone in urban centers throughout the world where educated prospects can think abstractly. Those who seek the message of Jesus have little concerned about legal methods of how He is presented and worshiped.

Building a "church building" will also not attract a generation that is seeking freedom. The buildings remind them of the past, of a confining religiosity from which they have fled. These new seekers do not seek confinement of their relational culture in a building, but interactive assembly in coffee shops, parks, schools, etc. They are not of that generation of people who confined their faith inside the four walls of a dedicated sanctuary. That was the past. The present and future is a daily Christianity wherever two or three can be gathered together in the name of Jesus. And if they can be gathered around a common work, it is even better. They have come to realize that disciples develop a greater relationship if they can work together hand-in-hand in the vineyard in order to accomplish a common task.

Focus is not on numbers, but relationships. The West has always counted success by reading results on performance charts in the corporate board room. This thinking spilled over into the meeting rooms of the saints, and consequently, many decisions were unfortunately made by those who had no patience for God to work through the word over a great deal of time. The Third World focuses on relationships. The Third World is not obsessed with results, but with relational encounters. It may be that the new generation of the West is beginning to realize that at least in this area of social development, the Third World is correct in what the West lost because of its activity-oriented obsession.

One thing is very apparent in reference to a generation of relational members. They do not look to sages with pronouncements from the stages in order to be driven. Sitting in a pew as a spectator no longer appeals to this disciple. And thus, preacher/pastor driven assemblies and one-man-bands have little appeal to a generation that is individual and relationally driven. This new generation seeks Jesus directly, independently and individually. They have been wearied of having to go through some authority figure in order to access the Man. They seek to fear God more than man, and thus they are fleeing from one-man-band churches in order to go directly to Jesus through His word.

People need friends. Any religious group that has founded its existence on the charisma of a dynamic speaker, sophisticated programs, or energetic assemblies will find that their numbers are diminishing. One can enjoy a great oration from a dynamic clergy, join in with a choir of inspiring singing, exhaust oneself through emotional outpouring, but after the closing prayer, have no friends. The tragedy of the institutional church was that it focused primarily on perfecting assemblies, while ignoring associations.

Seeking to emphasize one's religious heritage as a means to stay the exodus will not work with this new generation. This generation of truth seekers is not heritage driven. It is their heritage from which they are fleeing. They see their religious heritage as an institution of bondage that confined their freedom. They see their heritage as social intimidation to bring them into the prison of the traditions of the past, which traditions have now become somewhat repulsive. They do not seek to return to either reformation theology or a restoration heritage. What is so encouraging about this generation of truth seeks is that they want to peal away all the traditions of their heritage that have so clouded the simplicity of the truth. They want to know the truth by digging through all the historical rubbish that has been clinging to Christendom for centuries. And in doing this, they are making an awesome discovery. This discovery is the open door for the ekklesia to spur on a new restoration to Jesus. Since the gospel brings people closer together, the appeal of the gospel is unity. It is religion that has divided the world in reference to faith in Jesus. When people decide to put away that divisiveness of religion, they are receptive to the gospel.

Chapter 2

THE AWAKENING

The discovery is that Christianity is actually simple, tradition free, and in contact with all the emotional and practical needs of all men in all cultures for all time is rewarding and exciting. And because relational seeking people are discovering the simplicity of the gospel, they have to some extent argued with their fathers for handing them a religion that was so encumbered with the traditions of the past. Their religious heritage took them so far away from one another that they have rejected the past for the sake of their own future. They are essentially saying to the fathers that they have appreciated the genuine faith that was pasted to them, but do not appreciate their traditions that encumbered the faith. They are now in a process of sifting, sifting the heritage from the genuine faith in order to take themselves and their children into the future.

A. Driven to one another:

Now this is exciting. Once people start scaling away that which identified their particular restrictive heritage, they realize that the simplicity of faith and the gospel brings them together. Millions are discovering that truth does not separate one honest believer from another honest believer. It unites. And when believers have the same desire to sluff off the traditions and partyism of the past, they find themselves on roads that eventually lead them together.

This is not universalism, that is, every man for himself with what he has invented as his own religion. On the contrary, those of this new generation of seekers are seeking through the word of God. They have discovered that if religion tore them apart, then religion must be of human invention, and not from God. And the only way to discover what will bring us together again, is to go to God, to His word, straight to the One who prayed *"that they all may be one"* (Jn 17:21).

That which denominated them has thus become the curse from which they seek to flee. The deepest human urge is to be together. We fear loneliness, and thus crave the companionship of one another. The tower of Babel was built on the strong urge for human companionship. God made us this way. But what religionists have done throughout history is the opposite. Churches that are fundamentally contrary to the basic human nature of man to associate with his fellow man will continue to diminish. They will diminish because they work against the very nature of our God-created spirit. God made us social, and thus we seek to be together. And being together does not mean being present in large assemblies to play out some religion, but in assemblies wherein individuals communicate and interact on a relational basis. This is a new generation that seeks assemblies wherein individuals have the opportunity to interact with one another in a participatory fellowship. For this reason, the explosion of house churches throughout the world is the manifestation of a religious world that seeks to connect. The new seeks seek assemblies wherein there is liberty for those who "have a psalm, or a teaching" can express themselves (1 Co 14:26).

The phenomenal flight to house churches did not come because some have sought to restore a new doctrinal truth. House churches are only a manifestation of a social change, a change from the corporate, institutional church of the past 400 hundred years that became cold and indifferent, and worse, impersonal. House churches represent a change in the people of societies who seek to be relational. The leadership of growing churches have recognized this social change, and thus have encouraged small groups to emerge as the church throughout any particular city. The leadership of the true ekklesia does not feel threatened by those who seek to be relational in their communities. They are not fearful that a rebellion is occurring against some supposed human authority on earth. They are not because servant leaders claim no authority over the ekklesia of God. They thus encourage disciples to seek disciples wherever they can meet for mutual exhortation. And that meeting may be in a nearby coffee shop.

The concept of the "big church" of the last century worked against the spirit by which people seek to commune with one another. The failure of the "big church" was that it work against the innate nature of the individual to have close friends. The "big church" today, has changed. It no longer identifies itself with large single assemblies, but with small relational assemblies that are scattered throughout communities and cities. Its size is not determined by the number of heads that can be counted in a single assembly on Sunday morning in one building. Its size cannot even be counted by numbering small groups meeting here and there throughout a city. It cannot because when the true ekklesia is in its prime of growth, no one person knows of every group that is meeting. That is simply the way the ekklesia is

hidden as leaven, spreading throughout the loaf (Mt 13:33).

There is nothing wrong with a church building. Unfortunately, they have become representative of a cold cluster of mute individuals who have no contact with one another outside their walls. They not only represent an unfriendly atmosphere, they represent isolation into denominated groups throughout any community where they are situated. Church buildings represent a denominated religiosity that is contrary to the desire of believers to be together in order to survive the hostile world in which they live. They are no longer billboards that advertise the existence of the church, but have become monuments of heritage from which a whole generation of truth seekers are fleeing.

I once had a conversation with a social worker in South Africa who said to me, "The people do not want to go to church." However, they will talk for hours about church and Bible with one another on a street corner, or in a restaurant. I must personally confess that I have met with fellow Christians for three to five hours in meetings in a restaurant talking about God, the Bible and Jesus' work among the people. That's the ekklesia in communion with itself.

The symbols of religious division are shunned by this new generation of disciples who seek to be together wherever two or three can either converse or work in the name of the Lord. This is the reason why those who seek freedom in Jesus are repulsed by religious power structures, organizational restrictions, and leaders who seek to dominate the minds of freedom seekers. There are millions out there who personally seek the authority of Jesus in their lives as opposed to those who would have authority over them in this world. They seek the Lord, not lords.

What is happening, therefore, is that as the traditions that defined one's particular religious heritage in the past are being stripped away, truth seekers are coming together. When they discover the fundamental simplicity of Jesus and His ekklesia ("church"), they discover that they agree on more than they disagree. They discover the universal ekkesia that is identified, not by the heritage of a particular sacred institution, but by the disciples' love for one another and desire to serve humanity.

B. Networking freedom:

Those who are still isolated with a denominational partyism spirit will have a hard time understanding a generation of truth seekers who are searching for one another on the common ground of Jesus. There are those who seek unity in order to sustain their particular denomination, or religious affiliation. This is often an effort for unity that is based on cloning individuals after a common heritage. But this new generation of truth seekers is searching outside their heritage in order to find other previously confined inmates who also seek deliverance from their institutional past.

As seekers peal away the denominational restrictions that have separated believers for four centuries, they are discovering one another. They seek to network with one another in a spirit of individual freedom in Christ. They seek fellowship, not isolation.

Denominationalism isolated them for so long that they are driven to one another on the common ground of Jesus and His word. This religious/sociological movement presents the ekklesia with a tremendous opportunity. In fact, this 21st Century Restoration Movement would be the ekklesia struggling to morph her way out of structures and traditions in order to identify herself as the one universal body of Christ.

Even if one party of religious bodies of the present claim to be the sole fellowship of members of the ekklesia, it is a time for self-examination and opportunity. It is a tremendous opportunity for a cocooned ekklesia to reach outside its own cocoon in order to make contact with those who have no desire to "convert" from one cocoon to another, but simply to be simple Christians in a world of religious confusion. If this is to happen, then the disciples of Jesus must define themselves according to the undenominational simplicity of the New Testament ekklesia. Cocooning structures and traditions must be identified and discarded. Cocoons must be left hanging on dead branches in order that the bride of Christ might fly free in all her beauty.

This is not a Catholic church movement. It is not Catholic simply because it was autonomous groups that were structured after the Catholic church that caused the problem in the first place. In order to guard against becoming another Catholic church, the Reformation Movement leaders preached the autonomy of each denominated group. Such teaching only led reformed churches back to Catholic organizational structures that focused on authorities and lords within each "organized" denomination. Those who fled from Catholic structures thus developed their own synods and organizations that were again focused on figures of authority. From this came restoration movements that dissolved the synods, preached against the Catholics, and then established Catholic power structures themselves within each autonomous group. Church history reveals that people went from one universal Catholic Church to individual autonomous Catholic organizational structures wherein they denominated themselves from one another.

It is from these organizational (institutional) structures of the last four centuries, that are based on some center of earthly authority, that those of a generation of freedom seekers are searching their way out. It is a restoration that seeks to focus only on Jesus with only the authority of His world. In fleeing from authoritarian structures that brought believers into bondage, and subsequently division, the millions who are seeking Jesus today are drawn to one another by the common cause of restoring the authority of the word of God in their lives by submitting to the One who has all authority, Jesus. It is a generation of people who have learned that any authority among men on earth in the religious world hinders total submission to the authority of Jesus on earth through His word (Mt 28:18). They have grown weary of seeking permission from men on earth in order to serve, and thus seek to serve in freedom that was granted to them by the Prince of Peace two thousand years ago who promised, *"If the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed."*

We must not misjudge this restoration to be the result of an anarchist spirit. Those of this group are anarchists only to those who seek to remain institutionally minded, for it is from this mindset that they are fleeing. It is only natural that the guards of a prison sound the alarm when prisoners escape. But we would rejoice, not seek to imprison again. If we claim to understand the freedom disciples have in Christ, then we will rejoice when freedom seekers seek to joint themselves to Jesus, rather than some prison of human religiosity. Those who are free, and enjoy the freedom that they have in Christ, should rejoice over these who also are seeking freedom.

A common search for freedom in Christ has brought them together. It is a discovery of true unity that is based on a common submission to Jesus, not on some confining organizational connection with one another. It is not unity within denominated groups, nor unity through cloned interpretations, nor the social acceptance within cocooned fellowships that have become religious social clubs. It is an exciting unity of those who are coming out of denominated groups in order to seek unity in diversity that is based on the freedom that is guaranteed by Jesus and His word. The power of the movement is thus in the fact that it is not a movement that seeks unity between particular groups. It is a movement of disorganized groups who have a common goal. This is not a Babel unity movement that seeks to build institutional towers of big churches that would seek glory for themselves. On the contrary, it is a movement of small groups who are disorderly dispersing throughout the world as leaven in order to be fruitful for the purpose of populating the kingdom of God. They seek to be hidden as leaven, doing their work of influencing the whole world loaf.

What frustrates the institutionally minded is the fact that they cannot "number Israel," and thus include them among known Israelites on church registers. The institutionally minded cannot find these groups in local phone books, or identify them by monuments that have been built on street corners. These "leaven disciples" can be located on Sunday morning only by driving throughout local communities in order to find a group of vehicles parked in front of a house, in a park, or under a tree. Their membership was placed in heaven upon their obedience to the gospel, and they will not change it by placing it on the attendance role of some institutionalized church.

In the midst of a non-Christian world that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Christianity, believers are seeking a faith that will bring them together into a united force against the wiles of the Devil. In an increasingly secular world of those who have no desire for faith, there are those who are seeking how they might become the universal ekklesia that seeks to save as many as possible before God brings an end to a world that is becoming more difficult for the those of faith. It is for this reason that truth seekers are looking for a restored faith, common fellowship, and freedom that is based on the direction of Jesus through His word.

These are truly exciting times for world evangelism for those who can see the work of God in preparing the fields for harvest. As this united band of believers permeates the loaf of humanity, in its hidden existence it will find those who are of a kindred spirit. They are thus becoming God's ekklesia through which He will reach this world. This ekklesia does not look like the traditional church, and because it does not is the power that it has to represent Jesus before millions who "do not want to go to church."

Now I used a word in the preceding paragraph that I need to redefine, for its meaning has been corrupted in the dictionary of modern Christendom. It is the word "evangelism." Unfortunately, the word "evangelism" in the context of the denominated religious world means to many "converting" from one denomination to another. We think that we must "win them over to us." Evangelism has become so secular in its definition that we have lost sight of Jesus. In our efforts to shift members from one institution to another, we have forgotten that the root meaning of the Greek word "evangelism" is good news, the good news about Jesus. "Conversion" is not from one group to another, but to Jesus. "Placing membership" is not about moving membership from one cocoon

to another, but about having our names written on the membership role of heaven. I say these things because we must realize how far we have moved away from Jesus and His word in order to begin our struggle back. And the way back may be a long and difficult struggle, tripping over our heritage every scripture along the way.

C. Service-oriented disciples:

Another characteristic of this restorational generation of believers is the behavior of their lives. It is a behavior that is somewhat different from previous reformation or restoration movements. It is a behavior that is sparked by service, not doctrine. It is a movement of disciples who are moved by a Person (Jesus), not by human personalities.

In previous reformation or restoration movements, churches were established and built through victories in battles of debate over doctrine or catechism. The victorious formed their own denomination, and thus secluded themselves from those with whom they disagreed, or from those they had conquered in a doctrinal debate. The systematic theology of these newly established movements or churches was often reactionary, and thus to some extent their objectivity in interpreting Scripture was often questionable.

But this new generational response to faith is based primarily on a response to the person of Jesus. Its response to Jesus is defined by a desire to respond to social needs. "Voluntourism" has to a great extent replaced "campaigns." In the past, teams of campaigners were sent forth in order to win singles out of the camp of the enemy. They did so in an effort to either grow an existing body of believers, or initiate new groups in the midst of opposing groups with whom they doctrinally disagreed. Churches were thus established that were based on what a particular group did or did not do in a calculated assembly, instead of what a group did to serve a community. Churches established their identity on the foundation of a catechism of belief, not on what they did to manifest their love for the community in which they lived. These doctrinally "sound" churches thus sat in the midst of communities throughout the world, having little or no communication with those with whom they disagreed on often minute points of either Scripture or tradition. Their communication with other groups was limited to either doctrinal debates or skirmishes in competition for members. Working together to bring a common good to communities did not allow each autonomous group to bring glory to themselves, and thus win more recruits. They sought to work alone, bring glory to their own church, and thus manifest to the community that they were a group of exclusionists who had no desire to be a part of any who did not conform to their code either doctrine or catechism.

In their separation from the community they were to reach, they became groups that were identified by doctrinal catechism instead of their efforts to do good in the local communities in which the members lived. They contented themselves with a false sense of security by reassuring themselves every Sunday that they "had the truth." They became a colony of contentious contenders, identified by a cloned catechism of assembly by which they identified themselves as the true church.

But a new generation has arisen that has no desire to be skilled in the art of debate, nor to identify themselves by a system of assembly. Those of this generation seek to interface with a world that seeks friends. They want to be identified by their love, not by systematic assemblies or occasions of emotional outbursts of chaos. They are thus redefining the relational behavior of the ekklesia in the midst of a highly impersonal generation of the traditional church. They are people oriented and service driven. Instead of arrogantly huddling themselves every Sunday in assemblies of self isolation, they are leaving the buildings and authority structures in order to volunteer to serve in the lives of others. In reference to their going into all the world, a new word has been invented to replace the word "campaigners." They are now called "voluntourist." Voluntourists seek to show people how much they care, before speaking of Jesus for whom they care so much.

D. Word-focused disciples:

The new generation of seekers will go in one of two directions: (1) There will be those who are more relational oriented, and less word directed. (2) There are those who are relational oriented, but seek to be directed by the word of God as they find their way out of the milieu of institutional confusion that has stymied Christendom for a half century. Many will be of the second group because they know as believers in Jesus that the only way to find their way from the divided Christendom of the past is to go to the source from which they can define their future.

Those who forget the word of God in their search for definition and direction will go the way of all movements that are humanistic. They will create a religion after their own desires, and thus join the host of man-made religions of the world that are humanitarian, and yet misdirected by a god they have created after their own imagination. They will lose their sense of God in a world of religions that cannot focus beyond the calami-

ties of humanity. They will circle around in the desert of misguided religionists and find themselves where they started, in a world that is again religiously divided. This has happen enough throughout history that those who know history will not repeat the past.

But there is a tremendous opportunity for those who are seeking direction through the word of God in order to find their way back to the cross of Jesus. This is a generation of people who are truly Psalms 119 driven.

The literary structure of Psalms 119 is fascinating. The Psalm is outlined into divisions by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, one letter representing each division. Each division focuses on a specific aspect of life. The psalmist interwove the word of God around each aspect of life, and by doing so, allowed the word of God to mold the thinking of those who would focus on God while they faced the challenges of life. Throughout each verse of the Psalm, the psalmist turned the minds of the readers to God and how He only can direct one through life. If one would be pleasing to God, therefore, his life must be woven around the commandments, statutes, precepts, judgments and law of God.

There are millions of people in the world today who are seeking the simplicity of Christianity that is not entangled in the quagmire of the traditional religiosity that has so encumbered institutional churchianity for centuries. These millions are searching. They need direction. They seek fellowship with those who are of a kindred spirit. They want to be free. And to be free, they are not searching through that which brought them into bondage. This is why they are not searching through old church manuals, histories of heritages, or canons of catechism. If you think you will keep these seekers at home with a history book of your church, you will be truly frustrated.

These truth seekers are not searching for another domain of bondage, but a relational environment wherein they can serve others as their God has served them. They are looking only for the authority that manifests itself from the throne of Jesus, not for the lordship structures of men who seek to bring others into the bondage of either opinions or traditions. They seek no transfer of membership from one institution to another, but freedom from that which defines institutional religiosity. They are just not into denominational religiosity.

These are thus exciting times and opportunities for the preaching of the One who came in order to set us free from ourselves in order that we might be the servants of all. They are exciting times for those who have not taken the ekklesia into a spirit institutional denominationalism that separates members from those who are searching for the truth of the gospel.

Epilogue

The Emerging Ekklesia

This is an epic wherein the ekklesia is emerging from the institutional denominations of the past in order to manifest herself as the one universal body of Christ. The ekklesia that seeks to restore herself is now calling all the world to focus on Jesus, not on a particular denominated body that is cloned after those that identified Christendom in the past.

History has taught the ekklesia a great lesson. Institutional religiosity cannot call people to the person of Jesus. Neither can the simplicity of the gospel be used as a cloaked means by which to recruit people from one institution to another. The pure gospel brings people to the foot of the cross and in front of the opened tomb. No organization can take people there, for all the organizational sects are back in Jerusalem with the religious establishment.

It takes individuals to bring individual people to the person of Jesus. When people see Jesus in one's life, they are drawn to that love, for it is by that love that the ekklesia is identified. People relate with people, but not with an organization, even though we may call it "church."

What is happening is that people are discovering the truth that individuals can establish a covenant with God directly. One's relationship with God is not through a religious institution. The ekklesia is the serendipity of individual obedience to the gospel, not the means by which a relationship is established with Jesus. The ekklesia discovers herself when relationships are established with individual members who have obedience to the gospel in common. It is no longer "join the church of your choice," but join yourself to Jesus. When those who have joined themselves to Jesus discover one another, they discover another member of the universal ekklesia.

It is for the preceding reasons that the ekklesia must always function as the hidden leaven of the loaf, but work in harmony with all the other microbes of leaven that continue to multiply throughout the loaf. Each individual microbe of leaven is present in the loaf of the world. Those on the outside of the loaf cannot see each individual microbe. We cannot see their work. But we can see the results of the work because the loaf begins to grow. There are no bands and buildings, no monuments on the street corners, or great public relation cam-

paigns. The true ekklesia does not work in order to bring glory to herself. All things are done in the name of Jesus in order to bring glory to God. It is the universal ekklesia working in government, civic groups, institutional churches, political parties, and every other organization of man in order to be the salt of the earth. The ekklesia can so work as leaven because she is not an organization of man, but the kingdom reign of Jesus within the hearts of men. It is manifested only when members love as they have been loved by God (Jn 13:34,35).

It is crucial in these times that men be able to distinguish between the true ekklesia of Christ and religion. Christianity exists because of the word of Christ. When men seek to obey Christ, they are "Christian." Religion, on the other hand, is built after the doctrines and commandments and personalities of men. A Christian is religious, but not all religious people are Christians. Even those many man-made denominations that call themselves under the name of Christ are not Christian unless the adherents have given themselves over to the word of Christ. Simply because someone cries out "Lord, Lord" does not identify him as a Christian. Those who have obeyed the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in baptism are Christian. Those who have not have refused to obey the simple words of Jesus that we be baptized (Mk 16:16). Therefore, in these days of restoration, we must go to the word of Christ in order to identify how one becomes a Christian. We must use the word of Christ as we go out into the world of Christendom in order to find those who are truly seeking to follow Christ through His word. Those who are refusing to allow the word of Christ to direct their way are simply being religious. We appreciate their religious beliefs and good deeds. However, we would reserve the use of the name "Christian" in describing them as followers of Christ simply because they are refusing to follow Christ according to His word. One cannot be a Christian by simply being religious. There are good Muslims and Hindus throughout the world, but we would not identify themselves as Christian. Simply because one believes in the name of Christ does not make him a Christian. Belief, plus obedience to Christ, identifies one as a follower of Jesus.

Book 34

Restoration!

One thing is most obvious concerning what the world refers to as "Christendom" or "Protestant Christianity." It is divided. It is so divided that the non-Christian world has a hard time figuring out the nature of true Christianity. While many in Christendom are satisfied with the tremendous diversity and division that prevails throughout Christendom, there are those who have fled to the word of God as the only authority and hope for uniting those who accept Jesus as the Savior of the world. They thus seek for a restoration of Christianity in a world of religious confusion. This plea for restoration makes these people different. We can be sure of one thing. We can identify the people of God today by their desire to restore simple Christianity in a confused world of religiosity. Those who are not crying out for restoration are those who have little regard for the word of God. They cannot seek a restoration of simple Christianity, because in doing so, they would have to give up either their religion, their positions, and often, their purse. But those who humbly seek to submit to the word of Jesus will be relentless in this quest simply because they know that there are no other options to eternal life than Jesus. And in order to discover the "road map" to eternal life through Jesus, they must come to Him on the foundation of His word. Their obsession with Jesus and His word is the foundation of their mission. They thus call all men out of religion in order to be Christians only.

The Greek word ***ekklesia*** was used in the Roman society and government to refer to a city assembly of local residents who were called together for a town meeting. It was a participatory meeting where the citizens joined together to make mutual decisions that affected the entire town. The meeting was conducted on the foundation of Roman law and directed by the magistrates of the city. Both Gentiles and Jews in any city throughout the Roman Empire of the first century knew the function of the city ekklesia. We seek an ekklesia for the restoration of the ekklesia.

It is interesting that Jesus used the word ekklesia when He, for the first time in His ministry, spoke of those who would, after His death, be His disciples: *"Upon this rock I will build My* ***ekklesia*** [church]*..."* (Mt 16:18). The "town meeting," or participatory assembly of Jesus' disciples would be built upon the foundation of His fulfillment of prophecy as the Messiah and the fact that He was the Son of God (See Mt 16:13-18). **His ekklesia, therefore, would be totally founded and focused on Him and His word**. This is the fundamental foundation upon which we make our plea for restoration. We seek to call all God-fearing, Bible students to stand up and cry out for restoration among all religious groups. We cry out for a restoration to Jesus and the authority of His word in our lives.

As we look around and see the tremendous assortment of religious groups of Christendom throughout the world, we would join with all Bible-loving, Christ-centered disciples who are struck with awe concerning the amount of diversity that exists among all those who consider themselves "Christians." So as other Bible-loving, Christ-centered believers, we join with the chorus of cries throughout the world that something is definitely wrong. Something is wrong with a Christendom that is divided over pastoral pomp, power thirsty popes, and money-loving Balaamites. If what we see in Christendom is pleasing to God, then anything is pleasing to God as long as one cries out to Jesus, "Lord, Lord." But we know that the worldwide division in Christendom is wrong, and thus, we make our plea to all Bible-searching believers to join with us in restoring the simplicity of Christianity. We are taking a bold stand because our faith has driven us to conclude that God still hates division among His people (See Proverbs 6:16-19).

When we read our Bibles, we see a vast difference between what is revealed concerning the ekklesia (church) of God in the New Testament and what exists in Christendom today. We say this, not only as judgment on ourselves, but also for the sake of Muslims,

Hindus and other non-Christian religions throughout the world. We would ask them to please not judge the true ekklesia of Jesus that is revealed in the New Testament by the assortment of confused religiosity of Christendom that they witness in the world today (See Jn 17:20,21). The true church of Christ is not an assortment of confused religionists who have forsaken the authority of the word of God and followed after their own emotions or their own traditions. The church that Jesus built follows His will, and thus, the members are known for faith and behavior that is directed by the word of Christ.

Because of the tremendous confusion that prevails throughout Christendom, we call for a restoration of thinking and practice of what God would have us be as His ekklesia in these times. And so, **we affirm that our only source upon which to base such a plea is the revelation of God through Jesus two thousand years ago**. This center of reference for unity was written as the New Testament for the purpose of continuing and identifying the true beliefs and behavior by which God's people would be known throughout the centuries. We are thus calling for a return to the Bible in order to understand again what it means to have a Christ-centered faith that is based on the word of Christ.

When we call for a restoration of the true church (ekklesia), everyone usually asks, "Which church?" Those who would plead for restoration of the simple church that was born out of the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in the first century are always faced with the accusation that they are calling others to "their church." And truly, there are those who call for a restoration, but are actually assuming that "their church" is the restored church of the first century. So what they are really asking people to do is to "join their church" in order to become a part of the restored New Testament church. But we think that such a plea, that is actually a disguise for "church recruitment," does not truly honor a call for restoration. So do not misunderstand our plea. We are not calling people to a specific religious group. We are not calling people to simply produce union by accepting one another's man-made religious teachings or fellowships. **We are calling people to Jesus and the authority of His word in our lives**. We are calling people to turn again to the word of God as the final authority in **all** matters of faith.

To assume that all that one believes and does is the restored ekklesia of the first century is somewhat misleading, if not arrogant. It is a deception because no one knows all the truth. It is misleading because everyone tends to drift away from his biblical roots in order to follow after the traditions of his fathers. If one calls for restoration, therefore, he must first consider his own life in reference to following Jesus. Restoration is a continuing process in the sense that we continue to learn as we study our Bibles. We continue to correct our course lest we circle around and become just another organized religious group of Christendom. Because we often drift away and circle around, one thing is always true: **If there is no call for restoration from any particular religious group, then we can be assured that that group has strayed from the word of God**. That group does not represent Christ. The first point in identifying the true ekklesia of God is if the members are doing their best to study the Bible in order to know and live the word of God. We know we have strayed from the Bible when we are no longer studying it.

So when speaking of restoration, we are not talking about having the ideal established. Neither are we recruiting people to "our church." We are simply confessing up to the fact that we continually need correction. We are recognizing that our lives are not as Christ-centered as we desire. And we might add that we are not seeking to restore the behavior of the church of Corinth, a church with many divisions (1 Co 1:10). We are not seeking to restore the church of Laodicea which was known for her laziness (Rv 3:15,16). Nor are we seeking to restore the church in Sardis that was dead (Rv 3:1). We are seeking to call sincere believers to the word of God in order that we discover again the roots of our faith. And when our faith is rooted in the word of God, then we will be a part of the one universal church of Christ that functions as servants for Christ in communities throughout the world.

Because there are no perfect people, we conclude that there are no perfect churches, whether now or in the past. Our plea for restoration focuses on the individual believer, not on a corporate body of believers. True restoration is always focused on individuals, not corporate bodies of people. If we would judge the success of restoration by the beliefs and behavior of a specific group of religious adherents as a whole, then there would never be a true restoration, for there are always imperfections in every group. In Revelation 2 & 3 Jesus called for repentance among the churches of Asia Minor. But the focus in His call was on the faithful among the churches. Though the churches in the cities were judged as a whole, each church was judged because within the city fellowships there were those who were immoral. However, the faithful were not judged. They were not because they maintained their faithfulness in the midst of the majority who had gone astray. Restoration, therefore, is about a restoration of one's personal relationship with Jesus among those who have submitted to a "common salvation" (Jd 3).

When we call for restoration, some would assume that the outcome and success of restoration depends on some authority of man on earth. But true restoration always comes forth from those who seek to submit to the authority that proceeds from King Jesus who is in heaven (Mt 28:18). In fact, our call for restoration would be frivolous if we assumed that there were some authority on earth to whom we all would submit, and thus, be cloned after the legal rules of some man or group of men. Restoration never involves enthroning the opinions of any man or council or synod. Such man-centered organizations are the problem, not the solution. Such authorities are actually the cause for division among believers. Since the thinking of men is imperfect, then restoration can never depend on the opinions of any man or group of men. Our call for restoration, therefore, **is a call that is founded upon the fundamental principle of the final authority of Christ in all things that pertain to the Christians' faith**. And since we can be restored to unity only upon the foundation of the word of Christ, then it is imperative that our faith be validated by the Spirit-inspired word of God. It is God who must validate us as His sons, not man. And the only way we can know that we are his sons is if we are validated as sons according to His word.

Chapter 1

RESTORING A CHRIST-CENTERED LIFE

When there is any call for a restoration to true Christianity, there is always the assumption that what presently exists is something that has gone astray from that which is true. When the call comes in the midst of those who are content with that which has gone into apostasy, then tension will ensue when a call is made. Thus those who would call for restoration are sometimes referred to as either "heretics" or "liberals" by the apostate church, for restorationists call people to leave that which has gone astray in order to return to that which is true. They are referred to as such because they seek to be restored to a biblical foundation of faith, rather than a faith that is built upon the foundation of either heritage, religious traditions, or misguided emotionalism.

A call for restoration, therefore, indicates that people are once again reading their Bibles. They seek to be Christ-centered in their lives by knowing and implementing the word of Christ in their lives. If they have gone astray, they are discovering that many of their existing religious beliefs and practices are contrary to that which they are learning through their studies. No one is a liberal who seeks to give up that which is simply founded on heritage or tradition in order to believe and obey that which is revealed the pages of the Holy Bible. No one is a heretic who forsakes that which is contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. Heretics are too often defined by those who accuse others of leaving their heritage or traditional religion. The restorationist, therefore, is a "heretic" in reference to the church that has gone into apostasy. The restorationist seeks to leave that which is false according to the word of God in order to bind on himself the will of God.

But we must keep in mind that the biblical use of the word "heretic" is in reference to those who have gone astray from the truth, **not to those who are seeking to restore the true from which religious groups have gone astray**. If one is labelled either "liberal" or "heretic" in reference to leaving that which is apostate, then so be it. We would wear the unjustified labels with honor, for the labels have come from those who have little concern for the authority of God's word, and thus are steeped in their own religiosity from which they refuse to turn. We would consider it an honor to be counted with the great prophets of Israel who sought to call apostate Israel back from her wayward path of idolatrous religiosity that she had created after her own desires. So we would be "heretic" or "liberal" in our efforts as restorationists who turn from false religiosity to the word of God and the simplicity of the ekklesia as she is revealed in the New Testament.

In our use of terminology in reference to God's people, however, there are some subtle inconsistencies that often come forth in Christian writings. We sometimes use the phrase "New Testament Christianity." But this phrase subtly denies the fact that there is actually only one true Christianity. There are no other Christianities than the one we read about in the New Testament. We would not say that there is an "Old Testament God" or a "New Testament God." There is only one God. We would not say that we are "Tabernacle Christians" or "Pentecost Christians." There are only Christians. When we speak of restoring Christianity, therefore, we are speaking of restoring the only Christianity there is. We are speaking of restoring Christ-centered behavior that springs forth from our understanding of the revealed Christ. Everything else is fake and false.

Christianity does not revolve around humanly defined forms, functions, methodologies, emotions, or names of men. It revolves around manifesting in our lives a Christ-like love for others and a desire to live after the moral principles of a Christ-centered faith (Jn 13:34,35). True restoration does not focus on restoring an institution, but restoring our focus on Jesus. A restored Christ-centered life is manifested through personal ministry, and one's faith that is validated by the word of God.

Chapter 2

THE NEED FOR RESTORATION

So why would so many throughout the world be calling for a restoration to the simplicity of the church that we read about in the Scriptures? There are different reasons. There are those who feel burdened with the complexity of the man-centered religiosity of popes and pastors who are more concerned with preserving their means for existence than ministry to others and relationships among people. Many people have been exhausted with the cumbersome organizationalism of institutional religiosity. People want to turn from the lording authorities and masters of men to the sole authority of Jesus through His word. "Church" leadership has made the church so complex and governed by so many committees and power structures that the simple disciple is simply looking for a breath of fresh biblical air by which he can breathe freely outside the bondage of organized (institutionalized) religion. Most important of all, many people are calling for a restoration today because they have discovered that many of the churches they see are not as the church they read about in the Bible.

There are many people throughout the world who call themselves under the name of "Christianity," and subsequently cry out "Lord, Lord." But at the same time, they have little or no regard for the word of God. For this reason, many people have discovered that their faith is void of the word of God, and thus, they seek to go back to the Bible in order to discover a biblical foundation for their faith. Instead of basing their faith on the authority of men in organized religious structures, they seek to turn again to the sole authority of Jesus in their lives. They seek a direct relationship with Jesus through His word, and not through membership of some religious group that is not Bible based.

Christianity throughout the world was redefined and institutionalized over the centuries by the authority of men on earth. It was defined by those who had a sprinkle of Bible knowledge, but sought to invent or continue a religiosity that was created after the desires of men. As a result, "Christianity" became a conglomerate of independently organized religious groups that were divided from one another. The function of these religious groups was often founded upon ignorance of the word of God, and then constructed after the emotional allegiance of the adherents to their favorite religious institution or some founding father. Subsequently, many groups burdened their adherents with a multiplicity of religious traditions in order to identify and perpetuate their unique church. Because of added traditions, the Old Testament faith given to Israel became the "Jews' religion" (Judaism) by the first century (Mk 7:1-9). For the same reason, many churches today have become the religion of misguided religionists (See Gl 1:13,14). Once the function of the individual religious groups became a habit, they then became institutionalized. As a result, all that pertained to the religious institutions (denominations) was defined by the established heritage of the adherents of each particular denomination. With a sprinkle of biblical terminology and a few out-of-context scriptures legalistically mingled here and there, the institutions were defined as the denominations of "Christianity." But people have become exhausted with such structured religiosity that is void of human relationships and personal involvement, and above all, Christ centeredness. They have grown weary of a religiosity that has no biblical foundation or focus on the authority of Jesus in one's life. They have thus begun to seek freedom from the bondage of their own religious heritage in order to be simple Bible-loving, Christ-centered Christians who minister to others in their communities. This is an era where sincere believers are struggling to free themselves from the shackles of man-made religiosity and man-dominated religious hierarchies.

What often complicates restoration is that pseudo "Christian" groups are led by those who have little knowledge of the Bible, but are religiously zealous. These are as those about whom Paul warned Timothy: *"... men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth,* ***supposing that godliness is a means to gain****"* (1 Tm 6:5). These are those who use the "church" as a means of financial support. They are those who are *"always learning and* ***never able to come to the knowledge of the truth****"* (2 Tm 3:7). When there are those who preach for

gain, then the groups that they lead are maintained for the sake of their purse. **Restoration leaders seldom come from those whose goal it is to perpetuate a church for the sake of gain**. Such money-oriented church leaders seek to please the people, for it is the people who sign their paychecks. When a preacher is fearful of losing his salary, he is very apprehensive about teaching those things that do not tickle the ears of the audience (2 Tm 4:2). There are usually few pleas for restoration from those who use the church as a means for gain.

Compound the problem of "profiteering prophets" with the desire of the adherents of some churches to validate their "Christianity" by anything other than the Holy Scriptures of God. When men turn from the authority of God's revelation as the validation for their faith (See Rm 10:17), then it is difficult to turn them to a biblical foundation. It is for this reason that we cry out to a religious world to turn again to the ways of God. And in order to turn to the ways of God, we call on everyone to turn to the authority of His word. This means serious Bible study.

Turning from self-validation to the word of God is not an easy task. Sunday morning religious performances and experiences are too often used as personal validation that one is a Christian. The more frenzied the Sunday morning performance and emotional the outburst, the more difficult it is for the power of the word of God to work in the minds and hearts of those who are stricken with "assembliology," the belief that one's Sunday morning performance validates his Christianity. It is difficult to convince one that his Sunday-morning religious performances and emotional outburst must always be validated by the word of God. **All that we do must be brought under the scrutiny of the word of God** (See Hb 4:12). However, if the experiences of our assemblies are the validation for our identity and existence as Christians, then God's word has little chance of guiding our way. We must always remember that the power of man's emotions to control his direction in life is often more powerful than his study of the word of God to direct him in the right way.

It is in the preceding context of religious confusion, therefore, that men seek to establish their own conditions for salvation. Bits and pieces of Scripture are extracted from the Bible in order to give our religiosity some reference to the Bible. Unfortunately, the bits and pieces are often a twisted formula of conditions by which we would manufacture our own legal entrance into the kingdom. For example, the "sinner's prayer" is found nowhere in the Bible. But such has become a common "system of salvation" that is proclaimed by many religious groups throughout the world. It is claimed that the "sinner's prayer" is based on the statement of Paul in Romans 10:9. *"... if you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and will believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* **But if a simple confession is all that is required for salvation, then one need not repent, for repentance is nowhere mentioned in the context of Romans 10**. **One need not obey the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, for obedience to the gospel by immersion is nowhere mentioned in the statements of Romans 10**. But Paul said that unless one obeys the gospel, Jesus will be coming to him with vengeance in flaming fire (2 Th 1:6-9). **A consistent plea for restoration will never come from those who seek to dissect the Scriptures into parts and pieces in order to construct their own "systematic theology" for salvation**. If we are going to restore the word of God as our authority in all religious matters, then we must restore **all** the word of God that God intended that we in these times must obey. This means that we must restore all that God requires of us to be saved.

It is thus a great challenge for all those who would call for a restoration of primitive Christianity to succeed in their task. We are often challenged by where we are ourselves in reference to the true ekklesia. We are challenged by the fact that we who call for a restoration are removed from the true ekklesia of Christ. Therefore, we would guard ourselves from seeking to restore others to what we believe the true church to be. We say this because we too are sometimes crippled by our lack of understanding of the true ekklesia as she is revealed in the Scriptures. It is for this reason that **there must be a mutual desire on the part of many to go back to the Bible**, back to the initial revelation of the ekklesia as God would have her to be. In this way, **the restoration is not centered around the interpretations and opinions of any one man or church of adherents**. We would not be so presumptuous as to claim to have the final interpretative authority in matters of faith. The Bible alone must stand as our only standard to call us together as the true ekklesia of Christ. **Restoration is always a mutual movement of many Bible students who seek to move together in the same direction in order to restore the true**.

Movements that are led by individuals usually die with the passing of the admired leader. And such movements must die, for any religious movement that is not totally Christ-centered must cease to exist. We must keep in mind that the ekklesia is not about man, but about Jesus Christ. It is **all** about Jesus Christ, not "my church" or "your church," or some religious heritage that we consider sacred. It is about being the ekklesia of Christ because we have mutually obeyed the will of Christ.

Chapter 3

THE RESTORATION HAS BEGUN

Anyone who is familiar with the present state of global change in Christendom knows that there is a restorational paradigm shift from the old and traditional function of "church" to a more Bible based and relational fellowship of disciples in the communities in which Christians live. We have seen pockets of restoration movements springing up throughout the world. We have experienced so many over the past four decades that it is now true that no particular group can lay claim to the call of being a unique restoration movement. **Restoration movements spring out of a desire of people to return to the word of God. And wherever there are people who love the truth, there will always be those who call all people back to the Bible**.

What we are seeing in many churches throughout the world is a frustration with the churchianity of the past that is void of the word of God. We see a concerted effort by many to move toward a more realistic and relational partnership among believers that is based on a common love of Jesus and submission to Him through obedience to His word. Those who are of this restoration are willing to make all necessary sacrifices in order to move toward a more New Testament defined fellowship. It has sometimes been necessary for those of these movements to sacrifice much of their religious past, and just start over again. In order to do this, millions have just gone back home as the early Christians, and started simple. Some would call this a radical restoration. But it is radical only in the sense that the present churchianity has drifted so far away from the genuine.

As a result of people being a part of some "church" that has failed the people, this massive movement throughout the world seeks to discover one another in small fellowships. It is true that these groups are sometimes more relational based than word based. Those who come from wayward religious groups who had little respect for the word of God often resort to their relationships with one another alone as the foundation for the existence of their new fellowship. However, relationships may be a bond that will hold people together, but we must keep in mind that this was not the primary foundation upon which the ekklesia of the New Testament is based. **The early church existed because of the truth of the gospel every member had believed and obeyed** (Gl 3:26,27). The members' relationship with one another was the serendipity of their obedience to the gospel (Jd 3). Their relationships with one another was not their prime objective. They became the relational ekklesia of Christ because of their common obedience to the gospel of Christ that was revealed to them through the apostles (See At 2:41-47). They stood upon the foundation of this gospel as their reason for existence and continuation (1 Co 15:1-4).

But we would not criticize the existing restoration to small fellowships throughout communities, for such was the means by which the early disciples restored their relationship with God. We would only seek to bring teaching of the word to those who have seen the apostasy of the past in a religiosity that tore people apart from one another. It was an apostasy that sought to maintain an ecclesiastical religious institution that was dominated by a leadership who often perpetuated the system for the sake of their own existence. It was an organized religiosity that existed upon the foundation of estranged adherents who gave their tithes to continue something that was based more on tradition than an obedient response to the grace of God (See 2 Co 4:15; Ep 2:10).

However, we would caution those who "establish" churches. First, those who establish independent churches are often those who have fled from some religious authority on earth in order to gain freedom from institutional bondage. Those who have made the flight recognized the error of authoritative councils, synods and church governments of men. They fled such in order to seek Jesus only as their king. But if their flight from the authority of man was not to the sole authority of King Jesus, then they have fled from one authority of man to another. They have simply become independent denominations meeting as small groups under the authority of a man.

Second, **we must never separate the authority of Jesus from the authority of His word**. When we understand that the authority of Jesus on earth is expressed through His word, then the restoration will begin to take root. When people start studying their Bibles again, then the word of God will bring forth fruit by becoming the sole authority in our lives in reference to faith. But until then, fellowships that are founded upon relationships only, will be as frail as those who are members of such fellowships. We must not forget that the Bible is the source for discovering the message of the gospel. The more we know our Bibles, the more we know all that was involved in God planning and revealing the mystery of the gospel.

Chapter 4

RESTORATIONAL ATTITUDES

Restoration movements sometimes have a false beginning when people react to distorted religiosity. Unfortunately, when one reacts to something about which he disagrees, he often develops "reactionary theologies," or at least, an attitude of a crusader who brandishes the sword of the Spirit in order to inflict injury. But true restoration comes forth from sincere men who are studious of the word of God. They seek to call people back to the Bible from the bondage of misguided religiosity. In seeking to set aside their own religious prejudices, we must seek with open minds to lead honest people to the teachings of the Bible. We must reach out to other studious thinkers in order to allow their thinking to be challenged. We must, then, stimulate a fellowship that is based on a renewed and objective study of the word of God. A true restorationist, therefore, can always be determined by whether one is calling people to his own charismatic personality, or to turn people again to Jesus and His word.

It is easy to identity churches that are restoration oriented. **The members have Bible studies as a group where everyone participates as a result of their own personal studies**. They are not afraid to challenge traditions, beliefs or heritages in a group Bible class because everyone has been studying their Bibles in order to discover more truth. Apostate churches do not have participatory Bible classes because they are either dominated by the thinking of one man, founded on the traditions of their fathers, or simply afraid to discover that they are wrong in certain areas of either belief or behavior. But when we see a group of people who open their Bibles in a participatory Bible discussion, then we have discovered a group of people who are seeking to establish the Bible as their foundation for faith (Rm 10:17).

Biblically insecure churches, on the other hand, will always instigate an Inquisition to defend their oral religious traditions and heritages. Their cry that others are "liberals" or "heretics" only reaffirms that they are defensive concerning their lack of a biblical foundation upon which they have based their own faith. They would assert that we study our Bibles, but caution us about coming to any new conclusions. Bible study is thus shackled by an unwillingness to change in the face of new discoveries they would make in honest Bible study.

We have discovered also that religions that are based on emotionalism with a sprinkle of Bible are not likely to heed the call to restoration. Since such religions focus more on the adherents' emotional experience, rather than the authority of the word of God, their hysterical assemblies become the validation for their identity and existence. Such religions focus on the adherents, not the authority of Jesus through His word. Their religion is humanistic in the sense that the proof of their faith is based on the experiences of the individual. Colorful assemblies, therefore, become a weekly opportunity when the adherents emotionally validate themselves again in their religion rather than being an opportunity to worship God and study His word.

In the last century there has been a renewal in recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit. This has been a welcome renewal in recognizing that the Spirit of God is alive and working today among the people of God. But we must always keep in mind the words of Jesus in John 16:14 in reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. *"He will glorify Me."* **The purpose of the coming of the Spirit was to glorify Jesus, not Himself. A true restoration, therefore, always seeks to bring glory to Jesus, not the Holy Spirit**.

Sincere Bible students understand that if the church went into apostasy in the past—and it did in the second century—it can do it again within any generation. For this reason, every disciple of Jesus must be diligent in searching the Scriptures, always assuming that we have never discovered all the truth, but also that we can go astray in one generation. In being aware of apostasy, therefore, **it is not our task in our quest to quote our predecessors as authorities**. We appreciate the thinking of those who have gone on before us, **but our quest is not to restore their thinking as authority in matters of faith**. If our religious predecessors have led us astray, then they are part of the problem. We are not seeking to restore a previous apostate structure of the church to that which was promoted by our predecessors. **We are seeking to delve into the word of God in order to capture the true nature of the ekklesia as God would have her be in a modern world**. And in doing this, the Bible alone, specifically the New Testament, **must be our only authority**. It must be the only library of books to which we should go in order to discover the old paths from which we may have strayed.

What we learn from honest Bible study will rectify previous misunderstandings. We are thus not ashamed to challenge our own beliefs as we study the Scriptures.

We would not be so arrogant as to assume that we have arrived at all truth in our search for truth. An honest student of the word should never be embarrassed about changing his views because he has learned more from his personal study of the Scriptures. If we solidify our beliefs with a limited knowledge of the Bible, then our Bible will only become another document that is shelved with a religious library of books on theology that have been produced by our predecessors. **We have found that religionists who have little knowledge of the Bible will always go somewhere else than the Bible in order to validate their religion.**

We give respect to our fathers who were great students of the Bible. Their heritage of Bible study is greatly appreciated, for they gave us an inheritance to remain with the word of God as the foundation for all that we believe and do. We say this because in areas throughout the world where there is little scholarship of the word of God, it is quite difficult to stimulate a restoration to Bible study, and subsequently, a restoration to the true church of the Scriptures. **When there is no spirit of freedom that would be the culture to drive freethinkers, the people are trapped in the bondage of their own religious heritage and traditions**. Cultures of bondage bring people into captivity, and thus, rarely give rise to restorations. It is almost impossible for those in bondage to break free to study the Bible anew, and then, give birth to a restoration of the church about which we read in the New Testament. **One must always keep in mind that it is the purpose of organized religions to perpetuate their own existence**. Such religions are traditional and bondage oriented because of their ability to intimidate the adherents into perpetuating a false religion.

Chapter 5

RESTORATION OR REFORMATION?

What has often hijacked noble efforts for restoration is that some have unfortunately turned down the road of reformation. Reformation results from the efforts of leaders to reform various theologies or the practices of a particular religious group. Reformation is an effort to make a religious institution better by improving on its existing structure or spirit or doctrine. Men as John Wyclif, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and others were reformers of the Roman Catholic Church some five hundred years ago. They sought to reform certain beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church that they believed were contrary to the Bible. However, the result of their struggles to reform was that they gave us a Christendom of denominationalism, much of which was patterned after the religious structures of Roman Catholicism. Though their efforts were noble, they failed to take us all the way back to primitive Christianity.

Reformation movements promote division because the reformers can never agree upon a standard by which they would bring unity among themselves. It is for this reason that the work of reformers is often based on a particular reformer's unique beliefs. The unique beliefs are thus the beginning of a new denomination that is based on the reformer. Reformations, therefore, never lead to unity. They never lead us to the word of God as the sole authority in matters of faith because the succeeding leaders of the reformed churches spend years in their established universities in order to study and perpetuate the teachings of the reformers. The reformed churches, therefore, are subsequently perpetuated throughout history by a trained and paid clergy. **Bible students must never settle for a reformation when there is the necessity of a restoration**. Our call for restoration, therefore, must not be confused with efforts to reform existing apostate religions.

Once a reformed church is institutionalized, that is, identified by a unique doctrine or organization, its purpose is to perpetuate itself by a structured systematic theology that keeps its leaders and adherents faithful to the traditional teachings of the institution. Many such reformed churches have written creed books in order to guarantee that all adherents maintain the code of identity of the denominated religious group. If no creed book is written, then the denominated group will establish "oral traditions" to which all adherents must conform in order to maintain the traditions of the fathers. Some even establish legal systems of worship and assemblies by which they might identify themselves as different from others, but at the same time be known for being identified as a unique denomination. **Once an institutional religion is defined, its purpose is to perpetuate its unique definition**.

In the existing Christendom of denominationalism today, there are those who are preaching a "restoration" that is actually a disguised reformation. What such preaching has done has given us another era of denomi-

nationalism, which is now referred to as the "independent church movement." Instead of being attached to the traditional churches that originated out of the Reformation Movement of Wyclif, Luther, Calvin, Knox and others five hundred years ago, independent religionists are giving us an even more splintered Christendom where every "pastor" or "apostle" does that which is right in his own eyes. Many today have fled from the "traditional" religions that came forth from the Reformation Movement centuries ago. Unfortunately, what has happened is that the traditional churches have simply been splintered again into thousands of small independent groups that are scattered throughout the world. As members move from one of these groups to another, they become greatly confused. As one such member recently told us, "We don't know what to believe anymore because each pastor is preaching his own beliefs."

Restoration means going back to the former or original foundation two thousand years ago that will produce what God intended for His people to be throughout history. Restoration means struggling to throw off creeds, traditions, synods, traditional religiosity, and independent church confusion in order to restore the original foundation of the New Testament to its rightful place of authority among the people of God. It is a desire of brave men and women to be willing to sacrifice religious behavior or beliefs, even unique fellowships, in order to objectively establish their lives on the revelation of God concerning the existence of His community of believers. **Restoration must never be sidetracked by reformation**. Neither should it be disguised by break away independent churches. In order not to be sidetracked, the restorationist must be relentless in his efforts to be absorbed with the word of Christ in order that his life be totally Christ-centered. He must be so overwhelmed with the word of God that he will not be detoured from his objective regardless of the great onslaught of opposition that Satan will bring his way. And the opposition will come. It will come through those who have created a religiosity after their own traditions. The greatest restoration leader of all time said, *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me* [Jesus] *before it hated you"* (Jn 15:18).

The true restorationist in no way supports a reformation of existing denominations. He does not shroud his efforts by forming a break away independent church whose members are cloned after his own beliefs or personality. The true outcome of restoration does not fall under the umbrella of Protestantism, or form more independent denominations The restorationist does not seek to revise creeds, or restructure councils, synods or ecclesiastical organizations. In fact, his efforts will lead to the end of denominationalism, and the banishing of creeds and councils and those who would be authorities over the disciples of Jesus. We have found that there are few who are courageous enough to make this journey. There are few who are willing to be labelled "liberal" or "heretic" by their wayward contemporaries. There are few who are willing to be ostracized by their fellow theologians, and banned from the fellowship of those churches that have denominated themselves through obedience to either man-made creeds, councils or charismatic personalities. There are few who are willing to end up as Paul who said, *"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"* (Gl 6:17). Those marks came from misguided religious leaders. The marks were the result of beatings by religionists who stood against a restoration from Judaism to the simplicity of Jesus and His word.

Chapter 6

A BIBLICAL RESTORATION PRINCIPLE

When we call for restoration, **we are calling for all those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God to return to His word as the final authority in all matters of faith and godly behavior**. Fundamentally, we are asking people to start studying their Bibles again in order to make Jesus the center of reference for living by living according to His word. When such happens, there will be an explosion of men and women returning to Christ simply because there is power in the word of Christ to draw all men to Him (See Hb 4:12).

Those who would herald the call for restoration would be those who are captives of the word of God, and thus, they esteem the word highly in their hearts (Psalm 119:11). As captives of the word of God in their hearts, restorationists call on all those who accept Jesus as the Son of God to return to the authority of His word in their lives. In the apostate environment of the Israelites who had strayed from the word of God at the time God called Isaiah, so we would stand up and cry out to Christendom, ***"To the law and to the testimony! If***

they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). We are challenging religious leaders that if they do not speak where the Bible speaks, then there is no light in them. *"**Seek out the scroll of the Lord and read**"* (Isaiah 34:16). We are challenging every preacher that is not seeking out the "scroll of the Lord," that he has no right to lead God's people. He is a blind guide for those who seek to walk according to the word of God. If we seek out the word of God, then we can restore the right paths of God (Isaiah 58:12). If we do not, then we will lead the people into error. Unfortunately, most in Israel had no desire to restore themselves to the paths of God since they had created a religion after their own desires, which religion was perpetuated by their hired false preachers (Isaiah 42:22). We find the same true today among religious groups who use the name "Christian," but refuse to turn to the word of Christ as their source of faith and authority in religious matters. It is for this reason that we call on all sincere and God-fearing people to take a stand for Christ and His word.

The two prophets, Jeremiah and Hosea, sought to restore the people of God who had forgotten the commandments of God. Hosea spoke for God by saying, *"**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge**. Because you have rejected knowledge, 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**"* (Hosea 4:6). Jeremiah called for Israel to restore themselves to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16). He exhorted the people to turn again to the law of God (Jeremiah 31:21,22). He proclaimed to the people that they had turned to walk down the "bypaths" of apostasy (Jeremiah 18:15). It was a time in the history of Israel, therefore, when the people should have remembered and done the old ways, which ways were the ways of God (Malachi 4:4). It is such a time today. We call on people to return to the "scroll" (book) of God in order to learn and walk in the paths of God. It is as one Bible starved believer said, "We need more teachers of the Bible."

Jesus came into the world to restore Israel to submission to the word of God. He appealed to the religious leaders, *"**What is written in the law? How does it read to you?**"* (Lk 10:26). We need teachers who will teach us what is written in the law of God. Jesus' sentiment was continued by the apostles. *"If anyone speaks, **let him speak as the oracles of God**"* (1 Pt 4:11). Where are all those teachers who will "speak as the oracles of God"? The plea of the apostles was, *"**... what does the Scripture say** ..."* (Gl 4:30). We have for too long been listening to those who have no idea what the Scriptures say because they have trusted in their own ability to speak and not in their study of the Scriptures. We have been cursed long enough with biblically ignorant orators whose speech is sterile of the word of God. We are also burdened by those about whom Paul wrote in Romans 16:18. *"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**."*

We are exhorted to *"**hold fast to that word**"* that the apostles taught (1 Co 15:2). And if anyone would presume to be "Christian" among us, we would answer with Paul's affirmation in the context of those who sought to be the authorities of their own religiosity. *"For I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Co 2:2). This we would demand of anyone who would stand before us and assume to be a spokesman for God.

Since it is always the tendency of man to leave the authority of God, then it is a constant plea of sincere Bible-loving people to call for a continued focus on the right ways of God. If there is no one out there who is making the plea, then the misguided religiosity of men will take them further into a churchianity that is bankrupt of the word of God. And for such people, there is only one future, and that future is portrayed in the words of Jesus: *"Not everyone 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). The people want to do the will of God. But in order for the will of the Lord to be done, we must know His will. And this takes Bible study. "Lord, Lord" religionists will never call for a restoration if they do not get into the will (word) of God.

Chapter 7

FOUNDATION FOR RESTORATION

Our call for restoration is not without solid principles upon which we take our stand. In fact, the validity of any call for restoration must be based on the following beliefs:

A. Belief in a final authority:

We must believe that God intended to reveal a final authority to man in all matters of faith. If God did

not reveal a final authority in religious matters, then He left men to their own inventions. If there is no final authority, then every man is his own authority. And if every man is his own authority, then God cannot condemn us for inventing our own religious nonsense. This brings to mind the frightening statement of 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

> *"The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all* ***deceiving power and signs and wonders****, 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."*

We see the result today of religionists who have established their own authority in matters of faith. There is confusion in Christendom because men have no love of the truth. It is confusion because religious leaders are not faithful to the common foundation of God's revelation that would bring unity among all believers. Since many religious leaders have rejected the final authority of the word of God, they have established their own authority, and subsequently, their own religions. The confusion we see in Christendom today is proof that men can never be their own final authority in matters of faith.

B. Belief that God's revelation is understandable:

We must believe that God's absolute and authoritative revelation is understandable to the common individual without the necessity of any "official" interpreters. Division results when disciples terminate their personal study of the Scriptures, and subsequently give their brains over to "official" students of the Bible, the clergy. Preachers with advanced degrees in theology have intimidated the average member into believing that he has no chance of coming to a knowledge of the truth through simple Bible study. But we must never be deceived into thinking that it takes years of university study of the Bible to understand the fundamentals that are necessary for salvation. We must continually believe what Paul wrote to the average member of the church in Ephesus. *"Therefore, when you read* ***you can understand*** *my knowledge in the mystery of Christ ..."* (Ep 3:4). It takes no Bible scholar to read the Bible and understand the mystery of Jesus Christ. The mystery of the gospel has been revealed **because it can be understood by everyone**. We must never accuse God of shrouding in a maze of obscurity that which is necessary to believe and obey in order to be saved. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible to be written to common people, not scholars.

C. Belief that God's word has been preserved for all men:

We must believe that God's revelation is preserved today in the form that God intended it to be preserved. It has been preserved in a manner by which it can be studied, and by such study, one can learn the way of salvation. *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... so that the man of God may be complete,* ***thoroughly equipped for every good work****"* (2 Tm 3:16,17). Restorationists believe that the word of God is sufficient in its present written form to equip every person for every good work. Restorationists believe that the Bible alone is able to spiritually equip one for every good work. The Holy Spirit put about 1,500 years into the inspiration and writing of the Bible (See 2 Pt 1:20,21). One would be foolish to think that He would now lead us to ignore the Scriptures which He took so long to have written. Since the Spirit put about 1,500 years into writing the Bible, we can put a life-time in studying it.

D. Belief that God's word is all-sufficient:

We must believe that God intended for all those who would come to Him must come to Him on the basis of what is taught in His revelation. This is why Peter wrote that the disciples of Jesus have *"been* ***born again****, not by perishable seed, but imperishable,* ***by the word of God*** *that lives and abides"* (1 Pt 1:23). If one would be born again, he must be born from the instruction of the word of God that he obey the gospel (See 1 Pt 1:25). Through the revelation of Jesus, who is the way, truth and life (Jn 14:6), all men can learn what is necessary for salvation through Jesus, and thus be born of the word of God (At 4:12; see Jn 6:45). God's word, therefore, is entirely sufficient to educate one concerning what he must do to be saved, as well as, what he must do to live a Christ-centered life. The Holy Spirit will not lead us contrary to His written word. Neither will He lead us to salvation apart from what is revealed in the Bible. David still says, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105).

E. Belief that man's religious laws and traditions are not binding as standards by which we will be judged:

We must understand that men do not have the right

to bind on themselves mandates for salvation that are not bound by God. Binding religious traditions and laws lead us away from the commandments of God as they led the Jews away from God by the time of the ministry of Jesus (See Mk 7:1-9). It is not wrong to do something traditionally. But to make that which is traditional the law of one's religiosity, is to bring one into the bondage of men, and subsequently, divide one believer from another (See Gl 5:1). Restorations must affirm that any tradition that would lead us away from God must be sacrificed for the sake of staying close to the word of God. They must be sacrificed for the sake of unity among believers. We are free to follow our traditions, but we are not free to bind our traditions in a manner that brings others into the bondage of our traditions.

F. Belief that the word of God will produce unity among believers:

Restorationists believe that when people focus on Jesus, their direction by the word of God will always produce unity, not division. Jesus is the one who brings people together. Confused interpretations of the word of God will divide people from one another. The word of God is simply our telescope by which we discover the Son of God. Our focus is always on Jesus. But we cannot have a clear focus on Jesus unless we look through the word of God. It is for this reason that there can never be any "I am of Paul," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Apollos" among the disciples of Christ (1 Co 1:12,13). It is all, "I am of Christ."

Calling for the restoration of simple Christianity is not easy. Those who will defend the traditions of their fathers will always stand in the way (See Mk 7:1-9). Those who are intimidated by the religious establishment will not have the courage to take a stand for Jesus alone. Those who validate their religiosity by their own emotional experiences will always subject the word of God to their own feelings. Those who trust more in either pastor, priest or pope, instead of the word of God, will always follow personalities over the Prince of Peace. Restoration is a struggle. It is accomplished only by the brave who consecrate Jesus in their hearts. It is accomplished by those who take a stand on the principle the apostle Peter stated to the religious leaders of Jerusalem, *"**We must obey God rather than men**"* (At 5:29).

Chapter 8

THE TASK OF RESTORATION

We have found that there are some common goals among all those who seek to restore the foundation upon which to rediscover the church of the New Testament. These goals bring together a unified focus of all those who would seek to implement the teachings of the word of God in their lives in order to be **Christians only** in a world of religious complexity and confusion.

A. Restore Jesus as our sole authority in matters of faith:

When Jesus ascended from this world He reminded the apostles that He had been given **all authority** (Mt 28:18). He is now at the right hand of God reigning with all authority as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). Jesus *"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). On earth, He rules through His word, and thus, all must live according to the standard of His word (Jn 12:48). Restorationists seek to restore people's thinking to the fact that Jesus now reigns over all things (See Ph 2:9-11). If one would allow Jesus to reign in his heart, then he must submit to the words of Jesus (See Jn 8:31; Lk 17:20,21).

B. Restore the authority of the words of Jesus:

Restorationists seek to restore the New Testament to its place of absolute authority among all those who would seek to be well-pleasing to God. They seek to restore the word of Jesus as the **only authority** in matters pertaining to faith, and thus maintain the word of God as the source of faith. *"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Rm 10:17).

C. Restore oneness in Christ:

Restorationists are frustrated with the magnitude of division that prevails throughout Christendom. Knowing that people seek to follow Jesus and His word, they seek to be the one universal church of Christ. They seek to answer the prayer of Jesus concerning His disciples, *"**that they all may be one**"* (Jn 17:20,21).

D. Restore true worship:

Restorationists lament over the misguided worship of those who have created worship after their own desires. They thus seek to call all people back to true worship that is in spirit and the truth of the word of God. It is not that they call for the restoration of some legal formula of worship, but the simplicity of worshiping God from the heart and according to His directions. *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must* ***worship Him in spirit and in truth****"* (Jn 4:24). Jesus reassured the faithful, *"... for the Father seeks such to worship Him"* (Jn 4:23). Our question is whether the Father is seeking us because of our worship? If we are worshiping according to His truth, then we know that He seeks our worship.

E. Restore obedience to the gospel:

Restorationists seek to call all men to obedience of the gospel, as opposed to man-made conditions or systems for salvation. They seek to renew people's focus on the good news (gospel) of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). In obedience to this gospel event in history, they seek to restore obedience to the gospel by burial with Jesus in baptism, and resurrection with Him in coming forth from a tomb of water (Rm 6:4; more later).

F. Restore the individual priesthood of believers:

Restorationists seek to restore the responsibility of the individual priesthood of believers and one's direct relationship with Jesus apart from synods, councils, or the officials of religious organizations. *"You also, as living stones, 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). Our access to God is through Jesus Christ, not man-made organizations. Our road map to understand Jesus Christ are the inspired records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

G. Restore speaking as the oracles of God:

Restorationists seek to rid Christendom of all those unbiblical names and traditions that promote division among believers. They seek to return to being simple disciples of Jesus who have a common bond with one another because of their common obedience to the gospel (Jd 3). They do not want to be identified by any other name than the name of Christ (1 Pt 4:16). If they speak, they seek to speak according to the oracles of God. *"If anyone speaks,* ***let him speak as the oracles of God****"* (1 Pt 4:11).

H. Restore a direct relationship as a disciple of Jesus:

Paul wrote that He had been crucified **with** Christ (Gl 2:20). He reminded the Roman Christians that they had been buried **with** Christ (Rm 6:4; Cl 2:12). Since we have died **with** Christ, we live **with** Him (Rm 6:8). We are workers together **with** Him (2 Co 6:1). And when we die, we will be **with** Him forever (Ph 1:23). All that the Christian is and does is **with Christ**. Christ is the totality of the Christian's life. The fact that He is our center of reference in life is not something of this world. Christianity is all about Jesus Christ. It is about doing and being Christ. It is about the individual believer living a daily life-style that reflects the aroma of Christ (2 Co 2:14-16). When we speak of restoration, therefore, we are speaking of restoring one's life to a totally Christ-centered life that is a light unto the world (Mt 5:16).

These common goals among those who seek to restore simple Christianity will identify them as different, if not radical in the eyes of those who have strayed from the authority of the word of Christ. Restorationists will be different from those who have set themselves to promote or sustain any traditional religion that has been created after the desires of men. They will be different from those who have given themselves over to emotionalism as a validation for faith. In fact, the true restorationist will not be identified with any particular denomination or religious group that maintains separation from all those who would seek to restore the simplicity of discipleship in one's life. It is for this reason that in the midst of religious confusion and ignorance of the word of God, restoration to primitive Christianity can be a daunting task. Nevertheless, if we would be true to God and ourselves, we have no option in reference to our course of action than to stand firm on the word of God. We must cry out for a restoration to a relationship that is direct with Jesus as our King.

Any relationship with our King depends on our relationship with Him through the gospel. Paul explained this in his own life: *"I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord* [and King], ***for whom I have suffered the loss of all things****.* ***I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ****"* (Ph 3:8). If we would relate to the incarnational Son of God who left heaven for us, then we must be willing to leave all that is necessary in order to serve King Jesus. Anything less is simply a pseudo relationship with an incarnate King.

Chapter 9

RESTORING THE AUTHORITY OF KING JESUS

A plea for restoration in Christendom is basically a paradigm shift in religious authority. It is a shift from the authority of the religious creeds of men, the authoritative decisions of church councils, experiential religiosity, papal legislation, and any other similar man-focused foundation upon which men have based their faith. The plea for restoration is a paradigm shift from these "authorities" of men to the sole authority of Jesus Christ, who is now head over all things (Ep 1:22).

As long as people seek to function religiously with man as the center of authority in reference to their faith, the longer they are barred from Jesus Christ as the total focus of their lives. The more a particular religion focuses on the authority of men, the less focus there is on Jesus as the sole authority of one's life. We will never become totally focused on Jesus as the Lord of our lives as long as there are other authorities competing for our loyalty. Restoration will occur when people move away from earthly religious authorities to the sole authority of King Jesus from heaven (Mt 28:18). And in order to turn our attention from earthly lords to the Lord of heaven, we must seek out the word of our heavenly Lord (At 2:36).

Restoration assumes that all that is necessary in order to be pleasing to God on earth is discovered in the word of God. We must firmly believe that *"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God"* in order *"**that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**"* (2 Tm 3:16,17). We must firmly believe that God *"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). And we must firmly believe that the faith *"**was once for all delivered to the saints**"* (Jd 3; see Rv 22:18,19). Since God has finalized His revelation to man for all time, then we must believe that the word of God is totally sufficient to take one to heavenly glory.

The word of God must be our final authority in all matters of faith. By authority in all matters of faith, we mean that our spiritual behavior must be compared with the "spiritual words" that have come to us through the inspiration of the word of God by the Holy Spirit. Paul's admonition to those who claimed to be spiritual in Corinth reaffirms the biblical foundation upon which the restorationist stands. Those things that we should believe and behave that are pleasing to God are discovered only in the word of God. We would not know such things unless they were revealed to us from God. *"Even so the things of God no one knows **except the Spirit of God**"* (1 Co 2:11). In reference to the other apostles, Paul affirmed, *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God**"* (1 Co 2:12). **One cannot know the mind of God except through that which has been revealed by God through the Holy Spirit. And one cannot know the things that have been revealed by the Holy Spirit, except through the inspired word of God**. *"Which things we* [the apostles] *also speak, not in the words that man's wisdom teaches, **but what the Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual words**"* (1 Co 2:13). Those who would contend that they are believing and behaving spiritually, therefore, must base their beliefs and behavior on the authority of the Spirit-inspired word of God. If one would assume to be "Christian," therefore, then his assumption must be founded upon a "Thus saith the Lord." In this way one establishes the authority of Jesus in his life.

In a world of Christendom where there is little respect for the authority of the word of God, and subsequently little knowledge of the Bible, there are many people who seek to carry the name "Christian." **However, they cannot validate their beliefs and behavior by the word of God**. It is a frequent deception that some assume that they are Christians simply because of their good works in the name of Christ. We appreciate their good works in the name of Christ, but we would caution ourselves about using good works to validate ourselves as Christians. A person is not a Christian because he or she does good works in the name of Christ (Read Mt 7:21-23). This is true because **one cannot be justified by works of law**, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself (See Gl 2:16). We are justified by works of obedience, not meritorious works of law and good deeds (Js 2:24). Any attempt for legal atonement for our sins by good works will never justify us before God (See Rm 11:6). Good works, or attempts at perfect obedience of law, cannot atone for our sins simply because we would be putting God in debt to save us.

One's good works will not atone for erroneous beliefs or sinful behavior. One may do good works in the name of the Lord, but not be saved because of those good works. Simply claiming that Jesus is one's Lord

does not identify one as a Christian. We must always abound *"in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain **in the Lord**"* (1 Co 15:58). The problem comes when people assume that they are "in the Lord," when actually they have never started their spiritual journey in the Lord by baptism into Christ. *"For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ"* (Gl 3:27; see Rm 6:1-6). In order for our good works not to be in vain, we must be baptized into Christ. These words of Paul present a warning signal to all those who would claim to have submitted to the will of God, but believe to the contrary. 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). It is necessary to do the will of God in order to be a Christian. And the only way one can be assured that he is doing the will of God is to do what the Lord says in reference to being baptized into Christ.

We must keep in mind that **it is important what we believe**. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were changing their beliefs. They were in the process of returning to the Old Testament law. The writer of Hebrews rebuked his readers by saying, *"Therefore, we must give more earnest attention to the things that **we have heard** so that we **do not drift away**"* (Hb 2:1). If the Christian gives up his belief that is based on the word of Christ, then he draws back into destruction (Hb 10:39). He is no longer faithful, for he no longer submits to the commandments of King Jesus. Jesus can only be the Lord of those who have submitted to His word. And in order to submit to the words of Jesus, one must listen to and obey the words of his Lord. Ignorance of the Bible hinders people from restoring their allegiance to King Jesus. Please keep these words of Jesus in mind: ***"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"*** (Jn 8:31).

Chapter 10

RESTORING THE APOSTLES TO THEIR "THRONES"

Jesus made a very unique promise to His apostles in Luke 22:29,30. *"And I grant to you a kingdom just as My Father has granted to Me, so that you may eat and drink at My table, and **sit on thrones judging** the twelve tribes of Israel."* Now if one misses the metaphor of "thrones" in this statement, then he will misunderstand the message of the promise that Jesus here made to the twelve apostles. No interpreter would understand the word "thrones" to be literal thrones on earth. We do not have the apostles sitting on literal thrones and judging among the spiritual Israel of God. However, the standard by which they are now judging interprets the "thrones" and "judging" statements of Jesus' promise.

Before He made the promise of Luke 22:29,30, Jesus had personally promised the Twelve in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit *"will **teach you all things** and **bring all things to your remembrance that I have said to you**."* He promised the apostles that *"when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you*** **[the apostles]** ***into all the truth***" (Jn 16:13). In the context of John 14–16, these were exclusive promises that Jesus made to the twelve apostles. In fulfillment of these promises, therefore, the Holy Spirit would reveal to the apostles all things that would be necessary for godliness in order that the people of God be complete and thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16,17). Because of the promises, therefore, we would assume that the Holy Spirit delivered "all truth" to the apostles. We would assume that these truths would be delivered to all the disciples of Jesus through the apostles. And this is exactly what happened (Read 1 Co 2:13-16).

That which was initially revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles—all that Jesus had personally taught them and all truth—**is the standard of judgment by which the apostles are now judging among the people of God**. The apostles are now on their "thrones," judging through the word of Jesus that was revealed through them by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16,17). If anyone would reject this word, therefore, it will be this word that will be the standard by which he will eventually be judged. Jesus said, *"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).

A plea for restoration, therefore, is a plea that all men who would call themselves after the name of Jesus Christ must submit to the authority of the word of truth that was revealed through the apostles. In this way, the apostles are restored to their "thrones" of judgment. If one refuses to submit to the written words of Jesus, therefore, he dethrones the apostles, and subsequently, he brings himself under the judgment of the words of Jesus. In view of this, every disciple must consider Revelation 20:12. *"Then I saw the dead, small and great, stand*

before the throne. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. ***And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works****."*

When we stand in final judgment before God, no creed books of man will be opened as the standard of our judgment. No catechism, no orders of worship, or no manuals of methods will play any part in our final judgment. We will stand only before King Jesus and His word alone (Jn 12:48). And for this reason, every believer should be stirred to plead with every soul to restore people to Jesus and the authority of His word.

Chapter 11

JESUS' WORDS PRODUCE UNITY

When we speak of restoration to the authority of the words of Jesus, we are not talking about someone's authority as an official interpreter of the Bible. That which is necessary to be restored takes no scholars to discover, no method of Bible study to engineer, and no councils to mandate. If our method of Bible study that we use to discover the truth upon which we stand causes us to splinter into sects or denominations, then we know that we have invented the wrong method of study. Or, it may be that our motives in teaching are questionable. **God never revealed His word to His people in a manner that would divide His people from one another**. The true restorationist will realize this, and thus, he will never seek to bind where God has not bound, nor loose where God has bound. Neither will he invent a system of Bible study by which an outline of "doctrine" is defined, and then seek to clone disciples after his outlined deductions or inferences. And we might add that no true restorationist will arrogantly use himself as the center of reference for understanding the Bible. True restorationists stand behind the word of God because they are terrified to stand between the people and the word of Jesus.

The Corinthians needed milk instead of meat because they were carnal in their thinking (1 Co 3:1-3). The Hebrew Christians had become dull of hearing, and thus needed to be taught again the milk of the word and not solid food (Hb 5:11,12). The ignorant and unbelieving about whom Peter wrote twisted the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16). Spiritual things are difficult to understand when we are living carnal lives. They are difficult to understand when we have grown tired of listening. Therefore, **to accuse the Bible of being difficult to understand, and thus cause division, is to make a pronouncement against one's own spiritual inadequacies and lack of Bible study**. Making such an accusation against the Bible is also making an indictment against God by saying that He was not able to give man His revealed word in a manner that would create unity among all those who seek to please Him. Therefore, when we witness division among those who claim to be Christians, we must always conclude that the division is the problem of those who claim to be Christians, not the Bible.

A true call for restoration, therefore, can never be a call to division after the opinions, traditions and personalities of men. When sincere and honest Bible students come to the word of God, they come with a desire to be united in Christ. They come with a desire not to allow their personal opinions and deductions to become occasions for division among believers. They do not come to bring men into the bondage of their own opinions, but to set men free. **Any true restorationist, therefore, will guard the freedom of those with whom he seeks to be in fellowship**. He will guard their freedom, not at the expense of compromising the truth of God's word. He will, if necessary, sacrifice his traditions and personal opinions for the sake of unity.

One of the sure evidences of religious leaders who are not students of the Bible is their proclamation, "God told me!" God is not a respecter of persons, and thus, He does not choose specific people today through whom He would speak. All that is necessary for teaching and edification has been revealed through the written Scriptures (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:3; Jd 3). If anyone would be taught by God, then he must study the word of God. The writers of the Bible received and wrote the word of God by inspiration. But we must learn the truth by perspiration in diligent study. There is no easy way to learn the will of God. There is no cheap "God-told-me" way by which we can learn the truth. We must read and study (Ep 3:3-5). God tells us through the Bible to study the Bible (2 Tm 2:15). In order to listen to God we must study what He has written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only in this way will we restore the word of God to our faith and living. But as long as there are people who are unwilling to study, but stand up and proclaim that "God told me," there will never be a restora-

tion of unity that is produced by the word of God. The great division that we have witnessed in the religious world often comes from those who have claimed to have had some personal "dream" or "message" from God. The dreams and messages often conflict and contradict another, and thus, division is created among churches. However, the fact that division exists because of the personal dreams and messages of the leaders is evidence that the dreams and messages **did not** come from the one Holy Spirit. The Spirit would never lead the people of God into contradictory beliefs or behavior (See 1 Co 12:4-11).

We must always keep in mind that true nobility in the eyes of God is that we continually search the Scriptures. Listen to what the Holy Spirit said of those in the city of Berea:

> ***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).

Noble-minded Bible study will produce unity, not division, among sincere Bible students. Unfortunately, many have deceived themselves into thinking that **union** among churches, not unity, is the answer to the division that exists in Christendom. But the plea for union is based on a misunderstanding of the difference that exists between union and unity. Union is the result of leaders accepting one another regardless of differences in belief. Specifically, union among churches can happen regardless of the authority of the Scriptures in matters of faith. Two opposing groups can simply agree to accept one another's existence, regardless of what each group believes. In other words, two churches that are based on error can still accept one another in union by accepting one another's error. Unfortunately, their union is based on error, not truth.

Unity is the result of believers who have been granted unity by God because they have a common salvation that is based on the truth of God's word. This is the context of Paul's discussion in Ephesians 4. Ministries of teaching the truth were given to the early church *"until we all come to the **unity of the faith**, and of the **knowledge of the Son of God** ..."* (vs 13). The "unity of the faith" refers to establishing ourselves on the "knowledge of Christ," that is, knowing the word of God so 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"* (vs 14). **Unity is based on accepting the authority of the word of God in all matters of our common salvation**. And this common salvation we can know only in the word of God. Union, however, is based on those who preach "every wind of doctrine," but have agreed to accept one another's erroneous teaching. Restorations, therefore, call for unity, not union. In matters of faith, the restorationist cannot agree to disagree. In matters of opinion we will agree to disagree, but in matters of faith, it must always be "speaking as the oracles of God" (1 Pt 4:11).

Chapter 12

THE URGENCY OF RESTORATION

It is not without a sincere desire for the souls of men that there are times when sincere men and women must stand up and call for a restoration of Christianity. There are souls at stake. Apostasy from the word of God will lead many away from an opportunity to be in the eternal presence of God. The call for restoration, therefore, comes from the heart of those who contend for the following beliefs:

1. Belief that there are those who have departed from the faith (1 Tm 4:1-3).
2. Belief that there are those who are eager to twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16).
3. Belief that there are those who willingly deceive others, and thus do not have Christ because they have gone beyond the teachings of Christ (2 Jn 7-10).
4. Belief that there are those who go forth with teachings that lead people away from the foundation of the word of God (1 Jn 4:1).
5. Belief in the authority of Christ as opposed to the authority of man in matters of faith (Mt 28:18; Cl 1:18).
6. Belief that there are those who do not believe in the final authority of the New Testament as God's final revelation of truth to man (2 Tm 2:15-18).
7. Belief that all our emotions, experiences and be-

havior must come under the scrutiny of God's word (Rm 6:16,17; Cl 3:17).

8. Belief that there are those who seek a religious following by promoting legalistic practices that draw disciples after themselves (At 20:30; Rm 16:17).
9. Belief that all believers should be united as the one body of Christ (1 Co 1:10; Ep 2:16).
10. Belief that there is a pattern of sound words to which we must hold fast (2 Tm 1:13).
11. Belief that we cannot separate the lordship of Jesus from the authority of what He says through His word (Lk 6:46; Jn 12:48).
12. Belief that the faith has once and for all time been delivered to the saints (Jd 3).
13. Belief that there is a difference between clearly defined truth and opinions, and that truth must always prevail over opinions (Rm 14).
14. Belief that matters of faith are bound and loosed only by God (Mt 16:19).
15. Belief in the individual priesthood of the believer to study the word of God in order to arrive at one's own conclusions (Jn 8:32; 17:17; 2 Tm 2:15).
16. Belief that our salvation is by grace that manifests thanksgiving to God in our lives through good works (2 Co 4:15; Gl 5:6; Ep 2:8-10).
17. Belief in the one gospel, and obedience thereof, as the only means by which one can come into a covenant relationship with God (Rm 6:1-6; 1 Co 15:1-4).
18. Belief that it is not possible for people to direct their own paths religiously, and thus, all men must be instructed by the word of God (Jeremiah 10:23).
19. Belief that we can spiritually grow, but only as we are instructed by the truth of God's word (2 Pt 3:18).
20. Belief that in the final judgment, all will be judged by the authority of the word of Christ, and not by the religious creeds and traditions of men (Jn 12:48).

Restoration invariably calls on people to make some very serious decisions. It is the same call that the Holy Spirit made through Paul in reference to the religions from which the Corinthian disciples had to make a decision to leave. In quoting Isaiah 52:11, he wrote, *"'Therefore, **come out from among them and be separate**,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you'"* (2 Co 6:17; see Cl 2:20-23).

It is emotionally difficult to restore ourselves to the simplicity of the faith that is revealed in the New Testament. When one has believed and behaved for years what he thought to be correct, it is emotionally difficult to give up one's heritage in order to restore the heritage of God. It is difficult to give up religious heritages because we are often banned from friends and disfellowshipped from religious groups that have long left the old paths of God. Nevertheless, Paul called on the Corinthians to make the sacrifice. The Corinthians had to come out from among the religious idolaters of their community in order to be the temple of God (1 Co 3:16,17). Thousands of Jews in the first century left their religious heritage of 1,500 years in order to follow Jesus (See At 2:41; 6:7). And if we are willing to make the sacrifice, then we will join with millions who have willingly left erroneous religious heritages in order to follow the will of God. If we make the sacrifice, we must believe what God promised to all those who would make the journey to follow Him. *"'**And I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters**,' says the Lord Almighty"* (2 Co 6:18).

Chapter 13

WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

If you have made it this far in reading our plea for restoration, then you are probably wondering where do we go from here to initiate and continue the restoration of Christianity. The answer to what step to take now is simple. **We must begin with the gospel**! Mark began his book by saying, *"The beginning of the gospel* [good news] *of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"* (Mk 1:1). After His baptism by John, Mark stated in reference to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, *"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God"* (Mk 1:14). And with the gospel, we must begin.

When Paul went into the city of Corinth, notice what he said he did when he first visited to the city:

> *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the **gospel** which I **preached** to you, which also you **received** and in which you **stand**, by which also you are **saved**, if you hold fast to that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. **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 15:1-4).

The first thing Paul preached when he went to Corinth was the gospel. **This is the first thing by which we must begin any restoration**. Therefore, we must begin by asking, “What is the gospel?” Most people will reply, “The good news!” Correct! But it is good news about what?

To answer this question, here are some things we all know. All *“have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rm 3:23). And *“the wages of sin is death”* (Rm 6:23). The problem is that our sins separate us from God (See Isaiah 59:1,2). **Our greatest problem is sin, separation and death**. We are spiritually dead because of our sins. We need GOOD NEWS about our spiritual death problem.

But there is more. When Adam sinned in the garden of Eden, he was **separated from the tree of life**, lest he *“put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever”* (Genesis 3:22-24). When Adam was separated from the tree of life, all humanity after him was also separated from the source of eternal life. *“For since by man* [Adam] *came death, by man* [Christ] *came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so* ***in Christ all will be made alive****”* (1 Co 15:21,22). Because we are physically born from the seed of Adam, and thus separated from the tree of life, we will all physically die. **Our second greatest problem is physical death**. We need GOOD NEWS for this problem, for we all want to be made alive in Christ.

So here we are, spiritually dead because of our sin. We are destined to physical death because we have been driven from the source of eternal life. **We need good news**! And the gospel is good news. But what people usually do not understand is that the gospel is an event of history.

If we held up a copy of the Bible and asked, “Is this the gospel?”, most people would answer, “Yes.” But they would be wrong. The Bible is not the gospel! Now before you throw this book down, we are sure we will convince you before you complete your reading of this book that the Bible is not the gospel. Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4? In a few words he explained 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.”* Herein is explained the gospel event.

Since we are separated from God because of our sins, then **it is good news that Jesus died for our sins**. Since we are destined to die physically, **then we can have hope of eternal life in Christ because Jesus rose from the dead**. **Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection was an event of history**. It is recorded by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 as an event of history. **The good news (the gospel) is the historical event of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus**. The Bible is the Holy Spirit inspired **report** of this event. We can believe the historical event of the gospel because we believe the inspired report, the Bible. The gospel was an event of history. The Bible is the inspired written report.

Most “Christians” believe the historical event of the gospel of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. This event was **declared** to the Corinthians. Paul **preached** the event to them and they **received** his message as true. They thus based their faith on the truth of the gospel event, that it actually happened in history. They were **saved** by the gospel because they obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Now this brings us to wonder how they obeyed an historical event. Paul explained this to those in Rome, who, as the Corinthians, received and also obeyed the gospel event.

> *Or do you not know that as many of us as were* ***baptized into Christ Jesus*** *were baptized into His death? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death,* ***we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection*** *...”* (Rm 6:3-5).

In order to connect with the historical event of the gospel, **one must experience another historical event in his or her life**. This is the event of baptism. Romans 6:6 states that we must be **crucified with Christ**. There is a cross in the gospel event. Jesus died for our sins. And what do we do with dead bodies? We bury them. Jesus was buried. We must be buried also after crucifying ourselves on the cross of repentance (Lk 13:3). If we crucify ourselves in repentance, but are not buried, then we are as a walking dead man. There is no life until we are buried and resurrected. Now we understand why Peter said to the mournful Jews on Pentecost who were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. *“****Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins****”* (At 2:38). After one joins with Christ on the cross, he must go with Christ to the tomb. For us it is a tomb of water (See Jn 3:23).

One must go to the tomb before being resurrected to life with Jesus. We are thus *"**buried with Him in baptism**"* (Cl 2:12). But we are also *"**raised with Him** through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"* (Cl 2:12). In baptism, **we have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus**. We have obeyed the gospel.

Is obedience to the gospel important? Absolutely! 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 states that every person must obey the gospel. In the future, Jesus *"will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels."* He 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."* Paul wrote that those who do not obey the gospel *"will be punished with everlasting destruction."* So is it important to **obey the gospel** of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection? Peter asked a question that every person must answer. *"For the time has come that judgment begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us, **what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God**?"* (1 Pt 4:17). You know the answer.

In pleading with people to restore Christianity, nothing could be more clear than a plea to preach the gospel and call on all men to obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This is why there is so much in the New Testament about baptism, for in baptism one obeys the gospel (See At 2:31-47; 8:5-13; 8:26-40; 9:10-19; 10:24-48; 16:13-15,25-35; 18:8; 19:1-5).

If we cannot restore the preaching of and obedience to the gospel, then any efforts for unity in restoration are useless. Any struggle to be the one church of the New Testament is futile. **Any church that is built on any other foundation than obedience to the gospel is the result of men who have preached other gospels and other means of salvation** (See Gl 1:6-9). It is for this reason that we *"stand fast in one spirit, **with one mind striving together for rthe faith of the gospel**"* (Ph 1:27).

Begin A Restoration Of Christianity In Your Community

We look forward to the finality of the restoration of all things when Jesus comes again. Until that time, however, we cry out for repentance and obedience to the gospel. In Acts 3 Peter cried out to the people, *"Therefore, repent and be converted so that your sins be blotted out, **in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord**"* (At 3:19). Not only did repentance and conversion through obedience to the gospel identify the "times of refreshing," but such on the part of man also laid the foundation that God *"**send Christ Jesus**, who was before appointed for you, **whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things** that God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"* (At 3:20,21).

Since Jesus had already come in the flesh at the time Peter made the preceding statement, reference was to the time when Jesus would come again. The heavens had already received Jesus when He ascended in a cloud some time before Peter made the statements of Acts 3 (At 1:9,10; see Daniel 7:13,14). Jesus is now in heaven reigning at the right hand of God (Hb 8:1). He will remain there until He comes again in a cloud to take vengeance on those who know not God, and do not obey the gospel. The present "times of restoration," therefore, will continue until Jesus comes with His mighty angels at the end of these times (1 Co 15:26-28; 2 Th 1:6-9). These are the times in which all things must be restored to God's original plan for all men. It is a time to call all men back to God, back to His will. And in order for men to be restored to the will of God, they must repent and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since there are so many people in the bondage of religion, it is our great opportunity to preach the gospel of freedom. This was the message that Paul preached in Galatia. Unfortunately, there were some in the religion who wanted to take the newly born disciples back into the bondage of the religion of the Jews. This stimulated the writing of the letter of Galatians. In this letter Paul made a statement in reference to religion that we must never forget: *"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). Religion is a yoke of bondage. Millions throughout the world today are entangled in religion. It is the gospel of grace that set people free from religion. Therefore, we have a great opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus to a world that is entangled in the bondage of religion. We have the message of freedom for the captives.

If we are not motivated by the gospel that sets people free, then it may be that we are ourselves entangle in religion. Some say that one religion is just as good as another. And certainly they are right. But religion is not as good as gospel, for there is an inherent antagonism between gospel and religion. Religion brings people into the bondage of the heritage of their religious fathers. Gospel sets men free in order that we be brought into the servanthood of King Jesus..

Book 35

Worship God

We live in a religiously confusing world wherein people have created every imaginable concept of some god that they worship. Because many have rejected the word of God, and yet seek to worship some invention of their own imaginations, they are left to their own choices concerning who their god would be. Unfortunately, and in the absence of the word of God, they are left to their own intellectual and emotional devices concerning the character and nature of their god. In the absence of any knowledge of the Bible, religious people simply turn to their own imagination and subsequently conclude that there is some "higher power" out there to which they should give reverence. For most, this relegates the created to being the creator of some "higher power" that is fabricated after the religious aspirations of misguided people of faith.

• **Without revelation from God, people create and worship false gods, or no god at all.** Religious people who refuse to be guided by the Bible in their understanding of who God is, leave themselves at a great disadvantage as to how they should express their worship. Apart from the direction of the Bible, they thus devise all sorts of forms and manners of worship, occult rites, rituals and ceremonies. Occultism is the result of religious people who have little or no regard for the Bible. Spiritism (or, spiritualism) is the fanaticizing of spirits and beings people suppose wander among the living in this world. Those of the occult and spiritualistic religions thus invent every sort of ritualistic meditation or worship that is pleasing to themselves in order to appease conjured up spirits.

This is the world in which we live. It is a world that is misguided by the zealous religionists who would seek to lead people after their own religious inclinations rather than the word of God. On the other hand, those who are guided by the word of God know better. This small remnant of faithful believers call all people of the world to come to a knowledge of the God of the Bible in order that they might worship Him in spirit and in response to the truth of the gospel. Of this remnant, the Holy Spirit declared,

> ***You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house,***
> ***a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God***
> ***through Jesus Christ.***
> (1 Peter 2:5)

This one statement of the Holy Spirit explains the nature of all Christians. They are the holy priesthood of faith. And thus in a world of innumerably created gods, they are spiritual beings trapped in clumps of dust, yearning to pour out their hearts in worship to their Creator. *"Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name"* (Hb 13:15).

There is no prescription for worship. There is no command in the Bible to worship. What is commanded is who to worship. Worship is simply inherent in the nature of those who are people of faith. And since we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:26,27), this simple fact means that it is natural for the created to worship their Creator, the only true and living God. In fact, it is unnatural if the created do not worship the Creator.

From the very beginning of time when God first breathed into Adam the breath of life, Adam became a worshipful being. God put within Adam that which would naturally turn him to worship the One who gave him his first breath. Adam's worship, therefore, was not programmed, commanded, or reduced to acted out rituals. It was simply innate in his spiritual nature that was in the image of God.

It is the same with us today. It is only natural for us, who are also created after the image of God, to worship our Creator. Our first definition of worship, therefore, is that **worship involves the response of our spiritual image that is within each of us. Worship spontaneously comes forth from all those who recognize the awesomeness of their Creator**. Worship, therefore, can never be about the worshipers. It is all about the One who created us as worshipful beings. If in any situation worship turns to focusing on those who seek to narcissistically create that which is pleasing to them-

selves, then such worship is no longer true and acceptable to God. It is misdirected worship that fails to bring one to his or her knees in view of the awesomeness of the Creator.

• **People worshiped God before the Bible was written.** Before any verse of written Scripture was given to those who sought to walk by faith, people of faith worshiped God. Before God revealed any sacrificial expressions of worship, there was worship. And we might add that even before the invention of the guitar, there was worship. It is for this reason that worship is not defined by our ceremonial performances and orchestras that we would invent after our own desires and perform according to our own spiritual appetites. Worship is not noise that is generated by pumping noise into our ears or generated through "holy" environments in which one might sit on comfortable pews. It spontaneously explodes from our hearts anywhere and anytime. In these days of the pandemic, we must not forget this.

If there were no written revelation from God, then we would still be worshipful beings. However, without any revelation from God we are prone to invent some system or means by which to express our worship according to our own desires. Being human leads us to invent systems of worship that please the creature rather than the Creator.

There has never been a civilization discovered that has not had some form of religiosity and worship of either spirits or beings greater than the worshiper. Before the inscription of the first pages of Scripture that came forth from the hand of Moses, God's people were guided through the instructions of the patriarchs (Hb 1:2,3). In this way most people of faith were protected from wandering off into idolatry. However, in those cultures of people who rejected the guidelines of the patriarchs, misguided worshipers created in their minds all sorts of evil (Gn 6:5), and subsequently worshiped the creature rather than the Creator (See Rm 1:21-25).

We were created to be worshipful beings, and thus, whether right or wrong, we will worship something. Because worship is within our very being, God did not have to implant within us a robotic system to perform certain legal actions that we must do in order to worship Him. Neither did He program us to worship according to prescribed systems or ceremonies. We are sure that Abraham did not invent some stringed instrument before he could worship God. He simply worshiped.

Since worshipful beings without revelation from God often lead themselves to invent religious rites, rituals or ceremonies in order to worship, God had to reveal guidelines that would guard us from worshiping that which we would create after their own imagination. Hand-sculptured idols would always direct the minds of people away from the one true and living God. They would do so because such idols represent the religion of the people who have already forsaken God.

Our problem is that we are free-moral beings who often harbor a spirit of rebellion. We thus misdirect our worship, or worship according to what pleases us emotionally. We become idolaters. We seek to be free from the restrictions of God, but at the same time, we have this innate desire to worship. The result of this inner turmoil within us has been a history of idolatry since the days when someone in our past took that first step away from the true and living God in order to live according to his own rules of worship. And in living according to his own rules, he invented customary rules of worship according to his own desires, and subsequently, passed these religious rites, rituals and ceremonies of worship on to us today. We are now laden with a history of worship performances that we believe we must obey in order to honor our forefathers.

• **We are cursed with spiritual idolatry.** An idolater first creates a god after his or her own self, and then, he or she creates a religion and worship that conforms to the carnal desires of humanity. The idolater first imagines a god who will condone his or her life-style. If one is living in immorality, then he or she will create a god who condones fornication, which thing was common in Greek idolatry, especially worship surrounding the temple of Diana. It was common by the first century that many religions of that time established gods that would supposedly condone the sexual desires of the worshipers.

Nevertheless, from the first step that His people took away from His instructions, God started calling people back to worship Him alone. He sought to turn people away from their own carnal imaginations as to how they should worship a god that they had created after their own lustful desires.

God seeks to always bring us back to be true worshipers (Jn 4:23). In order to direct our restoration to true worship, God has revealed the vanity of humanly invented schemes of worship. In revealing the vanity of such worship schemes, it is God's call to all people of faith to return to worship Him in spirit and truth.

We live in a world of religion wherein denominated religious groups are defined by a confused assortment of worship rituals and ceremonies that are often contrary to the true worship that is defined in the Bible. It is unfortunately assumed by the vast majority of those who call themselves after the name "Christian," that God ac-

cepts all sorts of expressions of worship, regardless of the behavior of the worshiper or his or her beliefs. Unfortunately, such thinking has produced a wide spectrum of what is defined as worship in the religious world today.

At the time when Jesus was incarnate in this world, many of the Jewish religious leaders had created their own systematic theology of worship. Such worship was a part of the Jews' religion (See Gl 1:13). But Jesus referred to their worship as "vain worship" (See Mk 7:1-9). In reference to the idolatrous worship of the Gentiles, Paul used the term "self-made" worship. We would conclude, therefore, that God does not accept all worship, regardless of the sincere emotional outpouring on the part of the worshiper.

• **We must seek acceptable worship.** Simply because something is defined as worship by zealous religionists does not mean that this worship is acceptable to God. We must not forget that God will allow us to blindly perform what we consider to be acceptable worship, but actually we have self-deceived ourselves into believing that our worship ceremonies are true and acceptable to God (See 2 Th 2:10-12). It is not the work of God the Holy Spirit to make us worship correctly. If the Holy Spirit were the origin of our worship, then the worship would be from Him, not ourselves. He would be motivating someone to worship Himself, which thing some people indeed believe. Emotionally chaotic behavior that is passed off as worship is the definition of self-deception. We do not worship a God of chaos, *"for God is not a God of confusion"* (1 Co 14:33). He is a God of order, and thus, in reference to our worship we must *"let all things be done properly and in order"* (1 Co 14:40).

We live in a confused world of worshipers who have created vain and misleading worship that is imposed on millions of sincere people throughout the world. If the Holy Spirit is the author or source of such confusion, then we have accused the Spirit of dividing, rather than uniting, all believers in this matter. Our only escape from this confusion of misguided worship is to identify, or verify our worship in the pages of the Holy Spirit inspired word. When we study the sincere worship of men and women of faith in the Bible, then we begin to understand that our religious world is full of confusion concerning true worship. But when our worship of God is validated by His instructions, we are assured that He accepts our worship. It is only natural for the sons of God to seek His approval in all things that are done in reference to worship. So for this reason, sincere sons of God are seriously into the word of God in order that they not stray from the object of their reverence. Those who are ignorant of the word of God can be assured that their worship is in some ways twisted in reference to what God desires.

In reference to worship, the Bible speaks more of what one should not do in worship, rather than offer a legal prescription for performing worship. The word of God is a guide to keep us away from creating a god after our own imagination, and thus creating worship after our imagined gods. Israel had a historical problem with this because she was influenced by the idolatrous nations around her. We likewise live in a world where we are surrounded by a world of religious gods whose worshipers would deceive us into thinking that we as Christians should worship as they worship their twisted imagination of the God of Heaven. Therefore, we study the Old Testament prophets in order not to be led astray as Israel was led astray. We study our New Testaments in order to understand the true worship that God is seeking from us.

The Bible was not given for the purpose of giving us a legal system of worship by which we would be assured before God that we are worshiping God correctly if we perform certain rites or ceremonies of worship. Revelation was given in order that we first know the one true and living God. And in knowing Him, we, through a knowledge of His revelation to us, will pour out our hearts in worship that is in spirit and truth.

Chapter 1

WORDS ON WORSHIP

The word "worship" refers to giving someone or some thing worth in respect, devotion, reverent love and adoration. Worship can be offered to the imaginations that people have created in their own minds. These imaginations are often formed into a material object that reminds one of some god or spirit that he or she has fabricated after one's self. The Old Testament is filled with numerous examples of those who worshiped the creations of their own minds and craftsmanship of their own hands. In this way, these people were considered by God to be idolatrous in their religiosity. Such examples of idolatry were recorded by the Holy Spirit in order to remind us not to go down that religious road (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

What we first learn from the examples of idolatry in the Old Testament is that we must caution ourselves concerning our own worship. Second, the Old Testament examples of idolatrous worship remind us that not all worship is true and acceptable to God. And since all worship is not true and acceptable, then we are encouraged to seriously check our own worship with the word of God lest we be worshiping some figment of our imagination, or conducting ourselves in worship after the same example of those who formerly were referred to by God as Baal idolaters.

It is for the preceding reasons that we must be diligent Bible students on this subject. Fortunately, there are some key expressions in Scripture that give us a preliminary definition of true worship that comes forth from the heart of those who seek to reverence God in worship:

- *"As the deer pants after the water brooks,* ***so pants my soul after You****, O God.* ***My soul thirsts for God****, for the living God"* (Ps 42:1,2).
- *"O God, You are my God. Early* ***I will seek You****.* ***My soul thirsts for You****.* ***My flesh longs for You*** *in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water"* (Ps 63:1).
- *"****All the earth will worship You*** *and will sing to You"* (Ps 66:4).
- *"My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord.* ***My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God****"* (Ps 84:2).
- *"O come and* ***let us worship and bow down****.* ***Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker****"* (Ps 95:6).
- *"I stretch forth my hands to You.* ***My soul thirsts after You as a thirsty land****"* (Ps 143:6).

Worship is the craving of the soul of man to honor the source of his existence. It is praise and adoration that pours forth from the human spirit in appreciation for the Divine preservation of one's existence. Worship involves veneration and homage, emotion and intellect that instinctively flows from the inner soul of the created for the Creator. It is not something that is ceremonialized through prescribed actions and rituals, but spontaneously offered up by spiritually responsive worship warriors who recognize in their hearts the work of God in their lives.

In our quest to restore true worship in a world that is filled with so much confusion by those who have little knowledge of God and His word, it is imperative that we keep our worship in check by a vigorous study of the Bible. It would only seem logical that those who seek to pour out their hearts to God would naturally seek to base their worship on the foundation of the One whom they would seek to serve. In order to begin our search for true worship, therefore, there are several words in the Bible, both in Hebrew and Greek, that are used in reference to worship.

A. Worship is bowing down before God.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word that is most often used to define worship is *shahah*. The root meaning of this word refers to bowing down. Though not in a context of worship, when in Palestine, Abraham bowed down (*shahah*) to the people of the land, *"even to the children of Heth"* (Gn 23:7). He did so in order to manifest respect and honor.

The word *shahah* was also used in a worship context when Abraham went to the place where he was commanded by God to offer his son. Upon his arrival at the place of offering, he told his servants, *"Stay here with the donkey. I and the lad will go there and worship* [shahah]" (Gn 22:5). In this worship context, the word *shahah* is used to express an inward bowing down of the heart that was manifested by a literal prostrating of the body of the worshiper on the ground. Inherent in the Hebrew word *shahah* when used in a worship context is that the worshiper actually bows down both physically and emotionally. In the Old Testament context where the word is used, the worshiper actually bowed prostrate before the Lord, often on the ground. The worshiper bowed because he had first "bowed down" in his heart.

- *"Then* ***the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord****"* (Gn 24:26).
- *"And* ***I bowed down my head and worshiped the Lord****, and praised the Lord God of my master Abraham"* (Gn 24:48).
- *"Now it came to pass when Abraham's servant heard their words,* ***that he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the ground****"* (Gn 24:52).
- *"****They bowed their heads and worshiped****"* (Ex 4:31; see 12:27).
- *"And Moses made haste and* ***bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped****"* (Ex 34:8).
- *"****And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped****"* (Ja 5:14).
- *"Then Job arose and tore his robe. And he shaved his head and* ***fell down on the ground and worshiped****"* (Jb 1:20).
- *"****O come and let us worship and bow down****.* ***Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker****"* (Ps 95:6).

The word *shahah* expresses the natural reaction of the created toward the Creator. True worship, therefore,

must be manifested in one humbling himself before God, and such humbling is expressed by bowing to the ground. Though one may not always have the opportunity to physically bow down, the bowing down in one's heart is certainly present in the heart of the true worshiper.

The metaphorical application of *shahah* in worship would certainly speak contrary to what is often practiced in some assemblies wherein attendees writhe out of control while being entertained by a "church band." If one does not understand the importance of the preceding Bible statements in reference to reverential worship, then he or she may be having difficulty understanding the response of thanksgiving that one should have for the grace of God. If one is involved in an entertainment assembly, then one's pleasure to be entertained always hinders him from having God as the sole focus of worship. Paul expressed this in the following statement: *"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). It is grace that causes worshipful thanksgiving, not "church bands."

B. Worship is "kissing toward" the Lord.

There are several Greek words used in the New Testament to explain the emotion of worship. The most common is *proskuneo*. This word means "to kiss toward." It is used fifty-nine times in the New Testament and is always translated "worship." Without the prefix "*pro*," the word would simply mean "to kiss."

Proskuneo was an ancient custom of the Persians. They would bow down before and kiss the hand of the king to show respect and honor. The word eventually took on a metaphorical meaning, and thus, the physical action was dropped. When we come to the incarnational Son of God, *proskuneo* was used by Jesus when He explained that the true worshipers (*proskuneo*) would worship the Father in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). True worshipers would "kiss toward" the Father in spirit and truth in order to show awe, respect and honor. In fact, and on one occasion when the disciples finally realized that they were in the presence of One who could command the mighty wind, Matthew recorded, *"Those who were in the boat worshiped* [proskuneo] *Him, saying, 'Truly, You are the Son of God'"* (Mt 14:33).

One can physically bow down as a manifestation of honor without having a heart of worship. However, one cannot have a heart of worship without bowing down and "kissing toward" the King of all things. The soldiers of Pilate's court *proskuneo* (bowed down) before Jesus at the time of His trials, but they did not worship Him (Mk 15:19). An outward physical expression of *proskuneo*, therefore, does not necessarily infer worship. But when people come into the presence of God, it is only natural that they *proskuneo*.

- *"Now when they had come into the house, they* [the wise men] *saw the young Child with Mary His mother.* ***And they fell down and worshiped*** [proskuneo] ***Him****"* (Mt 2:11).
- *"You will worship* [proskuneo] *the Lord your God and Him only will you serve"* (Mt 4:10).
- *"Let all the angels of God worship* [proskuneo] *Him"* (Hb 1:6).

C. Worship is a life-style of reverencing God.

The second most used Greek word in the New Testament in reference to worship is the word *sebomai*. This word is used ten times in the New Testament and refers to reverence, or to considering something with great awe. The original meaning of *proskuneo* emphasized the outward manifestation of worship in bowing down, while *sebomai* focuses more on the inward soul of man and one's response to the awesomeness of the Creator. *"Now a certain woman named Lydia ... worshiped* [sebomai] *God"* (At 16:14). Titius Justus was *"one who worshiped* [sebomai] *God"* (At 18:7; see vs 13; compare At 19:27). It was the nature of Lydia and Titius to worship God. It was not so much something that they did at a particular time, but something they were in their daily lives. They were people of worship. Because they were *sebomai* in their hearts, they *proskuneo* before God daily.

D. Worship is serving in response to the Lord.

The third Greek word that is used in the New Testament in reference to worship is *latreuo*. This word means "to render religious service," "give homage," or simply, "to worship." In the strictest sense of the definition of the word reference is to the worshiper offering gifts or service in response to one's reverence of God. Paul wrote, *"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship* [latreuo] *the God of my fathers"* (At 24:14). *"For we are the true circumcision who worship* [latreuo] *God in spirit"* (Ph 3:3). In both of these contexts, the word *latreuo* could be translated "serve." Because of one's life-style (*sebomai*), he offers service to God (*latreuo*) by serving others. From the use of this word in reference to worship, we have developed the concept of "worship service." This was the thought that Paul sought to convey when he made the following statement: *"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; more later). Instead of "reasonable service," at least one translation reads, "true and proper worship" (NIV).

From the definitions of the words that are used in the Bible in reference to worship, we would conclude that worship is inward, not outward, though worship can be expressed in certain outward actions and behavior, such as bowing down in homage or serving in thanksgiving for the grace of God. Such things as singing and praying are not within themselves worship, but only the outward expressions of an inward appreciation and adoration of God. When one partakes of the Lord's Supper, one's hands and mouth are used in eating and drinking. But partaking of the Supper in eating and drinking is not worship.

No action of the worshiper to express worship is worship in and of itself. If such outward actions did constitute worship, then the worshipers could involve themselves in all sorts of ceremonial acts of worship, and then call the performance of such acts to be worship. It is for this reason that the phrase "acts of worship" can be very misleading. Self-deceived people can convince themselves that they have truly worshiped God after they have legally performed what they consider to be "acts of worship."

For example, one can certainly partake of the Lord's Supper and sing without worshiping. One can help his neighbor by serving his needs without doing so in worship of God. Unbelievers help their neighbors, but they do not do so in worship of God. We must keep in mind, therefore, that one can worship without any outward expressions or actions. Worship is internal, and specifically, individual. Worship pours forth from the heart without necessarily being manifested by any outward behavior in an assembly. The aged crippled widow sitting idle in her rocking chair alone at home can be worshiping truly in her heart. The only evidence of her worship may be a single tear flowing down her face. True worship can take place when one is alone in a closet, or in the presence of an assembly in an auditorium.

Though worship is internal and mental, it often finds its expression in one's behavior. This is the meaning of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:29: *"For he who eats and drinks not discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment to himself."* The problem is that at the same time some in Corinth were externally eating and drinking the Lord's Supper, they had carnal feelings in their hearts. If one eats and drinks with a carnal heart, then he or she is not worshiping. Actions, therefore, can never be the signal of true worship, or even worship itself.

However, worship can be expressed in the behavior of one's life. It is for this reason that external crutches that are used to generate worship in the heart, as physical environments, solemn ceremonies, burning incense, and special sanctuaries, often present a false sense of worship simply because those who rely on such external crutches have often not first given their hearts in worship of God. After the euphoria of the concert, for example, many who are motivated externally to worship are back to their same behavior and life-style Monday morning at the job. They performed a ceremony of acts of worship during the "worship hour" on Sunday morning that did not result from the daily outpouring of an inner worship that they lived every day of their lives. Entertained religionists often experience a momentary mesmerizing euphoria, but true worship does not seek to be entertained, neither does it subside after the "closing prayer." True worshipful hearts exist daily regardless of any external stimuli.

Worshipful saints can bring their spirit of worship together in assemblies. However, if our thinking is that we go to the "hour" and "place" of worship in order to be stirred into worship through performances by ourselves or others, then we have missed the point. Worship must take place in an individual's heart regardless of his or her presence with others, and in particular, before entering into any "place of worship."

Unfortunately, we live in a pandemic time when previously "worship" was too often confined to places, times, ceremonies and entertaining assemblies. It is all now different has millions of believers around the world are confined to their homes, and thus, cannot perform what was previously considered "true" worship. These are times in which believers must dig deep into their own hearts in order to discover hidden treasures of worship that have been buried for years under the rubbish of ceremonial religiosity.

We must never forget that true worship has always characterized the spiritual nature of God's people. True worship has always been poured out from godly hearts regardless of where the believer was when he or she had a moment of inspiration to worship. True worshipers have always worshiped anywhere and anytime. Worship warriors always worship God individually first in their hearts. Worship with others was only a serendipity as believers would come together in a common fellowship with one another, or when two or more believers had the opportunity to be in one anothers' presence. Worship has always existed within the heart of the faithful regardless of any opportunity to be in the presence of others. After all, worship in the lives of godly believers as Enoch, Noah, Abraham and David existed thousands of years before there was such a thing as "Christian assemblies."

Chapter 2

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP

We certainly live in a religious world today of confusion in reference to worship. In the non-Christian world, people seem to worship every imaginable god in every conceivable manner. God created us to be worshipful beings. If one does not know the God of the Bible, then we are driven inwardly to make up some god to worship. For this reason, we would assume that God would reveal Himself to us and how we should worship Him.

And He did. From the very beginning of time, God revealed Himself through the fathers of extended families long before His revelation of Himself came to mankind through the written words of the Bible (Hb 1:1,2). The vast majority of the religious world today, however, have little or no faith in the Bible. As a result, religious people have moved themselves back in history before God offered the gift of written revelation of who He is and how He can be approached in worship. The result of this move is that we now live in a world today that is populated with religious people who neither know God, nor have any desire to study His written revelation in order to discover how He desires to be worshiped.

This would be true also of much of the world of Christendom wherein many assert to be "Christian," but have little knowledge of the word of God. From a Barna Group report that was taken over a decade ago, an interesting point came forth from studies in reference to the religiosity of the American culture: "The Christian Church," the report stated, "is becoming less theologically literate. What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity **are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans ... especially young adults**" (Dec. 13, 2010). Notice the date of this study. The problem concerning a lack of Bible-based faith has progressively become worse in America since the time of the survey.

In their ignorance of the word of God, many "believers" of Christendom of the West would just as soon create worship after their own desires, assuming that the worship they create is pleasing to the God of whom they have little knowledge. As one ventures from one assembly of worshipers to another, he is confronted with an assortment of worship behavior, most of which is questionable in view of the worship that we find revealed in and defined by the word of God.

Simply because someone worships, does not mean that their worship is acceptable to God, especially if they have little knowledge of the gospel. There are too many warnings in the Bible concerning false worship to allow ourselves to be biblically ignorant of the word of God in reference to our own worship. It should be obvious, therefore, that if one claims to be a child of God, then he or she would search the Scriptures in order to guard himself from worshiping after the ordinances of man.

When we study the Bible in reference to worship, we must keep in mind that it is not necessary that we be taught to worship God. Worship is a natural instinct because we were all created after the image of God. In fact, it is actually unnatural not to worship. It is for this reason that the Bible was not given as a legal manual for correct legal ceremonies of worship. From our study of the Bible, we do not learn how to be inspired to worship. We learn **who** to worship, for faithful people worshiped God long before the Bible was produced. When one learns who God is, he or she naturally turns his or her worship toward the one and only true God.

We must mention in this context that in ignorance of the word of God, no one can sluff off his or her worship behavior on the Holy Spirit. In the context of worship, some today often confuse their spirit with the Holy Spirit. This is true because **there is no statement in Scripture that affirms that our worship is to be directed by the Holy Spirit**. If our worship were so directed, then we must conclude that the worship of all believers for thousands of years before the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was somewhat flawed, or misdirected. However, we are not prepared to say that either Noah, Abraham or any of the other Old Testament patriarchs were flawed in their worship because they were not supposedly directed in their worship by the Holy Spirit

At the same time some are affirming that their worship is Holy Spirit-driven or directed, they are quoting the Psalms of David, who at the time of his writing the Psalms, was not directed in worship. Only what he **wrote** in the Psalms was Holy Spirit-directed.

If one feels inadequate today about his or her worship, then the Holy Spirit cannot be blamed. Inspiring worship in our hearts is simply not the work of the Holy Spirit. If it were, then certainly the Holy Spirit must be confused because of the tremendous diversity of worship behavior that is witnessed today in assemblies throughout the world. And if it is the work of the Holy Spirit to inspire worship, then we would question why He does not do so equally among all the assemblies of the saints.

One must not become confused in understanding the assembly text of 1 Corinthians 12 - 14. In the context, prophecy was not an indication of Holy Spirit-inspired worship, but Holy Spirit-inspired teaching of the word of God for the edification of the assembly. Since there were no Bibles in those days among the churches, Paul and the other apostles had to lay hands on selected individuals in order that the word of God be taught among the disciples (See At 8:18; Rm 1:11).

Likewise, "tongues" (languages) was also not an indication of Holy Spirit-inspired worship. It was an indication of Holy Spirit-inspired guidance in speaking another language in order that everyone in the socially mixed Corinthian assembly could understand what was being said. To assert that either prophecy or languages were manifestations of Spirit-inspired worship is to miss the entire practical meaning of what Paul was addressing in the contexts of 1 Corinthians 12 - 14.

As will be discussed latter, there is such a thing as vain worship (Mt 15:8,9) and self-made worship (Cl 2:20,23). There is worship that is focused on the creature rather than the Creator (Rm 1:18-32). Because there is worship that is not acceptable to God, sincere believers should be driven to know the true worship that is acceptable (Jn 4:23,24). The only way one can possibly understand who to worship, is to discover the one true and living God who is revealed in the Bible. **Anyone who does not accept the Bible as the word of God, therefore, cannot worship acceptably the God of the Bible**. Though the one who is ignorant of the word of God will worship, he is never sure that his worship is acceptable to God simply because he does not know the God of the Bible.

The devout Cornelius of Caesarea *"always prayed to God"* (At 10:2). An angel eventually appeared to him and revealed to him that *"your prayers and alms have come up for a memorial before God"* (At 10:4). We must keep in mind that this Cornelius, though a Gentile, was living in a culture wherein the true God of Israel was distinguished from the idol gods that were worshiped throughout the Roman Empire.

Throughout the Empire, however, and in their ignorance of the word of God, idolaters worshiped the sun, moon and stars, and numerous other imaginations of men. Some worshiped angels, or gods they assumed controlled fire and seas. But it is as the angel instructed John when John bowed down before him, *"Worship **God**"* (Rv 19:10; 22:8,9). John was not instructed to worship. That he was already doing after being overcome by the visions that he experienced. He was instructed by the angel **who** to worship. Jesus even reminded Satan, *"You will worship the Lord your God and Him only will you serve"* (Mt 4:10).

In the Old Testament we have recorded history of how people worshiped the gods of Baal, Molech and a host of other imagined gods the people had created after their own creativity. All such worship was misdirected, and thus, it was worship that was unacceptable to God. In fact, the prophets chided the people for worshiping the man-made images of their imagined gods (See Is 2:8; 10:10,11; 44:9-20; 45:20; Jr 2:28; compare 1 Kg 18:17-46).

Worship in its purest form is revealed by God in His word. Since there is no other Creator, then certainly the One who created all things would be the One who should be worshiped by the created. It is for this reason that philosophies as evolution destroy man's desire to worship God. If we were not the result of a creating God, then we could conclude that we have no inward desire to worship a Creator. When humanists stop worshiping the Creator, they start worshiping the creation (See Rm 1:18-32).

Since God revealed that imagined gods are false, and thus the worship of them is unacceptable, then we conclude that there is an acceptable way to worship God. It is the task of those who claim to be believers in the one true God to discover acceptable worship. Since God is our Creator, then we would correctly concluded that He has the right to be worshiped according to His instructions, not according to our carnal worship inventions.

Chapter 3

IN SEARCH OF TRUE WORSHIPERS
(Part 1)

When the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus outside the village of Samaria, Jesus' conversation with her eventually led to a very profound statement in reference to worship. Jesus said,

> *"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**. **God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth**"* (Jn 4:23,24).

Since Jesus said, *"for the Father seeks such to worship Him,"* we must conclude that the Father is on a search for "true worshipers." It is significant to notice that His search is for individuals, not for ceremonies or acts that the true worshipers might perform in worship of Him. Therefore, the focus of the Father's search is for worshiping people, not legal ceremonies of worship.

In the context of the John 4 statement, Jesus generally defined the people for whom the Father seeks. These are those who worship in spirit and in truth. Worship in spirit is based on the simple fact that God is spirit. The obvious conclusion to this fact is that God is not seeking the mechanical inventions, sanctuaries, or legal forms of ceremonial performances of what we might consider to be worship. All such things originate from the material world that was created. The Creator, therefore, did not create instruments or physical environments by which, or in which, He would be worshiped. Therefore, regardless of the ingenuity of people to invent or perform according to man's hands, God who is spirit, cannot be worshiped with that which is the result of His creation. Nothing mechanical or material that is of this world, therefore, can be used to worship Him who is not of this world. Only that which is after the image of God—the spirit of man—can offer worship to the Father of our spirits (Hb 12:9). Therefore, God seeks for those who connect with Him in worship through the spirit.

At the risk of being redundant, it is erroneous for one to claim to use something of this physical world in order to worship God who is spirit, and thus, not of this world. God did not create a physical world of instruments with which He expects those who worship Him to use in their worship of Him. On the contrary, He created after His image the spirit that is within man. It is with the medium of this spirit that He seeks to be worshiped. Therefore, in our efforts to understand how to worship God in spirit we must lay aside all presumptions that we can use something of this world in order to worship the God who is not of this world. Unless we can break ourselves away from the confines of the physical world, we will never connect with the Father of our spirits.

All aids or environments one might create in order to generate a worshipful spirit within himself are of no value in worshiping our God who is spirit. Stain glassed windows, curtains and candles, and the sound of organs, guitars and drums mean nothing to God. In His search for true worshipers, God is not listening for the noise of pianos or looking through stained glass windows in order to hear or discover worshipful hearts. Being in existence in spirit, He is unconcerned with material creations that are the product of our hands. This is the very point that Paul made to the idolatrous worshipers of Athens:

> *"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*** [sanctuaries]. ***Nor is He worshiped with men's hands*** [idols and instruments] ***as though He needed anything*** [from man], *since He gives life to all, breath and all things"* (At 17:24,25).

Understanding this one profound statement of Scripture is enough to convince us that **any efforts on our part to worship God with the inventions of our hands cannot be acceptable to God**. This means that all handmade mechanical inventions, elaborate building structures, "holy" images, incense, decorated sanctuaries, or anything that is the product of our hands, cannot be used to worship God. Such things may be used to produce an elaborate atmosphere wherein people seek to praise God. But we must never forget that we are to worship God through the medium of our spirit, not via something that is the product of our hands. We must also not forget that the One who gives life to all cannot be worshiped by that which has no life.

Praise and worship are not the same, though in our worship we can praise God. However, when we say, "praise the Lord" before the unbeliever, we are giving a testimony concerning our faith. We are not moving into a state of worship before the unbeliever before whom we have personally testified that our God should be glorified in all things.

Praise can be offered to God before unbelievers, but our praise of God does not take the place of our worship. This helps us to understand what David wrote in Psalm 150:

> *Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet. Praise Him with the psaltery and harp. Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes. Praise Him on the loud cymbals. Praise Him on the high sounding cymbals* (Ps 150:3-5).

Now consider the ability to offer such praise to God with mechanical inventions. Remember that all the "noise" that is produced by the instrument is not for God, but for ourselves. God is not deaf. Since every person can worship, not every person can praise God with the skill of using a trumpet, harp, timbrel, flute or stringed instrument. Since such instruments can be used in pagan rock concerts, then there is no inherent spiritual meaning in such instruments, or their inherent noise. If one were to use such in praise of God, then the melody of the instruments is only the expression of the one who plays. There is no praise inherent in a flute.

Worship of God in spirit is the foundation of Paul's

statement in Ephesians 5:19. In the spirit of song, we speak vocally to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Paul wrote that in this form of communication to one another, we are also *"singing and making melody **in your heart** to the Lord."* The one who is using physical or mechanical inventions to express worship must realize that God does not consider such material inventions to inherently take the place of one's heart, nor is He impressed with any of our worship ceremonies wherein the atmosphere is as a rock concert. In the statement of Ephesian 5:19, Paul wanted to remind his readers that God is listening to the hearts of those who are using the instrument of their voices to communicate praises to Him.

God is thus worshiped with hearts, not with harps. Unfortunately, in many situations the harps have turned into an orchestra or band with amplifiers that drown out both the communication of the saints with one another in song, as well as taking the place of voicing words of praise in spirit to God from the melody of our hearts. God can certainly hear the melody of the hearts above the obnoxious clanging of the mechanical instruments, but it is questionable whether the worshipers can accomplish audible speaking to one another through song when the worshipers cannot hear one another because of the clamor of the instruments that are amplified through rock concert amplifiers.

We must keep in mind also that David's reference to musical instruments in Psalm 150 was not used in reference to an assembly context. David was alone when he offered up the music of an instrument. There was nothing equivalent to a "Christian assembly" among the rural Jews of Palestine. Their use of instruments in praise was individual. No Jew played his instrument for an audience in an assembly.

Worship in spirit involves both attitudes and motives in the heart of the worshiper. It is worship that is motivated by a sincere desire on the part of the worshiper to give homage to the Creator of our spirit. Handmade inventions as mechanical instruments, sanctuaries, idol images and incense have nothing to do with worship that pours forth from one's heart.

Worshipers today may have become inept at stirring worship in their hearts without the aid of something that appeals to their own senses. But true worshipers are not spiritually handicapped with physical things, and thus, they are not in need of any empirical crutches to generate an atmosphere or spirit of worship. True worship in spirit is spontaneous. It is individual. It comes from the naked heart of a gospel-obedient saint and is poured out individually and directly to one's Creator and Savior. It does not depend on an environment in which one is or the sound that comes to his ears, or the images presented before his eyes, or the aromas that appeal to the senses of his nose. True worshipers worship because they respond to who God is, and thus they communicate in worship to Him in spirit.

- God is spirit, and thus, one must worship Him in the holiness of one's spirit (See 1 Ch 16:29; Ps 29:2; 30:4; Is 62:9).
- God is a benevolent spirit, and thus, those who worship Him must worship with a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving for the gospel of His grace (See Ps 100:1-3; 2 Co 4:15; Js 1:17).
- God as spirit reigns over all things, and thus He must be worshiped with a spirit of reverence and awe (See Is 6:1-5; Rv 1:12-18).
- God is a spirit of wisdom and intelligence, and thus, He must be worshiped with the focus of our mental abilities (See Mt 15:7-9; 22:37).
- God is a spirit that cannot be seen with our eyes, and thus, He must be worshiped in faith (See Ex 20:4,5; 2 Co 5:7).
- God is a loving spirit, and thus, He must be worshiped with a spirit of love for Him and one's fellow worshipers (Mt 5:23,24; 1 Jn 4:8,11,20,21).
- God is a forgiving spirit, and thus, those who worship Him must have a forgiving spirit (Mt 6:14,15).
- God is a fatherly spirit, and thus, He is to be worshiped as a child who trusts in and is dependent upon the Father of our spirits (Mt 6:9; Hb 12:9).

We believe in a God who needs no handmade invention of this world in order to be worshiped by those who are confined to this world. If we would thus seek to worship God, then we must link with Him through our own spirits. We must transcend all that is physical of this world in order to come into the purity of His spiritual nature. The less we encumber ourselves with that which is carnal and physical, the greater we access the mental and spiritual realm wherein we can worship God, our Creator.

Chapter 4

IN SEARCH OF TRUE WORSHIPERS
(Part 2)

Since all that God is is real and true, then certainly if one would approach God in worship, then he would seek to understand the God he desires to worship. We would assume, therefore, that God would reveal the truth of who He is in order that we worship Him in truth. The problem with people and their inventions of worship is that they often become subservient to their religious inventions with which they assume that God is pleased. Consequently, the inventions often take over and the worshipers become servants to their own inventions. This is the spirit and behavior of idolatry.

The idolater creates a god after his own imagination, and then he assumes that his created god seeks to be worshiped with his own creations, as well as his own self-sanctifying ceremonies or acts of worship. The crutches of worship by which the idolater seeks either to perform or to create an atmosphere of worship, is thus presumed to be necessary in order that the worshiper perform his or her worship. The crutches take over and the idolater subsequently cannot worship his or her god without all the crutches. It is for this reason that when the idolatrous worshiper has been restricted from his or her environment of worship, or from performing what is believed to be necessary for worship, the idolatrous worshiper is quite frustrated. As he or she sits at home in confinement, there is a sense of guilt that one is barred from worshiping correctly.

Since God seeks to be worshiped in truth, we would correctly conclude that those who do not know Him would invent their own means by which they would try to worship Him. Those who have little knowledge of the word of God, therefore, submit themselves to a spirit of idolatry. This spirit of idolatry leads them to create gods they can understand and manipulate. Once they have created the god, they then assume that the god they have created in their minds seeks to be worshiped according to their own desires. This was the religious world of the first century into which the incarnate Son of God came, and to which the early evangelists preached the gospel.

Throughout history, people have invented false gods and worshiped that which appealed to their carnal desires. We would assume that this religious culture would also be common among those today who claim to be believers, and yet have little knowledge of the God of the Bible. If one does not believe this, then consider how much fornication (for example, homosexuality) is now accepted in the religious world. The worship of the biblically ignorant, therefore, is filled with misguided immorality that is contrary to the word of God. Unfortunately, those who worship in ignorance have no idea that they are offering ignorant worship.

For example, when we lived in Brazil many years ago, we picked up the local newspaper one day and read the report of how one "Christian" group had taken five or six of the babies of the church group, bound them, and in worship drown them in the sea at the beach. As we reel in horror at such an act, we must take a look at our own efforts to worship God.

It is certainly innate within man to worship. But if our worship is not directed by our knowledge of who God is, then we will invent rituals, systems and ceremonies of worship according to how we believe our imagined god is to be worshiped. Those who have had a history of spiritism, voodooism and animistic spirits in their culture will often bring their former beliefs into the context of Christianity. They will thus worship God according to their former religious culture, not according to the directions of the word of God.

From what Jesus said in John 4:23,24, we would assume that any worship that is not based on what God considered to be "the truth" is not acceptable to God. It is for this reason that not all worship is pleasing to God. Simply because one worships, does not mean that his worship is inherently pleasing to the God of the Bible.

It is not that God has prescribed a legal formula for acceptable worship. Worship "in truth" is not following a supposed scriptural form of worship. If God had prescribed expressions or acts of worship that must legally be carried out in order to validate one's worship, then we would eventually conduct such expressions or acts as a religious ceremony with no worshipful spirit at all. It is unfortunate that once people legalize acts or performances of worship, they then use their acts of worship to make judgments of others who do not act accordingly. They presume that others are not worshiping God according to the "biblical" and legal ceremony of worship.

This does not mean, however, that we cannot discover in the pages of the word of God expressions of worship that were carried out by faithful people of God. The expressions of worship of many in the Bible was what they offered according to the instructions of God,

such as, animal sacrifices. Others simply fell to the ground in worship, offering nothing and performing no acts of worship.

It is interesting to note that when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, the servant worshiped when he perceived that Rebekah presented herself at a well to give him water and water for his camels. All this transpired in fulfillment of a servant's prayer to God (Gn 24:26). In his worship, he offered nothing. It was worship in thanksgiving of what God provided (See 2 Co 4:15). He simply worshiped when he perceived the providential work of God to provide a wife for Isaac. He worshiped in thanksgiving that God answered his prayer to accomplish his mission for his master (Gn 24:12).

When one seeks to be true in heart to God, then he will worship God in response to the truth of the gospel. Being true to God means that one's life is given to God as His servant. We are servants to God, not in word, but in deed and truth (1 Jn 3:17). Through godly living, we thus seek to live as expressions of worship to our God. We are thus inspired as God's sons to live in service to all men (Gl 6:10).

Therefore, it is imperative that God reveal Himself in order that our worship be in response to the truth of the gospel. So it is as Paul wrote that God *"desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of **the truth**"* (1 Tm 2:4). If we are to worship God in truth, then we must have a knowledge of this "truth."

It may be surprising to many to know that "the truth" is not a selection of favorite scriptures that legally define some system of worship. "Coming to a knowledge of the truth" is not learning more Bible, but using the Bible to learn more about "the truth." In the Bible we learn "the truth" of the incarnate Son. Jesus explained, *"I am the way, **the truth**, and the life"* (Jn 14:6).

"The truth" is not the word of God. For Christians today, it is the medium through which we learn **who** the truth is. It is Jesus who is the truth through whom we seek to know the God who seeks our worship. The Bible is *"the word of the truth of the gospel"* (Cl 1:5). Therefore, if we would come to a knowledge of the truth, then we must understand and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have not obeyed the gospel are destitute of the truth of the gospel (1 Tm 6:5). On the other hand, gospel-obedient people worship in response to the gospel. This is the grace that inspires their worship (2 Co 4:15).

The obvious conclusion to this point is that **all worship of God that does not go through, or not is inspired by the incarnate Son of God as the truth, is false worship**. When Jesus said that He was the way, the truth and the life, He was saying that if anyone seeks to approach the Father, they must go through Him. Jesus continued, *"I am the door. **If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved**"* (Jn 10:9). *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out"* (Jn 15:6). Therefore, Jesus said, *"I have come as Light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness"* (Jn 12:46). Except through Jesus, there is no other door through which we can enter in worship into the heavenly sanctuary of the Father.

Our lives are given in response to the gospel of Jesus. In this way, our lives are given in worship. Romans 12:1 is a key passage that opens a door concerning the worshipful abiding of the Christian in Jesus Christ:

> *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**.*

The Greek word *latreuo* that is used in this verse is here translated "service," as it is also translated in Romans 9:4. The root meaning of the word is simply "service." In quoting Romans 12:1, some have assumed that all that we do is worship. This view has been assumed from adding statements as 1 Corinthians 10:31: *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the **glory** of God."* Paul likewise wrote to the Colossians, *"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). Those statements would include worship, but both focus on a life-style that is in the name of Jesus for the glory of God.

There is a difference between worship and service, though some service may be offered in worship of God. For example, we clean our houses every day. The cleaning of our houses is only our duty, since we do not want to live in a dirty house. We do not clean our houses in worship to God. However, if we clean our houses, it can be to the glory of God. Paul wrote in 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."* Because of the overwhelming grace of God that we realize in our own lives, we may be moved to clean houses in service to the needs of others.

When we understand the mercy of God, it is only reasonable that we serve Him by serving others. In the true sense of the phrase "worship service," we have worshiped God in serving one another. The life of the disciple of Jesus is thus full of worship service, though not all the service that one might perform is worship.

A form of the word *latreuo* (*latris*) is used both in

reference to service to God and men. A hired servant (*latron*) simply works for men. However, as a servant (*latron*) of God, we have given our lives in service to God (See At 24:14; Hb 12:28). This thought would be complemented by Paul's statement of Colossians 3:17. This would be the lifetime nature of the reasonable service of Romans 12:1. One gives himself in lifetime service to God, but is not always in a continual mental state of worship throughout his lifetime.

We would question the teaching that worship in truth is a ritualistic system that is defined in Scripture and legalistically performed. If we set out on a theological course to discover in Scripture such a supposed legal system of worship, and are honest with ourselves, then we will find ourselves to be inconsistent and often frustrated. We will find ourselves as a brotherhood divided as each Bible student comes forth with a greater or lesser number of acts or ceremonies of worship. We do not think that God would so frustrate the universal body of Christ.

We do not think that God would leave His people to their own deductive intellects in order to determine a supposedly true system of legal worship. If one's worship is validated as true by a legal system of worship performances, then the newborn Christian is at risk until he discovers the correct actions to perform in order that his worship be true. If we can only understand this one point in reference to worship, then we will confess what irrational humbugs we often become when we go to war with other religious groups over those things we propose to be correct performances of worship.

True worship is not validated by the legal performance of a worship system. When Abraham left his three servants, he went with Isaac to a place to worship alone with his son (Gn 22:5). When the child of David died, David washed himself, changed his clothes, and went alone to the house of the Lord and worshiped (2 Sm 12:20). These and many other worshipers in the Bible did not seek to worship by legally performing some ritual in order that their worship be true.

We must keep in mind that worship is simply vertical, that is, it is directed to God. It is individual, for it is individuals who pour out their hearts vertically to their Creator. When people feel inspired and thankful to God, they worship. When any of God's children seek to live true to their God, they worship in response to the truth of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus. If a saint is alone in a desert, he can worship without any mechanical crutches and without performing any acts of worship.

It is erroneous to assert that true worship is bound to or confined to the physical crutches of one's environment or ritualistic performances. In fact, unless one can strip himself of all the modern performances, electronic gear, and sanctuaries wherein people seek to stimulate themselves and "practice" worship, he will never learn the spirit of spontaneous worship in the solitude of being alone with God. If one seeks to learn to worship again, he should look for a desert. That is where God sent great men as Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist and Paul in order that they connect with Him in worship. If one cannot find a desert, then look for a closet (Mt 6:6). There are no mechanical inventions in deserts and closets. There are no rituals or acts of worship to perform. One is simply alone with God in the solitude of an environment that is void of any distractions.

One cannot worship God in response to the truth of the gospel unless he worships God in spirit, for all that was accomplished through the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection deal with spiritual matters. As a child seeks to obediently respond to a loving father, so the obedient saint responds in a worshipful spirit to the Father who loved him or her through the giving of His only begotten Son. This is the true essence of one's individual worship of His Creator and guiding Father. In order to discover again the joy of simple worship of God, one must present himself to God in the simplest manner possible. Therefore, find a desert, or place of solitude in order to find God.

Chapter 5

WAYWARD WORSHIP

As our creator, God is the Father of our created spirit that is within every human being (Hb 12:9). It is our natural instinct, therefore, to worship because we have been created after the spiritual image of God. It is for this reason that there are no commands in the Bible to worship. There is no need for a spirit-filled son to be commanded to pay homage to the Creator of his spirit. All commands in the Bible are in reference to Whom we must direct our worship, and how He seeks to be worshiped. The Who and how instructions are in the Bible

because mankind has throughout history gone astray in knowledge in reference to the only one true and living God. The spirit of idolatry has prevailed upon the earth from the beginning.

In the absence of a knowledge of who God is, people will seek out some object or some spirit to worship. God said the following of His people Israel when they were in a state of ignorance of His word:

> *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, 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).

It was not that Israel became irreligious. On the contrary, they remained religious, but they forgot the inspired dictionary that explained the God who had delivered them from Egyptian captivity. They subsequently created religious beliefs that would conform to their own desires. And once they had created such religious beliefs after their own desires, it was only natural for them to create gods who would condone their unrighteous behavior. No idolater wants to believe in a god before whom he must eventually give account.

We could say the same of many today who have either forgotten the inspired dictionary (the Bible), or who desire to have no knowledge of His revelation to mankind. Because these modern-day idolaters are worshipful beings, they create worship after their own inventions. Muslims and Hindus do not believe in the God of the Bible. Both Jesus and the New Testament evangelists, as they went forth into all the world, encountered such people in the first century. Our study of these encounters motivates us to look to ourselves and those around us in a religious world in order to determine the true worshipers of God today. In looking around, the only standard we have to judge whether we are idolatrous, is the word of God. Therefore, before we make any judgments concerning the faith of others in reference to the God in which they believe and worship, we must first consider ourselves. There are three contexts in the New Testament that clarify this matter. All three are encounters that Jesus and the early disciples had with religious people as the gospel went forth into all the world.

A. Vain worship:

The word "vain" means useless. When associated with the word "worship" it would refer to worship that is useless in accomplishing the purpose for which God seeks, that is, worship that is pleasing and acceptable to Him. The historical encounter of Jesus with the religious leaders of His day is the only context in which Jesus used the phrase "vain worship." The record of this encounter is found in both Matthew (15:1-9) and Mark (7:1-9). The following points that these two inspired recorders made in reference to Jesus' pronouncement of vain worship is both revealing and definitive:

1. *Binding where God has not bound:* In the context of this encounter of Jesus with the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes observed that the disciples of Jesus did not ceremonially wash their hands when they came from the market place (Mk 7:1-5). The accusation of the religious leaders involved a good practice, but it was simply a religious tradition of the Jewish fathers. **They had religiously bound something on the people that God had not bound**. Their tradition had thus become a religious law, and the opportunity by which they would judge others if this religious rite was not observed.

Jesus' declaration that vain worship involves establishing traditional acts of behavior that have no authority in the word of God, is our first warning concerning our own worship. If we bind on ourselves those things in worship that are of our own invention, then we might find ourselves worshiping God in vain. If we find ourselves arguing with ourselves concerning the performance of any religious ceremony that is not found in the Bible, then we have involved ourselves in the same disputing that the Pharisees and scribes sought to have with Jesus.

2. *Hypocritical behavior:* The occasion of the rebuke of the disciples by the religious leaders presented the opportunity for Jesus to exhort these leaders concerning their behavior and religious traditions, specifically their vain worship. Though the washing of hands, pots and pans would not be considered "worship," either by Jesus or by the religious leaders, the practice of binding where God had not bound in their religious behavior spilled over into their hearts, and thus, their hearts could not offer true worship to God.

The religious leaders could not worship in truth because they were more concerned with their religious life-style of traditions than keeping the commandments of God. Jesus thus referred to them as hypocrites, which reference was both in reference to their behavior and to their worship (Mk 7:6). It is in this context that Jesus quoted Isaiah, whose initial message was directed to the idolatrous nation of Israel that had turned from God: *"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me"* (Mk 7:6; see Is 29:13).

We could paraphrase Isaiah's statement by God to

read, "These people make pronouncements of praise with their mouths, but they live contrary to My will." If one is not true to God through an obedient life-style, then certainly he cannot worship God in truth. Today, **those who refuse to obey the gospel, therefore, worship God in vain. This is true because the appreciative demeanor of one's heart in response to the gospel validates his or her worship before God**.

If one does not respond to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, then certainly his or her worship is in vain in reference to the One who sent His Son into the world. **No matter how zealous and exhausting one's worship may be, if he or she has not responded to the gospel by being buried in baptism with the incarnate Son of God on the cross, then all such worship is useless in the eyes of God** (See Rm 6:3-6). This is not a judgment, but an obvious conclusion to the response that the gospel of Jesus should have on the hearts of people. If the gospel does not generate an obedient response in one's heart to the grace of God, then one cannot acceptably worship the One who revealed the gospel.

3. *Lip worship:* We can understand Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes' "lip worship" in Mark 7:6 by His statement in verse 7. He was connecting their life-style to their worship. "Lip worship" was simply going through the acts of worship, but the worship was purely outward, for their religiosity was based on the doctrines and commandments of men. Their worship, therefore, did not come forth from an obedient heart that sought to pay homage to God. The religious leaders, in their religious behavior, manifested an outward legal worship of self-righteousness that was void of an inner commitment to the commandments of God. Their hearts were far from God simply because they had exalted their religious traditions above the commandments of God. In fact, they rejected the commandments of God in order to obey their religious traditions, and thus establish a foundation for their own self-righteousness.

We are Bible students lest we fall under this same condemnation. We seek to know the God we worship. We can become zealously religious people, but our zeal in religiosity can never validate our worship. We can participate in euphoric worship assemblies, but all such assemblies are vain unless we know and obey the gospel. If such euphoric assemblies did validate ourselves before God, then the zeal of every religious person in the world would be validated in their own ignorance of the One who sent His Son into this world. It is for this reason that God "*desires all men to be saved and* ***to come to the knowledge of the truth*** [of the gospel]" (1 Tm 2:4). Unfortunately, there are those who are "*always learning and* ***never able to come to the knowledge of the truth***" (2 Tm 3:7). There are too many people who "*have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*" (Rm 10:2). In view of this fact in the religious world today, Paul wrote the following:

> *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).

4. *Vain worship:* Because the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes were far from reverence of the will of God, their worship was centered around the traditions of men. Though they performed what appeared to be worship of God, God considered their worship performances to be worthless. We would caution ourselves, therefore, when we approach God in worship, focusing on our zealous worship, but not on the knowledge of His righteousness.

The worshiper must determine if his or her worship is according to what pleases God, or what pleases one's own self. If one seeks to live according to the commandments of God, then his or her worship is not in vain. In the religious world today there are untold numbers of worshipers who advertise their worship as pleasing to God. But if their worship is based on a religiosity that is after the doctrines and commandments of men, then Jesus pronounces their worship to be vain.

5. *Laying aside the commandment of God:* Herein is revealed the cause of vain worship. We have found that many in the religious world today who worship God care little for the word of God. And because millions of worshipers care little for the word of God, they are defensive about their worship. On the other hand, true worshipers are very cautious of the fact that their worship pours forth from a gospel-obedient heart.

In the context of the religious leaders whom Jesus encountered, too many religionists care little for the word of God. They are more concerned about maintaining their religious traditions than in honoring God through a response to the gospel. Jesus' conclusion and application to their worship is obvious. If one has little concern for the commandments of God, then certainly he or she cannot worship God in response to the truth of the gospel. On the contrary, he will lay aside the word of God and carry on worshiping according to his worship traditions.

Those who willingly disregard any response to the gospel of Jesus in their behavior are worshiping God in vain. Jesus concluded, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9). This statement by Jesus is what identified their worship as useless. It is very difficult for some

to worship God, while they carry on with life-styles that are contrary to the will of God. They have constructed a religious behavior after their own heritage, and thus, their search for the will of God is little, if not at the point of rejecting the commandments of God. Their worship tradition after the doctrines and commandments of men is often too strong to ignore in order to discover worship of God in spirit and the truth of the gospel. A religious heritage that is not based on the word of God will not lead one to worship God in truth. A euphoric concert assembly in worship is in vain if those who participate in the assembly have not responded in baptism to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God.

It is necessary to interject here in the context of Jesus' judgment of the Jewish religious leaders. The theology of the Pharisees and scribes concerning self-justification spilled over into their worship. In this case, their self-justification through the religious tradition of washing pots, pans and hands as a religious act of self-justification made their worship vain. Jesus' response to this self-righteous behavior of self-justification in their lives by legally obeying their own religious rites and rituals reflected on their hearts, and thus, their worship of God was not acceptable to God. They came before the Lord with a heart of self-praise because of what they were doing in their lives, not with a contrite heart of appreciation for the grace of God.

If one seeks to establish his or her own system of righteousness wherein one seeks to justify himself through his meritorious works, then he becomes as the Pharisee who prayed, *"God, I thank You that I am not as other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess"* (Lk 18:11). Self-justification through fasting and tithes will not prepare one's heart for worship simply because worship must be generated out of a heart of humility, not arrogance. And herein was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes who brought judgment upon the disciples for not self-justifying themselves through the washing of pots, pans and hands.

B. Self-made worship:

There is a connection between the vain worship about which Jesus spoke in Mark 7:1-9 and the self-made worship about which Paul wrote in Colossians 2:20-23. The connection is that when religious people willingly reject the will of God, they will invent for themselves a worship that is after their own desires. Paul wrote,

> *Therefore, if you died with Christ* [in obedience to the gospel] *from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to* [religious] *ordinances?* ***Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.*** *" All these concern things that perish with the using,* ***after the commandments and doctrines of men****. 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.*

As the religious leaders in the context of Mark 7:1-9, even the Gentiles had legally imposed on themselves religious rites, which rites and rituals were in their religious behavior. Paul's immediate answer to such legal religiosity was not to touch, taste or handle. In other words, when religion digresses to legal obedience of religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, said that we must not go there. Such things profit nothing in reference to salvation simply because they pass away with those who invented them.

In the context of Colossians 2:20-23, Paul did make a statement that should shock all religionists today who would defend the legal religiosity about which he spoke. He stated, ***"These things have indeed a show of wisdom."*** We are reminded of the countless assemblies in Christendom wherein there is an entertaining "show" going on to excite the audience. The band is playing and the stars are performing. Everything presents a show of religiosity and worship, but the show will terminate with the passing of the performers.

True worship can never be a show, for shows are external. They are performed externally in order to excite an audience. Once the show is over, the audience goes home with only the expectation that there will be another show next Sunday morning.

True worshipers never involve themselves in theatrical performances that appeal to the lusts of the ears and eyes. In theatrical worship, the actors perform in order to excite the audience, but the audience is not participating in the show itself. The show makes them an audience. The supposed wisdom of the self-made religious performances may appeal to the senses of the audience, but we must not confuse such with worship. This is the deceptive nature of religious theatrics that are performed by a select few for the entertainment of an audience. It is not wrong to be entertained, but we must always keep in mind that entertainment is about us. We cannot entertain God with our worship performances. Worship is totally about God. In true worship, therefore, only God is the audience.

Self-made religion is a show for man, not God. As Paul inferred, such worship is of this world. Some translations use the term "self-imposed" worship in the Co-

lossians 2:23 passage. "Show religion" is religious behavior that the performers impose on themselves in order to demonstrate their religiosity before others. Such is vain worship, for it is man-invented and man-performed. It is external. It is not wrong to be entertained in a religious context with spiritual singing. However, we must understand that a performance for entertainment is not worship for the audience. Too often the performers in the show are seeking the "worship" of the audience. We might assume that God is being worshiped while we are being entertained, but in entertainment our minds are too often focused on the entertainers, not on God.

Though the context of Colossians 2:20-23 is not specifically in reference to religious entertainment, we would caution ourselves about becoming involved in religious behavior that hypocritically gives the impression that we are worshiping God, when actually we are "touching," "tasting" and "handling" a self-made religion that pleases ourselves. We must keep in mind what Paul said, that entertaining performers may put on a good show, but it is according to the commandments and doctrines of men. Once the performers are gone, the show is over.

True worship of God is never over when the performers fade away behind the curtain of death. They only continue their worship in the presence of God.

> *The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. And they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and because of Your will they were created and have their existence"* (Rv 4:10,11).

There is no show business in heaven.

One might ask if it is wrong to motivate an audience with teaching through spiritual songs. In view of the mandate of Paul in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the answer would be that teaching through song is a medium through which the people of God edify one another. Paul instructed that teaching be accomplished through song. Singing to one another does not always mean that everyone assembled is to sing at the same time. There are those who have been blessed with beautiful voices who can minister exhortation and encouragement through song.

If we discourage the vocally gifted not to minister in song, then we would be denying them the right to use their God-given gift to minister to others by teaching in song. As a preacher with the gift to speak has the right to use his gift to minister through vocal teaching, so the gift singer has the right to use his or her vocal gift to minister in teaching through song. As the preacher is not entertaining through his teaching, so the singer is not entertaining through his or her teaching by song.

C. Ignorant worship:

The worshipers that Paul encountered in Athens were not like the religious leaders Jesus encountered during His ministry. The Jewish religious leaders had received the oracles of God (Rm 3:2). They had a history of God working among them. However, they rejected the commandments of God in order to keep their traditions, and by doing such, they brought vain worship before God.

Those whom Paul addressed in the Colossians 2 context were seeking to manifest their religiosity by that which gave a presentation of worship, but actually, it was also self-imposed religious behavior after the religious inventions of men. Now in the context of Acts 17, Paul encountered those who had no revelation from God concerning who He was or how He was to be worshiped. They were thus worshiping unknown gods they had created after their own imagination. And because they were worshiping the creation of their imaginations, they had imposed on themselves self-made worship.

Paul stood up on the Areopagus in Athens and proclaimed to all these Greek idolaters,

> *Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things* ***you are very religious****. For as I passed by and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with this inscription, '****TO THE UNKNOWN GOD****.' Therefore, the One whom you* ***worship in ignorance****, Him I declare to you* (At 17:22,23).

The Greek Athenians had crafted many idols with their hands that portrayed the gods they had created in their minds. However, they were wise enough to understand that if the gods they created after their own thinking behaved according to their thinking, then their created gods were actually no greater than their thinking. They concluded, therefore, that there must be a God beyond the imagination of men. In coming to this conclusion, they fashioned an idol to "The Unknown God" just in case they offended Him if they did not offer Him worship. This "unknown God" was the true and living God they could not create in their imagination, but the God of which they were ignorant. Their worship of this God, therefore, was in ignorance, for they had no revelation from Him.

The Athenians were knowledgeable philosophers

who reasoned that there must be a true God of the universe. They concluded what Paul assumed all men should conclude from those things that have been created.

> *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).

From the wonder of the natural world, Paul stated that one should conclude that there is a Creator. A design presupposes a Designer. Since something cannot come from nothing, then Something has always existed. The honest worshiper, therefore, would seek for revelation from the Designer, the Something that brought all things into existence. Worshipful men, therefore, who are honest in their worship of the "Unknown God," will seek revelation from this God. Paul revealed this God to the Athenians. Through the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, this same God is revealed today. Those who are ignorant of the gospel will continue in their ignorant worship. However, it is incumbent upon all people of faith that they should grope after the one true and living God in their worship. Paul exhorted the Athenians,

> *And He has made of one man all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth ...* ***so that they 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 17:26,27).

From the statements that were made by Scripture in reference to vain, self-made and ignorant worship, we would conclude that none of these are acceptable to God. It is necessary, therefore, that all men seek out the word of God and read concerning how God would be worshiped in spirit and truth. Those who are held in bondage to their own self-made religiosity might not begin this search. Those who are satisfied with the gods they have created in order to appease their own self-imposed religiosity will likewise not search the word of God for correction and guidance in matters of worship. Few who are satisfied with their own self-imposed religiosity will search for both the God of the Bible, and how God would have all men come to Him in worship through spirit and the truth of the gospel of His Son. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that God judges some worship to be vain and self-made, sincere believers should make every effort to discover worship that is acceptable to God. This worship is discovered only in the revelation of the God who seeks our worship.

Chapter 6

WALKING WITH TRUE WORSHIPERS

We live in a religious world where people of faith have invented every sort of religious behavior, from which springs every imaginable expression of worship. In the worship of non-Christian religions, worship is centered around self-imposed meritorious religious ceremonies by which people seek to justify themselves before their gods. In reference to Christendom, countless worshipers have likewise burdened themselves with a host of meritorious religious rituals and ceremonies that have either hindered, or led them astray into a religious world of self-justification. So we wonder what Jesus would think if He were to step into the assemblies of some of the "worship" assemblies today.

We have allowed our minds and behavior in worship to be influenced by our own inventions and desires. For this reason, that which we would call worship is often a state of mind wherein we are actually aloof, shallow, indifferent, cold, distracted, and in some cases, simply narcissistic. "Worship" is more often about what we want, our feelings, our emotions, our performances. We seek entertainment that we pass off as worship. We have thus invented in modern times a gimmick worship that is focused on either elaborate sanctuaries, organized ceremonies, theatrical performances, or everything combined in a theatrical production that generates the emotional frenzy of a modern rock concert.

We have been in assemblies where people were emotionally overcome, and subsequently lost all control over themselves. We have witnessed those who have rolled in the dirt, cried out uncontrollably, and in some cases, fell into a state of subconsciousness where they were totally unaware of reality. We have experienced vocal puppeteers who pull on the emotional strings of the weak in order to lead them into emotional hysteria in the name of Jesus. We do not view such as worship, but the occult result of those who have lost all reason in reference to sobriety and self-control. Such assemblies have brought shame on the name of Christ by the unbelieving world who often view Christianity as assembled madness.

In this chapter we thought it would be good to go

back in history in order to rediscover those who maintained their senses in their worship of God. In order to do this, we must follow those heroes of faith who poured out their inner souls in worship of God. In taking this walk back in time to faithful worshipers, we can examine ourselves in order to make our own judgments concerning our homage to the God of heaven. We can do as Paul urged the Corinthians: *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves"* (2 Co 13:5).

Since we live in a time of religious history that seems to identify theatrical performances and uncontrolled neurotic episodes as worship, it would be good to allow the Holy Spirit through the pages of inspired words to define for us again the nature, essence, character and behavior of the worshipful believer. Only in this way can we understand the worship that is acceptable to God. We would, therefore, take you on this adventure, pointing out along the way some of the characteristics of true worship. In doing so, we must make some candid contrasts between the theatrical performances and emotionally charged occult assemblies of today in the religious world that are substituted for the true worship we see in the Bible. Our purpose in walking with worshipers through the word of God is to be restore to the simplicity of worship in our efforts to approach our Father with worship that is in spirit and in response to the truth of the gospel.

A. Abraham worshiped:

It is recorded in Genesis 22 where God tested Abraham (Gn 22:1). He asked Abraham to take his only son and offer him as a burnt offering (Gn 22:2). There is no break in the context between the command of verse 1 and the action of Abraham in verse 2. After the command to offer his son, Abraham slept throughout the night. He then arose early the next morning in order to make his way to Moriah, the place where God designated that he offer Isaac. After three days' journey, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place that God had designated for the offering. In verse 5 it is recorded, *"And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey.* ***I and the lad will go there and worship****. And we will come again to you.'"*

They were in the wilderness and far from people. Abraham even asked the two young men who accompanied them to remain where they were, while he and Isaac went a short distance further in order to worship alone. Abraham said to them that he and the lad *"will go there and worship."* We should note that there was no fanfare stirred on the occasion. There was no assembly, no audience, and certainly no performers. Their worship was to be in the quietness of a secluded place. Their worship was to be offered only by the two in the solitude of the wilderness. They would retain their senses in worship, and return again to the servants.

This was a worship of faith on the part of Abraham, for he told the young men, *"**we** will come again."* Abraham indeed would carry through with the command to offer Isaac, for the angel had to stay his hand as he was about to thrust the knife into Isaac. However, the Hebrew Scriptures that the Jews possessed for centuries did not reveal what Abraham believed in reference to resurrection. He believed that if he did administer death to his only son, Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. This belief of Abraham in the resurrection was discovered by the Jews over two thousand years later when the Holy Spirit revealed his faith in the book of Hebrews (See Hb 11:17-19).

In Abraham's worship on the occasion on Moriah, he was giving up something that he dearly loved. He did not come before the Lord empty handed. He would worship by giving up his only son. Isaac was worshiping by giving up his own life. **The purpose behind the command that Abraham offer his only son was that he, and the nation that would come from his loins, should never forget that a Father would indeed in the future give up His only begotten Son**. Though there would be ten thousand angels who stood by and could have stopped the death of the Son of God on the cross, they remained at attention by the command of the Father while the Son of God willingly died that all men might live. This is a gospel matter that should stir worship in our hearts.

B. Abraham's servant worshiped:

On another occasion, Abraham instructed his eldest servant in Genesis 24 to go to the house of his fathers in order to find a wife for Isaac, his son (Gn 24:4). In obedience to his master, the servant took ten camels for all the supplies that he needed for the journey, as well as gifts to give to the one from whom the future wife of Isaac would come (Gn 24:10).

When the servant came to Mesopotamia and to the city of Nahor, he kneeled down by a well of water outside the city. He then bowed down in prayer and asked God to lead him to the woman who would be Isaac's wife. He prayed to God that the damsel from whom he would ask water would be the one for whom he had journeyed. Even at the time he was making the prayer, God was in the process of answering his request, for Rebekah was already on her way to the well (Gn 24:15).

The events that immediately transpired resulted in the fulfillment of all that the servant had asked, and the subsequent accomplishment of his mission from Abraham. Rebekah offered him water and asked to water his camels. When asked concerning who she was, she responded that she was of the house of Nahor. Nahor was from the descendants of Abraham's ancestors.

When Abraham's servant perceived all that happened in response to his mission and prayer, he was overcome, understanding that he was personally experiencing the work of God. *"**Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord**"* (Gn 24:26). His worship was in thanksgiving to God for making his journey successful. His worship was individual and in the presence of Rebekah who certainly did not understand what was happening. His worship came from within his heart when he perceived the providence of God in his life. His worship was personal and directly focused on God. All that we are told concerning his actions was that he bowed down his head. No ceremonies were performed. No assembly was called. He remained in control of his person. His worship was individual and spontaneous. It was a solemn occasion. In all that transpired, he recognized the providential work of God. Those who worship in spirit need only to perceive the work of God in their lives.

C. Israel worshiped:

Before the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian captivity, Moses asked Aaron to gather together the elders of Israel (Ex 4:29). Once they were gathered, Aaron told the elders all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses concerning the deliverance of the nation of Israel. In order to confirm the words, Aaron did signs in the presence of the elders.

> *And when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, **then they bowed their heads and worshiped*** (Ex 4:31; see Ex 12:27).

When the people heard the word of God and perceived that He was working on their behalf, they were moved to worship. When Moses and the elders of Israel were in the presence of God at Mount Sinai, they were to worship (Ex 24:1). When they saw the pillar of cloud at the door of the tabernacle, *"all the people rose up and worshiped"* (Ex 33:10). When people understand that God is working in their lives, they worship in thanksgiving of God's work. It is for this reason that the grace of the gospel causes worshipful thanksgiving in our hearts (2 Co 4:15). Worship results from those who are in awe of God's presence in their lives. Worship results from the teaching of the gospel of God's grace. The act of teaching is not worship on the part of the audience, though the teacher may be worshiping in service of God. The audience would be listening. The teaching of that which the word reveals is what inspires the audience to worship.

D. Joshua worshiped:

In Joshua 5 it is recorded that when Joshua was near Jericho he encountered the captain (angel) of the Lord's army. When the captain revealed who he was, *"**Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped**"* (Ja 5:14). His worship was instantaneous when he recognized that he was in the presence of an angel who represented the Lord. His worship was individual. It did not depend on the presence of others. His worship was not expressed through any rituals or directed by anyone in his presence.

In those times when the saints are barred from assemblies, whether in times of war or pandemics, we must remember these things. As we stated before, there is no context of worship in Scripture where worship is inherently tied to or validated by assemblies. All the heroes of faith in the Old Testament often worshiped alone. Their worship often resulted from something that spontaneously happened in their lives. And since there was no such thing as weekly assemblies, the Israelites worshiped on their farms throughout Palestine.

E. Gideon worshiped:

In Judges 7 Gideon was instructed by the Lord to put together a small band of brave Israelites in order to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon was doubtful of his commission, though the Lord gave a specific sign that He was with him. In order to be reassured of his commission, Gideon took one of his brave young men and ventured secretly at night into the camp of the Midianites.

While listening secretly outside the tent of a Midianite who had a dream, Gideon secretly listened to another Midianite explain the meaning of the dream of his fellow soldier. The dream was that God would deliver the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites. *"**And so it was that Gideon worshiped when he heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation**"* (Jg 7:15). So there Gideon was, in the camp of the enemy, in the middle of the night, quietly with his fellow companion, and he worshiped. His worship was immediate, indi-

vidual, quiet, and in a hostile environment. There was no fanfare, no assembly, no audience, and certainly no noise.

F. The Magi worshiped:

At the time of Jesus' birth, wise men came from the East to Jerusalem (Mt 2:1). They had come from where they lived in order to worship the One they believed was the fulfillment of prophecy (Mt 2:2). *"Now when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother.* ***And they fell down and worshiped Him****"* (Mt 2:11). Their worship was in a house, solemn and poured out because they believed that the newly born babe was the promised Messiah. Again, there was no fanfare, calling for others, or generation of emotional hysteria. Their worship came forth from their hearts in the solitude of the newborn of Son of God.

G. A leper worshiped:

On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus came down from a mountain to a great multitude of people. In the midst of the great multitude, a leper came forth and worshiped Him (Mt 8:1,2; see Mt 9:18; Lk 8:49). Though surrounded by so many people, one individual was able to worship alone in the presence of a multitude of people. He was able to focus exclusively on Jesus in the presence of so many distractions. His worship was not generated by those who were around him, but in spite of their presence. One can worship regardless of those who are around the worshiper. Worship does not depend on the assembly of people. Worship is always individual, regardless of being in the presence of others.

H. A ruler worshiped:

On another occasion during Jesus' ministry, Jesus was in the process of teaching (Mt 9:18). While he was teaching *"a certain ruler came and worshiped Him"* (Mt 9:18). The worship was the result of the ruler's belief that Jesus could heal his daughter. The ruler worshiped in the midst of a multitude who were only listening to the teaching of Jesus. They were not in an "act" of worship as listeners to what Jesus said. Jesus was not worshiping in teaching. But here is this father who came and worshiped in their midst regardless of Jesus' ministry of teaching or the presence of others.

I. The disciples worshiped:

In Mark 6 it is recorded that Jesus walked on water (Mk 6:48). When the disciples beheld the marvelous event, they were terrified and cried out. Jesus reassured them, *"Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid"* (Mk 6:50). They were in the middle of the night and in the middle of a storm at sea. It was indeed a terrifying experience. Matthew recorded that Peter said to Jesus, *"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water"* (Mt 14:28). And so Jesus commanded him. Peter was empowered by Jesus, and thus, he also walked on the water.

Unfortunately, Peter eventually stumbled in his faith as he neared Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus reached forth and grabbed his hand as Peter was going down. They both then walked to and entered the boat with the other disciples. The storm was then calmed by Jesus. There was dead silence all around them. They were overcome by the surreal moment. *"****Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him****, saying, 'Truly, You are the Son of God'"* (Mt 14:33).

Jesus had brought total quietness to the sea. The disciples were alone with Jesus in the quietness of the moment. Because of what they had just experienced, and realizing that they were in the presence of the Son of God who could control the storm, they were inwardly overcome with awe. They were inwardly driven to worship. There was no hysteria, no crying out in remorse or anxiety. We can only imagine the awesomeness they had in their minds concerning Jesus as they quietly bowed themselves to the floor of the boat to the One who had power over the winds and the seas.

J. Reverent believers worshiped:

On one occasion immediately after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples. *"And they came and held Him by the feet and* ***worshiped Him****"* (Mt 28:9). At the ascension, Jesus was carried up into heaven in the presence of the disciples, *"and* ***they worshiped Him****"* (Lk 24:52). When Israel saw fire come down from heaven at the time Solomon dedicated the temple, *"****they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped****"* (2 Ch 7:3). When God reassured Jehoshaphat and the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem that their enemies would not overpower them, they worshiped.

> *And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground. And all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshiping the Lord* (2 Ch 20:18; see 2 Ch 29:29).

From the preceding, and many other occasions

where people worshiped God, there are several things that seem to define worship. Worship is personal and individual. Worship can take place on any occasion and at any time. Worship is certainly not identified by ceremonies and performances. The worshipers simply fell to their knees, or prostrate on the ground when they realized that they were in the presence of Deity (Ps 95:6). When people perceived the providence of God, they worshiped. When people heard the message of the word of God, they worshiped (Ne 9:3). When people experienced the work of God in their lives, they worshiped. Worship came from those who had thankful hearts. Worship was not planned or programmed around any events or confined to any specific locations. Worship was not defined by any performance of actions or ceremonies.

Chapter 7

WORSHIP ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME

As we have stated before, one of the most profound teachings of Jesus on worship during His earthly ministry is found in John 4 where He encountered the Samaritan woman. At one point during the conversion, the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet (Jn 4:19). In order to shift the conversion from her difficult relationship with other men, the woman brought up the subject of locations of worship.

The woman was a Samaritan, which was a mixed race of people who were not true Jews, nor did they worship according to the restrictions of the Jews' religious traditions. As with the Jews, the Samaritan woman referred Jesus to the sacred place of their worship, which was *"this mountain"* (Jn 4:20). She also pointed out that the sacred place of worship for the Jews was Jerusalem. But Jesus changed the conversion to reveal what had always been true in reference to places of worship.

Worship is not about places, but about people. It is not about where, but anywhere. And in reference to the established feast days of the Israelites when they brought their offerings to the tabernacle, and then later to the temple, worship was not about events and ceremonies, but about pouring out one's homage to God at anytime and anywhere. The Jews came into Palestine as farmers, and thus their individual worship of God for blessing them with the land was worship on their farms and in their homes. There was no such thing as a weekly assembly culture for worship written in the Sinai law.

"Woman, believe Me," Jesus responded to the woman, *"the hour is coming* ***when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father****"* (Jn 4:21). In their fall from the authority of the word of God throughout their history, the Israelites, after the manner of the idolatrous nations around them, sought out and designated high places to which they would go and worship (Jr 7:31). They desired to be in a particular place and environment in order to worship their imagined gods. Being built on a hill, the temple also became a place of worship, which place was never in the plan of God. The temple was a concession of God to David, for God knew that Israel as a whole would eventually be divided, with the northern ten tribes going into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. God knew that the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with a remnant that came out of the northern tribes after the Assyrian captivity, would gather around the temple of Solomon as a place to which they would take their sacrifices. But the temple was never in the Sinai law, for the Israelites were to move the tabernacle continually among the tribal areas of Palestine.

The Samaritans, on the other hand, who resided in the territory of the former northern kingdom of Israel, established their primary location of worship in Samaria (Jn 4:20). But in the context of John 4, Jesus revealed that the time had come when worship would not be confined to specific places. Worship had never been so confined, and the hour of restoration of true worship was coming when God's people, whether Samaritans, Jews or Gentiles, would not worship God in the confinement of a physical location. **True worship would exist throughout the world in the hearts of those who would come to the Father in spirit and truth**.

The fact that the gospel would go into all the world necessitated that the worship of Christians never be confined to any specific location. One lone individual in the jungle of Africa can worship God acceptably. One can worship in the wilderness as Abraham. One can worship in the camp of the enemy as Gideon. One can worship in the midst of multitudes of people as the leper. Location has nothing to do with inspiring or conducting worship.

We are in the habit of going to places in order to worship. We build buildings in which to worship. We even go up to mountain tops to worship. It is not wrong to go to Jerusalem to worship, for such did the Ethiopian eunuch (At 8:27). But he was only doing that which he knew at the time. We wonder where "he went to

worship" when he returned to Ethiopia.

Neither a particular place, hour, nor environment can either confine or define our worship. We are worshipful beings before we show up at the "hour of worship." We show up at a particular place because we are worshipful people. If we were not worshipful people, then we would never show up. But we must keep in mind that places and sanctuaries do not define the worship of those who worship in spirit and truth. And thus, our worship is not confined to places of worship, ceremonies or acts of worship, or the "hour of worship." All such things may result from our worship, but they do not define or confine our worship, for God's people worship in spirit and in truth at anytime and anywhere.

We need to conclude by referring to a passage that is almost consistently used out of context in reference to the presence of God in our lives and our worship of Him. It is a passage that has nothing to do with worship, but is almost always used in reference to worship. Jesus said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them"* (Mt 18:20).

This **is not** a statement that is used in reference to worship. It is in the context of judgment actions that are taken in reference to the one who refuses to hear the church concerning sin in which he is involved (Mt 18:17). If the passage were speaking of assembly and worship, then the poor brother who is alone in the middle of a desert or jungle does not have the promise that the Lord is with him in his worship. But such could not be further from the truth of God's presence or our worship. Our presence with two or three other people does not validate our worship, neither does it guarantee God's presence. Our being alone in worship does not restrict God's presence with us as we worship by ourselves in the solitude of our own closet.

God is where we are. He hears. He accepts our worship wherever we are in the world and whenever we pour out our hearts to Him in worship. God's presence in our lives is not determined by the assembly of two or three who have gathered together. He is always present wherever we are. David concluded, *"Where will I go from Your spirit? Or where will I flee from Your presence?"* (Ps 139:7). The answer is nowhere! Worship is simply not dependent on assemblies.

We must conclude that true worship is free from physical and emotional addictions. By this we mean that one's worship must not be dependent on anything outside the heart of man. We live in a world of religiosity where people in their religious behavior are addicted to many "worship stimuli." Some cannot worship unless they are in a particular place where there is an atmosphere of "spirituality." Some cannot worship unless they are stimulated by others, or the environment in which they are when they worship. Others must have incense or a crowd of fellow worshipers to spur them on to an attitude of worship. If one cannot worship as Abraham in a quiet place in the wilderness without a physical or emotional stimulus, then one should question his relationship with his Creator. One of the blessings during times when assemblies are either banned or impossible is that each individual Christian has the opportunity to learn how to worship in his or her own solitude.

A spiritual relationship with God is realizing who God is, what He has done for us through the gospel, and what He will do for us in the future when His Son comes again. One need not be addicted to influences outside one's own heart in order to be inspired to worship God. Though one may be inspired to worship because of his surroundings, this does not mean that we must have special surroundings in order to worship. Surroundings of the created world will stimulate worship, but we worship regardless of our surroundings or what comes to our ears. We are beings of worship. We cannot help but worship the God of the universe.

Book 36

Worship Freely

One of the most difficult changes to make in one's life is his change in worship after realizing that he has created a religiosity after his own desires, and especially, traditions. In the restoration of simple Christianity, the call for a return to the word of God will challenge the most sincere and serious worshiper of God. But if one is sincere, and seeking to live according to the word of God, then the change is easy. It is easy for the sincere to confess the wrong doing of their past and then to restore themselves to a closer walk with God. The traditionalist, however, finds it very difficult to change, even though he may realize that his present religiously was the product of his religious heritage. Since the validation of his religiosity is based on the traditions of the fathers, he finds it difficult to make a change to that which he has learned in the word of God. In order not to confront a possible need for change, therefore, many religious people have simply given up a study of the word of God, lest they discover some area where they have gone wrong in their relationship with God. But for the sincere and dedicated, it is the task of their walk with God to challenge continually their thinking and behavior with the word of God. In fact, we discover the disciples of Jesus by their willingness to repent from wayward ways of the past in order to comply with the wishes of their Master. In order to guard ourselves from apostasy, we are students of the apostasy of Israel in the Old Testament. Their examples of apostasy are a warning to all who would seek to created religiosity after their own desires.

I hate, I despise your feast days.
And I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies.
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.
Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.
(Amos 5:21-23)

The above proclamation from God concerning the spiritual and moral state of the Israelites in apostasy is the motivation for the writing of this book. Israel was obediently and legally keeping the feast days according to the law. But God despised them. They continued in their sacred assemblies. But God did not savor them. They continued in the rituals of their sacrifices according to the law that was given by God. But God would not accept them. They had no law for the stringed instruments. That was David's invention (Am 6:5). Nevertheless, God turned away from their songs for the same reason He despised, did not savor, and rejected all their other religious ceremonies. They conducted legal religiosity with unrighteous hearts. They needed to stop seeking evil and start seeking good (Am 5:14,15).

Amos' message is relevant today. A form of "Christianity" has evolved throughout the years that in many ways is spiritually void of righteous hearts. We legally perform the rites of religiosity, but often we are as the Jewish religious leaders whom Jesus indicted, "*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs that indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*" (Mt 23:27,28).

It is not that the subject of this book is new. Throughout history there have always been those who institutionally performed the form of religiosity, but inwardly were filled with the bones of mediocrity, laziness, indifference and a host of other adjectives that are typical of those whom preachers have rebuked for centuries. Sometimes the problem is the preachers themselves, as it was in the days of our Lord. But we are as Amos. There is a problem in Christendom and we seek to alert the worldwide body of believers that we should stand up and repent. We should repent if we find within ourselves any of the unrighteousness that Amos spoke against or any of the "whitewashed tombs" Jesus condemned during His ministry.

Chapter 1

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Paul wrote, *"... the doers of the law will be justified"* (Rm 2:13). James added, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (Js 1:22). We live in a time wherein many of Christendom are not known for being doers of the word of God. There are many who claim to believe the Bible, want to do what it says, but the norm or heritage of their religiosity is too strong for them to turn to simple obedience of what God directs through His word. We have had studies with hundreds of people who say they believe the Bible, but when it comes to doing what it says, the intimidation of their peers and past are often too strong for them to initiate obedience to what they learn in the Bible. This is a problem of Christendom in these times, and thus, the nature of those who have turned away from a Bible-directed way of life to a religion they have constructed after their own desires.

When men turn from daily obedience to the word of God, their religiosity usually turns to religious behavior that is orchestrated in a manner by which their assemblies are used to either identify or validate their religiosity, or both. This is the problem that is being challenged in this book. The challenge involves those who are just short of cutting their wrists in religious assemblies as the religious leaders during Elisha's contest with them on Mount Carmel (See 1 Kg 18:17-46). Assemblies have gone from small and solemn home fellowships in the 1st century to hysterical chaos that is patterned after the worshipers of Diana who cried out in hysteria for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (At 19:34). Somewhere between the quiet and ordered house meetings in the 1st century to assemblies structured around disorder, chaos and madness everyone must confess that some who claim to be Christian have simply gone astray in following their uncontrollable emotions.

The Corinthians had digressed to a point of madness in their assemblies. They had digressed into confusion to the point that Paul stated that if the unbelievers came into their assemblies, they would consider those who were assembled together to be mad (1 Co 14:23). Every Christian must confess, however, that the assemblies of Christians must reflect the sobriety and self-control that is befitting of those who are directed by the word of God.

In the latter part of the 20th century there arose out of society a generation of young people whose culture could be identified by the word "whatever." Because of their resistance to a previous confrontational generation, this "whatever" generation just concluded that whatever was right for you is fine. This thinking is changing the course of Christendom as a whole. The "whatever" generation now leads the vast majority of the "modern-church generation," and thus whatever goes is done. Though there are some great aspects about this generation in helping us to avoid nonsense debates over things that are just not necessary to argue, the world view of the "whatever" generation is in some ways directly opposed to a Bible-obedient relationship between God and man. There are aspects of the world view that actually hinder this relationship.

The "whatever" generation has now produced "whatever" churches that seem to identify Christendom as people who are spiritual, but are not motivated and directed because of their understanding of the word of God. The "whatever" churches are stirred into action, not because they are moved by their knowledge of the Jesus of the Bible, but because of their "spiritual humanism" to simply do good to their fellow man in a religious context.

The preceding is stated because the nature of this book may trouble some. If you are not a thorough student of the sober and self-controlled nature of Christianity as it is defined in the pages of the New Testament, then what will be said in the following pages will probably be somewhat irritating. It will be so because of the subject, as well as the challenge we make to what many believe and do in their religious behavior, particularly when they come together in assembly.

But all of us must be challenged concerning our religiosity. We must be challenged concerning our beliefs, and then, we must be challenged concerning how we carry out those beliefs in our behavior. And this book is meant to be very challenging. It is meant to be challenging in order to stir readers into thoroughly investigating the word of God in reference to why Christians assemble, and how they should behave when they assemble.

We also want to challenge those who are descendants of traditional religions. The problem with traditional religions is that the heritage of such religions is overbearing on the minds of the adherents. What father and mother believed and taught often becomes greater than what our heavenly Father teaches and has revealed

through Jesus, which knowledge comes only through the word of God. Most heritage-driven people, therefore, are afraid to study their Bibles simply because they might discover that the spiritual heritage that was handed down to them by their forefathers erred in some form or fashion. The desire to honor their forefathers is often much greater than their desire to search the word of God for truth.

When any believer is studying the subject of restoring New Testament Christianity, one's spiritual heritage should always be set aside. Our heritage will not allow us to be objective in our search of the Scriptures for simple Christianity. Whenever there is a conflict between Scripture and heritage, heritage must give way to truth. If we are not willing to sacrifice our heritage for truth, then we are hopeless in our quest to discover the simplicity of New Testament Christianity.

When our eternal destiny is at stake, nothing should sway us from investigating the word of the One before whom all of us must eventually stand in judgment. It is imperative, therefore, that we allow ourselves to be continually challenged by others concerning our beliefs and our religious heritages. But above all, we must be obsessed with our study of the Bible in order to stay as close as possible to the One with whom we seek to spend eternity. The purpose of this book, therefore, is to alert the readers concerning those who have strayed from the nature of true Christianity as a whole, and how wayward religiosity is played out in the assemblies of those who have strayed. If the thoughts of this book touch a nerve, therefore, please delve into the word of God to check your thoughts before throwing away the book. We write in order to awaken those who sincerely seek to be obedient to the will of God, but have traditionally been led astray to an institutional Christianity that is foreign to the pages of the word of God.

Now one final word before we delve into a very sensitive area of religious culture. The assembly of the saints is a privilege. It is an opportunity for worshipful people to come together in order to direct their attention to God in worship, and not to themselves. It is the natural result of the disciples of Jesus who love one another, and thus, out of their love, fall down in worship of the One who first loved them. Forsaking the opportunity to come together with other disciples in assemblies manifests a lack of love for others and for God. By forsaking the assembly, one cheats himself of an opportunity to worship God with others. If one would claim to be a Christian, therefore, he or she will seek out other Christians with whom to meet for mutual encouragement and worship.

As you read through the following pages, therefore, do not get the impression that we are against assemblies of the disciples for mutual encouragement and worship. What we are discussing is the digression in assemblies of some religious groups to the point that the assembly is used to validate them as a part of Christendom. In a pretense for worship, the assembly is actually entertainment or personal aggrandizement on the part of the main participants. Supposed worship assemblies have often become rock concerts and "healing" sessions, void of worship and with little concern for one's fellow brother or sister. Religious assemblies have often become social gatherings where attendees come to see what they can get, not what they can give in worship to God. To a great extent, therefore, many religious assemblies that are considered worship assemblies are actually weekly events in the lives of those who are looking for an escape from the reality of their own difficult lives.

One can never be against the assemblies of Christians for worship. What Christians should stand against are assemblies of religious people who have strayed from the word of God, and yet, they profess to be an assembly of Christians. We are responsible to awaken readers who have been hijacked by a wayward and false identity of Christianity. It is an awakening that restoration be accomplished in worship of God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).

We must keep in mind that every assembly of Christians does not have to be an assembly for worship. Christians assemble to stir up love and good works (Hb 10;24,25). They assemble to discuss doctrinal matters (At 15). They assemble to discuss the needs of widows (At 6:1-7). Sometimes Christians assemble to be exhorted by the teaching of others through song (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). Not every assembly of Christians, therefore, is an assembly for worship. However, when Christians designate an assembly specifically to bring individual worshipers together for worship, the assembly must be for worship, and not for emotional or personal aggrandizement of any one or two individuals.

Since Christians are motivated by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, then every Christian has a stake in the relationship that everyone has with the whole church. Assemblies, therefore, are a natural event because of our common obedience to the gospel. Gospel-oriented people always seek opportunities to be with one another, though when they are with one another their gathering does not necessary become a "worship service." Christians have the right to be with one another on any occasion simply because they share in their common obedience to the gospel. This is the identity of the community that the New Testament refers to as "church."

Chapter 2

SO HERE WE ARE

Many years ago we showed up at a small assembly of disciples in order to begin a week-long series of studies. Before starting the meeting, some of the members approached us with an issue that was causing some problems. The discord that was prevailing among the small group was that one elderly brother contended that a prayer should be said after the contribution was taken on Sunday morning. Others disagreed. Some discord ensued and we came in at the frontlines. The problem was not the issue. At the time, we dealt only with the issue, reassuring everyone that since the Bible spoke nothing of the proposed ritual, we should not bind it on the church. But this answer did not focus on the root of the issue. The real problem was the continuation of a particular ritual that the elderly brother strongly believed should continue as a part of a unique Lord's Supper ritual that they had maintained throughout the years. At the time, no one was really concerned about the contentious spirit of the cantankerous brother.

In another assembly a good brother prayed over the Lord's Supper, and then served the fruit of the vine first. Before the tray of cups reached the people, he realized his supposed mistake. He then recalled the trays, and then "properly" served the bread first. Little did he know that Jesus at least one time before He dedicated the bread with the disciples, He dedicated and served the cup. After the bread, He again offered and served the cup (Lk 22:17,19,20).

Have you ever wondered why almost all the arguments and divisions in churches center around things that take place during the assemblies, specifically during our observance of the Lord's Supper? And when some work up enough courage to initiate some "changes in the church," the changes center around things that are done on Sunday morning in the assembly. But at the same time, there is little serious discussion over change in the life-style of the attendees.

"The preacher ran off with the secretary!" So we were informed by a distraught member.

"We had to entrust the women of the church with all the contributions because the preacher kept stealing the money," so said another.

You have heard a host of similar problems among those who profess to be leaders, but carry on with unchanged behavior. We wonder why those who have been entrusted with such leadership "positions" would betray us. Why was there little change of behavior in the lives of those who were supposed to lead us down the narrow road of spiritual growth. While understanding that there will always be those who yield to the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life, the answer to why we have not affected life change in many is because of the nature of the Christianity that we have constructed.

Let's get specific. We were recently emailed an advertisement, or promotion, for a lectureship that was to take place in the near future. The theme of the lectureship was on how to enhance our assemblies of the church in order that they be more appealing to the attendees. In view of John 13:34,35, that struck us as odd. Have we developed an assembly-oriented religion that focuses more on our performances on Sunday morning, than on our behavior in relating with our fellow man the rest of the week? Some have turned the "corporate worship"—wherever that is in the New Testament—into a theatrical performance that appeals to the lusts of the eyes and ears. Our assemblies have gone from worship to WOW! Those who favor mechanical instruments have hijacked the assemblies of Christians in order to conduct Sunday morning concerts. The once peaceful background music has now come on stage with a full orchestra of musicians. We know of one church that has even added smoke to the performance in order to enhance the theatrical atmosphere of the Sunday rock concert. It is an assembly that has truly gone up in smoke. All this is done with focus on the Sunday morning assembly. Our obsession with the Sunday morning ritual has redefined Christianity. Instead of focusing on life changes, we focus on Sunday morning service changes. But where is this Sunday morning obsession in the New Testament?

Rock concert assemblies are now the identity of many churches. When we moved to a particular part of Cape Town several years ago, and subsequently talked to the neighbors about our move into their community, their immediate response, because we were evangelists, was, "You are not going to play loud music here, are you?" Some churches that were meeting in houses in a city of the capital of Namibia moved the city to speak out against instrumental music in houses for church assemblies simply because of the noise. Sunday morning noise is how some have started to identify themselves as Christians in their neighborhoods. We are known for our noise, not for our love of one another, and especially, our love of our neighbors as ourselves. So we are reminded of two scriptural thoughts: *"But we urge you,*

brethren, ... that you make it your ambition ***to lead a quiet life*** *...”* (1 Th 4:10,11). *“The Lord is in His holy temple.* ***Let all the earth keep silence before Him”*** (Hk 2:20).

So here we are, living in a world where the assemblies of the saints have been hijacked by theatrical performers and controlled by assembly teams. We are wondering if there is not something empty, void and useless about our assemblies where we walk away every Sunday with ringing ears and exhausted emotions. Have we constructed a religion that is foreign to the assemblies of the 1st century? In our efforts to establish a weekly emotional experience to generate worship in the hearts of those who are not worshiping in their hearts, have we forgotten that the Lord is in His holy temple, so let all the earth keep silence before Him?

Throughout the centuries, Christendom has developed an assembly-oriented identity. And subsequently, we seek to validate our existence as Christians by our assemblies. Since we have validated our existence by either performance of “acts of worship”—again, wherever that is in the New Testament—or, by “concertists” who seek to deafen us by turning up their amplifiers, we have become a religion of “assembliologists.”

Of course there is no such word as “assembliology” in our English dictionaries. But we have a tendency to allow the times to invent new words that explain current phenomenon in the behavior of the religious world. (Our dictionaries would be very small if we did not allow change into new social paradigms to stir the invention of new words that define new social orders.) And so it has been in the religious world. Assembliology may not be something new in the realm of religion because this phenomenon of Christendom developed before and out of the Reformation Movement centuries ago. But because we cannot go back two thousand years to the days of the early church in order to identify the assembly ritual we conduct today, then a study of the assemblies of the modern church is a very interesting phenomenon to consider.

Our religious history in the last few centuries has encouraged an interesting obsession in religious behavior that is used to define one’s faithfulness to God. Though in the Protestant world assembliology was born out of the Reformation Movement, it has intensified in the last half of the last century. It has intensified to the point that it has given birth to an assembly-oriented Christianity that is somewhat void of personal relationships that would enhance one’s relationship with others and God. Those of this new doctrine obsess over the assembly of the saints as the sole identity of the existence of a local church and the faithfulness of the individual believer in his relationship with God and other Christians.

Assembliology would be the study of our obsessive focus on the assembly of the saints as the identity of the church. The assembliologist seeks to validate his Christianity by his performance during an appointed “hour of worship.” In his theology, true assemblies can be determined by rituals of behavior or orders of worship, depending on the assembly of each particular religious group. Assembliologists seek to perfect their assemblies, either for “evangelistic” purposes, or to be in competition with the assemblies of other groups. The departmentalization of their Christianity to the “worship hour” has moved them to perfect the identity of their churchianity by the vibrancy of the assemblies that are locked in between an opening and closing prayer. All is done in order to win or retain the “faithful” in order that one’s church (assembly) grows. The success of the assembliologist, therefore, is measured by the size of his assembly. We thus judge the success of a particular pastor/preacher by his ability to assemble and retain a great number of spectators who would sit before him and be entertained by the orchestra and lecture.

Before we venture too far into this new identity of church, we would do well to investigate the refinement of the assembly of Christians that has developed over the last fifty or more years. A brief review of the evolution of this religious phenomenon will lay the foundation for our discussions later. We must understand why the identity of Christianity in these times has strayed from the behavioral life-style and participatory fellowship that Jesus mandated in John 13:34,35 that would identify His people.

Chapter 3

ORIGIN OF PROTESTANT ASSEMBLIOLOGY

We need to go back about 450 years in order to understand where we are today. We must take this painful journey into our past in order to discover where we should go from here. Our infatuation with the Sunday morning ritual is not something that is recent in church history. Its origins in the Protestant world date to the time of the Reformation Movement in the 1500’s, a time when Christendom was groaning in order to deliver it-

self from centuries of religious oppression under the dominance of Roman Catholicism.

If we dare to make this journey, we will discover why the Sunday morning assembly ritual characterizes almost all Protestant churches throughout the world today. To begin, we must confess that we have revealed our theology by our speech. We talk of the "opening prayer," "hour of worship" and "closing prayer." After the opening prayer comes singing, sermon, Supper, singing, and then, the closing prayer. With a few variations, you can step inside almost any Protestant church throughout the world today and find a similar ritual of assembly. Some assemblies will be more reserved, others more lively, but all with basically the same ritual. It is a Sunday morning ritual that defines Christendom to the non-Christian world.

Now the problem is that we cannot find in the New Testament this common Sunday morning ritual that is hailed to be the existing identity of Christianity today. Some groups of Christendom have sought to piece together with proof texts a codified system of assembly by which they separate themselves from other churches. Basically, however, Protestantism is defined by a common Sunday assembly among all religious groups that fall under the label of the Protestant world. But nowhere in the New Testament do we find the system of assembly that is characteristic with most Protestant churches today. In fact, it is impossible to identify any ritual of assembly that was common of all churches in the New Testament.

So where did the Sunday morning ritual originate? If it is not New Testament, then its origins must be discovered somewhere in the history of Protestant Christendom between the establishment of the church in the 1st century and today. In reference to the assembly structure of Protestant churches, we must go back at least 450 years, to the days when men were struggling out of the clutches of the Dark Ages and the dominance of the Roman Catholic church.

In his book, *How to Meet in Homes*, Gene Edwards wrote,

> But herein is the greatest tragedy for *all* of us . . . domestic or foreign: That pitiful, dead ritual, which supplanted the ekklesia, is *not* an organic expression of the Christian faith. Read that again!
>
> That ritual was invented in Geneva, and even *in* Geneva that ritual was not an organic expression of the faith in that city. It moved from Geneva to Scotland. When it got to Scotland . . . it was foreign to the Scots. When it spread to the English, it did not match the English. When that awful ritual got on a boat and came to America, landed and began cursing us here, it did not fit the American disposition or mentality. This pitiful ritual is not Albanian and does not fit Albanians! Nor any other ethos on earth. Yet in every nation on earth this very life-killing ritual *defines* our faith. That pernicious ritual is proclaiming to the world: "*This* is Christianity."[pp 12,13]

In order to understand the reinvention of the Sunday morning ritual by the Protestant reformers, we must go back another one thousand years to a second major player in the Sunday ritual. This would be Pope Gregory the Great. This pope of the Catholic Church, around A.D. 540, prescribed in a written decree how Catholics should conduct themselves during their Sunday assemblies. Basing his instructions on the pagan rituals of the times, Gregory outlined how assembly adherents should conduct themselves when they came together into the basilicas for worship. Gregory's mandate in reference to how Catholics should meet identifies the origin of the ritual. The assembly ritual was invented by man—the pope. It was slightly modified by Protestant reformers as John Calvin, and subsequently became the pattern by which churches of Christendom conducted their assemblies for centuries to come, even to this day.

Throughout the centuries slight variations of the Sunday morning ritual differentiated religious groups, but in general, one can go from one assembly to another in Christendom and expect to experience the same general ritual. Some have added unique practices to their assemblies. The Eastern Orthodox Church, for example, imposed on attendees the posture of standing for two hours in the assembly. There are no seats in their assembly halls. Some groups identify themselves by the hysterical nature of their assemblies. Some emotionally lose control, rolling on the ground and crying out in gibberish. Others have invented orchestras or healing services, and a host of other inventions that are carried out during the assembly in order to encourage the adherents to return. Regardless of either silence or commotion during the assembly, there is always a primary speaker, congregational singing, spectators during speaking, and often, a dominant band playing instruments. And of course, we must not forget the collection plate. Every ceremony is interrupted with prayers, and sometimes chants. Since Christendom is identified by this assembly ritual that may vary in some aspects, it is helpful to understand how it was entrenched as the mark of identity of Christianity and made the signal by which churches presently validate themselves as "Christian churches."

John Calvin was a religious leader of Geneva, Switzerland during the 16th century. He was an extensive

student of the Bible, and subsequently, he marshalled people into strict assembly adherence in order to proclaim his studies. Geneva was controlled by what was called the Consistory Committee. All citizens had to conform to the rules of the city, which rules were maintained by this committee of seventeen men (Will Durant, *The Reformation*; Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 1957; pp. 472-484). Five of these men were preachers and twelve were elders. Calvin was over the seventeen. Essentially, Geneva was a religious police state ruled by religious despots. Calvin was at the top of a controlled religious "military" that subjugated all citizens to the mandates of his assembliology.

The religious leaders of Geneva ruled by lordship and fear. For example, adultery was punished by burning at the stake. Witchcraft was punished by burning at the stake. And pity the poor soul who missed the assembly. If one missed too many assemblies, he or she was also burned alive. A heretic was anyone who disagreed with Calvin, and thus, heretics were also burned alive. However, there was some mercy. You could get off with the first offense. But if you were caught and tried for the third time, it was death.

Since Calvin believed in predestination, his conscience was soothed by the thought that harsh judgments were inflicted on those who had already been predestined by God to eternal hell. He simply began the burning of those who had themselves revealed that they were predestined to burn in hell anyway. During this religious reign of terror, fourteen women were accused of witchcraft by his seventeen enforcers, and subsequently, all fourteen were consigned to begin their burning in hell in life.

Calvin was a religious tyrant who could not cope with disagreement. The environment of religious behavior in Geneva, therefore, was molded around one who enforced his beliefs and practices on the people. Calvin was a great thinker and writer, and thus corralled people into assembly on Sunday in order to impart his dictates. Assembly, therefore, became the occasion where he could expound his studies to an audience. He thus judged faithful those who would not forsake the assembly. His seventeen enforcers made sure that everyone showed up at the assembly. The speaker-audience assembly thus became a system of assembly that has identified Protestant Christianity ever since. Out of Geneva, Switzerland, therefore, the Sunday ritual was given birth in Protestantism and entrenched in those churches that followed the system of assembly that was imposed on the residents of Geneva.

Because of his enforced system of assembly, Calvin enthroned the position of the clergy. He marshaled the assembly into a silent stupor, and subsequently, under the control of the clergy he drained the organic life out of the adherents. With the heritage of the Catholic Church that prevailed during his time, and the dominant control of Calvin and other reformers, the Protestant world today continues with the Sunday ritual. Though the ritualistic assemblies continue, the number of attendees is shrinking in many areas of the world.

We must keep in mind that the Sunday ritual was created by man. It is man perpetuated. It is neither 1st century nor New Testament, simply because the 1st century disciples met in homes throughout their communities (Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15; Pl 2). We would add that it is not natural when considering of the one-another relationships between Christians that is defined by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. And because such is not characteristic of our desires to connect with one another, a wave of change has come among those who seek to restore the organic nature of simple New Testament faith. This cultural paradigm shift has already started in the religious world. The ekklesia (church) is arising out of dead ritualism in order to regain its organic life. Even in America the latest statistics show that over nine percent of the attending Protestant membership meet in small fellowships in the homes of the members (*NBC Night News*, November, 2010).

As we venture into this controversial area of religious behavior in Christendom, we must keep in mind that the Sunday ritual is not wrong in and of itself. It is not wrong for Christians to come together in assembly, even if those assemblies are in the thousands and follow a prescribed order of assembly. However, a consistent diet of single-assembly attendance on Sunday morning week after week, without small group fellowships of the attendees sometime during the week, is a detriment to the relational growth of the individual adherents. A large single-assembly church has proved one thing in this postmodern world. Meeting exclusively on a weekly basis in large assemblies does not produce the desired numerical and spiritual growth that perpetuates the church. The stalemate and shrinking numbers of adherents of the traditional church in the last fifty years proves this point. What has happened in areas where the church is growing *en masse* is where small assemblies of 25-50 members come together in a small fellowship where there is personal interactivity. When a group grows above this number, the level of personal interactivity decreases. The larger the assembly, the less the personal relationship the members have with one another.

Because members have decided that they want friends and fellowship on a personal basis, a shift in focus has come. However, this paradigm shift is not with-

out criticism from those who have promoted and perpetuated the means by which power, purse and pomp can be protected and preserved in exclusively single-assembly churches. Nevertheless, there is a revival, a restoration that is arising out of the ashes of institutional churchianity that gives us hope for the future. People are weary of sitting in idleness on pews and staring with boredom while listening to the humdrum of professional lecturers. A movement of seekers has arisen who seek relationships. It is a religious culture of people who want to connect, to love and be loved. There is a revisiting of the organic ekklesia of the 1st century. People are discovering that there is a vast difference between assembly-oriented churchianity and one-another relationships. They are discovering that assemblies in the New Testament sprang out of one-another relationships. Contact is made in assemblies, but relationships are developed in personal encounters.

The ritualistic assemblies of the institutional church are lacking in that they seek to produce relationships through large assemblies, dynamic speakers and inspiring singing or bands. The New Testament teaches a one-another context of believers, from which assemblies of various flavors will originate. There is a vast difference between "one another" Christianity and assembly-oriented churchianity. One focuses on bringing individuals together into an atmosphere of love and good works while the other simply focuses on the performance of a few and the attendance of the many.

Those large single-assembly churches that are surviving have organized into small house fellowships throughout their communities. They are able to continue with the large Sunday assembly simply because they have taken their focus off the Sunday morning ritual and turned it to evangelistic house fellowships that meet throughout the week. They are becoming known for their house fellowships, not a Sunday morning performance.

Chapter 4

FROM WORSHIP TO CONCERTS

While living in Brazil in the early 70s we experienced an interesting religious phenomenon that began in the 50s in Latin America. The traditional mass of the Catholic Church was cold, quiet and centered around one man, the priest. However, Pentecostalism captured the imagination of the people. Assemblies ran through Jerusalem, and thus, completely changed in nature. The Pentecostal/charismatic assembly was loud, centered around all the participants, and often resulted in chaotic episodes of frenzied hysteria. The assemblies became opportunities for adherents to find an emotional release from the poverty-stricken lives they had to endure in the midst of economic depravation. One no longer went to an assembly of "Christians" in order to worship, but to find release. The purpose of the assemblies, therefore, began to change. They changed from worship to an opportunity for escape.

Such was the general trend among those of the charismatic movement that swept across Latin America, and was often characteristic of the Pentecostal movement in the Americas during the latter part of the 20th century. The assemblies changed the nature of Christendom as assemblies began to compete with one another for adherents. And thus, the amplifiers were brought in for the purpose of stirring up the session with sound that reverberated in church buildings and school halls around the world.

What developed in the latter part of the 20th century was the production in the secular music world of the rock concert. Rock concerts were opportunities for young people to swarm together in order to lose themselves in the music of the artists and the environment of thousands of spectators. Before this generation of music lovers arrived, music was broadcast through radio, TV and bands that toured the country and played before small groups of people in town halls. But the rock concert was bigger and better. It produced an atmosphere of musical and emotional ecstasy. Woodstock became a culture that was only refined by rock concerts that followed.

The religious world could not be left behind in a rock concert culture. After two generations of rock concerts, the rock concert participants began to determine the nature of the assemblies of Christendom. The behavior of church adherents in assembly changed. Assemblies changed from opportunities to worship with one's fellow man, to something that emulated the environment of a rock concert. In order for the preacher to grow his assembly, he had to buy larger speakers and turn up the amplifier. The electronic industry followed suit by producing amplifier/speaker systems that were built specifically for the world of Christendom.

And thus, cold Calvinist and Catholic assemblies have now given way to rock concert events every Sun-

day morning to which attendees often go to focus on themselves and instrumental music with sound that comes forth from an array of electronic machinery. Assemblies drifted away from opportunities to worship God. People fall on the ground, foam at the mouth, and writhed in emotional hysteria because the fervor of the event appeals to the emotional appetites of the participants. As the unbelieving world looked on such assemblies in Christendom, their only conclusion was that there is madness among them.

Now somewhere between the cold, ritualistic formalism that was void of worship, and was born out of the Reformation Movement, to the emotionally chaotic assemblies of the charismatic movement—also void of worship—many lost their way. Many lost sight of the purpose for which God exhorted His people to come together in assembly.

We would recognize that not everyone expresses his worship of God in the same way. Our worship of God stirs our emotions. But emotions have been used to stir worship. And in our efforts to become emotional in response to cold assemblies, we have allowed the stirring of our emotions to be the objective of our assemblies. In doing so, we have lost sight of God by focusing on ourselves. Many assemblies, therefore, have developed into sessions of focusing on the lusts of the ears in order to stir emotions of the heart which we have passed off as worship. We must never forget that in true worship one never becomes emotionally exhausted. But in subjective emotionalism, in a short time one eventually falls to the ground without any energy to continue.

Chapter 5

MUTUAL EDIFICATION THROUGH LOVE

For purposes of mutual edification and encouragement, Jesus taught that His disciples love one another as He had loved them (Jn 13:34,35). This mandate of Jesus must always be the focus of the Christian's behavioral standard by which His disciples are identified as a Christian. If we stray from our identity of loving one another as He loved us, then we will become ships without anchors on a religious sea where we will wander aimlessly among other misguided vessels with the same problem. It is an axiomatic truth in reference to all that Jesus lived and taught that His church is to be identified by mutual love, not by a codified ritual of assembly on Sunday. Since many churches have digressed to be identified simply by an assembly ritual, then we must pursue this matter with great diligence. There is certainly a difference between being validated as God's people by a relational love of one another and an assembly ritual.

Suppose we asked if the church existed in Timbuktu, Algeria—there is such a city. If there were a church there, how would we identify its existence. Most people identify its existence by what took place on Sunday morning. We might respond that the assembled adherents performed a system of acts of worship, and thus, because they successfully performed these acts, or ritual, they existed as a church. The group might be at war in biting and devouring one another in disputes and arguments over endless genealogies (2 Tm 2:24; Ti 3:9-11), but we would answer the inquiry by stating that a church existed in Timbuktu because of an assembly ritual that was regularly performed on Sunday morning. Now is this the manner by which Jesus stated that His disciples would be identified? Is this the standard of identity by which Jesus identified the seven churches of Asia (Rv 2 & 3). Seriously! One must find in the New Testament where the existence of a church is identified in any particular city by a ritual it may have performed on Sunday morning.

Jesus wanted His disciples to be identified by the love that He manifested toward them, not by their assemblies. We must not forget this point. It would be by their love for one another that the world would believe, not by either dynamic assemblies or a ritualistic system of assembly. The early Christians responded to their love of Jesus and one another's company. It was in one another's company that they stirred themselves to greater love of one another (1 Th 3:12). In their assemblies they planned and encouraged one another to maintain good works (Hb 10:24,25). The purpose of the assembly, therefore, was to encourage their love for one another and to motivate good works in their communities and among themselves (Gl 6:1-10). Their assemblies were the result of their "one another" relationships. And this could be accomplished even if only two or three were gathered together.

Christian assemblies are identified by how Christians manifest their love for one another because of their love for God. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19). Assemblies of Christians, therefore, must be occasions wherein love is manifested (Hb 10:24,25). For this reason, they must be participatory, not spectator ori-

ented. Loveless people can assemble as spectators, but loving people are never spectators. Loving people participate in one another's lives, and thus, the participation of the disciples in assembly is never confined to only a few on Sunday. Neither is their contact with one another confined to Sunday.

In the 1st century there were assemblies where only two or three were gathered together in His name. On other occasions, there were larger assemblies, assuming that the Christians showed up for evangelistic reasons among the unbelievers who were in the temple courtyard (At 5:42). But when the disciples came together on a regular basis for mutual edification, and to stir up good works, it was in small house fellowships. There is no evidence in the New Testament where assemblies are defined as the large corporate and concert assemblies that we experience today. This does not mean that large assemblies of the disciples are wrong. What is questionable is our obsession with large assemblies to the exclusion of one-another assemblies wherein there is mutual participation by all individuals who are present, in order that everyone might have an opportunity to express love for one another. Unfortunately, our obsession to "build a large church" (assembly), has marginalized, if not excluded, small assemblies wherein disciples have the opportunity to manifest their love for one another.

One might argue that the early Christians did not have the finances or opportunity to regularly have large corporate assemblies that are typical of many churches today. Fair enough. However, there is absolutely no evidence that the modern mega assemblies that are conducted today existed in the 1st century church. As previously stated, this does not mean that the mega super Sundays of today are wrong. However, we should be cautioned about reading the environment of the mega assemblies that occur today into the assemblies of the early church. This is very important because the assembliologists of today want to read their emphasis on assembly-oriented Christianity into the pages of the New Testament. We must always keep in mind that the assemblies of the disciples are an opportunity to participate lovingly in one another's lives, not to attend a performance of the few.

We must also keep in mind that the early church assembled in the homes of the members. The early church continued in the members' homes for over three hundred years after the establishment of the church. During the early persecution of the church, some disciples went into "seclusion assemblies" when the Roman Empire unleashed its fury on those they considered to be insurrectionists against the Empire. No historian rejects the fact that the early church met in the homes of the members. Why the early Christians met in small fellowships in their homes had more to do with maintaining loving participation in one another's lives, than conducting a supposedly institutional ritual that identified them as a church.

This brings us to a very important point. **If the assembly of the disciples were to be the focal point of faithfulness and identity of the church, then we wonder why there is no emphasis in the New Testament placed on the disciples' ritualistic performance in assemblies.** Other than a few passages, there is little discussion in the New Testament letters concerning what the early Christians did in their assemblies. Anyone who has a minimal knowledge of the epistles that were written to the early church by the inspired writers understands that the focus of every epistle is on the behavioral life-style of the saints, not on how they might have ritualistically performed acts of worship during their assemblies. But it seems that some have reversed this focus. Assembliologists today stir up contention over what might be erroneously conducted in the assembly, but remain mute concerning the conduct of the members after the closing prayer. The fact that this is true is evidence to the fact that we have developed a theology of assembliology that is foreign to the Scriptures. Our obsession with the function of our structured assemblies lends us to going to war with one another over any changes in the assembly structure.

Our obsession with our assembly rituals has become the occasion where we manifest our unloving attitudes toward one another. In other words, wrangling by some over changes in the assembly ritual has actually manifested that disciples are not identified by that which Jesus said they should be identified, that is, by their love for one another.

The epistles are saturated with "one another" statements. But these statements are always in the context of the mutual interactivity of the disciples, and not sitting beside one another in an assembly in order to perform according to a structured ritual by which we seek to identify ourselves as the church. The Corinthians were exhorted to correct some key dysfunctions of their assembly when they came together (See 1 Co 11,12,14). And, Paul gave some instructions concerning structure that would prevent chaos during their assemblies (1 Co 14:26-40). However, the instructions were given in reference to their consideration of one another, **not in order to solidify a Sunday morning ritual**.

Keep in mind that Paul's exhortation concerning the assembly consumes only three chapters of all the New Testament. When considering 1 Corinthians 13—

the chapter on love—that is placed in the context of the problems surrounding the Corinthians' assemblies, we would conclude that their dysfunctional relationships outside their assemblies had spilled over into their assemblies. Their assemblies were only the opportunity for their unloving hearts to be manifested. But if they followed the instructions of chapter 13, then all their assembly problems would be solved. In other words, the Corinthians would have had no need for the instructions concerning the structure of their assemblies as stated in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 if they had not digressed from loving assemblies that were expressions of the loving fellowship that they were to have with one another outside their assemblies.

One should be challenged to read every "one another" passage that is in the New Testament. In every passage, emphasis is not on the assembly, but on the fact that Christians were to maintain a relationship of considering one another's needs. Passages that discuss the assemblies focus on how Christians can enhance their one-another relationships by the opportunity of interactively participating in one another's lives. Hebrews 10:24,25 speaks of exhorting one another to love and good works. A careful reading of Hebrews 10:24,25—the favorite passage of assembliologists—reveals that the assembly of the saints was not for entertainment, nor an opportunity for one person or group of persons to be the sole participants in the assembly. It is not a passage to guarantee that the disciples submit to a legal order of assembly and obedience to codified ceremonies. "One another" in the text does not mean one to the others. No spectator assemblies occurred in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:24,25 is a reference to participatory assemblies wherein adherents have an opportunity to become involved with one another through love and good works. There are no spectators in Hebrews 10:24,25.

We must keep in mind, however, that it is not wrong for Christians to assemble together in large assemblies to enjoy teaching from the word of God or speaking to one another through song. *"I will declare Your name to My brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You"* (Hb 2:12). We would certainly assume that the assemblies of the early saints varied from one group to another. The Jews certainly did not conduct their assemblies as the Gentiles, and we would assume that in some ways the culture of the people was reflected in the behavior of the disciples in their assemblies.

There was also variation in what was accomplished in the different assemblies of the early church. In reference to 1 Corinthians 14:26 there may have been occasions when no one came with a song, or a teaching, or a language, or a revelation, or an interpretation. At least in reference to there being no one present who had the gift of interpretation, the one with the gift of languages had to keep silent. We would conclude, therefore, that each assembly of the Corinthian church may have been different every Sunday, depending on who was present. There was thus no prescribed actions of worship that were to take place that would validate their meeting as an official assembly.

One of the favorite passages that is used by assembliologists actually emphasizes the opposite of what they assert. This is Luke's historical account of Paul's visit to Troas that is recorded in Acts 20:7. In this passage one would think that the type of assemblies that are characteristic with Christendom today would be found in this passage. The occasion was Paul's trip to Jerusalem on his last missionary journey. He passed through Troas. The event was recorded by Luke. *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul* ***preached*** *unto them ..."* (KJV). The *American Standard Version* is better. *"And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul* ***discoursed*** *with them ...."* The *International King James Version* is better. *"... Paul* ***had discussions*** *with them ...."* The *World English Bible* reads that Paul *"****talked*** *with them."*

The Greek word for "preaching" in Acts 20:7 **is not** *karusso* (to preach), but *dialegeto* (dialogue), to have dialog or discussion. One would think that if the type of assemblies we have today in the institutional church were characteristic of the 1st century church, then certainly such an environment of assembly would be found in Acts 20:7 on Paul's last visit to the church in Troas. The fact that such an assembly as we have today is not found on this occasion, and other occasions of assembly in the New Testament, should alert us to the fact that something may be wrong with our understanding of the regular Sunday assemblies of the early church. Has Christendom strayed from the "one another" (interactive) assemblies of the New Testament church? And in our "assembly culture" of today, have we read into the New Testament the performance assemblies that we conduct among ourselves? Because we cannot read of our assembly culture of today in the New Testament does not mean that the way we conduct assemblies today is wrong. However, it does mean that we should be very cautious about emphasizing the manner by which we assemble. If we assemble in a way that hinders the individual worship of the attendees, then it is time for reform. If our assemblies misdirect the attention of the attendees to focus on themselves, and not God, then it is time to repent. If all our assemblies are spectator oriented, then

we have strayed from the rich relational gatherings that were typical of the early church.

The early church customarily had participatory assemblies. By participatory we mean that in some way almost everyone was involved in the assembly. 1 Corinthians 14:26 still says "every one of you has a song ... teaching ... etc." The Acts 20:7 assembly was a participatory assembly because of the Holy Spirit's use of the Greek word *dialegeto* (dialogue). Paul did not endlessly lecture during this particular assembly. We might assume that he would have done so since it was his last visit to Troas. But Paul did not prepare and deliver a sermon. The Troas disciples certainly had a great number of questions that had to be answered. The occasion demanded dialogue, not lecture. If we would refer to the disciples in Troas, as well as the Corinthian assemblies that Paul corrected with the Corinthian letter, then we could conclude that the early disciples had weekly participatory assemblies, not theatrical performances by a few participants. Some Corinthians tried to be performers with focus on themselves. But Paul said they were puffed up. He subsequently corrected their puffed up performances by writing the greatest chapter on love in human history (1 Co 13).

The "Corinthian problem" of puffed-up performers using their gifts to exalt themselves in competition with one another evidently did not exist among other churches. The assemblies of other churches reflected the one another relationships that prevailed among the disciples, which relationships were generated out of a heart of the disciples' love for one another. The regular assemblies, therefore, were opportunities for the disciples to manifest their love for one another, not an opportunity for performance.

Chapter 6

LIFE-STYLE CHRISTIANITY

Most people are guilty of reading the nature of our modern assemblies into the "one another" passages of the New Testament. It is a matter of *eisegesis*, that is, reading our definition of works and words into the words of the Bible. Here are two examples. Two favorite passages that are often narrowed in their application to Christian behavior are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. *"... speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Ep 5:19). *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"* (Cl 3:16).

It is assumed that the singing mandate of these two passages is primarily to the assembly context of the church, and subsequently, is one act of worship that validates an assembly as worship. In fact, these two passages are often used by some to determine one of the mandates for the codified ritual that must be performed during the Sunday morning assembly in order to determine if a church exists at a particular location. There are two reasons why neither passage in its context is teaching this. First, nowhere in the context of either passage is the Sunday assembly mentioned. It is just not there. It is only assumed by those who read their present religious assembly behavior into the biblical context of the passages that the passages are made to refer exclusively to the assembly of the saints.

In the context of both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Paul was discussing the life-style relationships that must be characteristic of every Christian. In the context, exhorting one another through song was one of the manifestations of this relationship. True, the singing can take place during the general assembly of the saints on any occasion, but not exclusively during the assembly. Anytime and anywhere Christians are together with one another they can use song to exhort one another.

Second, the singing that is mentioned in these two passages does not demand that singing take place during every encounter that Christians have with one another. This would include the general assembly of Christians on the first day of the week, as well as times when two or three Christians might encounter one another anytime during the week. All that is said in the passages is that Christians exhort one another in singing. Neither the occasion nor the context of the singing is mentioned in reference to when the saints might carry out the command to encourage one another through song.

Now this brings up a very interesting point in reference to assemblies and singing. Is the mandate of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to be carried out on every occasion when Christians come together? We would have to answer that Paul did not mean that Christians **must** sing to one another every time they encountered one another. If they encountered one another on

the street, they would not have to break out in song. If they encountered one another in a corporate business meeting, they would not have to start singing in the presence of the unbelievers who were present. What if Christians encountered one another at 10:00^{AM} on a Sunday morning? Would they be under a mandate to sing to one another? If Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to the daily living of the Christian—and they do—then we must assume that two or three Christians do not have to break out in singing when they meet one another on Monday morning at 10:00^{AM}. Now if they encounter one another on Sunday morning, the exhortation of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 does not change in meaning or application. The point is that Christians can meet together and not sing, as they can meet together and not study the Bible or pray or take up a contribution. There is thus no mandate in the Scriptures that assumes that worship takes place when certain performances are acted out. An assembly of the disciples is thus not validated as such when a particular ritual is performed.

It is natural for Christians to sing when they are together. When they come together on any occasion for worship it is only natural for them to speak to one another in song as they sing praises to God. While in prison, Paul and Silas applied this principle in a Philippian jail (At 16:25). What Paul was discussing in the context of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 was the nature of the behavior of Christians in their relationship with one another and God at all times. He was not giving a mandate that would become a code to determine an official assembly of the saints. Christians must exhort one another through song, but they do not have to do so every time they meet together. Is it natural in their behavior to sing when they come together in assembly? Absolutely! But mutual exhortation through singing was never given in the New Testament as an act by which the assemblies of the saints would be identified or validated. Neither was singing given as a validation that worship takes place. Singing to one another is the result of worship, not a manifestation that an assembly has been validated. Singing is a means for edification and teaching. It is not a signal for an "official" assembly. It is a signal of the Christian demeanor of life seven days a week.

This is a very important point in reference to our study of assembliology. Assembliologists consider singing on Sunday morning to be one of the key points that identifies the church. Some groups have added instrumental bands and orchestras to the vocal singing, and thus throughout Christendom, music, both instrumental and vocal, has become an identity mark of what is considered to be a church and a valid assembly on Sunday. Our point is that in many cases the singing and instrumental performance has taken assemblies beyond worship to rock concert religiosity.

The conclusion to the preceding thoughts is very practical. If a group of Christians are assembled in hiding for purposes of safety, and thus cannot sing lest their presence be discovered, do they sin? Are they conducting "an assembly"? If they do not sing, is their assembly considered "official" in the eyes of God? If a group of Christians know no songs to sing, do they sin when they assemble together if they do not sing? The singing of Christians is the natural result of their worship, but not their identity as saints of God. We must always keep in mind in this discussion that it is love, not the performance of specific rituals of worship, that defines the disciples of Jesus.

Chapter 7

CONTINUING THE HERITAGE

Since Luther, Calvin and others ingrained an assembly-oriented religiosity in the minds of people as the identity of their "Christianity," others have followed their beliefs by also identifying Christianity by an assembly. In the 400 years following the Reformation Movement, the existence of a church has been identified by what takes place in an assembly context on Sunday morning at a particular location. And in order to promote the identity of each particular denomination, each group has often adopted unique rituals by which their existence is preserved. This identity is reflected during the Sunday assembly, not necessarily in their behavioral relationships with one another throughout the week.

When restoration movements came forth out of such assembly-oriented religiosity over the past 400 years, restorationists heralded their adherents around a particular man or particular ritual that was ceremonially performed in their assemblies. Every group identified itself with a unique flavor of assembly, and then indoctrinated adherents to preserve the movement by preserving their unique assembly ritual. If no name was attached to a particular building in which the assembly

took place, unique groups could usually be identified by their particular behavior of their assembly ritual. However, regardless of some variations, every Protestant church has basically the same ritual on Sunday morning.

An example of this would be the Restoration Movement that originated out of America in the latter part of the 18th century, which actually had its initial origins in Europe. When the 18th century Restoration Movement occurred, one task of the leaders was to establish an identity of the churches of the movement by a unique assembly. Though not intended in the early part of the movement, identity by assembly ritual eventually became the hallmark of all those assemblies that would be identified with the movement, and thus, considered restored churches. The movement continued in unity until the Sunday ritual was changed by some with the addition of instrumental music. The change in the ritual divided the movement, and subsequently, gave rise to two different groups. This divided mark of identity continues to this day. It has been propagated throughout the world, and now, the two different groups of this movement are identified by what happens on Sunday morning, not necessarily by a love factor that exists in the relationship of the disciples for one another during the week. In fact, the adherents of the two groups manifested a loving relationship during the week, but divided themselves from one another on Sunday morning, meeting in church houses across the street from one another. Assembliology!

A ritual of acts of worship became the focal point of identity of many restoration churches. These acts (Lord's Supper, singing, preaching, praying, giving, and some say teaching, reading Scripture and instrumental music) were enshrined around the assembly to the point that any assembly identified as a true church had to carry on with these ceremonial acts. What subsequently resulted as history played itself out in this moment was that the acts became the identity as to whether one was a member of the universal church. In other words, if one did not assemble with those who were performing the acts, he or she was not a Christian, and thus not saved. The Sunday ritual, therefore, became the validation of one's sonship. If one did not participate in the ritual that was sanctioned as the "true assembly," then he or she could not be one who was in a covenant relationship with God. Obedience to the gospel by immersion for remission of sins, plus the legal ritual of the Sunday assembly, therefore, determined if one was saved (Consider At 15:1; Gl 1:6-9).

During the latter part of the 19th century and first of the 20th century, a debate raged among restorationists concerning acts or practices that took place during the assembly on Sunday morning. Because of the debate, "acts of worship" were legally enthroned, and eventually became the identity of an "official" Sunday assembly of the true church. After one went through the five steps of conversion (hear, believe, repent, confess, and baptism), his faithfulness was determined by his legal compliance to the acts of worship during the assembly ritual of the saints on Sunday morning. We would not argue with the simplistic nature of this system of religiosity. However, the focus of the five steps was on the legal performance of man in obedience, not on the gospel of Jesus' atoning sacrifice and resurrection. Legal performance of the acts was then translated into legal performances in "worship" on Sunday morning. The extreme focus on the acts of worship elevated the acts to be the legal identity of the church, regardless of whether the ceremonies of worship were a reflection of one's personal worship. Churches were subsequently identified by their legal obedience to the acts, and thus, laid bare for Satan to divide the disciples over trivial matters that took place in reference to the acts during the Sunday assembly.

One can now determine if he is an assembliologist simply by determining if he believes that legal compliance to defined performances during the "hour of worship" determines the faithfulness of the believer. Because assembliologists obsessed over rituals of worship, they could never understand why the one who took up the collection on Sunday morning would later steal it from the church. They could never understand why the preacher committed adultery. In their obsession with a codified ritual on Sunday morning as their identity, they had a difficult time understanding why those who legally kept the codes so precisely would behave so imperfectly. The error of the theology was in thinking that a legalistically performed ritual of "worship" was the manifestation of a changed life which sought to worship. They missed the point that worshipful saints manifest their worship through singing, prayer, offerings, good works and partaking of the Lord's Supper. [Leave out the preaching, for preaching could never be one of the "acts of worship" for the assembled for preaching is carried out by one person, and that person preached the gospel to unbelievers, not believers. According to the use of the word *kerusso* (preach) in the New Testament, preaching took place in reference to preaching the gospel to the lost. With the disciples, it was teachers teaching. Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that one *kerusso* (preached) to the disciples. Yes, look in a Bible concordance and read every context where the Greek word *kerusso* is used. The church is to send out her

preachers (Rm 10:14,15). It retains only her teachers.]

Legal adherence to codified worship worked well until the latter part of the 20th century. As a baby-boomer generation grew older, those of this generation began to perceive that ritualistic assemblies became spiritually dead. The baby-boomer generation enjoyed the sages from the stages. Charismatic movements that began in the early 1900's produced exciting assemblies that appealed to two or three generations of worshipers. And traditional adherents flocked to such exciting assemblies *en masse* because they had grown weary of the stiffness of traditional assemblies. However, as with both ritualistic and traditional assemblies, exhausted adherents in charismatic assemblies began to wander away from these assemblies in search of relationships with fellow believers. After a colorful assembly, even the exhausted charismatic remained lonely because he had no relationship with his fellow cheerleaders.

Those assembliologists who had a list of scriptures below every "act of worship" also began to wander. This migration from legalistic "worship" struck fear in the hearts of a generation of leaders who were nurtured on a legalistic performance of acts in order to identify their Christianity as being "biblical." As the X-generation, postmodern generation, and the 9-11 generation began a search for a relational Christianity, they fled from the boredom of ritualistic assemblies in order to find something that was more exciting and fulfilling.

The migration away from assembly-oriented churchianity gave further rise to the intensity of our focus on our assemblies. Assembliologists stepped up their assemblies in order to diminish the fallout. Many went into a competitive mode in order to attract adherents from competing assemblies. This gave rise to pulpit professionals, assembly leaders, digitally organized and electronic assemblies, and instrumentalists who could complete with any rock concert. Even electronic engineers were hired to perfect the worship presentation in order to develop a Hollywood production on Sunday morning. All such developments revealed the last groans of an assembly-oriented churchianity with which millions had become disenchanted. The failure of assembly-oriented churchianity to produce the love by which Jesus' disciples were to be known started to make itself very evident as history turned a new page into the 21st century.

What is natural about the human being is that we seek to be loved and to love. The human spirit seeks love far more than hysterical, or dynamically well-performed and engineered concert assemblies. In fact, 450 years of assembliology in the Protestant world has proved one thing. Codified and ritualistic assemblies do not develop loving relationships between the saints. As assembliologists sought to preserve their identity, and hang on to their adherents by orchestrating dynamic assemblies, love-starved people continued to walk out the back door. Where they had formerly gone to escape loneliness—the assembly of the saints—was where they were the most lonely, that is, in the large church assembly participating only as a spectator. No matter how well the pulpit professional performed, the exodus continued from the lonely assemblies. Widows still went home alone. No matter how intricately the worship leader perfected the mood of the assembly, love-famished people headed out in search of a well of love from which they could satisfy their thirst for someone who cared for them.

In order to stop this exodus, many churches have brought in "vocal puppeteers." These are those who seize a microphone, and through the aid of amplifiers and speakers, seek to chant the attendees into a state of emotional euphoria by pulling on their heart strings. The assembly thus becomes a place for emotional release from a desperate world in which attendees live, not a place where worship is poured out from hearts that seek to worship God. Vocal puppeteers can cheerlead the people into emotional expressions of hysteria, but after the emotional exhaustion, the attendees will leave to return to lonely homes.

Then came the instrumental concert that hijacked the assembly of worshipers in order to at least present an ear-spliting performance before religionists who were muted in their efforts to speak understandably to one another in song. The attendees could no longer speak to one another because their speaking was drowned out by the decibels of instrumentalists whose playing was amplified many times over by gigantic speakers. But regardless of all the clanging and plucking, attendees still left with ringing ears in order to discover a quiet relational worship of their Father with others of a kindred spirit. Turning up the amplifiers turned them away.

At the end of the 20th century, the handwriting was on the wall for assembly-oriented churchianity. When the statistics began to manifest the diminishing attendance of ritualistic Sunday assemblies, assembliologists did their best to preserve their churches. But no professional pulpiteer could perform in a way that satisfied the basic need for love in a lonely human individual. No assembly environment of the masses could bring individuality to those who sincerely sought to work and worship with a few worshipful people with whom they could confess their faults and establish lifelong relationships.

Chapter 8

KNOWN BY OUR ASSEMBLIES

There is almost an irony in history in reference to the institutional church assembly. In order to preserve the structure of the institution, professionals were hired for every department of ministry in order to perfect the institutionalization of the ceremonies. The more prominent the professionals, the more anonymous the individual attendee became. This was especially true in reference to the professional who regularly delivered a well prepared lecture on Sunday morning to an assembly of anonymous adherents. Unfortunately, the more ceremonial the assembly became, the more frustrated the individuals of the assembly became. Assemblies thus became impersonal meetings of the anonymous, and subsequently, the podium professionals of the large assemblies were usually beyond personal touch of the people, specifically, the pulpit professionals. The larger the assembly became, the more distant the individuals of the audience became from the conductors of the performance. The adherent's identity with the pulpit personality was always restricted by the availability of the professional lecturer. If he were to do his job well, he had little time for people relationships with those before whom he stood every week. This scenario of assembly developed a "Christianity" of people who were content to have only a "worship hour" experience with others on Sunday morning. After the worship hour, they willingly signed off their brothers until next Sunday.

The institutional church has approached the inherent problem of churchianity from every angle. Every program, every professional, and every penny has been spent in order to revive diminishing attendance figures. But the exodus from assembly-oriented churchianity in Western churches reveals that the Sunday morning ritual has run its course. Will the large and dynamic assemblies cease to exist that were promoted throughout the last 450 years of the Reformation Movement? In view of the history of empty European church buildings, they will certainly diminish in number. Statistics now prove that the downward trend of large single-assembly churches will continue. The assemblies will continue, though they will be greatly diminished in the decades to come. No longer do we see so many books written on how to build the large single-assembly church. Those large-assembly churches that do continue have all established cell or house fellowships to bring personal relationships among the members. This is a welcome change. But large single-assembly churches that are built solely around a dynamic personality will not be the future of Christendom. We are ending a 400 year period of history and things are changing. Only those who are aloof to the present paradigm shift that is permeating Christendom will cling to the sinking ship of man-made rituals of the past, and subsequently, go down with a dying generation of churchianists.

Does all this sound negative? If it does, then you may be clinging to the ship. But the present institutional and legally bound churchianity in chaos is a sign that the people are marching in the streets and struggling for release. As has been the case with many dictatorial countries in the past, the country of Tunisia in North Africa was under the bondage of a leadership that suppressed the citizenship and rigidly controlled all policies for over twenty-five years. But in 2011 the populace had enough. They took to the streets, sent the ruling party members into exile, and formed a new government. Social chaos in the streets resulted in the peoples' release from the bondage of a dictatorial and unjust government. So it happens with the church. The present struggle away from complexity and control has given rise to a positive restoration of simple New Testament Christianity. As individuals shrug off the bondage of ritualistic churchianity, a whole new era of people is being "born again."

The masses have simply discovered an old biblical truth. The road to a personal relationship with God and others is not through complexity, but simplicity. We did not grow more spiritual through the complexity of our institutional religiosity and organized rituals. Through such we become more estranged, both from God and from one another. Only when we take the risk of marching in the streets in protest against the bondage of ritualistic churchianity will we enjoy the freedom that was promised by Jesus. *"If the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed"* (Jn 8:36). Have we constructed a churchianity that is contrary to the very promise that Jesus made concerning freedom?

In the latter part of the last century, "church goers" began to speak by their actions. And their actions were not to show up on Sunday morning. They began to speak by their exodus from the professionally driven and organizationally complex church that was focused on professionally orchestrated assemblies and personalities. By meeting in small groups, wherever and whenever, a new movement has begun to speak with a reverberating voice

throughout Christendom. Those of this paradigm shift have given birth to cell or house fellowships wherein they can find one another. This restorational wave permeates almost every religious group of Christendom. While professional assembliologists carry on with diminishing assemblies in half-empty buildings, relational Christians continue to seek love for one another in the simplicity of small groups throughout the world. We are at the very beginning of a turning point in the history of Christendom that will play itself out in the next one hundred years. These are exciting times in the rebirth of simple Christianity.

The intensity, or extremity, to which assembliologists led the church into a complex ritualistic religiosity is measured by the intensity of their wail against those who seek love in small relational fellowships. This wail is primarily from the professionals of the assembly-oriented churchianists because they envision several things. They see the loss of contributors with the loss of attendance. (The nightly news in America recently reported that one of the famous mega churches in California had to declare bankruptcy because there was such a great exodus from their assemblies.) Assembliologists see the loss of adherents before whom they can perform their speeches. Some see the loss of people over whom they can exercise their narcissistic desire to control. And then some see the loss of those they have stolen from the lordship of Jesus. We can well understand this dismay if Christianity is an assembly-oriented religion that is defined by the modern assembliologist. If the church is defined by its assemblies in an assembly-oriented Christendom, then statistically the church is dying. But we would encourage another investigation of the Scriptures concerning the one-another, love-oriented Christianity we discover in the New Testament. This is the church from which the assembliologist led us astray. This Christianity is not dying. It is vibrant, exciting and permeating the lives of millions of people throughout the world.

This is not a church that is defined by complex and ordered Sunday assemblies. It is a worldwide body of disciples who seek to encounter one another wherever and whenever, with no particular location being the "sanctuary" of their encounter. These are encounters that emphasize what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, *"... neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem ..."* (Jn 4:21). These disciples seek to encounter one another anywhere and everywhere, in coffee shops, homes, parks, schools, . . . everywhere. They are not defined by formal assemblies. They are defined by their love that leads them to seek out one another, whether in caves or catacombs.

Are we now in a generation of Christianity that is seeking to rediscover the essence of true Christianity? Are we in a generation that is exhausted with "going to church," and now just wants to be church in their communities? We think so. At least the inner nature of the human spirit is driving this generation to others of a kindred spirit who also seek the simplicity of Christianity in a relationship with Jesus. What the assembliologists constructed in the last 450 years, and intensified in the latter part of the last century, which system of religiosity continues today, does not seem to be sustaining the organized church. The decline in attendance of assembly-oriented churches is evidence that something in that form of religiosity is lacking. History is now making a very clear statement. The large, single-assembly church will not survive the tidal wave of people who are seeking to bond with others in order to survive the future. And when we refer to survival in matters of the future, we are not thinking about 25 to 50 years. What we are discussing are matters that take one or two centuries to play out in history. It took a hundred years to empty out church buildings in Europe. It may take the same amount of time to do the same with the present assembly oriented churchianity of the West.

Those large assembly churches that will survive will be those who have encouraged their adherents to meet also in small relational groups in order to establish loving fellowships with one another. The large assemblies will continue only because the members come out of small groups in order to meet with the larger fellowship. It is thus not the time to sell the basilicas to be warehouses as was the case in Europe, but time to change church buildings into work stations. If we do not, then take some time and travel through the empty corridors of former church buildings throughout Europe in order to see the future. Travel around and visit large church buildings in America and be awakened by the vast number of empty pews.

In reference to large assemblies, we are not heading for the best of times. As the world becomes small in a digitally communicative populace, the negative forces of the world will become greater obstacles to Christianity. We speak as world citizens. Being a resident of the world since the early 70's has taught us many things concerning the survival of the Christian in the world. It has also taught us that the world is unveiling a new order that is not friendly to institutional churchianity.

There are religious forces that increasingly challenge the Christian that are associated with the West. In particular, Islam, a theocratic system of religion, has a difficult time separating Western government from Christianity. And thus, the hostility of Western governments

toward Islamic countries has developed a fundamental Islamist culture that will not go away. Within the world view of Islam, time is not a factor. The true Muslim believes that the world will eventually become Islam. And when considering the fact that there are now over 1.5 billion Muslims in the world today, he is probably not far from the truth. The mass immigration of Muslims to former colonial countries in the West will eventually change those countries into Islamic countries. Since these western countries are democracies, they will become Muslim led as the majority of the voting population becomes Muslim. Europe will become Muslim. Add to the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, the Buddhists of China, the Hindus of India, and a host of other non-Christian religions, and the religious world that is growing is a world that will be hostile to those who believe that Jesus alone is the only way to the Father.

Historians have correctly concluded that the rise of the Western economy was to a great extent the result of embedded principles of Christianity within the society. The irony of this story is that the more developed an economy becomes, the less it seems to focus on the principles of faith. When does the time come in the development of a society that it turns from the foundation or impetus of its growth to rejecting its foundation? America was founded on principles that came straight from the Bible. But now, as Europe, to a great extent America rejects those principles. With development came materialism, and with materialism came secularism, and with secularism came humanism. And thus the Western resident now lives in an era of the demise of its roots.

It must be said that Christianity in many ways has failed the West because the Western "Christian" shut up his Christianity in a church house on Fifth and Main. Have you ever wondered why a Muslim remains a Muslim? Or a Jew a Jew? We have discovered that it is very difficult for Western Christians to understand Muslims, Hindus, Jews and many other non-Christian religions throughout the world. The Western Christian has wondered why the adherents to such faiths can be so faithful. The answer is in the fact that a Muslim does not confine his religion to an assembly in a Mosque. He does not define his faith by an assembly. He is a Muslim by culture, faith and life, not by some performance in a ritualistic assembly as does the Christian. Assembliologists can never understand this. A Jew is a Jew, not because of any synagogue assemblies. He is a Jew by culture, faith and life. Now think of the difficulty of trying to "convert" a Muslim or a Jew to our assembly-defined religiosity.

Though the demise of Christianity is often reserved for those in Western urban areas, the same pattern prevails in developing countries. We would challenge you to investigate any megacity of the world. The number of disciples in these cities are few. Establishing fellowships among disciples in urban cities of the world is very difficult. Africa and India are known for great church growth. But this growth is not in the urban centers. It is among the rural people.

Mix development and urbanization together and you come up with a society that makes it very difficult for the survival of the Christian. It is axiomatic that the more the urbanization in a developing country, the less the church growth.

Ironically, China might be the last bastion of Christianity in the centuries to come. The present policies of the China government are conducive to church growth. As with Rome two thousand years ago, Christians in China are forced to remain disorganized and in small groups, often meeting in secret in their homes. The restrictions on Christianity that were carried out by the Roman government in the last half of the 1st century and throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries are being carried out by the government of China today. Christianity grew during those oppressive Roman years, and so the same is occurring today in China.

If the existence of Christianity in the context of the suppression of the Roman government teaches us anything, it teaches us that Christianity grows under suppression. When Constantine hijacked Christianity for his own political objectives in the 4th century, all that changed. When the church was at ease under Constantine, Christians, to a great extent, lost much of their survival instinct.

But for now, China is stirring a massive underground church movement. This movement will result in the preservation of Christianity in the midst of a rising Islamist movement worldwide that will not tolerate Christianity when it has the majority vote. We can thank the China government for not allowing Christianity to digress into an assembly-oriented organized institution.

Will the church ever go out of existence? To that question we would have to answer absolutely not. As long as there is one soul on earth who loves and obeys the Bible, the church will exist on earth. The sole purpose of the existence of the church is to populate and prepare people for heaven. The eternality of the righteous in the presence of God teaches this profound truth. This world is not our home. It is only the opportunity to populate heaven. As long as there is receptivity for populating heaven, then God will allow this world to continue. But when the receptivity of the world diminishes to the point where the church cannot carry out its mis-

sion of populating heaven, then there is no longer a purpose for the existence of the world. We would assume that God would leave at least "five faithful" for whom Abraham would plead. But we would not assume that God will allow the world to exist beyond the opportunity of the church to bring souls into eternity. When the hostility of the world, or the indifference of Christians, makes it useless for the church to carry out her mission, then we would assume that the end is upon us. Why would God allow a world to continue to produce souls who would only end up in hell? And what good for God is an indifferent and "whatever" church that will not accomplish His work of populating heaven?

We do not assume to be a prophet. But we would assume that the end of the world is much closer now with an urbanized society of people that is steeped in materialism, and a religious environment that is hostile to Christianity. As the institutional church becomes more indifferent to her calling to evangelize the world, then why would God still need the world if the church no longer sees the world as an opportunity to populate heaven? We would ask Jesus to hold off His coming destruction only in view of the fact that there are still some sincere souls out there who want to hear the gospel. There are still some who want to preach the gospel to them. But when there is no one who will hear or preach, then we can only say, "Come, Lord Jesus." Bring this thing to an end.

The church in Sardis gave the appearance that she was alive. Jesus said, *"I know your works"* (Rv 3:1). The Sardis disciples were active. Their "works" gave them a name that they were alive as a church (Rv 3:1). This was the church, therefore, to which people gravitated because they were active in works and appeared to be alive before the community. They were doing things, and assuredly, they were a vibrant church who had vibrant assemblies. However, Jesus' judgment of this church was, ***"You are dead"*** (Rv 3:1). For some reason their *"works were not perfected before God"* (Rv 3:2). Jesus' exhortation was that they remember and repent (Rv 3:3). They were exhorted to remember how they had received the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1,2). They must remember the word of God they had been taught. The lesson is that active churches are dead if they forget the word of God by which they were begotten (1 Pt 1:23). If the Sardis church did not repent, then Jesus' coming upon them in judgment would be as a thief. Thieves are not expected. Indifferent churches become unconcerned about the coming of Jesus, and thus, His coming in time in judgment on them is as a thief. The light of the Sardis church would go out long before they would realize that they ceased being a church for Christ. Simply because a religious group exists who calls on the name of Jesus, does not make that group a representative of Jesus (See Mt 7:21-23). Jesus knows only those who know and do His will. We can be known for our works, but we must be zealous to do works according to His will. *"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples'"* (Jn 8:31).

Epilogue

Almost all those who fall under the umbrella of Christendom focus on single assemblies once or twice a week for the members of a particular group. Throughout this book we have challenged the theology that the Sunday morning assembly should be the identity of the church. We firmly believe that such a means of identity is contrary to the nature by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified (Jn 13:34,35). Now that many churches have worked themselves into a corner on this matter, we thought it would be good to close with some suggestions on where to go from here. Suppose you have allowed yourselves to fall into an "assembly identity" of the church. Where would you go from here? The following are some suggestions that come from other single-assembly churches who have found themselves in the rut of single-assembly churchianity. There are literally thousands of these churches who, over the past thirty to forty years, have started working themselves back to a relational oriented body of believers.

- The leaders must sit down and make a plan of how they are going to approach the challenge of focusing on one another in small group fellowships. The plan must be written down and given to all the participating members.

- Start teaching the nature of discipleship as it is portrayed in the New Testament. Teaching on this subject should be over a period of several months. Some churches have conducted camps for all the leaders where the subject of relational Christianity was thoroughly studied over a weekend.

- Those leaders who will begin the initial fellowship groups in their homes must spend a great deal of time

in prayer that God prepare them to minister to the needs of others. These leaders must thoroughly study the relational behavior the early disciples had with one another.

- Be patient with everyone. If a group of disciples has been thoroughly indoctrinated with institutional assembliology, it will take several years to change the way they understand the behavior of the early Christians. It will take each person at least one year in a small relational fellowship to begin understanding the dynamics of the "one another" relationship that Christians are to have with one another.

- Remember that there is no ritual for house fellowships. Since nothing is stated in the New Testament, then use your imagination.

- Small group fellowships can be started during the week, or Sunday evening, depending on the desires of those who are leading the groups.

- Continue with the Sunday morning assembly. We have found that when churches in a region start focusing on their house fellowships as the means by which life changes can be encouraged, the focus of the Sunday morning assembly changes. It changes to an opportunity to invite others to come for initial contact. Since the world of Christendom is focused on the Sunday morning assembly, this may be the place where they initially contact all the church. Churches that have house fellowships throughout their communities use the Sunday morning assembly as an opportunity to reach their community.

- Some churches that have moved into being multiple-assembly have changed their Sunday morning into an evangelistic outreach to the community. They have subsequently moved the Lord's Supper to the house fellowships on Sunday night in the homes of the members.

- Continually focus the thinking of the members on the relational fellowship of the house groups. Once these groups begin to bond and function, they will in turn begin other groups. Do not assume that every member must be present for the Sunday morning assembly. When groups start other groups, the new, secondary groups may be too far from the common place of assembly for entire families to journey to the place of assembly. The work of the seed of the kingdom must not be hindered in its leavening process throughout a community. Our assemblies on Sunday should never hold back the permeating work of the leaven of God's word throughout a region.

Book 37

One Lord With All Authority Over All Things

The Christ-centered life starts and continues throughout eternity with Jesus. The Christ-centered disciple understands that Jesus must be the King and Lord of his life in all things. In order for one to feel this way about life, he must first believe that there are no authorities, masters or lords of this earth that stand between him and Christ. When individuals feel that they are first subject to a spiritual lord, master or authority in this world, they can never fully appreciate the meaning of a Christ-centered life. When disciples of Christ must first feel the approval of someone on earth in their relationship with Christ, they will never fully feel the approval of Jesus. Christians must understand, therefore, that their approval by Jesus never depends on the approval of some man or group of men on earth. The truly Christ-centered life first begins by realizing that Jesus Christ is the one Lord of our lives as He is the one Lord over all things.

"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."
Jesus
(Mark 10:42,43)

These words of Jesus were the revelation of a surreal behavior in leadership that would turn the world upside down. It would be a leadership that would be characteristic of the nature of the ekklesia He would establish. At the time He spoke, He was in the process of changing the beliefs and behavior of those who had for so long been influenced by the religious world of an apostate Judaism. But regardless of their past, Jesus was introducing to His disciples a concept of leadership that would change the world. It would change the world because it would be the reverse of what the world taught concerning leadership. Instead of leading by power and authority, His disciples would lead by servicing the needs of others. It is our challenge, therefore, to look into the pages of Scripture in order to discover this dynamic that changed the world in the 1st century.

Leadership among God's people during Jesus' ministry was in a paradigm shift of belief and behavior. A new and marvelous thing was in the process of being revealed to mankind. The servanthood leadership to which birth would be given from a community of loving servants would be a beautiful thing that the world had not experienced. The ekklesia would be a community with leaders who would be sparked into existence and sustained by the very nature of the incarnate God of love.

It was difficult for the early disciples at first to discover the magic of Jesus' concept of the ekklesia and her leadership. Through example and teaching, Jesus patiently worked with His early disciples in order to reveal what was so uncommon in the world in which they lived. But once they discovered the treasure of what He was bringing into the world, the community of first disciples, the ekklesia, became a wonderful force of love that exploded into existence with nuclear results in the 1st century.

The phenomenal growth of the early ekklesia was based on the nature of the community of God that gave birth to a dynamic leadership that was a magnet to thirsting souls in a world of political turmoil and religious bondage. If we can only discover the seemingly secret of what Jesus was revealing concerning true leadership, then we will experience the same growth today. If we restore the magic of His principle of leadership, we will enjoy again the restoration of the community of God that was initiated by Jesus two millennia in the past. So we ask that you sit back and marvel with us as we delve into history and the didactic of the Holy Writ in order to discover the heart of a community of people who gave rise to leaders who were not defined by the standards of the secular world.

We will discover that the early disciples were truly gospel-driven people. They lived the gospel that they had obeyed. Their lives, therefore, became the living testimony of the One who was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to take gospel-obedient believers into eternal life. This is the exciting discovery that we gain from studying the effect of the gospel on the lives of people.

Chapter 1

ORGANIZE FOR SUCCESS

We live in religious world where "Christianity" has become well organized and structured. Some refer to "the church" as a well-organized institution that would equal the organizational structure of any corporation of the Western developed world. The modern business world has had a great impact on how the ekklesia (church) of disciples organize themselves for action. Being subjects of our corporate world, we cannot help ourselves. Whenever a proposal is made by the disciples to accomplish a certain feat, we fret ourselves about who is in charge and how we are going to "plan" for success. We are cursed with our own corporate culture that regiments the troops into order in an effort to guarantee productivity, and thus, success. We have constructed committees, boards, councils and synods. And to efficiently run our religious structures, we have assigned administrators, directors and presidents. In order to guarantee the smooth operation of the organizations, we have invested the leaders with authority to dictate direction and control in order to guarantee success and accomplishment. We have often credited ourselves with our accomplishments to the point of minimizing the work of God through the ekklesia. Effective organization has taken the place of faith. And since the industrial revolution, our understanding of the "organized" church was exported throughout the world by a vast missionary force who had been cloned after the theology of the Western church.

In order to fund our organizations we have adopted the latest marketing strategies. Those organizations that make the greatest noise, and portray before the public the flare of order, are given the funds for continuation. In order to be the successful church, we have obsessed ourselves with "organizationalism" to the point that we have left no room for God to operate. If Jesus came today, we wonder where He would fit in with some of the monstrous ecclesiastical organizations that we consider so dear for the function and outreach of His ekklesia.

What if we stripped ourselves of our institutional organizational culture, and then as objectively as possible, read the pages of the New Testament? With an open mind, could we discover the "organization" of the 1st century ekklesia as it functioned as an organism to carry out the mission of evangelizing the world? Could we do this? Though we might not be able to do this objectively because our organizational culture is such a part of our inner being, we must at least give it a try.

In order for the institutional organizational culture of the modern world to exist, it must have structures of rank and command in its leadership. Someone must always be in charge in order to guarantee success. In the corporate and civic world, rank and command are necessary for the existence of governments and corporations. But when we come to the ekklesia, we must listen to Jesus' mandate, *"But it will not be so among you."*

But we are saturated in our culture with positions and authority. We plagiarize adjectives as pastor, apostles, elder, bishop, evangelist, and deacon from the pages of the New Testament in order to make them titles that set apart those we consider to have authority over us. If success is not accomplished, then someone must be blamed. Someone must be sued. In the religious world, if the church is not growing, it is the preacher who must go to court and be fired. This institutional behavior has been going on since the industrial revolution started to mold the organizational structure of the church of God. In order for the church organization to be successful, we assumed that structured organization with lords, authorities and masters would be necessary for the growth of the church. And in order to have a successful organizational structure, authority must be delegated to those we would hold accountable for either success or failure. In the modern institutional church, therefore, we have become obsessed with authority. Whenever we visit a group of disciples, we immediately search for "who is in charge." "Who calls the shots in this church?" And when a church is not growing, we assume that someone must be "sued" for lack of growth.

Our obsession with authority and success among the disciples always makes this a very colorful discussion. The humble servants of the ekklesia will have no problem. They seek only to serve, caring less about who gets the glory. But those who have determined to ignore Jesus' mandate, *"But it will not be so among you,"* will certainly have difficulty remaining calm in the midst of this discussion. We have found this true in discussing this particular subject with the many lords, authorities and masters among us. When questioning any authority on earth among the disciples on earth, men groan in their souls because they often feel that their very manhood is being attacked. We would assume that those who have failed to understand the servant nature of the ekklesia would naturally react in such a manner. And it is thus

for this reason that we must lay aside our business and political culture and turn again to the simplicity of the New Testament ekklesia in order to humble ourselves before the cross.

In order to understand the nature of the ekklesia it is imperative that we understand the nature of the leadership that Jesus mandated would be characteristic of those who would lead His flock. We do live in a world of political despots. It seems that this culture of the political world has in many cases made its way into the leadership structures of many churches. It is for this reason that we must take another look at the subject of leadership as it is revealed in the New Testament.

The problem with despots is that they breed a culture of suspicion. Some despots in governments go to drastic measures in order to guarantee their control of the country. Some stockpile massive amounts of armament. Among their appointed officials, some regularly shift their cabinets around in order that no one person gain a following among those over whom they have authority. Some surround themselves with "yes men" who continually feed the ego of self-proclaimed saviors of their country. Others simply enrich their generals in order that they not be tempted to stage a coup. The culture of the autocratic leader in government is based on suspicion. The despot leader is suspicious of everyone. And for good reason. As soon as he lets his guard down, he's gone.

Imagine religious despots who generate a culture of suspicion among the disciples of Jesus in order to maintain control. One-man-pastored churches are common in the religious world. This is particularly true among independent churches who have structured their organization after the religions around them. This one-man rule of churches creates suspicion among those who function as leaders. The single pastor is always afraid that someone is seeking "his flock." He thus develops a mentality of suspicion. And when there is suspicion, there are no true relationships among brethren.

We live in a world of Christendom today where there has been in the last few decades a massive growth in house churches throughout the world. This exodus from the institutional church structure has not been without cause. Institutional Christianity became so structured with hierarchies of control, boards, synods and committees that were ruled by religious despots, that many members fled the bondage of such organizations in order to find freedom in small individual assemblies. Unfortunately, many of those who fled simply took with them a similar culture of despot religiosity to their homes. When fleeing out the back door of the institutional church, they did not "dechurch" sufficiently in order to avoid bringing with them the same concept of lordship leadership that they experienced in organized religion. Subsequently, they established small organized institutional churches that met in their homes.

We have visited many independent churches throughout the years. One of the characteristics of those who have started such churches that initially came out of institutional religions, is that they seem to construct again that from which they fled. Leadership is still viewed as "taking control." Suspicion is thus high among some newly established independent churches. They are suspicious of others taking control of their new institutionalized churches. Preachers take control of their churches in order to reassure themselves that their particular group will not be stolen by another religious despot similar to the one that they fled. Many small independent churches, therefore, are actually a spin off with minor authorities who ran into conflict with the greater authorities of the organized institutional church. They thus circle around and become that from which they fled. The process of building another authority base begins again, from which there will ultimately be other spin off groups who conflict with the established authorities. This has been an endless cycle of multiplication by division that has plagued churches for years.

But we are not interested in reforming dysfunctional interpretations of the New Testament ekklesia. It is our task to focus on what Jesus initiated 2,000 years ago. In order to understand the leadership He seeks to lead His people today, we must first understand the nature of the ekklesia He established that was based on the fact that He only is the One Lord who has all authority over all things.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS THE EKKLESIA?

In the New Testament the English word "church" is used to translate the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word "ekklesia" was a common Greek word that was used in the culture of the 1st century. It was a word that was used in the political culture of the day, and thus, the word had many political connotations attached to it. We won-

der, therefore, why Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit, would use this word in identifying the community of God's people. We think the answer to this question is understood by understanding the definition of the word as it was used in the society of the 1st century.

In the society of the 1st century the word "ekklesia" was used almost always in reference to political assemblies, though the word was also used in reference to a general assembly of businessmen in order to make a community decision. This was the case in Acts 19:23-41. The word is used in verses 32,39 & 41. The word ekklesia is translated "assembly" in these verses. The craftsmen had gathered in an ekklesia (assembly) in order to make a decision by consensus in reference to the effect the ekklesia of God was having on the local businesses. In this particular situation the ekklesia was a meeting of the local businessmen in order to make a decision concerning the endangerment of their business. The ekklesia, therefore, was a general meeting for the purpose of making a decision by all who were assembled.

The use of the word as illustrated by the Acts 19 meeting helps us understand why Jesus used the word in reference to His people (See Mt 16:13-20; 18:15-20). The purpose for the calling of an ekklesia was to have a community discussion in order to make a community decision by consensus. The ekklesia in the secular world was a calling of the people to discuss a subject that affected all the people. All the people, therefore, were called together to make a mutual decision concerning the subject at hand. In reference to the ekklesia of God, emphasis is on two things: (1) the whole body of people are to be involved, and (2) the whole body of people must function as a group in order to make decisions as to what the whole body would do concerning the subject under discussion (See the examples of At 6:1-6; 15:6-21; compare 1 Co 14:23).

The ekklesia of God does not come together to make laws, but to carry out the work that is assigned to her by Jesus. The laws have already been given. It is the implementation of the laws in the lives of men that must be decided upon and carried out. The governing nature of the ekklesia, therefore, is not based on a body of leaders who make the decisions for the ekklesia, but a body of people who mutually decide for themselves what they will do. (Do not forget this point as we journey through the discussion of this book.)

If we can work our way through all the structures of organized religion that exist in the world today, it is possible to find our way to the central nature of the ekklesia that Jesus established. In order to do this, we must first focus on the subject of leadership. It is leadership that defines the nature of the church, for the nature of the church must be reflected in the nature of her leadership. Leadership that has given up a knowledge of the word of God, invariably establishes churches that are patterned after the culture of the leader. We live in a biblically ignorant world in reference to Christendom. We would assume, therefore, that there is a very corrupted concept of leadership in the religious world that is patterned after the leadership that is common in the world. The result of a biblically ignorant and culturally defined leadership is a world of dysfunctional churches that are patterned after the institutional organizations of the world.

It is imperative that our understanding of the nature of the ekklesia be based on our understanding of the leadership that Jesus instituted. After the establishment of the ekklesia in Acts 2, the leadership of the ekklesia was defined in the epistles with reference to the fundamental principles that Jesus taught during His ministry. The Bible, therefore, must be used to define the ekklesia, and subsequently, the leadership that originates from the ekklesia.

Jesus came to set us free from the bondage of the world in which we live (Jn 8:32). Being set free indeed by Jesus meant more than freedom in reference to salvational matters. It meant being set free from a world of oppression. It meant being set free through love. Jesus said to His disciples, *"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). He said that this love as He loved them would be the signal of discipleship, and thus, the identity of the ekklesia (Jn 13:35).

We often interpret the "new love commandment" of Jesus to simply mean our benevolent concern for one another as brothers in Christ. But there is something more to love and mutual care for one another's needs that must define our discipleship, and subsequently, the ekklesia. Being set free, and loving as He loved us, cannot be separated. **True love does not bring others into bondage**. True love sets free the one who is loved. It is for this reason that a husband is to love his wife as Jesus also loved the church (Ep 5:25). A loving husband does not bring his wife into bondage. Jesus loved us, and thus, He set us free. We are set free by love in order to be drawn to Him. Because He has set us truly free, we voluntarily stay close to Him in response to His love. A wife will stay close to her husband, and thus submit to her husband, when she is set free by her husband's love. Jesus' leadership through love draws us to Him (Jn 6:44; 12:32). Herein is the beauty of the ekklesia. We are drawn to Jesus by love, not law. Law confines, but love sets free. And free men are drawn to the One who indeed has set them free.

Love and freedom are an inseparable foundation upon which the ekklesia and her leadership is based. Leaders love, and thus, they set those they lead free to serve. They do not bring others into bondage. Previous to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jesus spoke concerning the rise of many false prophets who would deceive many. He spoke of a social context where *"the love of many will grow cold"* (Mt 24:11,12). When leaders grow cold in love of those they intend to lead, they will resort to authoritarian leadership. But those leaders who seek to set people free in Christ, will reach out with love. They will not command their leadership by exercising legal authority over the flock of God.

Love is the foundation upon which the ekklesia is led and sustained. As long as men and women seek freedom, there will always be a response to Jesus who seeks to set all men free. And as long as leaders love the ekklesia as Jesus loved them, there will always be those who will follow their love. This is the fundamental principle upon which the leadership of the ekklesia is defined. If one does not understand the "new commandment" of loving one another as Jesus loved us, then he will never understand those scriptures in the New Testament that speak of leaders among the disciples who led the early ekklesia by loving servanthood.

Chapter 3

THE EKKLESIA: A COMMUNITY OF FREE PEOPLE

Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, **and that they may have it more abundantly**"* (Jn 10:10). The abundant life to which Jesus referred was something in this life, not eternal life. He came to give us a fulfilled life, abundant in joy, peace and good works that results from our obedience to the gospel of grace. In the context of baptism in submission to the gospel, Paul referred to a new behavior in newness of life. *"... 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). Those who have the abundant life are walking in the newness of life that resulted from their obedience to the gospel. Those who walk in the newness of life are *"freed from sin"* (Rm 6:7). And being freed from sin by the grace of God, Christians walk in thanksgiving of the grace of God (2 Co 4:15). Walking in the newness of life, therefore, is enjoying the fullest of life in the grace of God. This is the abundant life. *"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ..."* (Ep 2:10). By walking in newness of life, we work out our *"own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Ph 2:12). Walking the abundant life is based on walking in the freedom by which Christ has set us free by His love.

When Jesus said that His disciples would be known for their love of one another (Jn 13:34,35), He made the connection between the newness of life and abundant life in reference to God loving us through Jesus (Jn 3:16). Jesus set us free through His love that was manifested on the cross (Jn 8:32). And since Christians have been set free by the love of God, they set one another free through love. Jesus did not bring us into bondage. We no longer walk in bondage, and should refrain at all cost from returning to a life of bondage by submitting to man-made ordinances to which Paul referred when he said that we should not "touch, taste or handle" the restrictions of bondage (Cl 2:21; see Gl 5:1). When one has been set free, he can enjoy the fullness of life. One who lives in freedom is more abundant in his ministry than one who works under bondage.

It is our spirit that is set free. And free spirits thrive in the newness of their lives. The ekklesia is made up of all those throughout the world who have been set free because they know that they have been loved by God through Jesus. And because they have been set free through the love of God, they reciprocate the same to others. They *"love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19). Christians honor the freedom of one another in order that they enjoy the newness of life because of their obedience to the gospel by baptism.

So what does all this have to do with lords, authorities and masters? Simple! Lords, authorities and masters bring free spirits into bondage. The nature of bondage works against all that Jesus did in order to bring us to freedom that results in living the abundant life. Bondage deprives us of enjoying a new life that is abundant in manifesting love and service to others. Paul expressed the abundance of his own life when he was delivered by grace out of the bondage of legalistic Judaism into the freedom of Christ. *"But by the grace of God I am what I am. 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). God's grace toward Paul was not wasted. He was moved to service. Grace moves one to work abundantly for God. God's love and grace set us free to labor

abundantly. Paul wrote, *"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 causes thanksgiving to abound. And because we seek others who would respond to grace to the glory of God, we preach the gospel of grace. Because of his grateful heart, Paul sought to set others free from those who sought to bind on them the bondage of legalistic codes of man-made religiosity.

Paul (Saul) was formerly zealous as a religious leader under a legal system of religious bondage. But when he was set free by the grace of God, he labored more abundantly. Freedom by grace, therefore, moves one to be more productive in life to the glory of God. The reason this happens in one's life is because after experiencing the freedom by grace that sets us free, we labor more abundantly in thanksgiving because of our salvation. And unless we labor for Jesus, we cannot experience the happiness that comes from serving others (Jn 13:17). If we would enjoy the abundant life, therefore, we must maintain our freedom that we received as a result of our obedience to the gospel of grace.

It is freedom that inspires. Freedom inspires self-initiative because one does not have to ask for permission to serve others spontaneously. Bondage confines. Freedom gives life to minister for Jesus, not to slave within the walls of organized institutionalism (denominationalism) that is controlled by lords, authorities and masters. This freedom that we enjoy in Christ is the "newness of life." And when one walks in the newness of the abundant life, he is free to walk with Jesus in serving everyone with whom he makes contact everyday of his life. Lords, authorities and masters seek to confine the individual disciple's freedom by a regimented system of organizational control by men in order that the organization receives the glory. But when one serves freely and individually through his submission to his one Lord Jesus, Jesus receives all the glory. Is this not what Paul meant when he wrote, *"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).

All those who walk in freedom to bring glory to Jesus through their service of others make up the worldwide ekklesia of Christ. Being part of the ekklesia is the abundant life. It is walking in newness of life. It is a new life in reference to our former life of bondage. But if we bring lords, authorities and masters into the ekklesia, then the new returns to being the old. The bondage of denominational religiosity is that men seek to captivate free people under an umbrella of man-made creeds in order to take the glory of individual service away from Jesus.

The 21st century is clearly illustrating the preceding principle in reference to man's desire to be free. After World War II countless dictators came onto the scene of world history. Africa has had its share. But the philosophy of dictatorial rule over groups of people works against the very nature of the God-created psychology of people to be free. The 21st century has witnessed the collapse of countless dictators throughout the world when the citizenship marched in protest against dictatorial regimes. Why?

Jesus said to a community of religious people who were in the bondage of their own religiosity, *"And you will know the truth, and* ***the truth will make you free****"* (Jn 8:32). Jesus referred to this same principle when He was asked by Pilate if he were a king. *"Everyone who is of* ***the truth*** *hears My voice"* (Jn 18:37). Pilate did not understand Jesus' concept of truth because he functioned as Rome's symbol of oppression of the people. After WW II there were countless similar oppressive governments and their leadership throughout the world. But with "truth" comes freedom. Jesus came with truth that would set the minds and souls of men free from both religious and totalitarian oppression. In religion, He set men free from the domination of religious dictators who reigned over the minds of the people. In world governments, He set men's minds free when they submitted to the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

When we "know the truth," we are set free. It is truth that sets us free from the propaganda of those who seek to keep us in bondage. As in the religious world, so in the world of dictatorial governments, knowledge ("truth") of the free world has brought down countless dictatorial regimes in the last few decades. Through mass-media systems of communicating information men have been set free from political oppression. No longer can people be held in bondage by misinformation. Education released the desire of people to be free from authoritarian propaganda. The fax machine brought down the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, for "truth" could be communicated to the people. People could be informed outside the institutional communication systems of totalitarian propaganda. The Internet, through social programs as Facebook and Twitter, gave people the opportunity to access the "truth."

When the desire of men to be free is connected with the "truth," revolutions are inspired. Informed people do not want to be held in bondage by dictatorial leaders who seek to confine them in bondage by their authoritarian rule. When those who seek to be free discover truth, they will revolt against lords, authorities and masters. In the spiritual world, Jesus truly did set us free. He set us free by revealing the truth that salvation

is by grace through faith, not via the bondage of religious legalism. Paul cautioned, however, that we *"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). The context of Paul's statement was in reference to those who sought to bind on the believers laws that God had not bound. The Galatians were threatened with the bondage of institutional Judaism. The Galatians had been set free from such religious legalism and were never to return.

The ekklesia is God's community of people who have been set free from the confines of religious regimes. Our freedom in Christ, therefore, is a fundamental teaching that must never be compromised (See Gl 5:1-6).

Chapter 4

FREE MEN SEEK TO BE FREE

There will always be those who seek to step up and step on our freedom. The world swarms with those who would be authorities over the faith of God's people. That we have been set free by the truth means that we also should be vigilant to keep ourselves out of bondage (Gl 5:1).

Among religious movements in Christendom there is almost always a shift in the leadership structure of the movements from Jesus in heaven to some man or group of men on earth. We find security in our leadership on earth who exercise authority over us. Such leaders give us destiny and direction. Our desire to have a visible authority among us is often too strong for us to remain alone with King Jesus in heaven who would have all authority over all things in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). The same thing that happened in Israel with their call for a king, often happens among God's people today. Israel cried out for a king, an authority they could see and hear. We hear the same cries today. The drift away from Jesus to men is often unnoticed. It is not painful, nor is there discomfort among those who willingly give their allegiance to a pope or pastor on earth who would command them to do this or that. Our empirical senses to have someone or a group with whom we would identify ourselves reassures us of who we are. Our "kings" make us feel that we belong when we pledge allegiance to his sovereignty over us. Any supposedly "abstract" authority that may be manifested from Someone we cannot see, touch or hug leaves us insecure. It is so natural for those who are earthly to construct earthly things in order to be identified among the earthly. We are cursed with a desire to have a hero among us who would fight our battles.

Our desire to be identified as distinct from others lends us to being institutionally structured to be identified as different from others. And in order to be different, we seek to identify and acclaim those among us who would tell us what to do and be. So as long as there are those among us who have a love for prominence, there will always be those who will set themselves forward as Diotrephetic leaders among the disciples in order to guarantee the existence and continuation of our heritage (3 Jn 9,10).

Those who love to be first will always seek to be first. As Diotrephes, they will unjustly slander competition with malicious words in order to guarantee their prominent leadership positions among the disciples. They will not receive evangelists who go about preaching the word of God, for those who preach the word of God threaten the positions of authority that Diotrephetic leaders assume among the disciples. Diotrephetic leaders will thus intimidate the disciples to conform to their mandates. As Diotrephes, they will threaten to cast others from the fellowship of the "organization." What we often do not understand, therefore, is that the very institutional nature after which we have organized the church to be, lends itself to develop and promote Diotrephetic leaders who command by the authority they are given. How we organize ourselves as the ekklesia becomes the mother who gives birth to the leaders we seek.

The preceding is the reason why we must have a clear understanding of the nature of the ekklesia of Christ. Christ set us free from the bondage of lords, authorities and masters. Therefore, the ekklesia is a community of free people who have been set free to serve only one Lord.

The ekklesia cannot give birth to something that is greater than herself. **If the ekklesia is a community of free servants, then she cannot give birth to lords, authorities and masters who would bring her into bondage**. If the ekklesia does give birth to lords, authorities and masters who would reign over her on earth, then the ekklesia has gone astray. She has become an institutional denomination patterned after the nations around her. She has become a denomination of people who are crying out for kings other than King Jesus.

We must always remember that Jesus never commissioned His people to give birth to something greater than themselves as the ekklesia. He reigns in the hearts of His people (Lk 17:20,21). He is the only Lord of His people (Ep 4:5). He did not delegate to His people the authority to appoint any other lords, authorities and masters who would function as a board of directors to take control of His people. The ekklesia was never given the authority to give birth to something different and greater than the ekklesia herself. Since the ekklesia is a community of free people who have been set free indeed (Jn 8:32), then the true ekklesia can never give birth to those who would bring her into bondage. This is why Paul made the statement in Galatians 2:4 concerning brethren who were false, and thus came in among the free disciples in order to bring them again into bondage. *"But this happened because of **false brethren** secretly brought in, who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, **that they might bring us into bondage**."*

We must never forget that the community of God, the church, is a fellowship of free people. So free people who love Jesus and His word will not be brought into the bondage of those who would assume authority over the sheep of Jesus. Because they were delivered from the bondage of those who would imprison them through the dictates of men, they will heed the mandate of Paul to remain free (Gl 5:1). If a church is not giving birth to leaders who seek to guard our freedom, then we need to take another look at the nature of the church we are promoting.

Being "entangled again with a yoke of bondage" means that there are those who would claim authority to mandate their decisions among the flock of God. Bondage means that authority is assumed by someone or a group of people. And in the context of Paul's statement of Galatians 5:1, there were those who were seeking by their assumed authority to bind where God had not bound. But the fact that Paul made the command, "do not be entangled," means that **no man on earth has authority to entangle the disciples with decisions that have not been bound by God**. If one cannot speak where the oracles of God speak, then he has no authority (1 Pt 4:11). Nowhere in the New Testament do we find it taught that men have authority to bind their decisions on the flock of God without the consent of the flock.

Fellowship of people ("churches") that have never really understood the freedom by which Christians have been set free, can never produce leaders who teach freedom in Christ and behave as freedom leaders. Have you ever wondered how Diotrephes gained such dominant prominence among those over whom he exercised authority? He certainly could not have taken control of the church unless control had been relinquished to him by the church. He was evidently the product of a fellowship of disciples who, as the Galatians, were willing to be courted by those who would bring them again into bondage (Gl 4:17). The disciples who do not understand the freedom that we have in Christ will always seek kings to rule over them and those who will keep them in bondage.

When men forget that leadership is through the example of loving service, they will seek to lead through mandates. And people who are in bondage will willingly have it so. **It is always easier to speak a command than to live an example**. But the disciples of God need shepherds among them, not authorities over them. The sheep need examples and models of obedience. The sheep voluntarily became members of the flock in order to be set free from the imprisoning bondage of the dictates of men. The ekklesia, therefore, is a group of free volunteers. They have voluntarily surrendered their lives to the one Lord Jesus Christ. They then seek the care of those who would spiritually lead them through examples of godly behavior. **Free men seek to be led by those who would guard their freedom from the bondage of false brethren who would take them into bondage**.

Freedom leaders among us speak with the authority of the word of God. They lead by their spiritual examples and service of the flock. However, some have become confused in assuming that the authority of the word of God mandates that they personally, as the messengers of the word, have authority over those who submit to the word. But students of the kingship and lordship of Jesus know better.

Godly freedom leaders function in a manner by which they guard the kingship and lordship of Jesus. They guard the fact that the ekklesia has only one Lord (Ep 4:5). They believe that any authority they would assume over the flock of God would diminish the total lordship of Jesus over the flock. Lordship leaders in the church, therefore, are in an act of stealing the loyalty by which the sheep must give themselves totally to the one Lord. Freedom leaders are in fear and trembling lest they become centers of reference for the flock, and thus, diminish the ownership of the Chief Shepherd who owns the sheep and seeks to serve His flock.

Safe leadership, therefore, is simply to live the gospel. When people see the gospel-living of others, they naturally follow those who live after the gospel that they obeyed. There is no complicated worldly leadership in church leadership. Leaders simply lead by being an example of how one should respond to the gospel.

Chapter 5

LET US WALK IN FEAR AND TREMBLING

Many years ago we sat in an assembly where a funeral was being conducted by the preacher of the local church. The church numbered over one hundred in attendance. The building was filled to capacity for the funeral, for the brother who passed on was a very well respected person in the community. During the funeral lesson the preacher made the statement, "This is my church," when referring to the body of disciples who assembled in the building where the funeral was conducted. As the years went by, that preacher faced untold turmoil. The church divided over personalities, particularly his. Members scattered. The preacher himself divorced his wife, married another woman, and went to another religious group. What was left in the building was a small band of disciples of fifteen or twenty who tried to pick up the pieces and carry on.

What everyone did not seem to realize as this drama played itself out in history was that when one seeks to steal the flock of God, God is against that person. God will punish those who seek to take ownership of His sheep. We often forget that when Philip went to Samaria, Simon the sorcerer was dethroned from his position of influence among the Samaritans when he chose to obey the gospel (At 8:9,10). Those of the community who also obeyed the gospel left his control and seized the freedom that came with submission to the Chief Shepherd by obedience to the gospel (At 8:12,13).

In his obedience to the gospel, Simon had to give up his position of influence and control over the people. However, when Simon saw that the giving of the Holy Spirit came through the laying on of the hands of the two apostles, Peter and John, he thought that he could possibly regain his position of renown among the people. So he offered to buy from Peter and John the power to impart the Spirit, that is, lay his hands on people so that they receive the Holy Spirit. However, Peter severely rebuked him for trying to buy his way back into a position of high esteem among the people of Samaria (At 8:20-23). Notice what Simon said in response to Peter's rebuke. *"Pray to the Lord for me* ***so that none of these things that you have spoken come upon me****"* (At 8:24). The text does not reveal what "these things" were. If as a Christ-sent apostle Paul could strike Elymas blind (At 13:11), deliver *"one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh"* (1 Co 5:5), take the rod of discipline to Corinth in order to unleash physical punishment on those who claimed authority among the Corinthians (1 Co 4:21), then certainly the Christ-sent apostles, Peter and John, could bring on Simon "these things" (physical punishment) because of his thirst for power and control. In view of how God looks on those who crave power and control over the disciples, we should fall to our knees in fear of God lest "these things" come upon us.

The apostle John meant to write a longer letter to Gaius. But because of Diotrephes' control over the disciples, he was coming to sort out the problem (3 Jn 13,14). We are sure he was not coming with a stern sermon. He was coming with the rod and the punishment of "these things" about which the Christ-sent apostles could unleash on those who would claim to seize control of the sheep of God.

When we discuss the subject of authority and control among the disciples of God, we must speak with fear and trembling. Moses was God's sole authority and lawgiver with Israel when God led the infant nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Through Moses, God revealed the authority that would later come to His people, the church, through Jesus (At 3:22,23). When Aaron and Miriam challenged the authority of Moses, Miriam, who evidently led in the conspiracy, was punished with leprosy (Nm 12). When Kohath, Dathan and Abiram rebelled against the authority of Moses, God also punished them (Nm 16). Moses was a type of the Christ who was to come. Moses was the one through whom God gave the law of authority to Israel. Jesus is now the lawgiver with all authority for the church (Mt 28:18). He is the lawgiver before whom all men will give account (Jn 12:48; At 17:30,31; 2 Co 5:10). Would we be so bold as to question the authority that has now been given to Jesus, by which authority He will judge the world?

When men on earth assume some of the authority of Jesus, they need to be in fear and trembling. These are not matters where we argue our case for some authority among the disciples of Jesus. These are matters where we fall on our faces to our Lord and King Jesus who upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3). He is head over all things (Ep 1:22). He is Lord of lords and King of kings (1 Tm 6:15). Whoever would want to steal away some of the authority of King Jesus? Is it because we feel so insecure with the example of our own obedience that we seek to resort to autocratically commanding the flock into being "our church"?

Some have been so arrogant as to use the example

of Aaron, Miriam, Kohath, Dathan and Abiram as examples of rebelling against Moses' authority in representing God on earth. But the example of the preceding individuals is exactly what some are doing in opposing the sole authority of Jesus from heaven. They are challenging the authority of Jesus among His people. They are minimizing the "all authority" that Jesus has by claiming a percentage for themselves. They thus rebel against Jesus by setting themselves up as lords, authorities and masters among the disciples. In fact, some have gone so afar as to claim to be the head of the church on earth, while Jesus is the head of the church in heaven. Some would claim to be authorities on earth, while Jesus is our only authority from heaven. In Jesus' physical absence on earth, therefore, they arrogantly assume that there must be a visible head or body of authority on earth to which people must submit. Remember these words? *"But it will not be so among you."* We must continually reminded ourselves to define our leadership on this foundation.

Chapter 6

FRANCHISED CHRISTIANITY

When discussing the subject of supposed lords, authorities and masters among the disciples, one thing is very clear. There is no consensus among Bible students concerning this matter. Some have claimed that there is absolute authority invested with the leaders of the church, and thus, the members are to submit to the mandates that are proclaimed by the leader or leaders as they would to Christ. Others have affirmed that there is inherent authority in the example by which the leaders seek to spiritually lead the flock of God. In a world where men thirst for the opportunity to be over someone, the ekklesia is often burdened with those who struggle to be great among the disciples, and thus have the authority to make the decisions. There are too many among us who seek to use the church as the opportunity to have someone under them.

In discussing this subject, most interpreters approach the subject from an institutional church prejudice that was born out of a Western business/industrial culture. By institutional we mean that the ekklesia is to be an organized institution much like businesses are structured in the corporate world. As businesses are autonomous from one another, so each group of disciples with their "bosses" and "owners" are autonomous from one another. If a leader seeks to "establish a church," he invests in a franchise, much like buying a franchise to establish a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurant. He subsequently assumes authority (a franchise) and he builds his KFC restaurant on Main Street with the assistance of the international KFC corporation. There are other franchised KFC "churches" across town, but each is autonomous from one another, for each has its owner and bosses, with promises to the employees that they too can advance in order to acquire a franchise if they manifest leadership. Advancement in the franchised KFC church means that the employees can look forward to being given authority over other employees (members) of the franchise. Thus each franchised KFC church is an independent institution that works under the guidelines of the international KFC corporation. The system works, for everyone wins souls (customers) directly for their franchise, but indirectly for the international KFC corporation throughout the world. Welcome to the franchised institutional church.

Since the church is supposed to be an institution with authorities at the top of some hierarchy of authority, then certainly there must be lords, authorities or masters among us who would call the shots in reference to decisions that are made within each franchised denomination. But we would challenge this view because it is not based on anything we read in the New Testament. The church was not organized into autonomous franchises within the cities wherein we discover the existence of Christians in the 1st century. There is no Bible student who would deny the fact that the early Christians met in the homes of the members, which homes were scattered throughout the cities. There were leaders among these Christians, but the ministry of the leaders to the needs of the saints was not confined or defined by where either the leaders or members assembled. When Barsabbas and Silas were spoken of as leaders among the brethren, the meaning is that they were leaders among all the brethren in the entire city of Jerusalem (At 15:22). The assemblies of the disciples in Jerusalem did not denominate the disciples from one another, and thus, the ministry of the shepherds of the flock was not confined to those with whom they assembled on any particular Sunday. The shepherds ministered to the disciples of the entire city, not to any one particular assembly. They did not confine their service to denominated franchises.

Our understanding of the responsibility of the leaders of the church, therefore, must be based on our understanding that the Christians in any area of the 1st century were meeting in the homes of the members. The shepherds worked among the sheep wherever they were throughout any city. As in Jerusalem, the shepherds possibly did not know all the estimated thirty to forty thousand disciples in the city by the time of the events of Acts 15, but the disciples knew all the shepherds. And all the shepherds knew one another.

Chapter 7

HELD TOGETHER BY AUTHORITY

In the world, governments, businesses and institutionalized religions are held together because the officials or administrators are given authority to carry out the mandates of the government, business or man-made religious organization. In government, dictatorial officials often maintain their positions for the sake of plundering the riches of the nation or holding on to power. In business, the owner of the business has a right to maintain ownership of the company in order to make a profit. In man-made religions where there is little respect for the word of God, men also cling to their positions in order to plunder the riches of the adherents of their particular religious group, or simply to hold on to power.

Institutional religion is defined and maintained by those who claim to speak with authority in order to maintain the traditions (heritage) of the institution that validates their existence. Position, power, pomp and purse are very strong influences. If an institution exists on the foundation of leaders who have been given authority, then those leaders will often work at all costs in order to maintain their positions as leaders of the institution. If they do not, then the institution that rests upon their existence as leaders will cease to exist. This is a particularly insidious problem with religious institutions that are built upon an individual, or a group of individuals around whom the institution functions. In fact, religious organizations are often started by those who either seek a position of authority over one's fellow man, power to control a group, thirst for recognition among men, or to establish a means by which one can financially support himself from the generous offerings of a submitted list of attendees. Religious groups that are centered around dominant personalities on earth are usually weak in their view of Jesus' control of their lives from heaven through His word. Religious groups that are led by dominant personalities usually have a low respect for the effectiveness of the authority of the word of God in the lives of individuals. They thus seek to keep their group of adherents loyal by their personality, not the adherents' submission to the word of God.

When dealing with the subject of authority, therefore, there is a great deal of conflict that often prevails among those who have been stricken with a thirst for position, power, pomp and purse. When dealing with the subject that Jesus has all authority among His disciples, some leaders are usually disturbed because Jesus' all authority attacks their credibility and position as leaders. Since their position as leaders is usually built upon the foundation of at least one or more of the preceding four "P's," they feel uneasy when the foundation for their leadership position is questioned. When the leaders of a particular religious group are uncomfortable with the teaching that Jesus has all authority among His disciples, then one can conclude that that religious group is sustained by a leader or leaders who are promoting an institutional religion that validates their existence. They believe that the continuation of the group is under attack if their authority is attacked. They thus feel that the attack is personally against them, not against the organization in which they are considered leaders.

When disciples have been brought to the total lordship of Jesus who exercises authority in their lives by their submission to His word, then the leaders of these disciples who seek to give a moral example of Jesus' authority in their lives are not threatened. They rejoice in the fact that their example has led people to make Jesus the Lord of their lives. When such leaders move away or die away, the faith of the submitted continues. However, when leaders who have exercised authority over the flock go away or die away, the flock usually vanishes away, or at least suffers as members leave with the passing of the leaders. Churches that are built around those who built them are no more stable than the builders. Their stability is built around the fallibility of man. If the man falls, the church of disciples falls. But disciples who are led to Jesus, and subsequently given living examples of submission to the word of God, are disciples who continue with the passing of any leader. *"According to the grace of God that is given to me* [Paul] *as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation and another builds on it.* ***But let every man take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ"*** (1 Co 3:10,11).

Chapter 8

A FOUNDATION FOR SLAVERY

Throughout His ministry, Jesus dealt with the attitudes of the disciples who sought to compete among themselves as to who was the greatest. Even to His final hours on earth, and immediately before the crucifixion in the upper room, *"there was also a dispute among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest"* (Lk 22:24). The disciples were no different than men today who seek to have prominence over their fellow man. If these men, who had walked for over three years with the greatest servant of all time, disputed among themselves as to who was the greatest, then certainly we should expect nothing less from those today who thirst for prominence among men.

At one time during His ministry, Jesus mandated the guiding principle upon which leadership among His people would be founded. The occasion was when the mother of James and John brought her two sons before Jesus in order to ask for special positions of authority for them. She asked that they *"sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left hand in Your glory"* (Mk 10:37; see Mt 20:20). James and John were not simply asking for positions through their mother. **They were asking for lordship and authority over the people**. Jesus responded to their request, *"You do not know what you ask"* (Mk 10:38). But they did know what they were asking in reference to worldly kingdoms. They knew what lords, authorities and masters were in their culture. Lords and authorities were a part of their religious and political background. But they did not know what they were asking in reference to leadership in the spiritual kingdom reign of Jesus in the hearts of men.

After Jesus' personal encounter with the two ambitious young men, He said to all the apostles, *"You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them"* (Mk 10:42). We do not know a Bible interpreter who does not understand this statement. There are rulers among the nations who are lords. Great ones exercise authority over those they command. Lords and authorities exist in the political and business world. Such existed in the religious world in which James and John grew up. Lords and authorities are placed at the top of a chain of command, and subsequently, instructions are handed down that must be obeyed. Those on top of the hierarchic ladder of authority make the decisions and the people must obey. The leaders on top are in charge and the citizens or followers must submit to their authority. That is how the world was during the time of the disciples. It is how the world functions today.

However, Jesus said, *"**But it will not be so among you**. But whoever desires to be great among you, will be your servant"* (Mk 10:43). We do not know of any Bible interpreter who also does not understand this statement of Jesus. Unfortunately, many find it difficult to practice. Some religious leaders zealously contend for authority and lordship over the flock of God. But Jesus said there would be no authorities among His disciples. Some leaders will argue vehemently that they have authority, but Jesus said there would be no lords, authorities and masters in the ekklesia. Why is it that those who can understand the simplicity of what Jesus stated cannot at the same time be diligent in applying His principle of leadership to their lives? Why would leaders seek to be lords, authorities and masters among us when Jesus plainly said there would not be such among His disciples?

What Jesus said in Mark 10:42,43 **must be the foundation upon which we interpret every passage in the New Testament that speaks concerning the leadership of the church**. We have found that interpreters will study and affirm the truth of Mark 10:42,43, but then argue for personal lordship and authority for leaders from statements that are in the epistles. Their inconsistency in this matter reveals their eagerness to be an authority over the disciples. And their eagerness to be an authority moves them to twist the Scriptures (See 2 Pt 3:15,16).

Jesus knew that men crave authority. After all, He created them to have dominion over the animals He also created (Cl 1:16). In the beginning, when God made man after His image. He created man to *"have dominion over ... every creeping thing that creeps on the earth"* (Gn 1:26). The problem is that some want to take their nature to have dominion beyond the creatures. They seek to have dominion over the disciples, ignoring the fact that Jesus has all authority in heaven and **on earth**, which would certainly include all authority over His flock (Mt 28:18).

Jesus came to turn the world of lords and authorities upside down in reference to the governance of His disciples. He knew that He could not reign totally in the hearts of men if men exercised lordship and authority

among His people. He knew that the more disciples submitted to men, the less they would submit to Him. In His personal absence, He knew that men would thirst to be lords, authorities and masters among His people. In order to emphasize His point with James and John, and the rest of the disciples throughout history, He concluded, *"And whoever of you desires to be the first will be the bondservant of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve ..."* (Mk 10:44,45). While on earth Jesus was a servant to the spiritual needs of man. We must go and do likewise.

Chapter 9

JESUS CLAIMED AUTHORITY

When Jesus stated that all authority in religious matters rested with Him, He revealed an axiomatic truth that needs no proof. Who would argue with Jesus, the Son of God. All authority to legislate law among the people of God has always rested with God. Before the ascension of Jesus, all authority rested with God, the Father. When Jesus ascended to the Ancient of Days, "glory, dominion, and kingdom reign" were given to Him (Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). Jesus is now Lord (At 2:36). God is the source of all authority, and now, this authority rests with God, the Son. Since His ascension to the right hand of the Father, He has given no authority to any person on earth to rule His people. It is for this reason that all authority in judgment rests with the Son whom God the Father has appointed to be the final judge (At 17:30,31; 2 Co 5:10). Christians will not stand in judgment before any authority other than Jesus. Nowhere in the judgment scenes in the New Testament do we see Christians being judged for disobedience of any supposed authorities of the church on earth. Therefore, there is no man on earth who stands with authority between the individual believer and Jesus. And for this reason, there is no man on earth who has the right to arbitrarily judge another brother.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus knew that He was headed to the right hand of the Father to receive glory, dominion and kingdom reign (Dn 2:44: 7:13,14). He knew *"that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God"* (Jn 13:3). He knew that He would be made Lord of all things (At 2:36; 1 Tm 6:15). This message was confirmed on the mount of transfiguration when the Father said from heaven, *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* ***Hear Him****"* (Mt 17:5). Statements as John 12:48 reconfirmed the submission that Jesus would command from men. *"He who rejects Me and does not receive My words,* ***has one who judges him****."* In order to reaffirm the principle that He would be the only Lord, the only authority among His people, Jesus reminded the apostles prior to His ascension, *"****All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth****"* (Mt 28:18). The Holy Spirit reemphasized this point many years later to the Colossians. *"And He* [Jesus] *is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,* ***so that in all things He might have the preeminence****"* (Cl 1:18). When it comes to discussing authority among the disciples of Jesus, there can be no question that Jesus has all authority, authority that is manifested through His authoritative word.

Matthew 28:18 states that Jesus has all authority in heaven. Most people have little trouble understanding this. He is at the right hand of God reigning as King of kings (1 Tm 6:15). However, some have trouble understanding the fact that Jesus also said that He has all authority on earth. If all angels are subject to Him in the heavenly realm, then we would assume that all men in the earthly realm should also be subservient to Him.

Everyone on earth may not be submissive to His kingdom reign, but certainly He has all authority on earth. *"You* [God 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). All men on earth do not submit to King Jesus. However, this does not mean that He does not have all authority on earth (See Ph 2:5-11). He has all authority on earth regardless of the disobedience of those who will not submit to His lordship.

One of the most subtle attacks against the gospel reign of King Jesus is the teaching that Jesus does not have all authority over all things simply because we do not witness at this time that He so reigns. Some contend that He reigns only over the church, saying that the church and kingdom reign of Jesus are the same. But this is an attack against the present gospel reign of Jesus over all things. We must not forget that the church is composed of those who are submissive subjects of the gospel reign. Because there are others who do not submit to Jesus' kingdom reign does not mean that He is not reigning over them.

Chapter 10

JESUS CLAIMED ALL AUTHORITY

As previously stated, on different occasions during His ministry the disciples *"disputed among themselves who was the greatest"* (Mk 9:34). In the occasion recorded in Mark 10, James and John asserted themselves for positions before the other disciples had a chance to do the same. When the others found out what James and John did, *"they began to be greatly displeased"* with them (Mk 10:41). They were greatly displeased because James and John had simply asked for the positions before they could do the same.

In the upper room with the disciples before Jesus' crucifixion, *"there was also a dispute among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest"* (Lk 22:24). This was the occasion when Jesus took up a towel and washed their feet (Jn 13). It was an overwhelming demonstration of the Creator on His knees before those whom He had created (Cl 1:16). And still the disciples were disputing among themselves as to who was the greatest. Jesus responded to their dispute by saying, *"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**"* (Lk 22:25,26). So what way would the disciples be among themselves? Jesus instructed, *"He who is the greatest among you, let him be as the youngest, and **he who leads as he who serves**"* (Lk 22:26).

Jesus continued with His disciples about forty days after His resurrection. Knowing that they would go out into a world of men who seek to be lords, authorities and masters over anyone they could control, He made a specific and direct statement concerning His lordship over those who would have Him reign in their hearts. In Matthew 28:18, in His final words, He proclaimed, *"**All authority** has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."* Now according to some interpreters, this "all authority" is limited. It is limited to things in heaven. Jesus can have authority over the angels and unbelievers. 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). *"God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name* [authority] ***that is above every name**, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and those in earth and those under the earth"* (Ph 2:9,10). No problem. But **all** authority over every living thing that exists, and even the inanimate universe (Hb 1:3), means that Jesus left no authority to be exercised among His disciples except His alone. Jesus will allow authority to exist among governments of the world in order to prevent anarchy (Rm 13:1-7). But He is the authority over the appointed government authorities among men.

Now the argument is presented that since He has "delegated" authority to governments to rule over the people of nations, then certainly He has done the same with the church. Therefore, we should expect to find throughout the New Testament statements that refer to authorities in the church as there are authorities in government. But we have already discovered the fallacy of this argument. Jesus clearly stated that there would be no lords or authorities among His disciples as we see among men (Mk 10:42,43). At the same time, through His revealed word He clearly revealed that lords and authorities would exist in governments. Jesus simply did not contradict Himself. He did not deny authority among His disciples during His earthly ministry, and then change His mind by allowing the inspired epistles to instruct the church to "appoint" authorities after He had assumed all authority in heaven and on earth at the right hand of God.

Jesus gave authority to the heads of the families on earth in order to rule well their families. The wife is thus instructed to be in subjection to the husband as the head of the family (Ep 5:22,23). Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit used the word "head," which would certainly include control and center of reference, as a metaphor in reference only to Jesus in His relationship with the church and the husband in his relationship to his wife. **The metaphor "head" is never used in reference to the leaders of the church in their relationship with the church**. The word "head" in reference to Jesus and the church can never be used by anyone on earth in reference to being the head of the church.

Jesus has now gone into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God as head over all things (Ep 1:22). He is there as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). He is reigning with dominion, glory and kingdom reign (Dn 7:13,14). This is the gospel reign of Jesus. If we would question this present reign of Jesus over all things, then we are questioning one of the greatest points of the gospel. The gospel is not just the cross and resurrection. It is also the present good news that Jesus now has all things under control. Though things may seem out of control, the fact that Jesus is head over all things is reassuring (See Hb 1:3).

Chapter 11

JESUS HAS ALL AUTHORITY IN HIS ABSENCE

It is a natural desire of men to have a visible sign of authority. One of the difficult things for people to do is to assign all authority to the One they cannot presently see. We thus assume that when Jesus ascended out of the sight of men, that He would invest authority in someone on earth that men could see. We falsely assume, therefore, that Jesus invested authority in the apostles, and the apostles subsequently invested authority in other men. However, we would challenge this deduction to satisfy the desires of men to establish authorities on earth that would minimize or compete with the authority that Christ presently has, by which authority He speaks among men through His word (See Jn 12:48).

Jesus had no intention of designating individuals as lords, authorities and masters on earth in His absence. If one would contend that He did, then one would have to take the position that Jesus is now absent from His church, and thus, there must be visible authorities on earth to control His people. While personally with the disciples on earth, Jesus said that He would physically be taken from them (Jn 14:15-19). However, He would send the Holy Spirit to personally dwell in them. *"I will not leave you orphans.* ***I will come to you****"* (Jn 14:18). In the context of John 14 there is a very profound statement in reference to Jesus being spiritually with His disciples. *"After a little while the world will no longer see Me. But you see Me. Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will know that I am in My father and you in Me,* ***and I in you****"* (Jn 14:19,20). Immediately prior to His ascension, Jesus promised the apostles, *"And, lo,* ***I am with you always****, even to the end of the age"* (Mt 28:20). We would correctly assume, therefore, that Jesus continues with His church as He personally continued with the apostles, though He is in heaven. He is absent only physically, not spiritually. And in His physical absence He is still dwelling with His people.

Jesus has now ascended to the right hand of the Father, having received all authority (Mt 28:18). He has been made Lord over all things (At 2:36). When the message of the gospel is preached, people submit to the lordship of Jesus, and thus, they submit to His authority in their lives. Receiving Jesus, therefore, means that one accepts the lordship of Jesus in his life. Paul wrote to the Colossians, *"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him ..."* (Cl 2:6). If one "receives" Jesus, he accepts the authority of Jesus in his life. Accepting the authority of Jesus in one's life is "receiving" (obeying) the message of the gospel (1 Co 15:3). Jesus now reigns on earth in the hearts of the submitted (Lk 17:20,21).

The authority of Jesus on earth is manifested through the obedience of individuals to the gospel. We are baptized in His name (At 2:38). The authority is in the name of Jesus, not in the messengers of the gospel message. The authority of Jesus on earth is in His message that is proclaimed by His messengers. Paul wrote, *"Now we command you, brethren,* ***in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*** *..."* (2 Th 3:6). Paul's command came from the authoritative name of Jesus, not from him as an apostle. In fact, Paul asked the Colossians, *"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 ordinances?"* (Cl 2:20). In other words, since they had "received" the lordship of Jesus in their lives by being obedient to the gospel, why would they continue to seek to be submissive to the authority of man's ordinances? Paul's instructions concerning submission to religious authorities (man's ordinances) were expressed through the command, *"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle"* (Cl 2:21). **Since Christians are not to touch, taste or handle the religious ordinances of any man, then we must assume that there is no man or group of men on earth who have the authority to command any ordinance for men to obey**.

The authority of the Lord's church is not visible. The kingdom of God is *"righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rm 14:17). The ministry of elders, evangelists and teachers is very important to the function of the church and the proclamation of the gospel. However, the existence of the church is not visible through some authority that we would suppose the leaders have. As the kingdom of Jesus is spiritual, and within the hearts of men (Lk 17:20,21), so also is the authority of the kingdom. It is visible when we see the submitted people of the ekklesia.

Jesus is the authority figure of the church. He is the authority figure who has all authority (Mt 28:18). And it is through the authority of His word that He reigns in the hearts of submitted people. Those who are leaders in the church, therefore, work as servants of Jesus for the sake of the church (2 Co 4:5). They walk by the Spirit (Gl 5:16). They humbly walk in submission to

the truth of the gospel they have obeyed (Gl 2:14). Their ministry in leading others, therefore, is not through lording over others, but in giving an example of submission. Paul explained, *"**Not that we rule over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy**"* (2 Co 1:24). If the apostle Paul did not rule over the faith of the disciples, then certainly any who would should be cautioned by his humble statement. We are fellow workers with one another, not authorities, lords and masters over one another.

Chapter 12

JESUS RULES THROUGH HIS WORD

In reference to spiritual and eternal matters, we must walk by some authority that is outside our own invention. God did not create us with the ability to determine our own moral laws. *"It is not in man who walks to direct his steps"* (Jr 10:23). *"There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death"* (Pv 14:12; see 16:25). We may think that we can determine our own moral laws. But history has proved that we cannot make any consistent moral laws that will preserve society. Since God states that it is not possible for us to direct our own ways, then we must assume that God is right. What is within us is the ability to direct our own ways that lead to death. It is for this reason that we must have an eternal source of moral authority that is the standard that directs our behavior.

God has always established His authority among men by revelation of His law. Men are messengers of this moral authority, but the authority is in the word of God, not in the messengers. The authority of the word of God in the lives of men is in the fact that God's word is delivered from an eternal God. God is eternal, and thus, His word abides forever (1 Pt 1:23,25). That which God would consider the final authority in the lives of men, therefore, must be eternal.

Throughout the Bible there are warnings that men do not have the authority to add to God's authority (Dt 4:2). *"If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. If anyone will take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the tree of life"* (Rv 22:18,19). *"Whoever goes ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God"* (2 Jn 9). The authority of the word of God is established in the proclamation that it is not to be added to or subtracted from throughout history. God's word is inherently authoritative in the lives of all men in the fact that it is eternal, and thus, needs no additions or subtractions.

Since it is not within man to make eternal laws, then we must assume that only an eternal God can do such. Men are not the same today and forever. And thus, because society is constantly changing, it is not within men to establish eternal moral laws. Establishing the authority of law in the lives of men, therefore, is the business of God, not man. And since it is God's business, then we have no right to change God's law by adding to or subtracting from it.

When people lose their respect for the authority of God's word in their religious behavior, they look to authority from some other source. They look to men who would have authority over them, and thus validate the existence of their religiosity. This has been the problem among religious groups for centuries. It will not change as long as people have little concern for the word of God, and thus, seek to continue their "Christianity" with the authority of man, rather than the authority of God.

Simply because one claims to be a Christian, therefore, does not mean that his life is in submission to the authority of Jesus. Many have confused their submission to their own religious experiences as submission to the lordship of Jesus through His word. It would be a truism that anyone who is not a student of the word of Christ cannot claim to be a Christian. He may be religious, but this does not prove that he is allowing his life to be directed by Jesus Christ, who has all authority over His people through His word. Why do we say this? It is because of what Jesus said in the following statement: *"Not everyone 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).

Gospel living means that one has brought his will into the control of Jesus who died for him. When one obeys the gospel, he has affirmed that he will live according to the gospel. In other words, the good news of Jesus' incarnational offering is the motivation to live according to the will of Him who went to the cross. If we live religiously according to our own religious heritage, or traditions, then we are marginalizing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are marginalizing the gospel of the cross by stating to Jesus that our religious heritage motivates us more than the atoning sacrifice of the cross. One may feel comfortable doing this, but he must remember that he will eventually stand before Jesus.

Chapter 13

LEADERS ARE RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS

When discussing the leadership of the ekklesia, there are two very important words that we must clearly understand in order to help us determine whether we are following the authority of man or the authority of the word of God. These are the words "authority" and "responsibility." According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the word "authority" means "**the power or a right to command**, **act**, **enforce obedience**, or **make final decisions**; **jurisdiction**" [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.]. Webster even quotes Matthew 21:23 where the chief priests and elders asked, *"By what authority doest thou these things?"* In the context of this question, the chief priests and elders were asking Jesus who gave Him the "power or right to command, act, enforce obedience" concerning the casting out of the money changers from the temple. They understood that only one with authority had the power to command what He did, and thus demand obedience to what He commanded. When one is invested with authority, as government and military rulers, then they are invested with a mandate to dictate the rules. They have the right to command obedience of those rules. Our question is did God give any man on earth the authority to command such things among Christians?

Another word that we must clearly understand in this discussion is the word "responsibility." *Webster's Dictionary* defines this word to mean "expected or obligated to account (*for* something, to someone); answerable; accountable; as, he is responsible for the car." The word involves "accountability, obligation, or duties; as, he has a *responsible* position." Webster also gives the definition, "... able to distinguish between right and wrong and to think and act rationally, and hence accountable for one's behavior." This definition seems to sum up the concept of the passages in the New Testament that picture the leadership of the ekklesia. By basing their behavior on the direction of the word of God, the leaders among the disciples are those who have determined what is right and wrong according to the word of God. Their lives are controlled by the word of God, and thus, they seek to lead others by living and teaching the word of God. By enacting the word of God in their lives, they give themselves as an example to others. This is the meaning that Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand in 1 Corinthians 11:1. *"Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ."* It is not that there is authority in the example of how one carries out the word of God in his life, for no man can live the perfect life. It is following the example of how Christ would want one to behave, and at the same time, realize the fallibility of all men to live perfectly before God.

According to the dictionary definition of "authority" and "responsibility," it would seem advisable according to the word of God, to focus on the word "responsibility" in reference to the leadership of the ekklesia. God gave all authority to Jesus (Mt 28:18). Jesus only has the right to mandate rules and demand obedience. Jesus in turn gave responsibility to those whom the ekklesia would designate to carry out ministries among the disciples (See At 6:1-6; 1 Pt 5:1-5). When those who have been given responsibility to serve, desire to rule by authority, then men start lording over the flock of God.

True servant leaders do not seek authority in order to fulfill their responsibilities. They know that they have received their gifts of leadership and ministry from the Lord, and thus, they seek to fulfill their destiny by serving the needs of others (Ep 4:7-13; 1 Pt 4:10,11). When one recognizes his gift from the Lord, he feels responsible. His sense of responsibility for the gift moves him to serve. He does not assume he has authority over others because of this gift to minister to the needs of others. He does not command others to submit to the administration of his gift. He simply seeks to use his gift to the glory of God in service to others. And knowing that all disciples have received gifts from God, then "church" is defined as a group of servants who seek opportunities to minister to the needs of others. Because everyone has submitted to the lordship of Jesus, then Christians in fellowship with one another seek to submit to one another in order that each member of the body might have an opportunity to serve. This is "church." "Church" is not an institutional organization that is controlled and maintained by a chain of authorities or appointed board of directors.

The preceding concept is clearly understood from what the apostles said concerning the designation of special servants to care for the needy widows in Jerusalem. They instructed the church, *"Brethren, look out from among you seven men ..."* (At 6:3). They then gave the church three qualities to look for in the men they would choose (At 6:3). The church as a whole, therefore, has the responsibility of looking out among the disciples in order to find those who have the gifts to serve in a particular capacity of ministry. The same is true of

designating shepherds of the flock. With the guideline qualities that Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, Timothy and Titus were to lead the church in looking out among the members in order to find those men who had the gift of shepherding. Once these men were noted among the disciples, then the disciples simply notify everyone that these men are to focus on shepherding the flock of God.

The administration of one's gift does not put him in an "office," nor give him "authority." When loving and caring people recognize their gifts of service, they search for people to serve. When one discovers that he has the gift of washing feet, he looks for dirty feet. If I have dirty feet, then I look for the footwasher. I submit to his ministry to wash my feet. Remember this passage? *"I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas ... that they have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints,* ***that you submit yourselves to such****, and to everyone who works ..."* (1 Co 16:15,16). We should not be too proud to have our feet washed by one who has assumed the responsibility of his gift to wash feet.

Recognition of our gift simply means that we assume responsibility to serve with our gift. **People who say they can do nothing are actually saying that they do not want the responsibility of doing anything**. It is the responsibility of leadership, therefore, to spur disciples on to loving others, and thus, get to work serving the needs of others with their gifts (See Hb 10:24,25). When the members assume their responsibilities to serve, then the ekklesia as a whole has the responsibility of submitting to the service of everyone. There is no authority needed in this function of the body of Christ. **The ekklesia functions as an organism of a people who have assumed their responsibility of ministering to others with their God-given gifts**.

Now in washing feet there are decisions to be made, especially if there are others who have the same gift. There can be the "footwashing committee." This committee can meet together in order to determine how they can orderly wash everyone's feet. This is exactly what happened in reference to the feeding of the widows in Acts 6:1-7. But we must keep in mind that it was the power of the word of God that moved men and women to wash feet and feed widows. It is the power of the word that develops hearts that want to serve. It is the power of the word that develops a spirit of cooperation among all those who seek to have all things in common and to serve in unity. The power is not in men, nor is it with authority that men may assume. If the footwashers work together as a group, this does not mean that they inherit some authority because they have chosen to work as a group. It simply means that they have decided to organize their efforts in order that every foot is washed. If they inherently had authority because they organized as a committee, then they could barge into houses, find dirty feet, and then force people to submit to their ministry. Nothing could be further from the truth of Christian service. The functioning organism of the body simply sends healing to those parts of the body that are wounded. No wounded member should seek to rebel against healing.

We must also keep in mind that the less we focus on the word of God as the catalyst for healing wounds and nurturing spiritual growth among members, the more emphasis we place on men and methodologies. The less emphasis that is placed on the power of the word to change hearts, the more emphasis we place on the ability of men to organize and manipulate the troops into organized programs. And the more we focus on men, the more strife and envying that is developed among the fellowship of the brothers (1 Co 3:3-4; 2 Co 10:3,4). The strife and envy comes when we focus on placing our "ministry" in the methodology (program) of the organized institution, give it authority, and then muster the membership into obedience of the committee. In order to prevent the strife and envy, some churches have resorted to designated authorities to organize and control the committees. The leaders then become the authorities or masters who control the organized committees within the institution.

But would it not be less complicated and conflicting to understand that our "ministry" (gift) is the result of our submission to the Lord Jesus Christ? When we recognize this spiritual growth in ourselves, then we became responsible servants to everyone for Jesus' sake (2 Co 4:5). We do not seek to exercise authority with our ministry, neither do we seek authorities to control our ministry. We are simply servants looking for opportunities to fulfil our responsibility. This is the ekklesia. It is the ekklesia functioning as an organic body.

Living the gospel of Jesus means that we live for others. When Paul wrote, *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus,"* he was instructing every Christian to live as Jesus lived for us (Ph 2:5). If we are to have the mind of Christ, then we will be inspired to live according to the sacrificial incarnation of the Son of God who gave up being in the form of God, but emptied Himself for us (Ph 2:6,7). Organic function, therefore, is living according to how the Son of God lived for us. Any other manner of being a disciple is simply a diversion away from the incarnational offering of the Son of God on the cross. The great thing about gospel living is that one cannot fake the life of Jesus.

Chapter 14

THE APOSTLES WERE MESSENGERS

If there were any authority to dictate decisions for and to the church outside the authority of Jesus through His word, then we would assume that the first "committee" of twelve would have exercised such authority among the early churches. But the apostles did not function in this manner with the newly established churches in the 1st century. They were given the responsibility to submit to receive the word of God by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13). They were given the responsibility of speaking the word with authority, and in this way, they were set as judges over Israel with the authority of the word of God (Lk 22:30). And, they were given the authority to exercise the discipline of a Christ-sent apostle for the edification of the early church (2 Co 10:8). But outside this authority, and the responsibility that they received from Jesus as Christ-sent apostles, the apostles refrained from making decisions in reference to the function of the church.

Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would deliver to them the word of truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). But He never established them as personal lords, authorities or masters among the disciples in order to make decisions concerning the function of the disciples. Paul was very careful not to present himself as a man of authority in reference to his personal choices. He emphasized the fact that he, as well as all the apostles, were only messengers of the authoritative word of God. As Christ-sent apostles, he reminded them that as an apostle he could exercise the "rod" of discipline in delivering the rebellious unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Co 4:21). But in reference to their local function as disciples in the community, the apostles did not work to organize the churches.

For example, to a church in which there were those who were consumed with a thirst for authority among the disciples, Paul wrote, *"**For we do not preach ourselves**, but Christ Jesus the Lord, **and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake**"* (2 Co 4:5). If Jesus had given personal authority to the apostles to organize the local disciples, then they could have considered themselves as authorities among the disciples. But they did not. They proclaimed to the church that they were only bondservants of Jesus. *"Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, **but servants by whom you believed**, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one"* (1 Co 3:5). There was no authority in Paul or Apollos to "call the shots." Jesus only was the Lord, and it was He only who "gave opportunity to each one" (See Ep 4:8). Paul and Apollos were as any other disciple who ministered the word of God. They had no authority over the disciples. They only preached the authority of the word of God. In doing this they maintained the lordship of Jesus in the lives of those to whom they preached. It was the Lord who "gave opportunity" to serve, not Paul or Apollos. It was the Lord who "called the shots."

Paul taught that there was only one Lord Jesus (Ep 4:4-6). And since there is only one Lord to whom all must submit, then there can be no other lords with authority among the disciples. During His earthly ministry, Jesus forewarned the apostles, *"**Do not be called masters**, for one is your Master, the Christ"* (Mt 23:10). The apostles were not established as masters among the people. Jesus admonished them, *"But he who is greatest among you will be your servant"* (Mt 23:11). The apostles, therefore, were sent forth by Jesus, not as masters over the people, but as servants to minister the authoritative word of God to the people. The authority was in the message, not in the messengers as masters. Paul reminded the Corinthians, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel ..."* (1 Co 1:17). The authority was in the gospel, not in Paul as one with authority to baptize. To assume that he, Apollos and Peter went forth as masters from Christ, would be thinking carnally (See 1 Co 3:3,4). They did not go forth as authorities, lords or masters, but as bondservants of the one Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43).

Chapter 15

USING OUR "BIBLE DICTIONARY"

When the subject of responsibility among God's people is discussed, the discussion must include the leadership that God instituted which should exist among free people. And when discussing leadership, we are usually discussing either the teachers or the designated shepherds of the flock of God.

This has always been a tempestuous area of theological study, especially in the industrial/business cultures of the West and the tribal cultures where such exists in the world today. These cultures flourish with societies of lords, masters and authorities. Success in the industrial/business cultures of the West depends on management. And management is determined by personnel who maintain quality control. Western culture is based on productivity that is the result of good management that controls and directs the factory output. In Western theological camps, therefore, we would expect that the concepts of lords, masters and authorities would saturate the thinking of the Western citizen. He cannot help but be what his culture dictates. Unfortunately, much of his cultural thinking and behavior has influenced his interpretation and application of the Scriptures, especially when discussing his attempts to exercise authority and control among the ekklesia of free people.

The Western Christian has often allowed his Western culture of productivity that is based on management to determine the "organization" and "productivity" of the servants of the ekklesia. What has subsequently happened is that the church has been formed into an institutional organization that is governed with a management structure that is characteristic of the best of the corporations of the West. Throw a copy of the Scriptures into a Western society and you will have debates and struggles over who is in charge. Throw a copy of the Scriptures into a camp of slaves and everyone will just go to work, not arguing over who calls the shots or gets the glory. It is like one brother prayed at a men's breakfast, "Father, why do we men always struggle over who is in control, when the women just do the job, and then ask, 'What's next'?"

It would be good here to briefly study the Greek words that are used in the New Testament in reference to the designated leaders of those who have been set free. These would be the leaders that God gave the ekklesia the right to designate in order to inspire the community of free people to excel in enjoying the abundant life.

We must first, however, caution ourselves with a few fundamental principles in reference to the use of words from our secular dictionaries and Greek lexicons. When determining the definition of words that were used by the Holy Spirit in order to convey the message of the will of God, we must always keep in mind that the original definitions of the words were taken from a secular dictionary of the times. The *koine* Greek word definitions, therefore, were determined by their use in the secular environment of the times when the New Testament was written. We would expect, therefore, that the words would have a flavor of "worldly thinking" because of their common use in the political, business and pagan religious society of the 1st century. When defining these words in the context of the Scriptures, therefore, we must allow the New Testament, and specifically the context in which the words were used in the New Testament, to be the final dictionary of the words. The Holy Spirit used commonly spoken words of secular society in order to convey spiritual truths in the Bible. He had to use the words of the 1st century dictionary in order to reveal the word of God. He did not have a "holy dictionary" in order to inscribe the word of God. Bible interpreters, therefore, must always be cautioned concerning the Hebrew and Greek lexicon definitions of the words that are used in the Bible, **for the person who produced the Hebrew or Greek lexicons determined the definition of the words by how those words were commonly used in secular society at the time the Holy Spirit chose them to inscribe Holy Scriptures**.

An example of the preceding would be words in reference to rule and submission that were used in a business or political context of the 1st century. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for "authority" (*exousia*) **is never used in the New Testament in reference to the leaders of the church in their relationship with the church**.

Some feel that we should assume that authority is inherent in the function of the leaders of the ekklesia. But such an assumption seems to contravene Jesus' statement that there be no authorities, lords or masters among His people (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43). Since the word "authority" carries with it the meaning that one can dictate mandates that must be obeyed, we would suggest that this word not be used in reference to the leaders' relationship to the church of free people. Since the word is not used in the New Testament in reference to the leaders' relationship with the church, then it would be reasonable to conclude that if we are seeking to use Bible words to explain the function of the ekklesia, it is a word that should not be used today. As stated before, the use of the word "responsibility" seems more in harmony with the function of the leaders as defined and demonstrated by Jesus (See Jn 13:1-17).

We will discover in the following definitions words as "oversee," "submit," and "obey." However, we must be cautious about assuming that worldly definitions of these words are the foundation upon which they are used in the New Testament. As previously stated, it is the function of the leadership of the church to serve and inspire a community of free people to enjoy their abundant life in Christ (Mk 10:44,45). It is thus the responsibility of the church to submit to the leaders' service

and inspirational leadership (See 1 Co 16:15,16; Hb 13:17). Our understanding of the following words in reference to the leaders, therefore, is consistently understood without violating the mandate of Jesus that there be no lords, authorities or masters among us who would seek to bring free people into the bondage of the dictates of men.

1. *Episkopos:* This word is translated with various English words, such as, "bishop," "overseer," "oversight," or "seeing over" (At 20:28, Ph 1:1; 1 Tm 3:1,2; Ti 1:7; 1 Pet 5:2). *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines this word to mean "an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly; any curator, guardian or superintendent; hence **in the N.T. a guardian of souls, one who watches over their welfare**" [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.]. In a New Testament context, the word would refer to one who has been designated with the responsibility of seeing after others with the purpose of encouraging their commitment to the work they have voluntarily chosen to do. Since one has voluntarily committed himself to serve Jesus, then it would be the responsibility of the *episkopos* to encourage by example and teaching those who have committed themselves to serve the Lord. It is the responsibility of the *episkopos* to look out over the flock in order to see if there are those who are falling short of their commitment to Jesus. If they find someone who is falling short, it is the responsibility of the *episkopos* to encourage the weak to maintain their commitment. The *episcopos* does this by their godly example and teaching the word of God.

2. *Oikonomos:* This word is used in the New Testament in reference to the function of the *episkopos*. The *oikonomos* are God's stewards who minister the flock of God. The contemporary use of the word in the 1st century was of one who functioned as "the manager of a household or of household affairs: especially a steward, manager, superintendent ... to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures ..." (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). Designated leaders of the household of God, therefore, are entrusted with the responsibility of being stewards of God's house. It is for this reason that Paul asked in the midst of giving Timothy instructions concerning the qualities of those who would serve as elders, *"If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?"* (1 Tm 3:5). Through the teaching of the word of God, the *oikonomos* as a group of designated men manage the direction of the house of God in order that it go in the right direction. They have been entrusted with the responsibility of being shepherd/teachers in order to guide the house of God according to God's will. The only way they can guide the flock according to God's will, therefore, is by teaching the word of God and living godly examples of how that word should be implemented in the lives of the believers. They can thus carry out their responsibility as the *oikonomos* only through the authority of the word of God and the example of their behavior.

3. *Poimaino:* This word is commonly translated "pastor" or "shepherd" (Ep 4:11; 1 Pt 2:25; 5:1,2). Thayer's definition of the word is in reference to the work of a shepherd with a flock. "To feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep; ... to rule, govern ... to furnish pasturage or food; to nourish." It is the responsibility of the *poimaino* to feed the flock. In the New Testament context, feeding is in reference to pasturing the flock on the food of God's word. When the church designates pastors of the flock, therefore, they are designating teachers who have the responsibility of teaching the flock and manifesting living examples of the teaching. It is for this reason that one of the qualifications of a pastor is his ability to teach *"so that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict"* (Ti 1:9; see 1 Tm 3:2). A person may live a godly example before others. However, if he does not have a knowledge of the word of God, and the ability to teach it to others, then he cannot function as a shepherd of the flock.

In the secular definition of this word there is the meaning "to rule, govern." The use of the word in the political and business world of the 1st century carried this definition. But if we bring this definition into the context of the ekklesia, then the leaders would be appointed to be autocratic leaders of the flock of God as officials in government. Such would be contrary to Jesus' mandate that there be no lords, authorities or masters among His people (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43). We must keep in mind that the Greek words that are used in the New Testament were also used in the business and political world of 1st century. Therefore, the New Testament must be the final dictionary as to the meaning of the words in reference to God's people.

4. *Presbuteros:* This is one of the most common words used in the New Testament in reference to the designated leaders of the church. This word is often translated "elder" or "presbyter" (At 11:30; 14:23; 20:28; Ti 1:5,7). *Presbuteros* is an adjective which literally refers to one who is older in age. In 1 Timothy 5:1,2, the word is used in reference to both men and women. In 1 Timothy 5:1 the word is used in the masculine gender, but in verse 2 it is *presbuteras*, the feminine gender. Reference is to older women who were to be given great respect.

The leaders as the *episcopos* are to function as those who see over the flock of God in order to direct and care for the flock through example and teaching. They are to be given great respect because of their age. The word *presbuteros* focuses thus on the dignity of the leaders, both of the elder men and elder women. Older men and women have responsibilities in reference to nurturing the flock of God.

Though the feminine of *presbuteros* (*presbuteras*) is used in reference to older women, we must not assume that the older women have an officiating capacity among the disciples. Some would conclude that *presbuteros* would mean that the men have an officiating capacity in the church because of some secular connotations in the definition of the word. But if we follow this logic, then we would have to contend that there is an officiating capacity of the older women. If we would assume that there is authority in the definition with reference to the older men (*presbuteros*), then to be consistent we would have to assume that there is authority with the older women (*presbuteras*). However, it must be noted that nothing is stated in the New Testament concerning elders (*presbuteros*) who would function in an officiating capacity in managing the affairs of the church because of the Spirit's use of the word *presbuteros*. The *presbuteros* functioned in seeing over the needs of the disciples, tending the flock of God, caring for the needs of the church, and setting godly examples for the sheep to follow. Older women (*presbuteras*) are to function in the same manner in reference to the younger sisters. This does not mean that the older women have authority to command the younger women.

5. *Proistamenoi:* This Greek word is translated "direct well," "over you," or "leader." Paul wrote, *"Let the elders who **direct well** be counted worthy of double honor ..."* (1 Tm 5:17). Also, *"... know those who labor among you and are **over you** in the Lord ..."* (1 Th 5:12). Thayer defines the word to mean "to set or place before; to set over; to be over, to superintend, preside over, rule." This is the one who "manages well" his own household (1 Tm 3:4). These are leaders who assume their responsibility to make sure that the organic function of the body is going according to the directions of God. Because of their knowledge of and obedience to the word of God, they direct the body to function according to the will of God. As a father maintains the spiritual direction of his family, so the elders as a group manage the spiritual direction of the church.

It must be noted in conclusion to this point that none of the preceding words were ever used in the New Testament as titles. They were used as adjectives to define the nature and ministry of these men in reference to the body of disciples. When we refer to someone as an "elder of the church," we are not giving the person a title. We are simply identifying what he is or his ministry among the disciples. Unfortunately, in our efforts to set ourselves forward in some assumed office, we want to be known as "The Pastor" or "The Bishop." But we must be careful with the use of titles among ourselves lest we seek to exalt ourselves above one another. Jesus had this thought in mind when He said, *"And call no one your father on earth, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven"* (Mt 23:9).

Chapter 16

ELDERS ARE SERVANTS TO WHOM WE SUBMIT

When discussing the responsibility of leadership among the disciples, the subject of elders (pastors, shepherds, presbyters) is often the center of focus. The discussion concerning the leadership of the elder must center around the qualities of life these men manifest, which qualities are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Paul delivers in these two texts qualities or attributes that must be possessed by those who would be designated as shepherds of the flock. Paul does not give a checklist of characteristics by which one would be qualified or disqualified as a candidate for a political party. He was simply giving Timothy and Titus a description of the spiritual nature and behavior of those who would be set forth before the church to function as leading disciples. Their leadership among the sheep is based on **what** they are in behavior, not **who** they are. The validation of the proposed elder, therefore, is based on the type of person he is among the sheep of God before he is considered for the function as a designated shepherd.

The fact that those who qualify to be shepherds must be behaving in the function of a shepherd before their designation indicates that there is little life change in their designation as a shepherd. Their behavior as a shepherd before their designation qualifies them to be set forward by the church to be shepherds. Since such men functioned in the work of shepherding without authority before their "official appointment," assumes that they can function as shepherds without authority after

they are designated. Their designation, therefore, is not for the purpose of giving them authority, but to notify the church that they are the ones to whom they must go for spiritual guidance. The only difference in the life of an individual after he is designated to be a shepherd is that he is to continue to focus his attention primarily on the flock, and the flock is to look to him for spiritual guidance.

Though a person may have a natural disposition for leadership among men, shepherds of the flock must be continually fine-tuned by the word of God as they grow as designated shepherds. The attributes of their disposition must be molded by God through His word. Unless a prospective elder is of a submissive disposition to the word of God, he has disqualified himself from any designation to be a shepherd. One of the first indications by which the church can thus determine if one has the attributes to function as an elder is that he must be an obedient student of the word of God before his designation. It is through submission to the word of God that the Holy Spirit prepares individuals to be shepherds of the flock of God. The flock thus accepts the leadership of the elders because of their example of submission to the word of God.

The word of God, therefore, is the standard by which men are determined to be shepherds of the flock. Their submission to the word of God manifests their character, and thus, draws those who have obeyed the word to submit to their leadership. In this way, the elders are first servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then, servants of the body of Christ. They are servants because the word of God is working in their lives. They are not masters because they have assumed an officiating position to which the church must submit in obedience. Those who are not thorough students of the word of God find it easy to become lords of the flock. When they cannot instruct by word and godly example, they resort to leadership by command.

It is for the preceding reasons that true elders would never resort to rule by command. They do not see themselves in official positions of authority, but with opportunities to service the needs of others. Their leadership is not by compulsion, but by the influential example of their submitted lives to the word of God. **Those who do not have such influence among the flock of God cannot serve as elders**. This is the concept that Jesus taught in Mark 10:44. *"But whoever desires to be great among you,* ***will be your servant****. And whoever of you desires to be first* ***will be the bondservant of all****"* (Mk 10:43,44). If one would lead among God's people, he must lead through service and example, not position. The leadership of the shepherds, therefore, is not because of a supposed position, **but because those who need their service seek out their service**. The submission of the church in reference to the shepherds is based on the willingness of the church to be served by their shepherds.

Instead of being the "high authorities" among the disciples, Paul instructed both Timothy and Titus that elders were to be rebuked when in error (1 Tm 5:20). They were to be rebuked publicly by the church. If the elders assumed the position of being officiating lords over the flock of God, then the flock is under no obligation to submit to such lordship (1 Pt 5:3). Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that the church should submit herself to those who would function as officiating officials of church affairs. The fact that the ekklesia has the right to bring elders to account for disobedience teaches that the elders are accountable to the ekklesia in reference to their behavior.

The fact that Paul instructed Timothy to correct those elders who sinned reveals that there is no autonomous authority in the example of the elders. The elders are to lead by example (1 Pt 5:3), but their living examples are not directly inspired by God. The church is to follow their examples only as they follow Jesus (1 Co 11:1). The fact that men are fallible in their obedience to the word of God is evidence that the example of any man is worthy to be followed only insofar as the example complies with the word of God.

If the shepherds of the flock are not to lord over the flock, and thus do not have the authority to dictate laws for the church, then they must serve under the authority of Christ. They must serve by the consent of the flock. By consent of the flock they are not allowed to make decisions that are contrary to the wishes of the church. This does not mean that the shepherds cannot make decisions contrary to all wishes of the flock. It is the responsibility of the shepherds to lead according to the word of God. If the majority of the flock seeks to walk contrary to the word of God, then with the word of God the shepherds must rebuke the wayward by the authority of the word. *"Therefore, rebuke them* [the wayward] *sharply so that they may be sound in the faith"* (Ti 1:13). As the evangelist who exhorts with the word of God, so must the elders. *"These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority"* (Ti 2:15).

We must always keep in mind that every member of the church has a right to be heard in every matter of the church. No individual or group of individuals was ever given the right to function as a governing board of the church with arbitrary authority. The leaders of the church have no authority to bind where God has not bound. The definition of denominationalism rests in the fact that men have taken it upon themselves to make

official binding decisions for the church to obey. Some groups have written their official decisions in books of law, and thus defined their particular denomination by the official decisions that have been made by their leaders of the past or present. But God never gave any man the authority on earth to bind decisions of men on the church (Rv 22:18,19; 2 Jn 9,10).

Good leaders do not focus in some supposed official authority, but on their responsibility to lead the flock of God according to the word of God and their godly example of obedience (1 Pt 5:1-5). And in leading, they assume their responsibility to teach the word of God to the flock. Those leaders who have little knowledge of the word of God, or are simply lazy in study of the word, find it easier to command the church as a master. In their willful ignorance of the word of God, those leaders of religious groups who seek a following will always resort to lordship, rather than leading people to the word of God by their obedient example. It is easier to command than to lead by example. Unfortunately, many leaders take the easy way in leadership. It is much easier to be a lord and a servant.

Chapter 17

SHEPHERDS SERVE THE FLOCK

Paul informed the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit had made them "overseers" (*presbuteros*) of the flock (At 20:28). The English word "overseer" in this context simply means that the elders were to **see over** the needs of the people. Those who would assume that authority is inherent in the word "overseer" believe that the term indicates an officiating office of power. But consider the fact that the English word "over" in the definition of the *presbuteros* is not used in reference to "authority over," but in reference to shepherds "looking over" the flock. "Looking over" assumes responsibility of the flock, not authority over the flock. In Acts 20:28, Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had made them responsible for the flock.

Peter exhorted elders to *"feed the flock of God that is **among** you"* (1 Pt 5:2). The term "among" is used over one hundred times in the New Testament in reference to the relationship that the disciples have with one another. In the context of 1 Peter 5, it is used in reference to the relationship that the shepherds have with the sheep. The words "fellowship" and "among" do not denote any official rank or hierarchy of authority among the disciples. These words do not portray that a certain group of individuals have officiating authority over other disciples or groups of disciples. The words "fellowship" and "among" define a relationship wherein everyone has all things in common. The ekklesia is a relational group of fellow workers who have all things in common. The ekklesia is a fellowship of servants who work as an organism with mutual concern for the needs of one another.

It is often heard that some have arbitrary authority to make the decisions for the flock of God. It is true that decisions must be made in our efforts to accomplish the work of God. But would it not be better to refer to the making of decisions as a responsibility of those who would lead? These decisions would not be mandates, but simply the result of discussions by the entire ekklesia as to what could or could not be done in reference to the work of God. Some have assumed that the leaders have autonomous authority to make arbitrary decisions outside the consent of the body, and thus, they have the right to function parallel to the body. **But has anyone ever considered the fact that there is no case in the New Testament where the elders arbitrarily made any decisions for the church as an autonomous officiating body of men**? When decisions were made, such decisions, as in the case of Acts 15, were made with the consent of the apostles, elders and the whole church (At 15:22). When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about taking up a contribution for the famine victims in Judea, nowhere in either 1 or 2 Corinthians did he ever speak of elders making the decisions. In fact, in all the problems that faced the Corinthian church there is never a call on the elders to make the decisions for the church. This would be true of all the epistles. There are no instructions in the epistles where the elders are called on to make decisions on behalf of the church. The writers of the New Testament wrote inspired instructions to the whole church in the epistles in order that the whole church assume the responsibility to correct the problems among them.

We can assume, however, that the elders had to make decisions. A case in point would be when famine relief funds were delivered to the elders of the church in Judea (At 11:28-30). When the funds were deliver to the elders, we can assume that the elders had to make decisions concerning how the funds were to be distributed. We would also assume, however, that this great responsibility was carried out by the consent of the

church, for the funds were meant for all the church. But nothing is said concerning how the funds were distributed among the needy. In the silence of the Scriptures on this matter, the Holy Spirit is saying that we have the right to determine for ourselves as to how we would accomplish such things.

We have observed that most elders (shepherds) make decisions according to how they have observed that other elders make decisions in other churches. A group of men (the elders) assemble in a room by themselves. They proceed through an agenda of points that gives an outline of what discussions and decisions are to be made for the day. The decisions are made and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The decisions are then announced from the pulpit on Sunday morning as, "The elders have decided ...."

We must keep in mind that there is no description of this sort of function among the elders in the New Testament. We might rightly assume that such meetings took place, but we would have to fill in the blanks concerning the existence of such meetings, as well as what was discussed during such meetings and the decisions that were made. But remember, we are "filling in the blanks." And it is truly unwise to base one's argument on "blanks."

If we would restore the function of the body of the New Testament ekklesia, then it is imperative that we take another look at how decisions were made in the New Testament by the disciples. It is never stated that the elders of the church made any arbitrary decisions for the church. Neither is it stated that the evangelists exercised some supposed "evangelistic authority" in making decisions for the church. Even in the apostle Paul's relationship with Apollos, Paul never commanded Apollos to work against his will. On one occasion he "strongly encouraged" Apollos to go to the Corinthian church, but he never commanded him (1 Co 16:12). There is no such thing as "evangelistic authority" in the New Testament.

What we do see in the New Testament is the consensus of the ekklesia making decisions. When the New Testament writers wrote their inspired letters to the church, the whole church was called on to make decisions to correct the problems about which the writers wrote. There is no information concerning the function of elders for about the first fifteen years of the existence of the church. We find them participating in making the decisions that were made in Acts 15. When Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch to attend the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15, they were sent by the church, not by the elders, though the elders in Antioch were a part of the church (At 15:2,3). Before this time, when a decision had to be made, the apostles instructed the church to make their own decisions (At 6:1-7). When it came to sending out Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-3, the whole church gathered in order to send them out. We never see in the New Testament a picture of the elders functioning in an officiating relationship with the church in order to make arbitrary decisions for the church. The organizational function of all the ekklesia is manifested in the following statement by Paul: "... *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).

Chapter 18

SUBMIT TO LOVING SERVICE

The Greek word for authority is *exousia*. **This word is never used in reference to the relationship of any preacher or elder with the body of believers**. It is never used in reference to the function of elders or any board of members making decisions for the church. Neither is it used in reference to the members' attitude toward those who function as leaders among the disciples. If the leadership of the church has been invested with some type of authority over the church, then we would certainly question such because the obvious Greek word *exousia* (authority) that would be used to explain this relationship is never used in reference to the leadership of the church.

The word *exousia* is used in 2 Corinthians 10:8, but it is used in reference to a Christ-sent apostles' authority to exercise miraculous power to discipline the church. Paul was about to exercise this authority (power) in Corinth upon those who had denied his apostleship by doing that about which we now speak, that is, the assuming of authority by some over the flock of God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians so he would not have to come to them with the rod of discipline. He would, however, if the arrogant false teachers did not repent before he arrived.

We do find the use of the word *exousia* in the context of those who exercise official authority to command and demand obedience. In reference to his former life, Paul wrote, *"And many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority* [exousia] *from the chief priests"* (At 26:10). *"As I went to Damascus with authority* [exousia] *and commission from the chief priests"* (At 26:12). Is this the authority that we want our leaders to exercise in reference to their relationship with the church? Jesus said that this is the authority that is among those of the world. But it would not be so among His people (Mk 10:43,44).

Because some unfortunately assume that authority to dictate orders to the church is inherent in specific commands to submit to the leadership, it would be good to focus on those passages where most of the controversy lies in reference to such supposed authority. These would be the statements of Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17 and the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 13:17.

In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul instructed, *"Let the elders who* ***direct well*** *be counted worthy of double honor."* Some of the older versions use the word "rule" for the Greek word *proistemi* that is used in this verse. Hebrews 13:17 states, *"Obey those who* ***lead*** *you and be submissive ..."* (See also vss 7,24). Again, the word "lead" is sometimes translated "rule" by some translations. The rendition is from the Greek word *hegeomai*. In view of the Church of England's influence in the translation of the *King James Version*, we can understand why their translators favored the secular definition "rule" in these two passages. The Church of England, and other religious groups that participated in the translation of the *King James Version*, consisted of a hierarchy of authorities in their churches. In the Church of England, King James I was at the top of the hierarchy. Since the institutional structure of authority in the Church of England was established by the time the *King James Version* was released in 1611, we would assume that in reference to any passages that would refer to "church government," there would be the flavor of authoritarian rule sprinkled throughout the version. Since the Church of England wanted to maintain a hierarchy of authority in the church, it would have been only natural for the translators to focus more on the secular definition of the words *proistemi* and *hegeomai*, rather than the New Testament foundation principle of servanthood leadership that was defined by Jesus in Mark 10:35-45.

In order to understand the statements of 1 Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:17, our foundation upon which we would interpret what is meant must be Jesus' mandate that there be no lords, authorities or masters among His disciples (Mt 23:10; Mk 10:42,43). The numerous scriptures that emphasize the mutual servanthood of the disciples to one another must be the guiding principle by which we would understand these and other passages on the subject of church leadership.

The context of 1 Timothy 5:17 is in reference to the elders. However, we do not necessarily need to assume this of the Hebrews 13:17 passage. The subject of elders is not in the entire chapter of Hebrews 13, and thus, as interpreters we would only assume that the passage would include the function of the elders of the church. We would, however, assume that the passage is also discussing leadership beyond the elders. It would be better to simply follow the context of the passage by understanding it in the context of the leaders of the church. 1 Corinthians 16:15,16 would be a context where Stephanas and his household had dedicated themselves to the service of the disciples. We are not told that Stephanas was an elder. Nevertheless, the church is instructed to *"submit yourselves to such, and to everyone who works with us and labors."* Assuming that the "household of Stephanas" included sister Stephanas, then we would conclude that Paul exhorted the Corinthians to submit also to her service. It was not that Paul's call for their submission assumed that sister Stephanas was given authority in the church. His call for submission was that people submit to the service of the entire household of Stephanas who had dedicated themselves to minister to the saints. The same thought is in the meaning of Hebrews 13:17. The Hebrews 13:17 instructions would fall into the context of "everyone who works" in reference to the leadership of the church. This does not mean, therefore, that we would assume that reference would only be to the elders of the church in Hebrews 13:17.

The Greek word for "direct well" in 1 Timothy 5:17 is different from the word that is translated "lead" in Hebrews 13:17, though the word "rule" is used by some translations to render the words of both texts. The Greek word that is used in Hebrews 13:17 is also used in Acts 15:22 in reference to Barsabbas and Silas who were *"leading men among the brethren."* No one would argue that Barsabbas and Silas were "ruling" men among the brethren. They were leading through the example of their teaching and service, not because they possessed some official position, and thus ruled over the brethren. There is no teaching in the New Testament that would infer evangelistic authority among some who would appoint themselves as pastors of a particular church. This concept is simply foreign to the teachings of the New Testament. However, if we understand that the word *hegeomai* that is used in Hebrews 13:17 should be translated "rule," then we could say that both Barsabbas and

Silas had evangelistic authority among the brethren in Jerusalem. But in the context of the Acts 15 passage, there were elders who were present in the Jerusalem church. Would both the elders and men as Barsabbas and Silas have officiating authority? And if so, who had the most authority? Could leading men as Barsabbas and Silas step up and assume more authority than the elders, men who had fulfilled qualities and qualifications to be designated as elders?

The Jewish readers to whom the Hebrew writer wrote would have understood the meaning of Hebrews 13:17. Though the passage was written in Greek, they would have understood the concept of a shepherd that is inherent in the word *hegeomai*. The Hebrew word *ra-ah* (rule) meant "to feed," "shepherd," "care for," or "rule." The noun form of the word, *ro-eh*, means "a shepherd." If we used the example of Barsabbas and Silas as "leading men" among the brethren in Jerusalem, then we would conclude that they were leading through teaching and ministry. Elders are to feed the flock and watch over the flock. Their function is not a legal mandate to demand obedience of the flock to their official decisions. They are to nurture the flock by teaching the word of God. They are to be examples to the believers (1 Pt 5:3), shepherds of the flock (At 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2), teachers of the word (1 Tm 3:2; Ti 1:9), ministers to the sick (Js 5:14), and be those who watch over the flock (At 20:28). Elders are servants. They are not members of an executive board of directors.

In order to understand the meaning of Hebrews 13:17, consider the passage itself. It interprets its meaning. *"Obey those who lead you and be submissive, for they watch for your souls as those who must give account. Let them do this with* ***joy*** *and not with* ***grief****, for that would be unprofitable for you."* When a servant leader approaches one who is falling short of his commitment to Jesus, and he is turned away or rejected by the backslider, the servant leader suffers grief in his heart. He is discouraged. However, when a lord with presumed authority approaches the same backslider and is turned away, he does not suffer grief, but frustration, and possibly anger. Those who think that they have authority respond with frustration and anger when their "authority" is rejected. But the rejected servant leader suffers grief because he cannot carry out his responsibility to shepherd the wayward disciple. It is for this reason that we must submit to the efforts of "those who watch for our souls" in order to spare them grief. If our lack of submission to their godly examples of work causes them grief, then we could possibly discourage them from ministering to our needs, and thus, we would cheat ourselves in discouraging the caring leader from approaching us again. We submit to the service of the leaders, therefore, for our own benefit. We want the leaders to watch out for our souls. We need their encouragement. They need ours. And because we need one another's encouragement, we submit to their service in order that they not be discouraged.

If we take the concept of authority out of the context of Hebrews 13:17, we can understand the passage upon the foundation of what Jesus said in Mark 10:35-45. When free men submit to the loving service of those who are looking out for their souls, then they experience the abundant life. This is the organic nature of the ekklesia.

Chapter 19

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IS BASED ON SUBMISSION

In reference to servanthood leadership, we would place an interlude here concerning the effectiveness of servant leaders. Instead of focussing our attention on the leadership styles of the world—Jesus told us not to do that—we can understand the nature of the leadership of the ekklesia by constantly reminding ourselves that leadership among the disciples is always based on the willingness of one disciple to submit to the loving service of another (Ep 5:21).

The effectiveness of the servant leader depends on the submission of those he seeks to serve. This is a world turned upside down in reference to leadership. This is why it is often so difficult for carnally minded men to understand the nature of the leadership that Jesus intended for His people. In the world, effective leadership is almost entirely dependent on the ability of the leader. But Jesus came with a different concept of leadership. The effectiveness of the leader among His disciples would depend on the loving concern and godly behavior of the leaders and the spirit of submission of those who are served.

Now consider the preceding in view of the nature of the leadership that Jesus lived before His disciples. He came to serve (Mk 10:44,45). However, His service

was useless in the lives of the rebellious. Jesus did not unconditionally mandate the salvation of all men. Repentant believers had to submit humbly to what He had to offer in reference to their salvation. If there is no submission, then there would be no salvation.

It is the same in reference to the leaders of His disciples. Their leadership is effective only when others submit to their service, just as Jesus. Leaders among the disciples, therefore, can do nothing for the people unless the people submit to their service. The leaders can work in response to their own salvation (2 Co 4:15; Ph 2:12), but they cannot lead the people unless the people submit to their example of work and service of their needs.

It would be good here, therefore, to remind ourselves of what the Holy Spirit said in reference to our spirit of submission. The ekklesia is a community of the submitted. It is a community of those who have humbly submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus in their hearts.

1. Christians have submitted to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:3).
2. All Christians are to submit to those who give themselves to ministry (1 Co 16:16).
3. Christians are to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord (Ep 5:21).
4. Christians have submitted to God (Js 4:7).
5. Christians have submitted to every ordinance of man (1 Pt 2:13,14).
6. The younger are to submit to the older (1 Pt 5:5).
7. Christians have humbled themselves as children (Mt 18:4).
8. Christians are exalted by God because they have humbled themselves (Mt 23:12).
9. Christians associate with those of humble positions (Rm 12:16).
10. God gives grace to the humble (Js 4:6).
11. Christians are those who have humbled themselves in the sight of the Lord (Js 4:10).
12. Therefore, Christians are to be submissive (Hb 13:17).

The ekklesia is defined by her nature of submission. Now take this character of submission to the context of Hebrews 13:17 and similar passages. The disciples are to submit to servant leaders because these leaders have dedicated themselves to submit to the needs of the saints (1 Co 16:15,16).

Suppose two leaders, as Barsabbas and Silas, sought to lead the disciples by organizing a local evangelistic campaign (See At 15:22). They go to work in order to involve the church in the effort. They persuade through their zeal and teaching that it is the responsibility of the church to preach the gospel to the lost. They manifest an example in their lives of reaching out to the lost. However, no one seeks to follow their zeal and enthusiasm to be involved in an evangelistic campaign. Barsabbas and Silas are grieved because others have not submitted to their leadership. They are simply discouraged in trying to lead the church to do what it is supposed to do. They may be grieved to the point that they cancel the effort, and subsequently plan no future outreaches to involve the church in what it should be doing, that is, taking the gospel to the world. This would not be profitable to the church. It would not be profitable because the church would be in rebellion against what they should be doing.

Every disciple must be cautious about maintaining a spirit of submission to good works that are offered by leaders who seek to step up and reach out with ministries that the church is to be doing. This is the meaning the Hebrew writer had in mind in Hebrews 13:17 when discussing our submission to those who lead us. We are led by the example of their lives (1 Pt 5:3), not by the command of their dictates. If we were led by the command of their dictates, then they would be frustrated with us if we did not follow their example. Our obedience to follow their example, therefore, encourages our leaders to continue to lead us. This is profitable for our souls. **The effectiveness of their leadership depends on our willingness to submit to their example of good works**. And our submission depends on how much we respond to the gospel that we obeyed.

Chapter 20

PASTORS SERVE AS A GROUP WITH CHURCH CONSENT

In a religious world of "single-pastor" churches, it is sometimes difficult to see how some can miss the point that when elders (pastors) are mentioned in the New Testament, they are always mentioned in the context of a group, or plurality. There was never a one-man-band pastor (elder) of any particular group of disciples in the New Testament. For example, when Paul and Barnabas revisited some newly established disciples in the cities

of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, they *"designated **elders** in every church"* (At 14:23). The same was true in the city of Ephesus. *"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **presbyters** of the church"* (At 20:17). There was also a plurality of elders in the city of Philippi. Paul wrote *"to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **overseers** and menservants"* (Ph 1:1). When Paul left Titus in Crete, one of the ministries he was to accomplish was to designate **elders** in every city (Ti 1:5). And then there was the plurality of elders in Jerusalem who functioned with the entire church and the apostles in dealing with problems that were affecting the new Gentile converts (At 15:2,4,6,22). Paul and Barnabas delivered famine funds to the elders of the church in Jerusalem (At 11:30). And finally, the Greek word *presbuterion* is used in 1 Timothy 4:14 to refer to a group of men. *"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the **presbytery**."*

There was never one elder (pastor) designated for an independent group of disciples. Pastors (shepherds) always worked together to shepherd the many assemblies of the disciples that were scattered throughout the 1st century cities. Their work as a group of shepherds was a guard against any one person who might assume a position of authority over any particular group of disciples, a situation that is so prevalent today. **It is impossible to find any statement in the New Testament that remotely states that one pastor (shepherd) ever had specific authority within himself to control or mandate decisions for a particular group of disciples**. When elders functioned as a group, they are to be submissive to one another, as well as to the needs of the church. They are even accountable to the church in reference to their behavior (1 Tm 5:19,20). They are responsible to the spiritual needs of the church, and thus, they must function as a group in making any decisions in reference to their ministry to serve the church as a whole.

1 Timothy 4:14 is a case where the elders worked as a group in conjunction with the church in sending forth an evangelist. Paul wrote to Timothy that he must not neglect the gift that he received from Paul at the time he was sent forth *"with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery* [presbuteros]*."* The *presbuteros* (plural) would be a body, or group of elders. They would be a group of pastors who worked among the disciples, which group gave a commission to the young Timothy when he was initially sent forth with Paul. However, not by any stretch of the imagination would we conclude that these elders functioned as an officiating "board" who gave Timothy permission to go with Paul in his mission travels. Paul made the decision that Timothy go with him (At 16:1-3). He did not ask for the permission of the elders. Neither did Timothy ask for permission. The "laying on of the hands of the *presbuteros*" was simply the elders functioning as a group to send Timothy forth from among his fellow disciples, as Paul and Barnabas also had hands laid on them in Antioch in order that they be sent forth by the disciples of Antioch (At 13:1-3). The elders functioned as a group to give their blessing that Timothy go forth as an evangelist. In the Acts 13 case, it was the "prophets and teachers," with the whole church, who fasted and prayed, and then gave their blessing when they *"laid their hands on them"* (At 13:3).

Some have assumed that the elders as a group should have the officiating authority to mandate decisions for the church. The elders as a group are viewed by these to be a corporate board of directors who hand down dictates to the church, which dictates must be obeyed by the church. For example, one writer strongly asserted, "The authority of the eldership in the church is the authority of Christ. To rebel against the scriptural eldership is to rebel against Christ." This is an extreme statement, but it does reveal the view of some concerning the official position and authority of elders. Holding such a view, however, is void of any support from the Scriptures and is contrary to the instructions of Jesus that there be no lords, authorities and masters among His people. It is a view that lays the foundation for apostasy. It is a belief that led to the early departure of the saints from the total lordship of Jesus over the individual believer, which apostasy eventually led to the development of the Roman Catholic Church. Lordship is claimed by the Catholic Church, which church has a hierarchy of authorities, lords and masters.

The fact is that **there is no Scripture throughout the entire New Testament where any clearly stated decision-making took place on the part of the elders as an exclusive and autonomous group**. We do see examples where the elders worked with the church in making decisions (At 15), and for blessing decisions that were already made (1 Tm 4:14). But there are no cases in the New Testament where a group of elders acted as an autonomous group to mandate decisions for the church.

Elders as a group, however, must make decisions. There is no question about this. In order for them to function as shepherds of the flock, decisions must be made among themselves in reference to fulfill their responsibilities to see over the flock of God. However, they must make their decisions with the consent of the church. The whole church cannot at all times be in-

volved with making all the minor decisions that must be made in reference to the function of the shepherds to fulfill their responsibilities. However, elders who function without the general consensus, or mandate of the church, are taking the church down the road to dictatorial lordship and apostasy. We must remember that the church follows its leadership because of their persuasion and influence, not in obedience to dictates they may make as a group of autocratic lords, authorities and masters.

We must keep in mind that if any group of men, or any individual among the flock of God, assumes the authority to mandate policies for the flock, then the flock has become institutional in structure, and thus, equal with the Catholic Church apostasy. If only one decision is mandated that is based on the supposed authority of a leader or group of leaders, then that one decision has established the basis upon which others will follow. Eventually the church will end up with a book of mandates (creed book). Religious groups have existed for centuries with the authority of books of mandates (creed books) that validate their existence as a unique denomination. These creed books originated from groups of men who enforced their decisions on men. The Roman Catholic Church believes in the authority of the Bible, but also in the authority of papal mandates and church traditions. Churches that have given their leaders the authority to mandate decisions have set themselves on a course of moving away from the authority and lordship of Jesus. They are in violation of the principle of Mark 10:42,43 where Jesus specifically said, *"Not so among you."* One way to determine if one is not a Christ-centered leader is if he assumes the authority of Christ.

Chapter 21

DESIGNATION ASSUMES DECISION-MAKING

A lot more is revealed in Acts 6:1-6 than simple historical facts concerning the feeding of widows. In this historical incident, we have the opportunity to revisit a situation where we can discover how the apostles functioned in relation to the church. If we could use this case to deduct some wisdom concerning leadership, we would do well. It is significant to assume that this event took place about five years after the establishment of the church. Could we assume that elders were present in the Jerusalem church at this time? We think so. Compare the historical event when Paul and Barnabas returned to the Gentile cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch after being gone for only a few months. When they returned, *"they designated elders in every church"* (At 14:23). If elders would have been designated within only a few months after the establishment of the church in the Gentile cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, then we could certainly assume that elders existed in the Jewish church in Jerusalem after five years and by the time of the events of Acts 6:1-6.

In the historical events of what transpired in Acts 6:1-6, however, there is no mention of the elders, though we would assume that there were elders this early in the Jerusalem church. Since the apostles were still in Jerusalem at this time—they remained in Jerusalem for about fifteen years after the establishment of the church—then we would assume that they were the ones to whom the disciples primarily went for teaching (At 2:42). So when a situation arose where some widows were being neglected, then it was only natural for the disciples to come to the apostles to make a decision to settle the dispute.

When the church approached the apostles concerning the neglect of certain widows, the apostles answered that it would not be right for them to leave their teaching the word in order to serve tables (At 6:2). As Christ-sent apostles, it was their responsibility to preach and teach the word of God. It was the responsibility of the disciples to care for one another's needs. It was the responsibility of the church to choose "committees" in order to service the needs of the church. The church was thus free to choose those who would focus their energies on specific needs of the church. And thus, what the apostles advised *"pleased the whole multitude"* (At 6:5). It was the whole church that brought the matter to the attention of the apostles. It was the whole church to whom the apostles gave advice. And it was the whole church that looked out among the disciples in order to designate a group of men to service the needs of the widows.

Once the seven men were chosen, they were set before the apostles, not elders. The apostles prayed for them and laid hands on them in order to set them forth in their ministry. Now when the seven worked in order to care for the needs of the widows, decisions had to be made. What the church did in this case was to choose seven disciples to make the necessary decisions concerning the administration of the collected provisions for the widows. The church has the right to designate certain

disciples for specific ministries, and subsequently, give those disciples the responsibility to make decisions in accordance with the consent of the desires of the church. If the seven men failed to function by the consent of the church, that is, neglect the responsibilities for which they were designated, then the church had the right to terminate their function, either as a group or individually. The seven men, therefore, could work only on the foundation of the consent of the church. They were not an autonomous group who had authority to function outside the will of the church to care for the widows. If they had such authority, then they could make a decision to do something other than what they were mandated to do by the church. If they had such autonomy, then they could have distributed the provisions for the widows to something else. But they could not do this simply because they had no officiating authority to misappropriate the provisions that were designated for the widows.

It would not be working outside the wisdom of the apostles to understand the same example of the seven in reference to the designation of a group of shepherds to function in caring for the spiritual needs of the church. God has given the right to the church to designate shepherds. However, these shepherds (elders) must function on the foundation of the mandate of the church to shepherd the flock. They are to be servants to the flock of God. If they begin functioning outside the mandate of the church in reference to the biblical duties of a shepherd, then they have given up their right to function as designated shepherds.

Decisions must be made in order for the shepherds to carry out their mandate that was given to them by the church. However, these decisions can never be considered authority over the church who designated them as shepherds. When shepherds function outside the consent of the church, then they are either lording over the flock or functioning outside their mandate to shepherd the flock. Lordship by elders is defined by the actions of those who would mandate decisions for the flock that are not by the consent of the flock who designated them. There is no other definition for lordship. This is exactly what Diotrephes did, even to the point of threatening to excommunicate those who would not submit to his decisions (3 Jn 9,10).

When shepherds cease to function as shepherds, then they lose their mandate from the church to be shepherds of the church. Shepherds are not appointed to an office wherein they are established in officiating positions, and thus, they become a self-perpetuating autonomous council that can function parallel to the decision-making of the whole ekklesia. They are given the responsibility by the ekklesia to function in the ministry of watching out for the souls of the ekklesia. When they cease to carry out this resonsibility, then they are no longer functioning as shepherds, and thus, they are not shepherds to the flock.

Chapter 22

UNITY EXISTS WITHOUT LORDS AND MASTERS

Jesus said, *"Do not be called 'Rabbi,' for One is your Teacher,* ***and all of you are brothers****"* (Mt 23:8). The ekklesia is a brotherhood of believers. The members are brothers and sisters in Christ who walk in submission to one another as servants to one another's needs (Ep 5:21). They walk in unity that is based on their common belief and obedience to the gospel. If there were lords and masters among the brothers, then they could be commanded into unity by the authority of their leaders. This was the unity system of Diotrephes, for he threatened to cast out of the fellowship those who did not conform to his wishes (3 Jn 9,10). However, the unity of the believers is not commanded by authoritative leaders, but by the common submission of each believer to the lordship of Jesus. The disciples have all things in common because they have a common salvation in Christ (Jd 3). Nowhere throughout the New Testament are the believers called into unity by authoritative councils, synods or "official" meetings of the church. The call for unity is always based on a call to submit to the authority of the word of God.

Sometimes things are understood better if they are interpreted with common sense. For example, the executive of a corporation has the authority to make his employees do this or that. If they do not, then they can be fired. If two employees cannot get along with one another, one can be fired in order to restore unity to the company. But such authority can never exist among the disciples. The church has no bosses who can fire members. The leaders cannot make the members do anything. They cannot make them attend the assemblies. They cannot make them study their Bibles or pray. They

cannot make them attend crusades or gospel meetings. If the leaders were invested with authority, they could "fire" those members who did not perform according to the wishes of the leaders. As previously stated, Diotrephes assumed authority over the disciples in 3 John 9,10. And, when there were those who did not obey his mandates, they were "fired." They were cast out of the church (3 Jn 10). Leaders who want to assume authority over the disciples want to "fire" idle and disloyal members.

So wherein is the leadership of the leaders? It is restricted to persuasion, the example of their godly behavior, and their ministry of the word of God. The leaders lead by persuading the disciples to cooperate and follow the will of God. But this persuasion must be understood in the context of the responsibility of the leaders to teach the authority of the one Lord Jesus in the lives of the disciples. *"Those who continue in sin, rebuke before all so that others also may fear"* (1 Tm 5:20). As evangelists like Timothy, the leaders of the church have the responsibility to teach the word of God in order to persuade and encourage the members to conform to the will of God. The shepherd must know the word of God *"so that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict"* (Ti 1:9).

So if persuasion and instruction by the word of God are the means by which the leaders direct the church to worship and serve, then in order for one to be persuaded and taught, he must have a submissive spirit. And this would bring us to the fundamental principle for leadership among the disciples of Jesus. As previously stated, Christians are to submit to one another (Ep 5:21). They are to submit to the service of others (1 Co 16:15,16). They are to submit to the shepherding of those who have dedicated themselves to watch over the needs of the saints (Hb 13:17). If one has a submissive spirit, then he is easily persuaded by the teaching of the word of God. This again brings us back to the authority of the word of God, not to a supposed authority that is personally invested in those who preach and teach the word. The teaching of the message reaffirms the authority of our one Lord who has all authority over all things. Authority, therefore, is not inherent in the messenger because he preaches, but in the message of our Lord he preaches. The messenger has every right to proclaim the message because all authority rests with Jesus. This is why Paul said to Titus, *"These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority"* (Ti 2:15).

It is imperative, therefore, that Christians be very sensitive about maintaining their character of submission. Israel went astray because the people became dull of hearing (Mt 13:15). The Hebrew Christians were on the verge of apostasy because they were dull of hearing (Hb 5:11). When men become dull of hearing, they have become rebellious and desensitized to the power of the word of God. The problem with those who have become dull of hearing is not that they are refusing to submit to the teaching of the leaders. They are not submitting because they have become insensitive (dull) to the word of God. The backslider is indifferent to the lordship of Jesus, not rebellious to the leadership of the church.

In the context of this discussion, 1 Corinthians 12:25 is interesting. *"... so that there should be no division in the body,* ***but that the members should have the same care for one another****."* Notice that avoidance of division is not based on submission to lords, authorities and masters among the brethren. Unity is maintained by the care of servants for one another. Unity in the church can never be based on the authoritative mandates of dictatorial despots. Unity is preserved when members submit to one another's needs. It is for this reason that the ekklesia is an organism of functioning servants. It is a body of servants who are fitly framed and knitted together for the purpose of building up one another (Ep 4:16). Members are individual stones in the temple of God that are fitted together in their service of one another (Ep 2:21; 1 Pt 2:5). No member, therefore, can function outside the existence of other members. In order for each member to carry out his responsibilities of service toward his brother or sister in Christ, he must of necessity associate with his brother and sister. There is no such thing as "free-lance" Christians.

What has caused a great deal of division among the disciples is the persistent claim of individuals who feel that the church for which they preach belongs to them. They steal the sheep of God by claiming dictatorial authority over their group of sheep. They divide their group of adherents from other sheep, and thus, make their group an autonomous denomination that is controlled by the leader. We see nothing as this practiced in the New Testament. When leaders claim authority over the sheep, only division results in separating groups of sheep from one another.

There is a unique irony in the personality of those who crave to be authorities among the sheep of God. These vehemently assume that they are the authority, and thus, demand submission on the part of the flock. But at the same time, these lordship leaders are the least submissive among the flock. Lordship leaders do not have a heart of submission, though they demand that others submit to their leadership.

Chapter 23

RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ABSENCE OF LORDS

In discussing the work of elders, we must always wonder who has the authority when there are no elders? Most of the single-assembly churches throughout the world today have no elders. Are they cheated from some authority because they have no designated authorities on earth? Is it not possible that the individual's submission to the lordship of Jesus is able to carry him through life and into eternal life, even though he may never live in the presence of a designated elder?

Because we have failed to understand the concept of elders in the cities, as was characteristic with the New Testament church, we have assemblies with elders and others without elders within the same city. If elders are assumed to have authority to make arbitrary decisions among a group of disciples, then we wonder who has the right to make such decisions when there are no elders. In answer to this supposed dilemma, some have assumed the practice of "evangelistic authority." In other words, authority rests with the single "pastor/preacher" if there is no designated plurality of pastors. One misunderstanding has thus led to a second.

Because of the misunderstanding concerning the nature of the ekklesia to lead herself as a whole in carrying on with her work, another scenario has developed concerning the lack of leadership. Those preachers who do not want any competition in making decisions do not lead churches toward designating elders among the disciples. If the elders have authority—so they assume—and the preacher designates elders, then who has more authority, the preacher or the elders? If the preacher designates elders who supposedly have mandate authority to bind where God has not bound, then they could fire the preacher once they were designated. When the preacher is supported by a foreign source to preach for a particular group of disciples, then he is very apprehensive about growing individuals in the church for which he preaches to the point that the church designates elders. If the church does designate elders, he assumes that they would have more authority than he has, and thus, they could dismiss him as the preacher.

If a preacher sees the church for which he preachers as a source of income, then he will possibly discourage that church from designating elders if he believes that the elders would be in competition with his authority. If elders are designated, then they could fire him as the preacher. He would then have no source of income. Western churches who support their own preachers with great sums of money have little understanding concerning these matters in the developing world. It is easy for them to hire and fire preachers, for the preachers can go somewhere else and "get a job." But in the developing world, the preacher who has worked hard to build a church that financially supports him cannot do this. It is for this reason that many preachers will not designate elders if they have been taught that elders function with the official authority to fire the preacher.

There seems to be some confusion here, especially in view of the fact that Jesus is to have all authority and headship over His body and all things. He is the sole head of the body, the church. In their efforts to set forward some with authority among the disciples, men leave themselves in a very precarious doctrinal dilemma. If there are men on earth who have the authority to bind where God has not bound, then we would question the total headship of Jesus over the body. Because we assume that there is authority on earth in the church, we leave ourselves with difficulty concerning the development of leadership among the disciples. The difficulty is when men with assumed authority ("evangelistic authority") are not motivated to appoint any other authorities of the church.

Some have proposed that elders at least rule by "example authority." In Peter's exhortation that elders be *"examples to the flock,"* it is assumed that there is authority in their example (1 Pt 5:3). Though we should follow the example of all godly men, we would be cautious about making the example of any man on earth the authority by which we would direct our lives. We should note the life of Peter. When Peter wrote the exhortation of 1 Peter 5, he identified himself as a "fellow elder" (1 Pt 5:1). We are not told when Peter was designated to be a shepherd of the flock. The apostles spent almost fifteen years of their ministry in Jerusalem after the establishment of the church, receiving and teaching those Jews who came to the annual Passover/Pentecost feasts. The apostles, including Peter, were in Jerusalem in Acts 15 for a great meeting concerning legalism that was being preached by some Judaistic teachers. Had Peter been designated an elder of the church by this time? We are not told. The conference that was held in Jerusalem in Acts 15 was possibly conducted around A.D. 45. 1 Peter 5 was written around A.D. 65.

Now sometime after A.D. 45, Peter went to Antioch of Syria. He was having a good time in fellowship

with the Gentiles in Antioch. But when some Jewish brethren of Judea came to Antioch, he withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles. Paul *"opposed him to his face because he stood condemned"* (Gl 2:11). Barnabas and the other Jews in Antioch followed the example of Peter (Gl 2:13). Did this example of Peter have authority? Was he an elder at this time, and thus, his example was authorized to be followed by the church? We must be very cautious about saying that the example of elders has authority. No man is perfect. No man can live a perfect life according to the word of God, even Peter.

Chapter 24

WE HAVE ONLY ONE LORD

In 1 Peter 5:3 Peter instructed that the elders among his readers must serve with eagerness, *"**not being lords** over those entrusted to you, but being **examples to the flock**."* The translation "being lords" comes from the word *katakuriuo*, meaning "to hold in subject," "to be master of," or "exercise lordship over." The fact that Peter gave this exhortation so early to the church indicates that lords, authorities and masters would be a difficult problem throughout the history of the church. If men in Peter's time misunderstood the servanthood leadership that was explained and illustrated by Jesus throughout His ministry, then certainly we would assume that this would always be a challenge to some in the leadership of the church. In correcting the problem among Peter's readers, he stated that leadership among the disciples would always be by *"being examples to the flock."* Leadership would be manifested by those who submitted to the lordship of Jesus, and thus, they would be guarded from being lords over the flock by focusing on their godly behavior. In fact, those who would lead by lordship have disqualified themselves simply because they have failed to understand the servanthood by which the flock is to be led.

Lordship leadership can be defined by certain characteristics that may prevail among the leaders, as well as those over whom they lord.

1. If leaders have a difficult time encouraging others to assume responsibility for specific works among the disciples, then it is possible that those they seek to encourage to assume responsibility of ministries are being intimidated by the leaders.
2. If members of the body feel that they must ask permission before they can serve, then they are being intimidated by the aurora of authority that has been assumed by the leaders.
3. If the leaders think too highly of their own opinions and judgments, then they have exalted themselves above the members.
4. If a particular leader cannot let go of special programs or ministries he seems to control, then he is functioning in a manner of discouraging others from stepping up to assume the responsibility of ministry. (Leadership involves either calling on the help of others to minister in certain areas, or finding someone to take ownership of a ministry.)
5. Leaders who have to ask for recognition have assumed that they are in a position or office, not in a ministry to serve others. (Announcements concerning the elders are made to let it be known to the church that they are there to serve, not to make it known what they are doing.)
6. If elders find themselves making decisions concerning the physical matters of church property, then they are micro controlling the physical affairs of the church.
7. If members are afraid to initiate a ministry without the approval of the leaders, then the leaders are lording over the flock.
8. If the leaders have difficulty in getting the people to do anything, it is possible that the members have been cowed into inactivity because of the dominant leadership of the leaders.

When the Holy Spirit told the elders to be examples to the flock, and not lords, He was asking them to focus on having the mind of Christ (Ph 2:5). The mind of Christ was servanthood. If the elders would lead, therefore, they must lead in servicing the needs of the flock as Jesus serviced our needs. This is gospel living before the flock of God. The flock must have examples of how to live the gospel. Therefore, the elders must give themselves over to living the gospel among those they seek to lead into having the mind of Christ. In fact, Philippians 2:5 is hortatory, not imperative. *"Let this mind be in you"* is a hortatory statement. Therefore, the elders must allow the mind of Christ to be in them as it was in Christ who served us.

Chapter 25

DO NOT MINIMIZE THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

We need to take another look at 2 Corinthians 4:5. *"For we do not preach ourselves,* ***but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake****."* Those who would have authority would have every right to assert themselves as official spokesmen for Christ. But Paul teaches the opposite. He was writing to a church wherein there were those who questioned his apostleship, and thus, they were preaching themselves as having authority over Paul. They were calling the church to submit to their leadership, and at the same time, rejecting the leadership of God through Paul. Paul countered their attitudes and arguments. He did not assert some apostolic authority, but preached "Jesus Christ as Lord." When we stand against those who would seek to be lords over us, then we reaffirm that Jesus is the only Lord of our lives. It is as Paul said, *"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to think anything as coming from ourselves,* ***but our adequacy is from God****"* (2 Co 3:5). The adequacy is not in the messenger, but in God who has given the message. We are thus only the messengers "for Jesus' sake" (2 Co 4:5). Preachers are only *"****servants by whom you believed****"* (1 Co 3:5). So Paul rebutted the authorities among the Corintians by saying, *"So then neither he who plants* ***is anything****, nor he who waters,* ***but God who gives the increase****"* (1 Co 3:7). Paul had planted. Apollos had watered in Corinth. But neither Paul nor Apollos were anything special, though the Corinthians had made them to be something special (1 Co 1:11,12). Paul and Apollos, as well as all evangelists, were only servants of the Lord to preach the message of the gospel (See Mt 23:8-12). Preachers too often think too much of themselves. We are nothing but slaves proclaiming a glorious message.

What some leaders do not realize is that they minimize the authority of the word of Christ and the lordship of Christ by assuming to be lords, authorities and masters to subject the disciples to their mandates. When leaders focus on a supposed personal authority that they have as God's messengers, then they minimize the authority of the word of Christ. What happens in the lives of the leaders is only natural. They assert themselves over the word of God, and thus, they pay less attention to what the Bible says. This was the problem with the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day. They first laid aside the word of God in order to maintain their heritage of religious dictates (Mk 7:7,8). They then rejected the word of God in order that they might maintain the authority of their own dictates (Mk 7:9). Those who have little knowledge of the word of God have little fear of asserting themselves to be authorities, lords and masters over God's heritage, the church.

When leaders have little knowledge of the word of God, they will assert their positions as authoritative among the disciples in order to maintain their followers. Biblically ignorant men often claim authority in order to maintain their leadership positions. The opposite is true of those who truly love the authority of the word of God in their own lives. The more one respects and depends on the word of God, the less he looks to himself as a figure of authority. When we exalt the word of God, we minimize ourselves. When others can see that we are students of the word of God, they will follow.

When we exalt the lordship of Jesus, the less we seek to be lords. When we exalt Jesus as Lord, we are in fear of competing with His lordship lest we be found to be standing between a disciple and his Lord. If Jesus is truly exalted as Lord, then one is in fear of exalting himself. The point is that one cannot exalt Jesus as Lord unless he humbles himself before God. In 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter rebuked some elders for lording over the flock of God. Notice the interesting statement that he made in concluding this rebuke: *"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"* (1 Pt 5:5,6). What a worthy note to be placed as a concluding statement for those who would exalt themselves with personal lordship over the flock of God!

Apostasy always starts when men assert their own positions as leaders, and then, claim authority to mandate decisions that are binding on the church. When Paul met for his last time with the elders of the city of Ephesus he saw this apostasy coming. *"Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things,* ***to draw away the disciples after themselves****"* (At 20:30). A few years later Peter realized that apostasy had set in among some of those to whom he wrote, for he chastised some elders for lording over the flock (1 Pt 5:1-3). We would assume that this apostasy was in the mind of Jesus when in His final words He stated that all authority rested with Him alone (Mt 28:18).

Those who humbly throw themselves before the lordship of Jesus will not seek to lead by arbitrary man-

dates. They will not seek to endanger or minimize the lordship of Jesus in the lives of others by placing themselves between the humble believer and his Lord Jesus. However, those leaders who are insecure in their knowledge of the word of God will seek to maintain their positions by asserting themselves before the people. It is a truism in apostasy that religious leaders who have little respect for and knowledge of the word of God, will assume to be lords, authorities and masters in order to validate and sustain their leadership positions. They will assume that the existence of the church depends on their existence as leaders.

A successful leader directs people to the lordship of Jesus. It was for this reason that Paul instructed Titus to preach and apply the message *"**with all authority**." "These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority"* (Ti 2:15). The word "speak" in this verse is from the Greek word *epitage*, meaning "command." Paul did not exhort Titus to rely on some supposed "evangelistic authority." He exhorted him to confidently speak the commands of the word of God. The authority was in the message, not in the messenger. And because the authority was in the message, Titus, as all Christians, had the responsibility to speak the commands of the message. Many people miss this point. The messenger has the responsibility to speak. He does not speak because he has personal authority, and thus, what he personally says is the command of God. That which changes people's lives is the message.

When there are those who rebel against the message in the midst of the audience, the messenger does not "pull rank" on them with authority. The messenger must gently instruct those who oppose the message, emphasizing the authority of the word of God (2 Tm 2:25; 4:2). If the messenger asserts authority over the rebellious, then the messenger has himself manifested a spirit of rebellion against the lordship of Jesus and the authority of His message.

The leadership of evangelists and shepherds rests in their responsibility to minister the word of God to the people. There is authority in the word, not in the administrators of the word. The New Testament is absolutely silent concerning the shepherds overseeing the work of the church as a corporate manager oversees a corporation. They are portrayed as shepherds, not corporate board administrators who "call the shots" in directing the church. The same holds true of the evangelists. Neither the evangelist, nor the elders, are to rule by official mandates that they would pass down to the church. We see such administration of the disciples nowhere in the New Testament. What has caused a great deal of trouble among the disciples are those who would assume official power because of their thirst to be first among the disciples (See 3 Jn 9,10). Whenever one person or a group of people would set themselves forward as appointed officials of the church, and thus, seek to exercise official authority over the body of Christ, they are to be resisted. Such people should be resisted even if it means division. If such people are not resisted, then the church is headed toward a Catholic apostasy.

Chapter 26

ANOINTED OR APPOINTED

The independent church movement throughout the world has resulted in an explosion of churches scattered throughout communities from Burma to Boston. The leaders of these groups often find themselves in competition with one another in order to gain or retain adherents to their particular group. An interesting development of this movement is the effort of the preachers of the churches to compete with one another in reference to validating their right to be the leader of their group. In these efforts to validate their position, a word has been coined in order to assume some divine mandate that they lead their group. It is the word "anoint." If one claims to be personally "anointed," then his ministry is validated, and thus, he has the right to be the leader.

In reference to leadership among independent churches, some people often confuse the anointing of leadership among God's people in the Old Testament with the designated leadership of the church. It is assumed that the church has specific "anointed leaders" today, and thus, these leaders have special ministries among the disciples. But this is an indication that some are confused concerning the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament and the kingdom of Jesus that is now in existence.

The word "anoint" is used in the New Testament only in reference to Jesus and the church as a whole. In reference to His ministry, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was upon Him to anoint Him to preach the gospel (Lk 4:18). *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power"* (At 10:38; see Hb 1:9). In 2 Corinthians 1:21 Paul stated that we as the church have been anointed (See 1 Jn 2:20,27). **There is no specific**

anointing of individuals in the church to do specific ministries. Anointing for special ministries is found nowhere in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the word "anoint" is used in reference to the anointing of priests (Ex 28:41), kings (1 Sm 15:1) and prophets (1 Ch 16:22). The anointed priests functioned in an official capacity of offering sacrifices for the people. The anointed kings functioned to maintain order among the people. The anointed prophets functioned to speak of the coming Messiah who would be the Anointed One over all things (Ps 2:2; Dn 9:24; At 4:25-27). Because believers have been baptized into Christ (Gl 3:26,27), they are the "anointed ones" as the ekklesia (2 Co 1:21,22; 1 Jn 2:20,27). John stated that the baptized believers did not need special anointed individuals to teach them because they had been anointed as the ekklesia by the Holy Spirit. They were taught through inspired teachers in the absence of the written word of God (1 Jn 2:26,27; see At 13:1; Ep 4:11; Js 3:1). John's encouragement concerning anointing was to all the disciples. The supposed anointing of one disciple to exalt himself over other disciples did not exist in the early church. All the disciples had been anointed, and thus there was no need for any one disciple to receive a special anointing to be set apart from the ministry of all the disciples. The teaching of special anointings discriminates disciples from one another.

Chapter 27

CRY FOR AN EARTHLY "KING"

Moses, the prophets and the kings of Israel lived in a different world than those of the church. Through Moses, God established a nation. Through the prophets, He guided the nation. And through the kings for whom the people cried out, God sought to preserve a remnant of the nation. God subsequently spoke with authority through these leaders as His spokesmen for the preservation of national Israel. To revert to these examples of officiating authority in the Old Testament in reference to God's relationship with national Israel, is to revert to the Old Testament law.

Authority was given to different men in the birth and history of national Israel in order to accomplish the purpose of bringing national Israel to the fulfillment of God's promises to the fathers (See Gn 12:1-4). The fulfillment of the promises was in Christ, the Messiah. But now that the Christ has come, we are no longer under the Old Testament law (Gl 3). Moses was God's anointed lawgiver to national Israel (Jn 1:17). If one rebelled against Moses as the lawgiver, he rebelled against God (Nm 16). When the Israelites rejected the theocratic authority of God directly from heaven, and subsequently sought for a king on earth, God allowed them to have a king over themselves (1 Sm 8; 9:15-17). However, it was God who chose and anointed the king. God's authority was thus invested in the anointed king of Israel to reign over Israel. In their request for an authority (king) on earth, they were rejecting the direct authority of God from heaven in their covenant with God. They sought for a king who would speak with authority and lead them as the other nations that had kings who led them (1 Sm 8:5).

The presence of the earthly king in Israel was a manifestation that Israel had rejected the authority of God from heaven that was manifested on earth through the giving of the Old Testament law. The people wanted a human figure of authority they could see. Recognition of God's authority manifested through the word of the law was not sufficient. We can study the Old Testament and discover the end of this story. Israel's desire to have a king on earth to lead them with authority led them further away from God, and eventually, into apostasy and destruction. When the kings went bad, so did the nation. Such was the exact thing that God told Samuel to tell the people when they first asked for a king (1 Sm 8:9-18). The historical lesson is that when men cry out for a visible authority on earth in kingdom matters, the authorities will lead them away from God. This is the foundation upon which Jesus made the proclamation, *"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).

When the church cries out for visible authorities, we can know that apostasy is in the wind. Worse yet, when men cry out that they are the authority for the church, then we can know that a cold wind has blown through the church, taking with it the lordship of Jesus out of the hearts of men. When men on earth dispute about who is the greatest, or who is in authority, then we know that the winds of apostasy are growing.

Chapter 28

DESIGNATING LEADERSHIP

Jesus gave the church the right to appoint (designate) men for certain ministries. The word "appoint," however, is loaded with a great deal of politics and the struggles of men to assume control over others. In the political world, we appoint ministers and governors, lords and masters. With this appointment, authority is assumed, for the authorities are appointed in order to assume control of a body of people. If we are not careful, we will want to bring this meaning into the fellowship of the family of God. But Jesus said, "Not so among you."

In the religious world the word "ordain" is used, which word also has a great deal of ecclesiastical baggage. But in the New Testament, the word "ordain" simply means to "cause to stand" or "to set." In the Acts 6:1-6 event the disciples appointed (ordained) seven men to work with the distribution of provisions to widows. In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas set forth (appointed, or ordained) elders in every church. Titus was to set forth elders in every city (Ti 1:5). The appointment, or ordination, was for the sake of the church, not the men appointed. It was a public announcement that certain men were to function in a designated ministry of service for the spiritual welfare of the church. In reference to the widows in Jerusalem, the appointment made it possible for the widows to know who to approach in order to have their needs fulfilled. The designation of the seven men, therefore, was for the purpose of identifying before the church the ones who had the responsibility to minister to the widows. In reference to elders, ordination was an announcement to the church concerning those men to whom they could direct their needs. There were no ceremonies of ordination. In fact, the more ceremony that is built around the designation of elders, the more some elders feel that they have been placed into a political office.

The ordination or appointment did not make the men function as elders. They were functioning as shepherds before their designation. Their designation, therefore, only redirected the men to focus on the mandate of the church to continue to fulfill certain needs that the church had as a whole. If one is not functioning in the ministry of caring for the spiritual needs of the church, then he has disqualified himself from being designated to be a shepherd. If one is designated to be something he is not in behavior and character, then he will often feel that he is being designated to an office to officiate the business of the church.

Chapter 29

THE NEED FOR SERVANTS

If we changed servant leaders into figures of authority, we destroy the spirit of voluntary submission that should be characteristic of the church as a whole. If we transfer the lordship of Jesus to men, then we minimize the total submission of the church to the lordship of Jesus. In such a transfer the church would become a corporate system of management, control, with focus on productivity. If we transfer the authority of the message to the messengers of the message, then we are minimizing the authority of the message in the lives of men. When we make such transfers, inevitably, because of the weakness of the flesh, men become lords of the flock, and subsequently, function as dictators over God's heritage. We cease being imitators of our Lord and Teacher (Jn 13:14), forgetting that our Lord and Teacher *"did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Mk 10:45).

In His physical absence, Jesus did not need to delegate authority to men on earth. He simply delegated an example of servanthood that the leaders *"should do as I have done to you"* (Jn 13:15). If we would identify our leaders among us, therefore, we should look for the person who has the dirtiest towel from washing so many feet.

The plea of God's word is for those who will humble themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pt 5:5-7). *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you"* (Js 4:8). *"And whoever of you desires to be the first will* ***be the bondservant of all****"* (Mk 10:44). *"Whoever will humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Mt 18:4). *"Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them,* ***for of such is the kingdom of heaven****"* (Mt 19:14). These statements of Scripture need no explanation in reference to defining the character of our leaders among us.

Chapter 30

LITTLE CATHOLIC CHURCHES

History reveals many truths. Before his death, Paul saw an apostasy coming. It was an apostasy that would be led by men who sought to command the following of the disciples. In his discussion with the Ephesian elders, he said that grievous wolves would enter the flock of God (At 20:29). He warned these leaders that from among them men would arise *"to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (At 20:30). Peter evidently experienced the rise of some of these men, for he exhorted that those elders to whom he was writing not to lord over the flock (1 Pt 5:1-5). It may have been that John wrote at a time when some lords had already arisen among the flock, and thus were commanding with authority the submission of the flock to their dictates (3 Jn 9,10).

History teaches that an apostasy of men seeking authority and lordship had already risen among the disciples before the close of the 1st century. A few centuries later, this apostasy of men thirsting to be lords and masters became full blown in the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church. Popes became the head of "the church." Bishops and archbishops were established over regions with the authority to mandate the orders of the head. The Catholic Church became a dominant religious government of the world. In the Reformation Movement of the 16th century there was a general rebellion and call for freedom from the bondage of religious despots. Another call for freedom in the religious world is happening today as men and women throughout the world seek to be free from the lords, authorities and masters that are so prevalent in the world of Christendom.

Reformers and Restorationists have rightly reacted to the heresy of religious bondage that Paul said would be born out of those who would seek to exercise authoritative lordship over the disciples. People have rightly rebelled against those lords who have with Diotrephetic preeminence sought to reign as lords and masters over the flock of God. We live in a world today wherein there is a paradigm shift from the rule of men back to the lordship of Jesus. People of faith throughout the world have discovered that when Jesus is totally lord of one's life, He can totally work in our lives to His glory.

When Christianity became organized, institutionalized and structured after the business plans of Western business/industrial cultures, a new theology developed. In our reaction to the hierarchy of authority that was promoted by the Catholic Church for fifteen hundred years, which hierarchy continues today, we developed a new theology that would supposedly be a safeguard against the Catholic heresy ever developing again among us. We searched for scriptures that would teach a theology of assembly independence that would guard ourselves against one another. But instead of having lords and masters seeking rule over clusters of groups, we formulated a plan to bottle up the lords into isolated groups. We assumed the right for a group of disciples to exclude themselves from the authorities and masters that existed in other groups. Each group of disciples, therefore, could maintain their own authorities, lords and masters to mandate the affairs of the local autonomous group of adherents. So we become "little Catholic churches" spread across the world.

These little Catholic churches often have their authorities, lords and masters. The "pastor/preacher" is often the head of the hierarchy of authority. The elders become the "bishops" who carry out the desires of the pope/pastor whose wishes are weekly dictated from the pulpit. If the pope/pastor feels threatened by any other emerging "popites" among the disciples, he will quickly subjugate such aspiring young men, or encourage them to move on and start their own little Catholic church. The pope/pastor will reign over the appointed bishops, reaffirming that his authority in his little Catholic church is greater than the bishops. When the Diotrephetic pastor ordains bishops, it is emphasized that they are under him. Deacons become the archbishops, and thus, they are given rule over specific duties of the little Catholic church. From the top down to the humble laity, there is a rank and reign of authorities, lords and masters. In fact, the existence of the concept of the "laity" assumes that there are authorities above and over the people. But are we not all one man in Christ (Gl 3:28)?

So we end up today with what we assume is a guard against a Catholic heresy. Autonomous little Catholic churches have their own authority structures and territorial limits of reign. And because they are autonomous, there is no danger of two or three of these little Catholic churches making decisions together in order to carry out a particular work. They are anti-cooperation in their relationship with one another, separating disciples in the same city from one another lest the little Catholic churches grow into a big Catholic church, and thus claim authority over the entire city. As long as each little Catho-

lic church remains introverted with its own authorities, lords and masters, we assume that we have guarded ourselves against becoming a worldwide Catholic Church. This structure seems to preserve the right of those who thirst for power and the right to rule over one's fellow man. The system restricts their lordship to a small group of disciples. The one body of Christ is thus divided up into many little Catholic churches. In all this autonomous institutional confusion, we keep hearing the one Lord with all authority over all things saying, *"But it will not be so among you."*

Epilogue

RESTORATION IS IN THE WIND

If one is not completely clueless concerning the present paradigm shift in Christendom, then he can understand that there is a restoration to the lordship of Jesus that is taking place throughout the world. After centuries of being burdened with the ecclesiastical structures of organized churchianity, millions throughout the world have turned to a breath of refreshing air in freedom of Christ. There is a renewed search for a personal relationship with Jesus that is not bound by the strings of institutional religiosity. There is a thirst to discover Jesus who can reign in the hearts of the individual believer, and thus, motivate the individual to bear fruit in his or her life to the glory of God.

This paradigm shift is usually manifested in the phenomenal return of believers to meeting in small groups in houses, schools, under trees, in coffee shops, or wherever it is convenient. Even large assembly churches have caught a breath of the refreshing wind of restoration as they encourage their members to meet in small groups in order to reconnect with one another. Regardless of where people are meeting, there is a phenomenal desire to manifest one's growing relationship with Jesus by reconnecting with others. Organized churchianity took people so far away from one another, and strangled them with the mechanics of church organization, that individuals have discovered that they can have a personal relationship with Jesus apart from the structure of the institutional church. Individual believers have made the wonderful discovery that they can have a relationship directly with Jesus every day of the week. Instead of being suffocated with the politics of the organized church, individual disciples have discovered that they can wake up everyday as if it were "Sunday." This is a tremendous opportunity to preach the freedom that we have in Christ.

One elder once told us, "I resigned from the eldership so I could do the work of an elder." There is a weakening among elders who want to be shepherds again. We have heard of entire groups of elders standing up before the flock who designated them. They repented, and then reminded the flock that they wanted to be shepherds again, not members of a corporate board of directors for the church. Instead of managing the affairs of the deacons, they resigned from such and then found themselves among the people. They started smelling like sheep again.

These are indeed times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. They are exciting times as leaders reaffirm their biblical mandate to lead humbly the flock of God. What is exciting is the fact that this change is coming from our shepherds. They have lived long enough to discover that we had moved away from the biblical nature of the ekklesia. We moved to a corporate church that was patterned after the "spreadsheet" culture of the Western business/industrial world. But now it is time to return to our roots, to our desire to have all things in common with one another, where we are all servants of Jesus who seek to serve one another until He comes again.

Book 38

The Christ-Centered Faith

"I do not pray for these alone, but for those 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 Christ, the Son of God
(John 17:20,21)

It was God the Son in His incarnate ministry on earth who uttered the above words in reference to His twelve apostles. In the historical context, Jesus was in a personal conversation with the apostles in John 17. Knowing that they would undergo tremendous persecution for the sake of preaching the gospel of the atoning death of the cross and resurrection to eternal life for all those who believed, Jesus wanted the testimony of their unity to be a life-style declaration that what they preached was from the one God of heaven. They accomplished their mission. They remained united. They preached the gospel in their unity. They all died as a witness to the fact that the simplicity of Jesus' message will produce unity. But something has since gone wrong. Christendom today is divided about as much as it could be divided. It is so divided that the unbelieving world is totally confused. The unbelieving accuse that if the Christian's Savior would produce so much disunity, then they will have nothing to do with it. The division that prevails in Christendom is a testimony to the fact that the problem is not with the message, for the apostles remained united. The problem is with us. We have sought to follow our religiosity rather than the simple message of Jesus. Men have arisen among us with a desire to promote themselves and personal traditions over the message of the cross. And so, we live with the consequences of religious men who have gone astray in their efforts to carry out their religiosity among men according to their own desires. It is for this reason that we call for a restoration from man-made religions to following a Christ-centered message that brings unity. We call for men to restore their lives to the preaching of the message that produces the unity that the apostles retained throughout their ministry.

Chapter 1

KNOWING WHO WE ARE

Christianity is a response-defined faith. It is a behavioral conduct of life that is oriented around an obedient response to a loving Creator. It is such because of revelation from a loving God who created man after the spiritual and aesthetic nature of His own being. When the creature recognizes and acknowledges the origins of his existence, there is response. It is not a response out of legal compulsion, but out of a heart of thanksgiving that seeks for instructions from the Creator (2 Co 4:15). It is a worshipful response from one who recognizes that he is the result of a loving Creator who wants his companionship throughout eternity.

Paul said it this way, *"And He has made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth ... **so that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him**, though He is not far from every one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being ..."* (At 17:26,27). We were

created to religiously "grope" after our Creator.

When the greatness of God's love was revealed on an atoning cross two thousand years ago, it was then that faith-defined servants drew closer to their Creator. Our "groping" was satisfied in the cross. The love revealed on the cross was the definition of God's love, and subsequently, the defining nature of Christianity. It was the manifestation of God's intended destiny for all those who through faith would give themselves in obedience to Him. Eternal dwelling was thus guaranteed by the cross to faithful respondents who have groped after and found their Creator.

But herein is revealed the failure of man-made religions, and at the same time, the definition of false religion itself. False religion is different from Christianity in the fact that false religion originates from those who seek to define their own means by which to acquire a clear conscience before their Creator. God created man to be a religious being. Religious people who would either reject the revelation of God, or simply be ignorant of God's revelation, will create for themselves various religious beliefs and systems of religious behavior. They will do so, first because we were created with enough sense to know that this world is not all there is (Rm 1:20), but also because men must worship in order to appease their own consciences. We are religious beings, and thus, we must be religious.

Unfortunately, religion apart from the direction of God is the manifestation of either rebellious hearts or ignorant minds. Those who create their own religion are either rebellious against God's revelation, or simply ignorant of it. In either rebellion or ignorance, people religiously function outside the realm of God's divine directives concerning worship and behavior. The result of such religious functionality is a world of assorted religions that are created after the desires of men. Idol gods are always an invention, not the result of revelation.

When we consider Christendom, we are challenged with the religiosity of men who have invented an assortment of religions that are based on an ignorance of the will of God. We would use the word "Christendom," therefore, as an umbrella term that does not define true Christianity. Christendom is filled with false religions, but true Christianity is not defined by the religious confusion of Christendom. Please do not misunderstand this point. It is our task to move past our religiosity in order to be simple Christians. **All Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians**. Every person, therefore, who might claim a stake in Christendom is not necessarily a Christian.

We are challenged with the task of defining true Christianity in a confused Christendom of religious people. In order to define true Christianity, we must first take a closer look at what we would define as religion, and then go to the Scriptures in order to define what we mean by being Christian. If we are not Bible-oriented religious people, this will be a daunting task. In fact, we would say that it will be impossible for the religious person to determine if he is a Christian in a world of religious confusion if he is not into the word of God as a zealous student. We would thus challenge every religious person to find a Bible. This will not be a pleasant journey for some, especially for those who have given themselves over to false religions. The very foundation of our religiosity, therefore, may be challenged as we take this journey from religion to Christianity.

But this is exactly what James did in taking his readers from the behavior of Sadducean hypocritical religion to the purity of true faith. In chapter 1, James challenged the religionists among his readership. *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (Js 1:22). The religionist who does not get into the word of God is deceiving himself. **By getting into the word of God we mean that the word of God gets into his life**. If one is not controlled by the word of Christ, then he is deceiving himself by thinking that he is a "Christian," when he is really only being religious. The religionist is like the man who sees himself in the mirror of the word of God, but refuses to change from that which he sees (Js 1:23,24). However, the true man of faith *"looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues to abide in it ..."* (Js 1:25). James then challenges the religionist who thinks he is a Christian. *"If any man among you seems to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart,* ***this man's religion is useless****"* (Js 1:26). Since one's speech betrays his unholy heart. The religionist is found to be only religious, not Christian, because of his lack of obedience to the law of liberty. **Life-style religion before God and the Father is manifested in the loving obedience that one manifests in his relationship toward the unfortunate**. *"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). This was a challenge to those who boasted in their religiosity, but were void of the loving heart of true Christianity. It is for this reason that we must challenge ourselves to understand the difference between simply being religious and being Christian. We must continually remind ourselves that all Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians.

All the essentials that are necessary for a healthy

faith are found in Christianity. (1) Man needs a faith that includes an omnipotent, omnipresent and merciful God of all things. (2) Man needs a Savior for his inability to justify himself through perfect keeping of law. (3) Man needs a Holy Spirit that is active in his life. (4) Man needs words of instruction from his Creator in order to cohabit with his fellow man. (5) Man needs a faith that is alive and dynamic. (6) Man needs a faith that is practical and applicable to daily living. (7) He needs a faith that produces a good conscience toward his God. (8) And finally, men of faith must have a hope for the afterlife that is sure and steadfast. In true religion God has provided all these things in order that we believe and obey according to His will. But those who would ignore or distort what God has revealed have created their own religion.

Christianity provides all spiritual essentials for the soul of man. Man-made religions in the past and present have tried to nurture spiritual things in the minds and hearts of men. But all attempts of man-made religion fail in comparison to the truth of Christianity that is revealed in the word of God. When men start inventing their own religions after their own desires, they always twist the Scriptures, and by doing such, destine themselves to destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16).

There is a difference between being a religionist and being a Christian who expresses his religiosity according to the will of God. The use of the term "Christian" in the first century is our initial definition of what a Christian is. The term "Christian" was probably a derogatory statement that was first used by unbelievers in their identity of those disciples of Jesus who were of the Way (At 9:2). Luke recorded in Acts 11:26, *"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."*

Those of the Way, the disciples of Christ, were called Christians by the religionists of the day. There were many religions and religious people of the first century. But there was only one group of religious people who had given themselves to be disciples of Jesus Christ. These people were called Christians, or the religious group who followed the teachings and behavior of Christ. Therefore, they were called Christians because they were Christ-centered people who were obedient disciples to the word of Christ.

If the name Christian was the "new name" of God's people about which Isaiah prophesied (Is 62), then regardless of who came up with the name, whether unbelievers or the disciples of Jesus themselves, the name identified all those of the early religious world who were living Christ-centered lives. We would be called Christians today in a world of religious confusion. We would be called after Christ in order to be separated from those who are carrying out their religiosity according to their own religious inventions. And for making such a commitment, we would gladly suffer under the name of Christian from all religionists who have created their own religions (1 Pt 4:16). And yes, we were easily persuaded to be a Christian because we believed in and sought instruction from Jesus Christ, the Son of God (At 26:28).

Chapter 2

MAN-MADE RELIGIOSITY

The nature of man-made religion can always be identified by the behavior of the adherents. Because many religions have a mix of some Bible together with many religious inventions of men, it is often difficult for those who have little Bible knowledge to separate the true from the man-made in reference to Christianity. Protestantism is an umbrella term that is used for all sorts of religious mixtures with which Christianity must often compete. But we must never make the mistake of classifying true Christianity as just another religion in the "shopping center" confusion of Protestantism. Protestantism is defined as such by those who seek some acceptance by others of their syncretism of Bible and Baal. Christianity is defined by the revelation of its Originator, and nothing else. The religious nature of man must never be used to define Christianity.

It is incumbent on us, therefore, to first define what we would call man-made religion, and then compare this definition with the nature of Bible-revealed Christianity. Our task to define religion might be somewhat challenging since our efforts are frustrated in digging through the assortment of man-made religious inventions, which inventions are sometimes allowed in reference to the freedom that God gives us in our response to His commandments. However, we must seek to discover the true definitive characteristics of Christianity in the word of God in order to discover those beliefs and religious behavioral practices that are contrary to Christianity. It is easy to identify that which is false, simply because a passage from revelation would reveal the error. It is also easy to

identify that which contravenes what is true. But in defining religion in contrast to Christianity, some preliminary concepts of man-made religion must be identified.

Jesus surely had the syncretism of false religion and true religion in mind when He stated, *"Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven ..."* (Mt 7:21). The religionist who seeks to fall under the name of Christendom will cry out "Lord, Lord," but his heart is revealed by what Jesus said in the last part of the statement of Matthew 7:21 concerning what the religionist does. He does not do *"the will of My Father who is in heaven."* Our challenge is to separate the "Lord, Lord" religionist from the "does-the-will-of-My-Father" Christian. Identifying the ekklesia (church) of Christ on Sunday morning involves more than finding people who cry out "Jesus, Jesus," or those who perform certain ceremonies they have invented to validate their identity. In order to discover true Christianity we must identify the primary concepts that would define man-made religiosity.

A. Religion is always legal.

The adherents of man-made religions seek to appease their deity and soothe their consciences by legal obedience to religious rites and rituals, which rites and rituals are the invention of the adherents of the religion. Since the religionist functions outside the realm of God's revelation, humanly invented rites and rituals are invented that must be legally performed in order to bring a sense of religious satisfaction to the worshipers. Once the rites and rituals are established, authorities are established in the religious hierarchy in order to marshal the behavior of all adherents to conform to the prescribed rites and rituals of the religious heritage. Temporal punishments are often inflicted on the rebellious in order to discipline the adherents into conformity to the established performances that both validate and identify the religion. The result is that the obedient adherent feels a sense of ease once he has conformed to the established codes of conduct of the religion. His legal performance both validates his faithfulness to the religion, as well as it gives him a sense of peace of mind.

This is what Jesus had in mind in reference to the "Jews' religion" that He defined in Mark 7:1-9. Later in life Paul looked back on the religiosity that Jesus confronted in Mark 7, and subsequently, he made the statement concerning his former performance in the Jews' religion, *"For you have heard of my behavior* [or, performance] *in the past in Judaism ..."* (Gl 1:13). Judaism was the "Jews' religion." By the time of Jesus it was no longer the faith revealed from God, but a religion that was based, as Jesus stated in Mark 7, on the doctrines and commandments of men. And in these doctrines and commandments of men, Paul said, *"And I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation,* ***being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions****"* (Gl 1:14).

One of the strong motivations to move Christianity into the realm of simply being a religion is to make it a system of legal rites and rituals that are the invention of men. The religionist often seeks to use even the Bible as a legal code book. He does so in order to establish a legal system by which he can identify his "Christianity," as well as bring himself peace of mind in knowing that he has performed "his duty" in conforming to the demands of what he believes should validate his religion as true.

Efforts to make Christianity a mere religion leave little room for a healthy theology of grace in the Christian's relationship with God. Once one seeks to legally justify himself before God through works of law, he focuses little on the grace of God. Those of Christendom who seek to make Christianity just another religion of men always legalize their performance of law before God, and thus, they make demands on God for salvation because of their works.

B. Religion is tradition oriented.

Remember what Paul said in Galatians 1:14, that he was extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions? In order that the adherents of a particular man-made religion might know that they have legally conformed to the identity and validation of their religion, statutes must be identified for strict obedience. The origin and authority for such statutes, codes or creeds is the tradition of the fathers. Religionists have a high regard for their heritage and the traditions of the fathers. The religionist has a great sense of peace when he has obeyed the traditions of the fathers. "This-is-the-way-it-has-always-been-done" acts as the authority and identity of the religion. The adherents are thus intimidated into following the heritage of the fathers in order to honor the fathers. One's religious heritage (traditions) is thus exalted to the status of both being the authority and the identity of the religion.

It is for this reason that the religionist finds it very difficult to conceive of the idea of restoration, for in doing such he has to turn from the heritage of his father and mother, as well as the religious leaders of his past. Very few religionists cry out for restoration to Christianity simply because such a cry is contrary to the very nature of their religion. **One can thus identify a reli-**

gion of men by the lack of a plea for a Bible-based faith that is directed by the word of Christ.

There are never any restoration movements that take place among traditional religionists. Restoration movements come from the individuals of many religious groups who realize that all religions of men have moved away from the authority of the word of God to the authority of the traditions of the individual religions. Tradition-oriented religions, therefore, work against the restoration of Christianity. They do not move people closer to a Christ-centered life that is based on the word of Christ. **A person cannot be Christ-centered in his faith if he is not focused on the word of Christ**.

C. Religion is performance oriented.

Since man-made religion is legal oriented and tradition bound, it of necessity must be performance demanding. The adherents must focus on the performance of the unique rites, rituals and traditions that identify the religion in order to be identified with any particular group. This is why Paul wrote in reference to his former behavior in the "Jew's religion." He wrote that he "*advanced in Judaism ... **being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions**"* (Gl 1:14).

Religions that are more strict in their demands for performance advance to being cults. **Cults are religious systems of cloned adherents**. Most religions allow slight infractions against the traditions of the fathers, but cults become harsh in reference to violations of the codes of the religion, and thus, exclusive in their introverted religious cocoons. Though cults will clone, all religions of men will socially intimidate adherence into conformity through the individual adherent's desire to be accepted by the members of the social religious body. If one does not perform according to the norms of the social religious group, then he or she is ostracized from the group. Obedience to social religious norms, therefore, determines the acceptance of the members of themselves in the religion. Those who perform the most, or best, in carrying out the rites and rituals of the religion are considered to be the most faithful.

D. Religion is production defined.

Faithfulness in a legally defined religious group is defined by the performance of the individual adherents. The performance is defined by what adherents produce. Once the adherent of a particular religion is confirmed to be a member, he is expected to produce, or evangelistically stated, to reproduce himself. The product of one's religious performance is usually to capture or convince, or "convert" in order to grow the religion. Through an assortment of legally performed good works, one identifies himself as "faithful." Western cultures lend themselves to developing great religions simply because the culture of the West is productivity oriented. Efficiency is the identity of success. Productivity is the manifestation of efficiency. A religionist of the West is considered "unfaithful," therefore, if no results can be seen on a spreadsheet of productivity. If no products are witnessed, then it is assumed that there is no legal performance of the adherent. The unproductive adherent, therefore, is subjected to systematic reprimand or intimidation until enough guilt is produced to move the unproductive into action. Western originated religions are good at this. They are so product oriented that their religious work is governed by results, not realizing that when working in the spiritual realm, the work of God cannot be calculated on an end-of-the-month report.

This does not mean that the Christian is to be unproductive. The point is that a Christian can exist in the middle of a very hostile environment. He can remain faithful though his environment is "unproductive" (unreceptive). The growth of the early church was measured by Luke in recording a great many converts (At 2:41; 4:4). But the purpose of Luke's record of these figures was to emphasize the impact of the disciples' preaching of the gospel, not to glorify the disciples by the legal performance of preaching the gospel.

The church grew in the first century because of the message of the gospel, not because of a legal performance of the great commission on the part of the disciples. Many great man-made religions today grow because the membership is avidly dedicated to work. The Mormon church grows because the members are simply zealous performers in their efforts to promote their religion. Because there are a great deal of vehicles parked outside a particular place of worship does not mean that the truth of the gospel is being preached inside. We must never forget that growth in Christianity is the product of the gospel message, not the result of our legal performance of law, less we boast in our works (Rm 11:6).

E. Religion is man centered.

In a world of narcissistic people who focus on themselves, it is only natural that independent religious groups would pop up throughout the world that are centered around dynamic individuals. Traditional religions that were based on dynamic Reformation leaders have been around for centuries. However, there seems to be a tidal wave of independent churches springing up throughout the world today that come in every color possible. Many

of these groups are established in developing world economies as a means of support for the originators. They are not the result of religious people who have been searching the Scriptures in order to restore Christianity. The phenomenal rise of the independent church movement throughout the world to a great extent, therefore, is simply a continuation of religious men seeking to create religion after their own desires. They are thus man-made religions simply because their origins were not based on a desire of men to return to the authority of the Scriptures. They are only the result of religious people who seek to help their fellow man to be only religious.

In order for such religions to perpetuate themselves, emphasis must be placed on those who are skilled in speaking, or in the case of traditional religions, on those who know and speak the traditions of the fathers. Since the authority of religion is man-originated, then of necessity the religion must be based on either personalities or precepts of men. Man-made religion, therefore, is inherently man focused and directed by those who know the traditions of the fathers, or adherents who follow the leadership of charismatic personalities.

Because some religions of men are so man focused, they lend themselves to being spontaneously generated by dynamic personalities. Dynamic vocal leaders who misuse their gift to speak often flatter adherents into a "church," and then preside over the huddled group by proclamations from the pulpit that "God told them" or they "had a dream." When the self-proclaimed "apostle" or "prophet" goes away or dies away, his sheep are often scattered, revealing that the "church" (religion) he started was sterile of Jesus and a commitment to His word. The clergy of such religions are often sterile steers financially feeding off the good will of deceived cows.

This is the religiosity about which Paul wrote in Romans 16:18. *"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."* Religionists do not serve our Lord Christ. Their leadership is based on "appealing words" and "flattering speech." The result of a religiously dedicated person who has the gift of appealing words and flattering speech is a "church" full of innocent people with "deceived hearts." For this reason, one should never judge whether a church is of the truth by the number of members who attend the assemblies. We must remember the words of Paul. *"**And this I say so that no one should deceive you with persuasive words**"* (Cl 2:4).

F. Religion focuses on assemblies.

Since religionists cannot validate their man-made religion by the unchanging authority of God through His word, their primary validation for existence beyond the keeping of their traditions is their assemblies. **Man-made religions are audience oriented**. The assemblies are focused on what the individual attendees receive when they attend. The planners of the assemblies, therefore, place great emphasis on performances during the assemblies that insure that all attendees "get something out of the assemblies." The planners know that an uninspired audience at the end of the assembly will be less in number next Sunday morning. Therefore, the assemblies of man-made religions are very organized, inspirational and orchestrated for attracting attendees, **for the number of attendees present is used as a measure of identifying the strength and continuation of the religion**. The clergy of audience-oriented religions take great pride in the number in attendance in order to determine their status among other religious groups. And in competitive cultures of the world, particularly the West, the number in attendance on any given Sunday morning is a measure of success of the preacher and planners of the assemblies.

The "worship" assemblies of man-made religions are usually not focused primarily on worship. **They are focused primarily on entertaining the attendees**. People are thus encouraged to enjoy the attractions of presentations in order to be emotionally stirred. The attendees are not necessarily stirred to pour forth worship that is in their hearts, but by an inspirational atmosphere from outside, they are stirred to emotionalism, which is often confused with true worship. The emotion of the hour is stirred from the environment, not from the inner man who pours forth worship from his heart. **The difference between entertainment and worship is that entertainment focuses on the people and worship focuses on God**. Man-made religions must focus on entertaining the people in order to build the religion. It is for this reason that religions are primarily audience-oriented, and thus, they validate their existence by their assemblies.

An interesting modern phenomenon for religious assemblies has been the move toward "concert assemblies" that are patterned after the rock concert culture of the last half century. We find nothing as such in the assembly behavior of the first century church, though such concerts attract a great deal of religious people who are drawn by the instrumental noise and emotional chaos that sometimes prevails in such assemblies. A well-planned concert seems to attract audiences that are given to entertainment. The invention of electricity has made it possible for electronic amplifiers to drive monstrous loud speakers to the point of measuring a great assem-

bly by how much one's ears ring when the assembly is over. It would be interesting to see how many adherents of these religious groups would show up at such assemblies if the electricity failed, or the electronic instruments were unplugged. Those who would show up at these assemblies after the electronics are all gone would be those who were truly searching for truth.

One is reminded of the great religious assembly at the Temple of Artemis (Diana) in Ephesus in Acts 19. The adherents of this man-made religion carried on for two hours crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." This was certainly a dynamic "church." Could it be that this religious assembly gives us a New Testament example of religion that is so typical of many assemblies today in the concert-oriented worship of the modern Christendom?

G. Religion is miracle obsessed.

We must not confuse ourselves when discussing this point in defining religion, specifically those religions that classify themselves under the umbrella of Christendom. We understand that God works providentially to heal the sick in a non-miraculous manner (See 2 Kg 20:5; Js 5:13-16). He works to provide Christians with the necessities of life (Mt 6:9-13). He opens doors (1 Co 16:9; 2 Co 2:12; 2 Th 3:1,2). He provides an escape from temptations and trials (Rm 8:28; 1 Co 10:13; Ph 1:9; 2 Pt 2:9). He works to deliver people from evil doers (2 Co 1:9-11; 2 Tm 4:18). He aids the saints in times of need (Rm 15:30-32). There are countless other things that God would choose to do in a **non-miraculous** manner. We would affirm, therefore, that God still works, but He has chosen to work today in a providential manner. This work is not meant to either confirm the word of God or his messengers. It is simply God working in the lives of His people to bring about the purpose for which He created the world.

By non-miraculous we mean that God works "behind the scenes" in a providential manner in order to bring about that which is good for the saints. This would be the work of God that is **perceived by faith**, not sight. **A confirming miracle, however, would be a work of God that was empirically witnessed**. In the New Testament record of Jesus and the apostles' miracles, there was no questioning of the fact that a miracle of God had occurred (See At 4:14-16; 26:26). The presence of the supernatural work of God was clearly evident in confirming miracles of the New Testament (Jn 3:2; 11:43-45). But we now live in an era when men in their lack of faith obsessively seek confirming miracles to reassure them in their religion. They are as Thomas who would not believe unless he had personally experienced the resurrected Jesus (See Jn 20:25).

The religious world, whether of Christendom or non-Christian, is so obsessed with miracles today that whole religions are built upon those who supposedly work miracles to heal the sick and raise the dead. Contrary to what is claimed, the obsession with supposed confirming miracles identifies a religious group as a religion. Though we might argue concerning the work of God in our lives, one thing the modern-day religionist must deal with is the testimony of non-Christian religionists who also claim the miraculous work of their gods in their lives. When spiritists who do not believe in Jesus claim to be healed because they have touched some stone or tree, the modern-day miracle worker must deal with this claim. If he claims that a true confirming miracle took place in the life of the spiritist, then he must accept the non-Christian spiritist in his religion.

We have found that there is such an obsession with miracles today that few religionists have taken the time to use the Bible to define the nature of a true miracle of God. In fact, their obsession with miracles hinders them from considering the definition of the true miracles in the Bible. Their obsession has blinded their minds.

The context of Paul's comments in 2 Corinthians 11:12-15 could not be more definitive of the modern-day miracle worker who masquerades himself as a Christian. Paul introduced such people in verse 12. *"But what I do 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."* These supposed miracle workers wanted "to be regarded" as special people, just as the apostles of Christ. They love to be first, stand before the people, and be regarded as key figures in their religiosity. But they are *"**false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ**"* (vs 13).

We live in a day where self-proclaimed "apostles" and "prophets" pop up everywhere in order to promote all sorts of religious nonsense. We are not uninformed, nor surprised at such, for Paul continued to exhort us in 2 Corinthians 11, *"And no wonder, **for Satan masquerades himself as a messenger of light**"* (vs 14). Since Satan is in competition with Jesus, the religions of men are in competition with Christianity. In view of this competition, Paul concluded, *"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"* (vs 15; see Rv 21:8). Those who would not be deceived must understand that there are a host of religious "apostles" and "prophets" out there with

flattering lips and "miracles" who want to be regarded as somebody in a confused religious world. We must remember that they are "deceitful workers." They are *"masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ."*

Since people who claim to be Christ-centered in their belief and lives have thrown away their Bibles in defining true miracles, any discussion of this subject is often filled with contention. Masquerading "apostles" will fight for their miracles. But we would at least make some suggestions here concerning the subject. Since religionists have little faith in the word of God to confirm their religion and their miracles, they are driven to validate their faith through other means. That other means is usually some confirming miraculous work in their personal lives. If it is not in their personal lives, we have found that they seek to have their faith confirmed by some miraculous happening about which they heard in a some far away city or other land. But we would challenge these religionists concerning their obsession with miracles. We would challenge them because their obsession with miracles results in the following:

1. *They are seeking to walk by sight and not by faith.* Paul wrote that Christians walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7). The religion of the miracle-obsessed person is that he turns this around. He seeks to confirm his religion by sight, not by faith, especially a faith that is based on the word of God. He forgets Romans 10:17. *"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."* If we understand this passage correctly, the truly Christ-centered person seeks to increase his faith by focusing on the word of Christ, not by seeking to personally experience miracles.

2. *The sufficiency of the word of Christ is minimized:* It is common that all religionists, even those who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, claim to be working confirming miracles in order to validate their faith. But in the realm of those religions that seek to fall under the umbrella of Christendom, their dependence on confirming miracles in order to substantiate their faith leads them to have little concern for the word of God in reference to their faith. Paul wrote, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ...* ***so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"*** (2 Tm 3:16). We have found few people who are obsessed with miracles who really believe this statement of the Holy Spirit.

3. *The recorded confirming miracles of the Bible are minimized:* 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, the Son of God, and* ***that believing you might have life through His name"*** (Jn 20:30,31). **There are only seven confirming miracles of Jesus recorded in the book of John**. Jesus worked many other miracles, but the Holy Spirit inspired John to record only these seven. Therefore, the initial recipients of the book of John had enough evidence in the recorded seven miraculous works of Jesus that they could believe and have life through Jesus. No more miracles are thus needed to believe and have life than just these seven recorded miracles. What we are blessed with today is a whole Bible full of miracles. What more would we need. Those who seek to base their religions today on modern-day confirming miracles are ignoring the evidence of God's work that is recorded in the Bible. This leads us to believe that their claim to work miraculous wonders is more about drawing people unto themselves and their religion than in bringing people to believe in Jesus.

4. *Through miracles, religionists encourage people to come to Jesus for selfish reasons.* In 2 Timothy 4:20 the apostle Paul left brother Trophimus sick in Miletus. We wonder why he did this. Could it be that confirming miracles were not meant for the believers, but to be worked only on unbelievers in order that there be no denial of their occurrence? Since a confirming miracle was not worked on Trophimus, then we wonder if his faith was shaken because he was not miraculously healed. We think not. We do not believe that Trophimus originally came to Jesus to be healed. He, as all Christians in the early church, responded to the gospel of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). They did not respond in order to be healed.

The early church was not composed of people who came to Jesus to be healed. Members of the church in the first century became sick. But the church was not a membership of people who had no sicknesses. If it were, then the world would have flocked to this group of people among whom there were no sick people. What would have happened is that people would have selfishly come to Christ to be healed, rather than responding to the message of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The church of the first century was not composed of a membership of "sickless" people. And we would add that those religionists today who claim to heal miraculously the sick are still full of people with various infirmities, regardless of their obsession with miracles.

Someone always asks how we would be able to simply identify if a miracle is either true or false. The answer to the question is simple (Please read chapter 8). If the one who claims to have worked a miracle is not with Christ, that is, he has not obeyed the gospel of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection by baptism, then you can

know for sure that the phenomenon that he "performed" was not a miracle from God. How, or why, would God allow any miracle to be worked through the hands of one who is not a Christian? Would God allow the non-Christian religionist to work a true miracle in order to draw people away from Christianity to a false religion?

Countless religions have been invented by man throughout history for various reasons. They were born out of darkness and dispelled by the light of the truth. Jesus came that we might know the truth (Jn 8:32). As the light of the world (Jn 8:12), Jesus Christ has judged all man-made religions as false. He is the only way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). He is the one who came and fought against the darkness with the sword of His mouth (Rv 2:16). Through Him, therefore, we have overcome the darkness of man-made religion by walking in the light of His truth (1 Jn 1:7). The answer to man-made religion, therefore, is Jesus Christ. He is the way, truth and life to lead us out of the darkness of men's religions.

Chapter 3

FOCUSING ON THE ETERNALITY OF CHRIST

Making a distinction between man-made religion and Christianity depends on how one views Jesus Christ the Son of God. Those who do not accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, but carry on with religious rites and rituals of men, are certainly religionists, but not Christian. The Muslims and Hindus are often very religious, but they are not Christian. However, we also live in a world where there are many people, who to some extent accept Jesus, but only as a historical figure. These people too would be understood to have a religion, but the fact that they do not accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God would classify them as simply religionists. Then there are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but have no knowledge of Him according to the word of God. These people are often very religious, but their lack of knowledge of who Jesus is would classify them as simply religionists. They would fall under the identity of what Paul explained in 2 Timothy 3:5. *"... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. And from such people turn away."* These are those who are *"**always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**"* (2 Tm 3:7). Therefore, not everyone who cries out "Lord, Lord" would be considered a Christian. They would simply be religious, though they recognize Jesus as more than a historical character (See Mt 7:21-23).

We live in a religious world where there is an assortment of beliefs concerning Jesus Christ who walked on this earth two thousand years ago. We would expect such an assortment of beliefs among religious groups that claim to be a part of Christendom, but have little knowledge of the Bible. Most non-Christian religious groups may accept Jesus as a great teacher or prophet. But their beliefs fall far short of the claims of the Bible that would identify them as Christian. There are also those who seek to accept Jesus for all He claims to be, but do not do His will. These too are simply religionists. They are "Lord, Lord" religionists who do not the will of the Father.

What is striking is the fact that there are those who would bring themselves under the umbrella of Christendom, but at the same time deny the full essence of the deity of Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul wrote, "*Therefore, from now on we know no man according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, **yet now we know Him thus no more**."* Deity in reference to Jesus is assumed in this statement. His eternality is assumed. Paul was affirming that Jesus walked on this earth "according to the flesh." But now He is beyond the nature of the flesh that He embodied on this earth. He is now dwelling in a glorious body beyond this world as King of kings and Lord of lord (See Ph 3:21; 1 Tm 6:15). Such an existence assumes eternality. But what was the nature of Jesus' "dwelling" **before He came to this world**? Some have denied His existence before His coming to this world. They have concluded that Jesus was a part of creation, and thus, they deny the eternality of Jesus.

There are those today who teach that Jesus was not an eternal deity before the creation of the world, but was part of the creating work of the eternal God. It is stated that "He [Christ] was the first of Jehovah's creations."[1] As the "firstborn," Christ was the first of all that God created, and thus, He was the first to be created.[2] It is affirmed by some, therefore, that Christ was not part of the eternal Godhead.[3] Some have taught "that Jesus Christ is not God, as Jesus himself declared, but is the Son of God."[4] They assume that the phrase "Son of God" indicates that Jesus was created by God. All such claims affirm that Jesus is not eternal as God, but the result of God.[5]

Some have assumed that Jesus was totally human,

and thus, He could not have been eternal in existence before the creation. Some have stated, "When Jesus was in the flesh, he was a perfect human being; previous to that time he was a perfect spiritual being; and since his resurrection he is a perfect spiritual being of the highest or divine order."[6] Granted that as God Jesus was a spiritual being before His incarnation. But we must affirm that He was more than a "spiritual being." He was God. He was not, as some have affirmed, a spiritual being who descended on the human Christ at the time the man Jesus was baptized. Such is the old Gnostic belief of the second century. The Gnostics believed that once Jesus died, He would remain dead forever.[7] But if one believes the Bible, he must reject such teachings on the basis that it is affirmed in the Bible that Jesus is eternal. There was no beginning to His eternality. There will be no end. His incarnation was a momentary revelation in time for the purpose of bringing finite beings, that is us, into an eternal dwelling with Him.

In order to be Christian, one must accept the teaching that Jesus was one with God the Father before the incarnation. Though being in the form of God, and on an equality with God, in His incarnation Jesus was still one with God in purpose. In His present state of existence, He is not in the flesh in which we now exist, but is reigning as God over all things. These beliefs define the theology of the faith of the Christian concerning who Jesus is. This understanding of Jesus begins our quest as to whether one is a Christian, or simply a religionist who accepts Jesus only as a good man, or simply a prophet.

Chapter 4

THE PREEXISTENT AND ETERNAL SON

The Bible teaches that Christ existed before the creation of the world. He not only existed, but was eternal in existence before He personally created all things. Jesus was in the form of God, and thus, He was God.

A. Jesus was in glory with God.

Jesus was in glory with the Father before the creation of the world. He thus preexisted with God in glory as God. Jesus affirmed, *"And now, O Father, glorify Me with Yourself* ***with the glory that I had with You before the world was****"* (Jn 17:5). Jesus was in glory with the eternal God before the creation of the world, for He prayed, *"... You loved Me* ***before the foundation*** **[creation]** ***of the world****"* (Jn 17:24). Before Jesus was sent "into the world," He existed with God apart from the world (Jn 3:17). When the world was created, Jesus was then manifested in the flesh. *"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"* (Jn 1:14; see 1 Tm 3:16), for God prepared for Him a body in which to dwell (Hb 10:5).

From these few passages it is clear that the Bible teaches that Jesus was with the Father before He came into this world. However, these statements do not directly answer the assumption that Jesus was created. They only state that He existed before the creation of the material world. However, John wrote, *"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). What is interesting in this statement is not brought out in English translations. The Greek word for "was" is in the imperfect tense, that is, it expresses continuing action in the past. Before His incarnation, therefore, Jesus was in continual existence with God before the creation of the world. Jesus had no beginning.

B. Jesus was of the eternal God.

Genesis 1:26 is an important statement that lays the foundation for discussions concerning the eternality of Jesus. The Hebrew word for "Us" in Genesis 1:26 and 3:22 indicates a plurality of Deity at the time the world was created. Jesus was not created to be a part of the eternal God. He was of the eternal God who created. Moses wrote, *"Then God said, 'Let* ***Us*** *make man in* ***Our*** *image, and after* ***Our*** *likeness"* (Gn 1:26). Since the passage is talking about the spiritual image of God, then we would assume that the context is not talking about the cloning of eternal beings. God did not make little gods. Man has been created after the spiritual image of God in the sense that there is a spirit within every man.

In Genesis 1:26 the word "Us" is plural. There was thus a plurality in the essence, nature and being of God. Jesus was a part of this plurality, and thus, He was part of the Divine Godhead. He would eventually become the message ("Word") of God to all men in that He would reveal God to man (Rv 19:13). And since He

was the "Word" of God to man, He dwelt in heaven with and as God before the creation (Jn 1:1,2). Jesus was the "bread of life" that "came down out of heaven" (Jn 6:51,62). He existed in heaven before He "came down" to this world.

This point was affirmed by Jesus when He referred to His existence before Abraham was born. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, "**I AM**"* (Jn 8:58). Jesus was talking to the Jews at the time He made this statement. Though they did not believe that He was the Messiah, they believed *"that the Christ abides forever"* (Jn 12:34-36). They were right. Unfortunately, many Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Christ who was in eternal existence with the Father before the creation of the world. They were not, therefore, disciples of Jesus during His ministry. Those who would not accept Jesus today as the revealed God of heaven, would also not be disciples of Jesus. They might believe in Jesus, but if they do not accept Him as the Christ and Son of God, then they are not Christians (See Jn 8:31). Their theology does not classify them as Christian, even though they may accept Jesus as a good teacher or simply a prophet.

C. Jesus existed in the form of God.

In this discussion, Philippians 2:5-11 is a vital context of teaching. Paul wrote that before His incarnation, Jesus was *"in the form* [morphe] *of God"* (vs 6). That is, He was existing in the nature, essence or eternality of Deity. He was *"equal with God"* (vs 6). Being equal with God, and in the form of God, cannot mean that He was created to be equal with God in form. God does not create God, for God is eternal. Before His incarnation, therefore, Jesus was God in the totality of all that God is. As God, He did not create Himself.

In order to incarnate in the flesh of man, He *"made Himself of no reputation"* (vs 7). He took *"the form of a bondservant"* (vs 7). In other words, Jesus "morphed" from the essence and nature of God in eternity in order to manifest Himself in the likeness of man. His morphing was an action that He did, not one that was taken by the Father. When He morphed into the likeness of man, this did not mean that He changed who He was, or the purpose for which He existed as the God who created man. He was simply God on a mission to bring those of His creation into eternity with Him. Jesus, as God, sent Himself on a mission in order to evangelize the world.

D. Jesus is "from everlasting."

In Micah 5:2 a prophecy was made of the Messiah to come. *"But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are small among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you He will come forth to Me who is to be Ruler in Israel, **whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting**."* This very same passage was quoted by Matthew in Matthew 2:6 in reference to Jesus as the Messiah. Micah 5:2 was a direct reference to Jesus as the Messiah. We must keep in mind that the prophecy spoke of the Messiah as One *"whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting."* Jesus, the Messiah, existed before His incarnation. His existence was eternal. He was the manifestation on earth of the eternal God who existed throughout eternity.

In the languages of men, there is no better way to state the eternality of Jesus. He was "from everlasting" in reference to our confinement to time. He was also "everlasting" on earth, and now He has gone "into everlasting." He is the Lord God *"who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"* (Rv 1:8). Christianity is defined by those who believe in the "everlasting" existence of the Jesus who was momentarily incarnate on earth as a bondservant in order to accomplish the redemption of man. Any faith that claims to be under the umbrella of Christendom, but does not believe in the eternal existence of Jesus the Son of God is claiming to be something that is totally foreign to Christianity. If any would claim to be Christian, he must at lest believe that Jesus is the Christ, who was, is and will be in eternity.

Chapter 5

JESUS IS DEITY

The *New International Version* translation of Jesus' statement in John 8:24 significantly introduces the subject of this chapter. *"I told you that you would die in your sins; **if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be**, you will indeed die in your sins."* What Jesus was saying was that in order to have remission of sins, one must first believe in all that He claimed to be. Those who would be Christians, therefore, must believe all that is revealed in the entire Bible concerning who Jesus is. There can be no options or exceptions in refer-

ence to what Jesus claimed to be. We must believe all that He defined Himself to be.

In His incarnation, Jesus became as man. He gave up being in the form of God and on an equality with God in nature. However, before His incarnation, we must not confuse His existence in His state of incarnation with His existence before He came into this world. As Paul said, we do not know Him now according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16). We must also understand Him before His incarnation that He existed in a state that was "**not according to the flesh**."

A. Jesus is Deity.

Jesus is part of the eternal Godhead. The Greek word *theotatos* (Godhead) is used in the New Testament only in Colossians 2:9. In some translations the word "Godhead" was manufactured to translate the word *theotatos*. However, a better translation would be, *"For in Him **all the fullness of Deity** dwells in bodily form." Theotatos* in this text refers to a state of being God or Deity. The word "Godhead" is an invented English word to define God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since there are no words in any language of man that would adequately define the nature of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then the word "Godhead" must be defined exclusively by the revelation of God through His word. There is nothing wrong with the word as long as we use the Bible as the dictionary to define its meaning.

In His present state of existence, Jesus as God dwells as the resurrected and reigning King of kings. This is the Jesus we do not now know according to the flesh (2 Co 5:16). In reference to His state of existence before creation, Jesus was God (Jn 1:1,2). The Christian is defined by his theology of understanding who Jesus is as God. Christians understand Jesus beyond the physical nature of His existence in His incarnation. Christians, therefore, do not confine their understanding of Jesus to His state of incarnation.

There is more to Jesus than what is defined in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, for the records of these historical books were written by the Holy Spirit with the words of men. Unfortunately, in understanding who God is we are confined to the definitions of our own words. Our words are defined by our experiences and relationships with all that is of the physical world. Therefore, we must not limit God to the definitions of our words. The fullness of Jesus is thus beyond the definition of our words. But what is revealed of Him in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John gives us sufficient understanding to believe, which belief will take us into eternity with Him.

B. Jesus is God.

The Bible emphasizes the deity of Jesus by referring to Him as God. Before His incarnation, John affirmed that Jesus *"was God"* (Jn 1:1). Matthew 1:22,23 is a quotation of Isaiah 7:14, a prophecy and reference to Jesus being *"God with us."* And in reference to Jesus, Paul wrote, *"Christ came, who is over all, **God blessed forever**"* (Rm 9:5). When Thomas had touched the resurrected body of Jesus, Jesus did not correct him when he spontaneously proclaimed, *"My Lord and my **God**"* (Jn 20:28). Jesus is our God and Savior (2 Pt 1:1; see Ti 2:13). He is our true God and eternal life who was revealed in the flesh of man (1 Jn 5:20). No man could ever be proclaimed as such, and thus, Jesus was not just any other man. He was the incarnate revelation of God to man. If there are those religious people who do not accept the totality of what is revealed of Jesus as God, then they are simply religious people promoting a religion that is confined to the minds of men.

C. Jesus is the Mighty God.

Isaiah 9:6 is a prophecy in reference to Jesus. *"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."* Some have affirmed that this passage indeed refers to Jesus as the Messiah, but they fail to consider the fact that the passage speaks of Jesus as the "Mighty God." Prophecies as Isaiah 9:6 that refer to the Messiah, therefore, were more than prophecies in reference to the coming of a unique person in the history of Israel. The prophecies were of God coming in the manifestation of the Messiah.

Consider Isaiah 9:6 in the context of Isaiah's Messianic message to Israel. In Isaiah 10:21 Isaiah wrote, *"The remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, **to the Mighty God**."* The context of verse 21 is in reference to *"the Lord, the Holy One of Israel"* in verse 20. Since the same Hebrew word for "mighty" that is used in Isaiah 9:6 is also used in Isaiah 20:21, we would conclude that both contexts are speaking of the same God. And since Isaiah 9:6 is a prophecy in reference to Jesus, then we would conclude that the remnant of Israel would be restored to the Mighty God Jesus.

The same word for "mighty" is also used in Jeremiah 32:18. Jeremiah referred to the *"great and Mighty God"* (See also Is 45:22). We must conclude, therefore, that the phrase "Mighty God" is a reference in prophecy to Jesus as God. Jesus was in existence with and as the Mighty God before He was revealed through His incar-

nation. Before His incarnation He was one with the Mighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

D. Jesus is inherently eternal.

God is inherently eternal. He cannot go out of existence since He is God. And since we are affirming that Jesus is eternal, then we must affirm also that He cannot go out of existence. When we speak of Jesus being inherently eternal, then we are speaking of Jesus as God who is inherently omnipotent, for all that exists must have originated from God. If Jesus is of the eternal and omnipotent Godhead, then we would expect the Scriptures to teach such. And they do, especially, when Jesus spoke of His "death." Since God cannot die, then we would assume that He spoke only of the death of His physical body, not His eternal being, for God cannot cease to exist.

In John 2:19 Jesus said to the Jews, *"Destroy this temple and in three days* ***I will raise it up****"* (See vs 22). In this statement Jesus spoke of the resurrection of His body. He had the power to lay His body down in death, and He had the power to raise it up. *"Therefore, 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). If Jesus were not one with God the Father, then we might conclude that there is a contradiction with the statements of John 2:19; John 10:17,18 and what is stated in Acts 2:32 and similar statements that God raised Jesus from the dead. Peter proclaimed on Pentecost, *"This Jesus God has raised up, to which we all are witnesses"* (At 2:32; see Cl 2:12). We must conclude that in His death, Jesus did not cease to exist (See 1 Pt 3:18,19). He did not cease being one with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Jesus stated that He had power to lay down His body in death, He as a part of the eternal Godhead, had the power to raise it up again. When it is stated that "God" raised Jesus from the dead, then we must conclude that the Godhead (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) worked as one in raising the incarnate body of the Son from the dead.

E. Jesus is the LORD Jehovah.

Depending on the particular translation, the words "LORD" or "Jehovah" are used to translate the Hebrew *Yahweh*. Most translations today use the word "LORD," in all capitals, instead of Jehovah. Yahweh is the Hebrew word that is used in the Old Testament to refer to all that God is. It is thus interesting to follow the use of this word throughout the Old Testament, specifically in Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament in reference to Jesus being one with Yahweh.

1. Isaiah 6:5: *"Woe is me,"* Isaiah stated, *"for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips,* ***for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of armies****."* In a prophetic vision, Isaiah saw the glory of the King, the LORD (Yahweh) of armies. In John 12:37-41, John quoted from the context of Isaiah 6:8-10 and affirmed that the prophecy was of Jesus whom Isaiah had seen. Thus Jesus was the LORD Jehovah whose glory Isaiah saw. In His preexistent state, Jesus was one with God, and thus, He was the LORD Jehovah who was revealed to the prophets.

2. Isaiah 40:3-5: *"Prepare the way of the LORD* [Yahweh]. *Make straight in the desert a highway for our God"* (vs 3). *"And the glory of the LORD* [Yahweh] *will be revealed and all flesh will see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken"* (vs 5).

Now consider the fact that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy that one prepare the way for the LORD (Lk 3:4; Mt 3:1-3; Mk 1:3; Jn 1:23). However, John prepared the way for Jesus (Mt 3:1-3). The logical conclusion is that John prepared the way for the prophesied LORD, who is Yahweh (God). We would thus conclude that Jesus was of the Yahweh about whom Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 4:2-5.

3. Isaiah 43:11: *"I, even I, am the LORD* [Yahweh], *and besides Me there is no savior."* According to this statement, there is no Savior other than the LORD Jehovah. Paul wrote in Titus 2:13 that Jesus is our Savior. Thus Jesus is the LORD Jehovah who is our Savior.

4. Isaiah 44:6: *"I am the first and I am the last, and besides Me there is no God"* (See Is 41:4; 48:12). Only the LORD Jehovah is the first and the last. But in Revelation 1:17 and 2:8 Jesus claims to be "the first and the last." Since Jesus is one with the LORD Jehovah about whom Isaiah wrote, then Jesus is also the LORD Jehovah since He is the first and the last.

5. Isaiah 45:5: *"I am the LORD* [Yahweh] *and there is no one else. There is no God besides Me."* There is no other God than the LORD Jehovah. John affirmed that Jesus is God (Jn 1:1). Thus Jesus and the Yahweh (the LORD) of Israel are the same. Jesus is one with God, and thus, He is God.

F. Jesus is worshiped as God.

We are the result of the creative work of God. Spe-

cifically, we are the result of the creative work of God the Son. Paul wrote, *"**For by Him** **[the Son]** **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). And John added, *"**All things were made by Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (Jn 1:3; See Hb 1:2). Now it does not take a lot of reasoning to make some logical conclusions from the fact that Jesus was the creator of all things. First of all, since only God can create, then Jesus must be God. Second, since only God is to be worshiped, then Jesus, as God is to be worshiped.

The worship of Jesus throughout His ministry took place on several occasion. At His birth, wise men came and worshiped Him (Mt 2:1,2). During His earthly ministry different people came and worshiped Him (See Mt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 18:26; 28:9,17; Jn 9:38). After he came to his senses in reference to the resurrected Jesus, Thomas worshiped Jesus (Jn 20:28). In His present ascended position at the right hand of God, Jesus is worshiped by the angels (Hb 1:6). Add to this the fact that throughout the epistles the holy writers wrote in a worshipful manner in reference to Jesus (See Ti 2:13; 2 Pt 1:1; 3:18).

Only God is to be worshiped. And since there is no condemnation in the New Testament of any man or angel who worshiped Jesus, then we would conclude that the Holy Spirit's inspired record of men and angels who worshiped Jesus assumed the deity of Jesus. Men must honor the Son as they honor the Father (Jn 5:23). And for this reason, they must worship the Son as they would worship the Father.

Neither men nor angels are to be worshiped (See At 10:35,36; Rv 10:10; 22:8,9). If Jesus were just a man, then it would have been wrong for men to worship Him. But the fact that He accepted the worship of men proves that He was God and worthy of worship. If He knew that He was not God, but a mere man, then it would have been arrogant on His part to accept the worship of men. In fact, His acceptance of worship if He knew He was only a man, would negate Him as any trustworthy religious leader. He would have been arrogant to accept the worship of men.

The Hebrew writer quoted from both Psalm 97 and Psalm 102 in the first chapter of Hebrews. The psalmist referred to the LORD Jehovah (Yahweh) in the contexts of both Psalms. But in Hebrews 1 the two Psalms are quoted in reference to Jesus as the LORD Jehovah. He is the LORD Jehovah who is worthy of worship and praise. Christians, therefore, accept Jesus as God who is worthy of worship.

Chapter 6

WAS THE SON CREATED?

In view of the truths of the preceding chapter, it seems almost superfluous to make the arguments of this chapter. Nevertheless, we must focus our attention on the subject of this chapter simply because there are those who call themselves under the umbrella of Christendom, and yet, they deny the eternality of Jesus as one with the eternal Godhead. Because they make such a claim, they would be considered religionists, but not Christians.

One of the interesting teachings that was taught in the last century was the concept that Jesus the Son of God was simply the creation of the eternal God. He was not eternal, but as the Son of God, originated as a created being in order to become a sin offering for man. This teaching was derived from some unfortunate erroneous interpretations of words and phrases in the Bible. Therefore, we need to take another look at the so-called proof texts of this theology. The following are the key passages that have been misunderstood in reference to the existence and ministry of Jesus:

A. Jesus was "brought forth."

Proverbs 8:22-24 is a personification of wisdom. *"The Lord possessed me* [wisdom] *in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, before there was ever an earth.* ***When there were no depths, I was brought forth*** *...."* The context of this verse is an exaltation of **wisdom**. It is not a verse of prophecy in reference to Jesus. It is a verse of personifying the beauty and value of wisdom. Wisdom existed before the creation of the world simply because all wisdom was inherent in the eternal Deity who created all things.

B. The Father is greater than Jesus.

John 14:28 is a statement that was made by Jesus during His earthly ministry. *". . . I go to the Father, for* ***My Father is great than I****."* If taken out of its historical

context, this statement would indicate that the Father was greater than Jesus in being and existence. But Jesus is not stating that He is divinely inferior to the Father. In order to bring the statement into the historical context of Jesus in relation to the Father while He was on earth, Jesus said in John 5:23, *". . . all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father."* The context of John 14:28 is Jesus' personal conversation with His immediate twelve apostles. The historical context is found in verse 25. *"These things I have spoken to you **while being present with you**."* Jesus was present with His disciples on earth, while He was in a state of having given up being on an equality with the Father and being made in the likeness of man (See Ph 2:6,7). The Father was greater than the Son in form while the Son was on earth, for the Son was in the form of man.

The earthly ministry of Jesus was only temporary in reference to His eternal work of redemption. After His earthly ministry, He ascended to the Father (Dn 7:13,14). He ascended on high to be seated at the right hand of the Father (Hb 8:1). He is now reigning with all authority (Mt 28:18), as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). He will exist as such and in such a position until His final coming and the consummation of all things. At that time, the end of time, God will be "all in all" for eternity (1 Co 15:28).

C. Jesus is the firstborn and beginning of creation.

Colossians 1:15 and **Revelation 3:14** teach the superiority of Jesus over creation because He was the creator of all things. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15, *"He* [Christ] *is the image of the invisible God, **the firstborn of all creation**."* It is assumed from the statement "firstborn of all creation" that Jesus was the first to be created by God the Father. But take another look at the context of the statement. The context is the preeminence of Jesus as stated in verse 18. Jesus is the "head" and "beginning" and "firstborn" *"so that in all things He might have the preeminence."* Preeminence refers to being first and above all else. Reference is not to creation, but to the Son's value and dominance over all things. This is brought out in verse 17. *"And He is above all things and by Him all things hold together"* (See Hb 1:3). But the crowning thought that dispels the irreverent concept that Jesus was created is found in verse 16. *"For by Him all things were created ...."* Jesus was not created, for He was the creator of all things.

Only God can create. God the Father did not create a god in order that this god create all things. Jesus was not the "agent" through which the Father created. As "God all in all," the Son created all things of His own power and essence. He was the representative of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to carry out the work of creation. A work of His eternal ministry was to create all things, including man, and then bring the obedient of His creation into eternal existence with Deity. This is brought out in the last part of Colossians 1:16. *"All things were created through Him and **for Him**."* God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit created through the medium of the creating ministry of the Son for the purpose of the Son's redemptive work. In this way, all men have been created for Jesus and His atoning ministry to bring the obedient into the eternal presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The word "firstborn" in the context of Colossians 1 is thus used as a metaphor. In the Old Testament usage of the word, the firstborn had legal precedence over all the other children. The firstborn was first, and thus, he had the legal responsibility to carry on with the heritage of the father. In the context of Colossians, the metaphorical meaning is in reference to the responsibilities of Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. The metaphorical meaning emphasizes **responsibility** and **privilege**, not origin, or creation.

Now in the context of this point, take another look at Revelation 3:14. *"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, 'These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, **the beginning of the creation of God.**'"* The Greek word *arche* (beginning) that is used in this passage refers to that which begins to exist. Reference is to origin and that which causes the existence of something else. Jesus was the origin of all that exists (Cl 1:16). He was that which caused everything to come into existence (Jn 1:3). This corresponds with Paul's statements in the context of Colossians 1:16,17. Jesus was *"in the beginning of creation"* since all things orginated from Him.

Consider also that the Greek phrase *tou theou* ("of God") is in the genitive case. It is thus to be translated "of God," not "by God." Jesus was the source of the creative work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He was not created **by** God, and then used by God to create. He was "of God," and because He was "of God," He had the power to create, for only God can create.

D. Jesus is divine.

John 1:1 has been a disputed passage because of the translation work that was done many years ago by the translators of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*. The translators of this version rendered the passage, "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god**."

The *International King James Version* correctly translates the verse, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* All major translations are similar to this rendition.

The *New World* translators assumed that since the indefinite article "a" was not in the text in the statement, *"the Word was God,"* they could add the article, and thus, claim that Jesus as the Word was only "a god." It is true that there is no indefinite article in this Greek text with the word "God." In some texts where the indefinite article is missing, it can be added without changing the meaning of the text. However, the text of John 1:1 does not call for the addition of the indefinite article. Its addition changes the meaning of the text. The rule for adding the indefinite article is that it can be added if the meaning of a particular text is not changed But if the meaning of the text is changed to make it contradict clear statements that are made in other passages, it cannot be added. By adding the indefinite article to the text of John 1:1, the text changes in meaning, and subsequently, is made to contradict other teachings in reference to Jesus.

When the indefinite article is absent from the text, emphasis is on **quality**. When the indefinite article is present, the emphasis is on **quantity**. The meaning of the text of John 1:1 is the **quality** of the Word. The Word was God, or divine. The Word was Deity and this Deity became flesh (Jn 1:14).

The *New World* translators are not consistent in their use of the indefinite article in the context of the entire chapter of John 1. The indefinite article is not found in verse 6 with the word "God." Neither is it used in reference to God in verses 12 and 13. But in the text of these three verses, they do not add the indefinite article "a" to the word "God."

The quality of Jesus as Deity is emphasized in John 1:1. This point is even emphasized in the verb "was" (*eime*). It is imperfect indicative in tense, and thus, emphasis is on **continuous action or state of being in past time**. The Word was in continuous state of existence before the beginning of all that was created. If the Word was only a created being at some point of time in the past, then John would have used the aorist tense which expresses a completed action in the past. But the fact that he did not use the aorist tense emphasizes the fact that he did not want us to understand that the Word was created, and thus was simply "a god."

Some have argued, however, that the Greek word *eime* ("was") is **inceptive** imperfect. Therefore, the emphasis should be placed on the **beginning** of a past action rather than the continual being of that action. But this context does not warrant this meaning. Since only the context can determine if a verb is to be understood as inceptive, descriptive or iterative action, then we must understand the statement of John 1:1 first in its initial context, and also in the context of all other passages that refer to the nature and essence of the Word.

Matthew 5:2 is an example of the inceptive imperfect (See also Lk 5:3; Mk 5:37; At 3:8). Matthew 5:2 could be translated "Then He opened His mouth and **began teaching them**." The context would allow this translation. In other words, Jesus began at that point in time to teach and His teaching continued thereafter.

John 1:1, however, is saying that the Word was in continuous being at the point of the creation of all things. The Word was not created before all other things, neither was the Word a part of all that was created. There is no translation that renders John 1:1 with the inceptive imperfect. All translations are in agreement that the Word was in existence at the time all other things began. The context of the passage is focused on the divine nature of the Word, and thus, because the Word was God, *"all things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (Jn 1:3).

Chapter 7

GOD IS MORE THAN JESUS

When discussing the incarnation of Jesus as the Son of God, there always arises the question concerning whether Jesus is all there is in reference to God. Some have concluded, "Since Jesus is God, then we must assume that all that God is can be identified in Jesus." In other words, there is no such thing as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism in Matthew 28:19 is unto a relationship with Jesus only as all that God is. Some have referred to this teaching as "Jesus-only theology."

When Jesus stated that He and the Father were one, then some have concluded that Jesus only is God (See Jn 10:30). Jesus said, *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (Jn 14:9). But we must not conclude from this that Jesus only constitutes all that is God. When Moses wrote *"the Lord our God is one God,"* we must not conclude that Jesus only is the revelation of all that

God is (Dt 6:4). Though we may not understand the nature of the triune God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we must not conclude that Jesus only is all that God is. The following are some points to remember concerning this discussion:

A. God is "Us."

We must remind ourselves of the statement of Genesis 1:26. *"Let **Us** make man in our image, after our likeness."* This is the first indication in the Bible that God is "plural." Though Genesis 1:26 does not identify the nature of the plurality of God, we must conclude that the one God is in some way plural in essence, nature and being.

The plurality of God is revealed in the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which word is used in Genesis 1:1: *"In the beginning **God*** [Elohim] *created the heavens and the earth."* The root meaning of the Hebrew *El* means God. When *El* is placed with *ohim*, then the subsequent word, *Elohim*, is plural. Thus in the beginning *Elohim* (God) created the heavens and the earth. When the statement is made that God created, the verb "created" is singular. Thus the God of plurality functioned with a singular purpose in order to create the heavens and earth.

The statement of Genesis 3:22 coincides with the context of Genesis 1. *"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become as one of **Us**, to know good and evil.'"* After the sin of Adam in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam came to know good and evil as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit knew the evil of Satan. The same plurality is again mentioned in Genesis 11:7. *"Come, let **Us*** [God] *go down and there confuse their language ...."*

We must not conclude from the statements of Jesus in the New Testament that He only constituted all that God was and is. The plurality of God was affirmed in the Old Testament. Though the Jews did not understand the totality of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they were at least prepared in their thinking that God was plural in nature. Therefore, when Jesus came as a revelation from the "Us" (*Elohim*) of the Old Testament, they could not refer to the Old Testament in order to refute Jesus' teaching concerning the coming of the *Elohim* from heaven to earth. They refuted the fact that Jesus claimed to be from God, but they could not base their refutation on the fact that God was singular, and thus, could not be revealed on earth in an incarnate body.

B. God the Father and Jesus the Son have separate works.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus we can conclude nothing other than the fact that Jesus functioned in His ministry separate in state of being from the Father who was in spirit in heaven. However, both the Father and Son functioned as one in purpose in order to bring about the redemptive work of the Son. We would thus expect that the Father and Son would communicate separately during the ministry of Jesus on earth in His incarnate state. Their communication to man, therefore, manifests that they were two in part functioning as one in purpose.

John 17 is a key discussion of Jesus in reference to this subject. The entire chapter was a prayer of Jesus to the Father. The fact that Jesus was praying to the Father would certainly refute the idea that Jesus only constituted all that God was. Jesus began this personal prayer between Himself and God the Father by making the statement, *"Glorify Your Son so that Your Son **also** may glorify You"* (vs 1). The word "also" begins the identity in the prayer that there is a difference between the incarnate Son on earth and the Father who was at the time in spirit in heaven. The word "also" is used again in verse 21. *"... 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 ..."* (vs 21). As the Father and Son are one, so Jesus wanted the apostles to be one in purpose. Jesus could not have used the phrase "one in Us" unless He was one with the Father in purpose.

The apostles certainly did not become one person. They were twelve, but one in spirit and purpose, as also was the Father and Son. The meaning is also expressed in Matthew 19:5 where it is stated that a man and woman become one in marriage. They remain two individuals, but they become one person in the eyes of God. The man and woman remain two different individuals in their function in life, but they become one in the unity of a marriage bond.

God the Father and Son are two in function, but they remained one in spirit when the Son was incarnate on earth. Because they are spiritually one in essence, nature and existence does not mean that they are one in function. In the redemption of man, the Father and Son have two functions in order to bring man into eternity. But they work as one in order to accomplish this mission.

John wrote, *"This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son"* (1 Jn 2:22). The word "and" separates the identity of the Father and Son, but the essence and nature of God is always one. This is brought out in 1 John 4:14. *"And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of*

the world." The Father was the "sender" and the Son was the "Savior."

Now take this thought back to John 1:1. *"In the beginning was **the** Word, and **the** Word was with God, and **the** Word was God."* The definite article "the" is used to identify something that is specific. If the article is not used, then something generic is indicated. For example, when we say "the man," then we are referring to a specific individual. But when we say "man," then we are referring to mankind in general. In John 1:1 the Word is identified as "the" Word. The Word was with God. It does not say that the Word was with "the" God. The Word was specific, but God was generic. In other words, "the" Word (Jesus), was with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Word was incarnate (Jn 1:14). But the totality of God remained spirit (Jn 4:24). The Word was sent into the world, but God the Father and Holy Spirit remained in spirit form.

There are numerous references throughout the Bible that teach the plurality of God. In reading these passages, one cannot come to the conclusion that Jesus is all that God is. The totality of God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though we do not understand this totality, we accept it as true.

PLURALITY OF GOD

Psalm 110:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 13:32; John 6:38; 14:16, 28; 15:26; Acts 2:33; 7:55; 1 Corinthians 15:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:14; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; Hebrews 2:3,4; 6:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20,21

C. Baptism is unto God.

The "Jesus-only theology" is in some way encouraged by the erroneous conclusion of some people concerning what some suppose they must say at the time they baptize someone. Some have believed that there is almost some "magical" or "spiritual" connotation placed on what is said at the time one is baptized. At least, some believe one's baptism is validated by what is said by the baptizer. But in the New Testament, **nothing is said concerning what must be said at the time one person baptizes another**. The fact that nothing is said in the New Testament that must be said, leads us to conclude that nothing need be said.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, *"Going, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them **into** the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit."* Some have erroneously used this passage to establish a creed that these words must be said at the time one is baptized. But this is not what the passage is saying. Jesus speaks of **what is done**, not what is to be said. One is baptized **into** the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word "into" comes from the Greek word *eis*. The meaning is that one is baptized into a relationship, specifically a covenant relationship, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is emphasizing what happens at the time the discipled person is immersed. To make what is done into a formal statement that must be said, is certainly going beyond the meaning of the text, if not establishing a creed of men that is based on an erroneous interpretation of the text. We must keep in mind that Jesus did not command His disciples what to say at the time they baptized someone. He simply revealed to them what to do. And when they did what He said, He explained what took place in the spiritual realm concerning the one who was baptized into a covenant with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke used the phrase "in the name of Jesus" as in his quote from Peter in Acts 2:38. *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you **in the name of Jesus** ..."* (see also At 10:48, compare 1 Co 1:13). Notice carefully what Peter meant. It is similar to the statement that Jesus made in Mark 9:37. *"Whoever receives one of the little children **in My name**, receives Me."* Jesus was not speaking of something that must be said when the little children came unto Him. Receiving the little children was representative of receiving Jesus. The receiving in the name of Jesus was something that was done, not something that was said. The receiving of little children, therefore, was not validated by something the apostles were to say when they received little children.

In Acts 2:38 Peter used the word *epi* in the phrase "in [*epi*] the name of Jesus." He thus commanded them to be baptized "on the basis of" the name Jesus Christ. Their immersion would be valid only if it were based on Jesus. The validation of the baptism, therefore, was not based on something the baptizer was to say at the time he baptized someone.

Working "in the name of Jesus" means working under the authority that goes with that name. Consider these passages: *"**In the name of Jesus Christ** of Nazareth rise up and walk"* (At 3:6). *"And they called them and command them not to speak at all nor teach **in the name of Jesus**"* (At 4:18; see 5:40). Paul *"preached boldly in Damascus **in the name of Jesus**"* (At 9:27). Paul *"spoke boldly **in the name of the Lord Jesus** ..."* (At 9:29). *"I command you **in the name of Jesus Christ** to come out of her"* (At 16:18). In the book of Acts, when one spoke or worked as a disciple of Jesus, Luke wanted us to know that that person did such as a representative of Jesus. Upon the authority of Jesus' com-

mission, the early disciples went forth into all the world. The phrase "in the name of Jesus" had nothing to do with what they said in reference to what they did.

What a disciple does is not validated by what he says. If one does proclaim that a work he does is "in the name of Jesus," the proclamation is to the unbeliever as a statement of identifying himself as a representative of Jesus. A statement need not be made, however, to validate one's work.

Colossians 3:17 states, *"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."* This statement speaks of the total Christ-centered life of the Christian. All that the Christian does is a reflection of his submission to Christ as his Lord and King. One's life must reflect the fact that he lives as a representative of Jesus Christ. His works in the name of Jesus, therefore, are a proclamation of Jesus as his Lord.

The phrase "in My name" is also used in Jesus' statement of Mark 9:41. *"For whoever will give you a cup of water to drink* ***in My name*** *because you belong to Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward."* Christians are representatives of Christ. Therefore, when one does a good deed as a Christian, he is doing the deed to the glory of Christ. Actions, not proclamations, are the evidence of one's identity as a Christian.

In Acts 10:48 Cornelius was baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ." The Greek word used here for "in" is *eis*. Cornelius was thus baptized unto a relationship with Jesus Christ. We are not told of any statements that were made by Peter at the time Cornelius was baptized. We are told only what happened, that he was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Because there is no record in the New Testament of any statements that were made by the baptizers, then we must conclude that it is not necessary to make any statements immediately before one is baptized.

"In the name of Jesus" is not a spiritual statement that is made at the time one is baptized in order to validate one's baptism. Emphasis is not on a statement that is made, but on an action that is accomplished. When one works in the name of Jesus, he is working as a representative of Jesus. When one is baptized in the name of Jesus, he is being baptized as a representative of Jesus' work of the atoning cross, burial and resurrection for our hope. To degrade "in the name of Jesus" to some simple legal formula of words that is to be stated at the time one is baptized is to minimize the atoning ministry of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection. Obedience to the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the most important event of one's life. It is one's obedience to the gospel that manifests his discipleship to Jesus. The sacred event of obedience to the gospel is not made spiritual by what the baptizer might say at the time one is baptized. When one is baptized, all focus is on the one being baptized, not on what someone else is saying at the time of the baptism.

To make the statement, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," or "I baptize you in the name of Jesus," is not wrong to say when one is baptizing another. However, we must understand that in making the statements, we are proclaiming to those present what is taking place. The one who is baptized should already know why he or she is being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The proclamation, therefore, is not to the one who is being baptized, but to the audience who is present. If the one being baptized does not know the meaning of the proclamation, then he should not be baptized in the first place, for he does not understand what he is doing or what is happening at the time he obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. If there are unbelievers present, then it is certainly appropriate to proclaim to them what is happening at a baptism. For this reason, we would make the proclamation that one is being baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The baptizer is proclaiming that he is baptizing as a representative of Jesus Christ, and thus he is baptizing in the name of Jesus.

Neither Jesus nor the apostles gave any formula of statement that must be said at the time one is baptized. No specific phrase in reference to what happens when one is baptized is consistently used throughout the book of Acts. Because no specific statements are recorded that must be said, then we would understand that it is the liberty of the baptizer to say what he feels is appropriate at the time he baptizes another person.

Chapter 8

BEGINNING AND CONTINUING WITH JESUS

We come to this final chapter that focuses on the primary response that one must make in order to begin a Christ-centered faith. This is the focal point that distinguishes Christianity from all religious groups that would like to be classified under the umbrella of Christendom. This is the determining factor as to whether one is a

Christian or simply a religionist. The sad point that will be brought out in this chapter is that there are so many people who claim to have a Christ-centered faith, but have neglected one very important response in their lives that manifests to God that they have joined with Christ in life in order to be with Him in eternity.

A. Our hope:

We begin this discussion with the primary desire of every human being. Because of the sufferings of this present world, and the brevity of life, we seek to have life beyond this world. All religions of man have some system of theology by which people can live beyond this world. Whether under the umbrella of Christendom, or some invented non-Christian religion of the world, men seek immortality. Of all faiths of the world, Christianity has a hope that is unsurpassed by all the inventions of men. Christians have a hope that is *"an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil, where Jesus, the forerunner, has entered for us ..."* (Hb 6:19,20). Our hope is based on the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Those who believe what Jesus claimed to be, have a hope that is far beyond any invention of man-made religions.

Our hope to live beyond this world is based on one absolute. That absolute is that we must be **with** Jesus and **in the presence** of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Since only God is eternal, then only those who would seek eternality must be in the presence of the eternal God**. This truth is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. In the context of Paul's revelation of this truth, he wrote that Jesus will be coming in flaming fire to take vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel. Those who do not obey the gospel, he said, will be *"punished with everlasting destruction **away** from the presence of the Lord and **away** from the glory of His power ..."* (2 Th 1:8,9). When Jesus comes again, the condemned will be turned "away" from the Lord Jesus and "away" from the glory of His power that is able to sustain them for eternity. All those who **do not obey the gospel** will suffer such a fate when Jesus comes again. The obvious and urgent desire of all men in realizing this fact should be **to be with Jesus**. The hope of the Christian is that his being with Jesus in this life guarantees his being with Jesus for eternity.

The Christian seeks to be with Jesus, both in life and in eternity. The Christ-centered faith is a faith that keeps us close to Jesus in life in order that we be with Him in eternity. The apostle Paul emphasized this desire in his own life. To the Corinthians he wrote, *"We are confident, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be present **with the Lord**"* (2 Co 5:8). He wrote a similar statement to the Philippians. *"For I am torn between the two, having a desire to depart and to be **with Christ**, which is much better"* (Ph 1:23). In order to be **with** Christ in eternity, the "with" must start in life. As Bible students, our goal is to determine when one begins his journey "with" Christ in life that will extend throughout eternity.

B. Beginning "with" Christ:

We now come to the point of determining the true distinction between religion and Christianity. Of all the "theologies" we might address in reference to this subject, this point is the principle truth in determining whether one is a Christian destined for heaven with Jesus, or simply a "believer" who suffers from the deception of man-made theologies in a confused religious world. When we discuss those religions that seek to hover under the umbrella of Christendom, it is this point that will determine those who are Christians, and those who are simply masquerading as Christians. One context of Scripture will identify those who are Christians, and those who are not, and subsequently, those who will not arrive at the desired end of their faith. One of the primary contexts of revelation that reveals this truth is **Romans 6**, specifically verses 1-11.

The historical context of Romans 6 is Paul's reminder of how people of faith in Rome became alive in Christ. He explains when their life **with** Christ began.

1. *Questions concerning beginnings of the Christ-centered life:* In verses 1-3 Paul asked three questions concerning the Roman Christians' immersion (baptism). The questions were based on exhorting them not to continue in sin simply because they had "died to sin." When they were "baptized into Christ," they were baptized into the death of Christ. He asked the questions of the first three verses, knowing that the Roman disciples knew the answers. Nevertheless, in verses 4 and 5 he answers the question concerning their immersion into the death of Jesus.

2. *Buried with Jesus:* We seek to be with Jesus in eternity. In answering the questions of Romans 6:1-3, Paul explains that the disciple who is baptized is "buried **with**" Christ. We seek a new life. Jesus was raised from the dead never to die again in order to give us this life. If we are buried **with** Christ, then we will be raised to walk in newness of life **with** Christ. Our bodies in this new life will suffer physical death, but our souls will never spiritually die. The reason for this is that the faithful Christian will be **with** Christ in eternity because

he has been buried **with** Christ in this life. The eternality of the soul, therefore, depends on whether one has been buried with Christ. When we find those who have been buried with Christ, then we will find true Christians.

Paul may have assumed that the Roman Christians did not fully understand what he was saying in verse 4. So he repeats the meaning of verse 4 again in verse 5. Herein is revealed our joining with Christ in preparation for being **with** Him in eternity. Paul wrote, that *"if we have been **united together** in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection."* Our walk **with** Jesus in life, therefore, begins when we are united together with Him in baptism. Our eternity with Him begins in life when we are raised from the waters of baptism.

3. *Crucified with Jesus:* Our walk with Jesus actually begins before we are immersed with Jesus in His burial. Verse 6 is crucial to understanding the concepts of Romans 6. Before we are baptized, Paul wants us to know something. He wrote, *"... knowing this, that our old man was crucified **with** Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be bondservants to sin."* Before one goes to the tomb with Jesus, **he must first be crucified with Jesus**. When Jesus was crucified, His body died on the cross. Metaphorically speaking, everyone who deires to be **with** Jesus in eternity must first be crucified **with** Jesus in life. His old man of sin must die. When one dies with Jesus, the natural desire is to seek life **with** Him. Therefore, until one goes with Jesus to the tomb in order to be resurrected to "walk in newness of life," **he is dead**. There is no life in him until he is raised with Christ from the tomb of water in baptism. **Dead men naturally seek to live again**. And so it is with those who have truly died with Jesus on the cross of repentance. Repentance does not bring us life. We bury the dead. **Those who have died with Jesus on the cross of repentance must be buried in order to live with Christ**.

We know of many religionists who fervently preach that one must die with Christ on the cross. But they have failed to tell the people how they can become alive in Christ. They leave dead men walking around with a false hope, allowing them to believe that they have life without going to the tomb of baptism with Jesus. They give them the false hope of being with Jesus in eternity without going with Jesus to the tomb of water. **The difference between the religionist and the Christian is that the Christian has died with Christ on a cross of repentance, and also has been buried with Christ in baptism in order to be raised to walk in newness of life**. The religionist who believes in Christ, but has not gone to the tomb of water in baptism, is simply a walking dead man. He died on the cross with a repentant experience, but has never gone to the tomb with Christ.

4. *Live with Christ:* The religionist cannot have the hope that Paul revealed in Romans 6:8. *"Now if we died **with** Christ, we believe that we will also live **with** Him ...."* Paul's focus is on crucifying the old man of sin in order that the resurrected man might dwell with Christ in eternity. In verses 1-6 he explained the transition from death to life, mentioning baptism as a necessary part of this transition. From verse 6 and throughout the chapter he does not mention baptism again. Some feel, therefore, that we can allow dead men who have been crucified with Christ to continue without burying them for the purpose of raising them to walk with Christ in life. But we must not allow ourselves to miss the importance of baptism with Christ. Our journey with Christ is initiated at the cross, but our new life with Him in this life begins when we are raised with Him from the waters of baptism. And unless we are raised with Him, we cannot be with Him in eternity.

Jesus followed the same transition of death to life in Mark 16:16. *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned."* Some have erroneously concluded that baptism with Christ is not necessary because in the last phrase of this statement of Jesus, Jesus did not mention baptism. But it is like eating food. He who eats food and digests it will live. But he who does not eat food will die. There is no sense talking about digestion when one does not eat food. Likewise, there is no sense talking about baptism if one does not believe.

The conclusion is that the Christ-centered life begins when one believes that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, and then repentantly crucifies the old man of sin. However, one's crucifixion with Christ is only the beginning of his journey to the new life. Crucifixion brings death, and there is no life in the dead. Crucifying oneself in repentance does not bring life. Dead men seek life. The person who has truly died with Christ will seek to live. **The only way we can discover those who have truly died in repentance is if they are looking for a tomb in which they can be buried and from which they can be raised to live again**. If the dead are not looking for a tomb, then they have deceived themselves into thinking that they have life in their death. We must never forget that which is most important to do in order to be within the eternal preserving power of Jesus forever is where Satan will do his best work. And certainly in the religions of the world, Satan has performed marvelously in keeping dead men dead. He has deceived the dead into believing that they are alive out-

side obedience to the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We would conclude by defining a Christian as a dead man who found a tomb of water in order to be buried **with** Jesus. He was buried with Jesus in order to be raised **with** Him to walk with Him in newness of life. Religions that do not teach people to obey the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, are simply religions. They are not Christianity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Let God Be True*, p. 35.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 37, see also: Joseph F. Rutherford, *Reconciliation* (Brooklyn, New York: International Bible Students Ass., 1928).
4. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Trustees under the will of Mary Baker G. Eddy, 1934).
5. *Let God Be True*, p. 63, see also: Rutherford, op. cit., pp. 11,113.
6. *Studies in the Scriptures* (International Bible Students Ass.,) 1886-1917.
7. *Government*, (Watchtower Bible Tract Society, 1928), p. 10.

Book 39

Fellowship At The Table

"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 Corinthians 10:16,17)

A principal function of the body of Christ that manifests the loving relationships that the members have with one another, takes place when the members of the body of Christ come together for the love feast/Lord's Supper celebration. All the connectivity, celebration, fellowship, participation, mutual affection and love of the body are reflected in the gathering of the saints for the occasion of the Lord's meal. It is at this time when the family of God proclaims to the world that every family member has submitted to the one King who is the center of reference to his or her life. The Lord's Supper that is celebrated during a meal is the living memorial of the gospel.

The purpose for the Supper event is so evident in Scripture that there was no need to give any legal commandments concerning the frequency of the Supper. The only command came from Jesus who said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Therefore, the family of God should remember Jesus on a regular basis in order to remind Him of His covenant promise to come again for His people.

The Supper was never intended to be a legal ceremony of church rituals. Jesus knew that if people responded legally in their consideration for one another and of Him, love would soon give way to ritual behavior. When ritual-oriented people come to the Supper, the Supper simply becomes a heartless legal ceremony.

But the love feast/Supper event is to be anything but a ceremonial performance of law. When those of the world look on, disciples of Jesus should be seen as a loving family in reunion in order to proclaim who they are and that Jesus is their reigning King. The Supper should in every way reflect the nature and behavior of the *ekklesia* (church) of Christ.

If by chance an unbeliever should show up at the love feast/Supper of the *ekklesia*, he should be able to witness the affectionate nature of the body of Christ, and thus, fall down before the Lord. The reflection of love that is manifested during the love feast and Supper should be so strong that those of the world who are searching for a family will be drawn by the atmosphere that surrounds the disciples of Christ as they come together to remember Jesus through the bread and wine. The Supper, therefore, is not only an opportunity for the members of the body to renew their connectivity with one another and Jesus, it is also an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to every unbeliever who might show up at the assembly.

The Lord's Supper reflects the love that gospel-obedient disciples, as the body of Christ, have for one another. And since it does, we can better understand the stern rebuke by which Paul reproached the Corinthians for their corruption of the love feast and Supper. Their problem was not in violating some legal ceremonial codes of the love feast and Supper. It was in the fact that they brought the unloving attitudes and behavior of the pagan temple feasts into the love feast of the family of God. And by doing such they were manifesting to the unbelievers that there was no difference between the pagan feasts at the temple and the Lord's feast and Supper of gospel-obedient Christians on the first day of the week.

Paul's condemning judgment of the Corinthians was justified because they were in their attitudes and behavior denying before the world the very nature of the love that should bring all disciples together in assembly. The *ekklesia* of Christ was to be known for the members' love for one another (See Jn 13:34,35). Unfortunately, the Corinthians were reflecting in their feasts everything but a loving spirit when they came together.

Sometimes in our own attitudes and behavior today we are not too distant from Corinth. As members of the *ekklesia* of Christ we have often embarrassed ourselves because of our disputes over circumstances surrounding the Supper. Our squabbles have often overshadowed the very purpose and meaning of the Supper. We sometimes become so involved in insignificant discussions that our attention is drawn away from what we should be remembering when we fulfill Jesus' instructions of what the Supper should mean in our lives.

When the Supper digresses into being only a legal ceremonial identity of who we are as the gospel-obedient family of God, then our observance of the Supper becomes a ritual that must be carried out on Sunday morning in order that we feel a sense of self-sanctification. Instead of remembering the blood of Jesus by which we are sanctified, we have often moved in our thinking to believe that our performance of keeping the Lord's Supper ritual has somehow sanctified us before God. We then go on our way after the "closing prayer" with the feeling that we have justified ourselves before God.

Ritualistic performances always become a part of our religious traditions, and subsequently, our religious heritage. Our traditional rituals then digress to points over which we often dispute with those with whom we disagree in reference to conflicting traditions. The Lord's Supper that was instituted to remind us of our gospel unity that we have in Christ often becomes a traditional ceremony of division among us that must be legally kept in order to prove our existence as the people of God. It is at this stage of digression that we lose our focus on the purpose of the Supper. We find ourselves disputing over ritualistic performances, while at the same time we forget the meaning of the rituals that have now become a part of our traditions.

It is axiomatic that the more traditional our rituals become, the more we forget the meaning of the rituals of our traditions. When the observance of the Lord's Supper becomes a ritual that is simply a tradition of our identity, then we fall into a struggle of reminding ourselves how to perform the ritual correctly. We obsess over how the traditional observance of the ritual is maintained, instead of on that which the ritual is to remind us. The gospel focus of the ritual is long gone by the time the ritual has become a tradition of heritage identity.

When we consider the ceremonial observance of the Supper over which we often dispute about our ritualistic performances, we often manifest a divisive spirit about which we are sure God is "scratching" His head. When we even mention the phrase "Lord's Supper," there are a host of traditional performance rituals that flash in our minds. Each church group has a customary way by which they partake of the Supper. Too often, however, each unique system of observance has become a legality, and subsequently, the "law" for the "correct" manner to partake of the Supper.

The significance of the Supper is revealed by how often we partake of the Supper. There are the "no Supper" people whose assemblies are often limited to singing and preaching, with no observance of the Supper at all. Then there are the Christmas/Easter observers who partake of the Supper only during these two holidays each year. Then there are the "chip and sip" folks who weekly perform a ceremony of passing around pieces of bread and sips of the fruit of the vine as starters before a feast that often never happens. And finally, there are the love feast/Supper people who enjoy a full meal in fellowshipping with one another, during or after which they remember for themselves and remind the Lord to come again for them.

It is this last group of believers who truly enjoy the communion they have with one another and the Lord during the Sunday Supper event. It is this group that needs no command as to when they would enjoy the love feast/Supper event. They need no command because they are gospel-driven people who seek at every opportunity to remember the One who revealed the gospel of grace.

If the Supper reflects the gospel-obedient nature of the body of Christ—and it does—then we are on a quest through the Scriptures to identify ourselves as God's people by understanding the gospel nature of the Supper. This is not difficult.

God never required of us anything that was essential to be difficult to understand. Neither did He enjoin on us any command that was impossible to obey, or simply went against common sense. We must keep in mind, therefore, that the confusion that often surrounds the Supper is not God's fault.

It is ours. It is imperative, therefore, that we objectively allow the word of God to speak for itself concerning matters of the Supper. We must take every precaution not to read into the text of Scripture on this subject any of our "Supper traditions" in reference to what we discover in the text of Scripture.

We seek to step outside our "Supper traditions" for a moment in order to delve into the historical behavior of the early disciples when they remembered the One who revealed the message of the gospel of God's grace. In order to do this, we must first understand the historical background upon which Jesus instituted the Supper. And then we must sit with the disciples in a small candlelite upper room two thousand years ago when the Lord took bread and raised a cup, and said, "This do in remembrance of Me." **The Lord's Supper reflects the love that gospel-obedient disciples, as the body of Christ, have for one another**. And since it does, we can better understand the stern rebuke by which Paul reproached the Corinthians for their corruption of the love feast and Supper. Their problem was not in violating some legal ceremonial codes of the love feast and Supper. It was in the fact that they brought the unloving attitudes and behavior of the pagan temple feasts into the love feast of the family of God. And by doing such they were manifesting to the unbelievers that there was no difference between the pagan feasts at the temple and the Lord's feast and Supper of gospel-obedient Christians on the first day of the week.

Paul's condemning judgment of the Corinthians was justified because they were in their attitudes and behavior denying before the world the very nature of the love that should bring all disciples together in assembly. The *ekklesia* of Christ was to be known for the members' love for one another (See Jn 13:34,35). Unfortunately, the Corinthians were reflecting in their feasts everything but a loving spirit when they came together.

Sometimes in our own attitudes and behavior today we are not too distant from Corinth. As members of the *ekklesia* of Christ we have often embarrassed ourselves because of our disputes over circumstances surrounding the Supper. Our squabbles have often overshadowed the very purpose and meaning of the Supper. We sometimes become so involved in insignificant discussions that our attention is drawn away from what we should be remembering when we fulfill Jesus' instructions of what the Supper should mean in our lives.

When the Supper digresses into being only a legal ceremonial identity of who we are as the gospel-obedient family of God, then our observance of the Supper becomes a ritual that must be carried out on Sunday morning in order that we feel a sense of self-sanctification. Instead of remembering the blood of Jesus by which we are sanctified, we have often moved in our thinking to believe that our performance of keeping the Lord's Supper ritual has somehow sanctified us before God. We then go on our way after the "closing prayer" with the feeling that we have justified ourselves before God.

Ritualistic performances always become a part of our religious traditions, and subsequently, our religious heritage. Our traditional rituals then digress to points over which we often dispute with those with whom we disagree in reference to conflicting traditions. The Lord's Supper that was instituted to remind us of our gospel unity that we have in Christ often becomes a traditional ceremony of division among us that must be legally kept in order to prove our existence as the people of God. It is at this stage of digression that we lose our focus on the purpose of the Supper. We find ourselves disputing over ritualistic performances, while at the same time we forget the meaning of the rituals that have now become a part of our traditions.

It is axiomatic that the more traditional our rituals become, the more we forget the meaning of the rituals of our traditions. When the observance of the Lord's Supper becomes a ritual that is simply a tradition of our identity, then we fall into a struggle of reminding ourselves how to perform the ritual correctly. We obsess over how the traditional observance of the ritual is maintained, instead of on that which the ritual is to remind us. The gospel focus of the ritual is long gone by the time the ritual has become a tradition of heritage identity.

When we consider the ceremonial observance of the Supper over which we often dispute about our ritualistic performances, we often manifest a divisive spirit about which we are sure God is "scratching" His head. When we even mention the phrase "Lord's Supper," there are a host of traditional performance rituals that flash in our minds. Each church group has a customary way by which they partake of the Supper. Too often, however, each unique system of observance has become a legality, and subsequently, the "law" for the "correct" manner to partake of the Supper.

The significance of the Supper is revealed by how often we partake of the Supper. There are the "no Supper" people whose assemblies are often limited to singing and preaching, with no observance of the Supper at all. Then there are the Christmas/Easter observers who partake of the Supper only during these two holidays each year. Then there are the "chip and sip" folks who weekly perform a ceremony of passing around pieces of bread and sips of the fruit of the vine as starters before a feast that often never happens. And finally, there are the love feast/Supper people who enjoy a full meal in fellowshipping with one another, during or after which they remember for themselves and remind the Lord to come again for them.

It is this last group of believers who truly enjoy the communion they have with one another and the Lord

during the Sunday Supper event. It is this group that needs no command as to when they would enjoy the love feast/Supper event. They need no command because they are gospel-driven people who seek at every opportunity to remember the One who revealed the gospel of grace.

If the Supper reflects the gospel-obedient nature of the body of Christ—and it does—then we are on a quest through the Scriptures to identify ourselves as God's people by understanding the gospel nature of the Supper. This is not difficult.

God never required of us anything that was essential to be difficult to understand. Neither did He enjoin on us any command that was impossible to obey, or simply went against common sense. We must keep in mind, therefore, that the confusion that often surrounds the Supper is not God's fault.

It is ours. It is imperative, therefore, that we objectively allow the word of God to speak for itself concerning matters of the Supper. We must take every precaution not to read into the text of Scripture on this subject any of our "Supper traditions" in reference to what we discover in the text of Scripture.

We seek to step outside our "Supper traditions" for a moment in order to delve into the historical behavior of the early disciples when they remembered the One who revealed the message of the gospel of God's grace. In order to do this, we must first understand the historical background upon which Jesus instituted the Supper. And then we must sit with the disciples in a small candlelite upper room two thousand years ago when the Lord took bread and raised a cup, and said, "This do in remembrance of Me."

Chapter 1

FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

We are the creation of a God of love. John reminded us, *"He who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**"* (1 Jn 4:8). We would say, therefore, that anyone who does not come to the table of our Lord with a loving spirit, does not know the love that was revealed through the gospel that we remember at the table. The Lord's Supper must reflect the love of God through those who come to the feast of love. It was because of the love of God for the world that the gospel was revealed through the Son of God (Jn 3:16). Loving hearts, therefore, come before the Lord at the table to remember the love that was poured out from the heart of God.

As the reflection of the heart of God on earth, Jesus added,

> *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).

Anytime the disciples manifest their love for one another at the Supper celebration, they identify themselves as the church of the God of love. We would assume, therefore, **that we must partake of the Supper in some way that manifests our love for one another**. This is why ritualistic observances of the Supper are so inadequate and shallow in reflecting the heart of God's love through His Son. It was the Son who gave a new commandment that we be identified by our love for one another. Obedience to legal performances of the Supper manifest little love. Therefore, when we come to the table of the Son, our love for one another must be reflected in our joint participation as the body of Christ.

Since the occasion of the Supper is the opportunity to manifest to the world the church of Christ, then we should seek to reach into the Scriptures in order to discover what the Holy Spirit said in reference to the love feast and Supper. This brings us to introductory statements in the Scriptures that explain the relationships the early Christians had with one another. The Holy Spirit even inspired relational teachings to be written in the context of the presence of false teachers who endangered the disciples' relationships with one another.

When studying the following statements of both Peter and Jude, we must keep in mind that **their statements were written by the Holy Spirit about thirty-five years after the establishment of the church**. This time of writing is significant. It is significant because the tradition of the love feast continued for at least this number of years after the initial days when the *ekklesia* of Christ was first established in Acts 2.

In the Acts 2 account of the function of the early church, it was stated,

> ***And they continued steadfastly*** *...* ***in the breaking of bread****. And continuing daily with one accord ...* ***breaking bread from house to house****, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart ...* (At 2:42,46).

What the first disciples began as the "breaking of bread," the second generation disciples were continuing over three decades later when the books of 2 Peter and Jude were written.

A. The feast:

Peter wrote around A.D. 65, just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the context of immoral people and false teachers who arose among the disciples at that time, he wrote, *"They are stains and blemishes, carousing themselves with their own deceptions,* ***while they feast with you****"* (2 Pt 2:13).

Peter mentioned the feast of the disciples in passing. It had unfortunately become an opportunity for the unrighteous to maintain fellowship with the early church, and thus, influence the disciples contrary to gospel living. But these apostates were "brute beasts" who *"speak evil of things that they do not understand"* (2 Pt 2:12). They were thus "stains" and "blemishes" in the disciples' fellowship meal. They were such when the disciples sought to manifest the love of God that should prevail during an event when the members came together to commune with one another over a meal.

The disciples' breaking of bread from house to house continued to A. D. 65. Unfortunately, the environment of the feast of Peter's readers had been spoiled by unrighteous apostates who had *"eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls"* (2 Pt 2:14). These apostates had taken the occasion of the feast of the disciples as an opportunity to exercise their ungodly influence among the disciples (See Rv 2:14,20,21).

Though this corruption of the feast was certainly not prevalent among all the disciples of the early church, at least it was among those to whom Peter wrote. What is important to notice is that the love feast of the disciples was so common among the early churches that it continued regardless of the corruption in attitudes and behavior of some who had crept in among the disciples to whom Peter wrote.

B. The love feast:

Jude also wrote his epistle in a time of apostasy among the disciples to whom he addressed the message of Jude 12. He also wrote around the same time Peter wrote 2 Peter in A.D. 65. Jude added an adjective to the feast of the disciples: *"These are spots in your* ***love feast*** *when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear"* (Jd 12). This "love feast" was not only a feast of the disciples where a full meal was eaten on a regular basis, it was a **love** feast. It was the *agape* (love) meal that had been retained by the early disciples since the early days of the establishment of the church in Acts 2. And since the writing of both 2 Peter and Jude was in the middle 60s, we would correctly assume that there were many second generation Christians among Peter and Jude's readership. The eating of a love meal among the disciples had become an established tradition by the time these two books were written.

How else would we refer to a meal that is purposely eaten by the disciples to express their love for one another? We are servants of the God of love who expressed His love toward all men through Jesus (Jn 3:16). As God unconditionally loved us through Jesus, the new commandment was that we so love one another (Jn 13:34,35). It was by this that the disciples of Jesus signaled to the world that they were the true disciples of Jesus. The *agape* (love) feast that the disciples had with one another on a regular basis, therefore, was an opportunity for the disciples to reflect the unconditional love of God in their hearts toward one another. It is for this reason that the "feast" was a full meal, rather than a ceremonial observance, or ritualistic "partaking" of bread and the fruit of the vine.

The love feast was a sermon of love to the lost. Paul, Peter and Jude dealt harshly with those who tarnished this opportunity for the disciples to preach the gospel of love to an unloving world. Since the love feast of the disciples was so significant to the behavior of the early church in the members' relationships with one another, it would be imperative for us to discover the roots from which the early love feast came. This would take us back to the beginning of feasts that God established among His people when they were given birth as a nation in their deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

Any study of the Lord's Supper must be in the context of the love feasts of the early church, which feasts had their origins in the Passover feast that God instituted with Israel immediately before the nation's deliverance from Egyptian captivity. **The Passover feast was a covenant meal**. It was a celebration feast with God who made a covenant with His people at Mount Sinai. Therefore, in order to understand the full significance of the Lord's Supper in reference to our covenant with God today, we must in our study of the Lord's Supper first pass through the covenant feasts in the history of God's people from the beginning of time.

Chapter 2

MEMORIAL COVENANTS

When Jesus instituted His Supper He made a significant statement in reference to the contents of the cup, *"**For this is My blood of the covenant**."* (Mt 26:28). Being Gentiles who are millennia removed from the Jews who were in a fifteen-hundred-year national covenant relationship with God, we as Christians must understand that we are now the nation of God who is in a special eternal covenant relationship with God (See 1 Pt 2:9). We often do not fully appreciate the nature of Old Testament covenants that God established with His people throughout their history, as well as the blessings that surrounded those covenants. In order to fully appreciate the covenant that we now have with God, it would be good to review the nature of and celebration that surrounded the establishment of Old Testament covenants.

In the context of Jesus' covenant statement, He used a symbol—the fruit of the vine—as a signal of remembrance of His covenant that He would establish with His disciples. His blood would be poured out in order to cleanse the sins of those with whom He would bring into a covenant relationship. In order to continually remember the blood of the covenant, the fruit of the vine was a physical signal to generate remembrance, and subsequently, be a reminder to Jesus of His promise to return for His covenanted people.

In reference to our covenant relationship with God through the gospel of Jesus, our challenge is to determine **whose** remembrance is in the context of Jesus' statement when He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Was the signal of God's covenant for the sake of the people with whom He would establish a covenant? Or, was it for God to remember that He had established a covenant and made promises to the covenanted people of things He would or would not do? We would answer that the signal, or sign of the covenant, was for both, though we often forget that the sign of covenants were also to remind God.

A. Remembering covenants:

Genesis 9:12-17 is a commentary passage in reference to the covenants that God established with His people. The occasion for the statements of the text was immediately after the flood of Noah's day. As Noah and his family stood captivated by the appearance of a rainbow in the sky that they had never before seen, God said to them:

> *Then God said, "This is the **sign of the covenant** that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for successive generations: I set **My rainbow in the cloud**, and it will be for **a sign** of a covenant **between Me and the earth**. And it will come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. **Then I will remember My covenant** that is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh. **And the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh**. And the rainbow will be in the cloud, and I will look on it **so that I may remember the everlasting covenant** between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." And God said to Noah, "**This is the sign of the covenant that I have established** between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."*

When we read this passage carefully, we notice that there are some important truths revealed in the promises that God made to all humanity:

1. ***Signs of the covenant:*** God established a signal that there was a covenant between Him, the earth, all animals and all humanity. The rainbow was a signal that God would keep His promise in reference to the continuation of the covenant.

2. ***Promises of the covenant:*** The promise that God made to Noah was that He would never again destroy every living creature and man that roamed upon the earth as He did with a global flood. Throughout the rest of history, when people saw the sign of this promise (covenant), they could be reassured that never again would there be a flood of waters that would come upon the face of the earth to destroy all flesh.

3. ***Remembrance of the covenant:*** In this case, the rainbow was established as **a reminder for God**. God promised humanity, *"And it will come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. **Then I will remember My covenant**."*

The appearance of the sign of the covenant, the rainbow, was for God to remember. It is not that God forgets. So how would God be reminded with the appearance of a rainbow that He must never forget to keep His promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood? Actually, the meaning is quite simple. It is as a groom who gives a ring to his bride during a marriage ceremony. What the groom is saying in the giving of the ring is that when his wife sees the ring, she must remind him that he made a covenant to love and cherish

her. The ring is a signal of the covenant that the groom makes with his bride.

The presence of the rainbow is as a parent who gives a small token to a child, telling the child that when the child sees the token (sign), he or she must remind the parent of promises made to the child. It was not that the parent would forget, or that the groom would forget the promises that he made in the marriage covenant. The reminding was for the benefit of the one with whom the covenant and promises were made. By reminding, we remember.

The more we remind God, the more we remember. We must keep this thought in mind when we come to the regularity by which the early disciples observed the Lord's Supper. Every time the disciples' partook of the Supper, they reminded Jesus of the promises that He made in reference to the covenant of life that He had established with them. The Supper is a reminder of Jesus coming again. It is not that Jesus will forget to come again. However, our prayers to remind Him to come keeps His imminent coming fresh in our minds (See 1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:20).

B. Remembrance enacts action:

When God remembers the promises of His covenants, it means that He takes action. Consider this when it was time to deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity.

> *"Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage.* ***So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham****, with Isaac, and with Jacob"* (Ex 2:23,24).

Had God forgotten His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Certainly not! The point is that the people wanted God to act on the promises of His covenant that He made to the forefathers that of their seed He would make a great nation. They were not only crying out to God because of the hardships of bondage, they were also crying out for nationhood. They still remembered the promises of God's covenant with Abraham that were made in Genesis 12:1-3. Their cry to God for "remembrance," therefore, was a cry to be formed into the nation that He first promised to Abraham (See Ex 6:6-8).

We must remember this point every time we study the Lord's Supper. In partaking of the Supper we make a proclamation. We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again in order to deliver us out of the bondage of this world and into the glory of eternal heaven (1 Co 11:26).

C. Remembrance enacts renewal:

After the Israelites had dwelt in the land of promise for several centuries, and because of their apostasy from their conditions to keep their covenant with God, they were banned to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Nevertheless, after their repentance in captivity, God promised to remember His covenant with them.

> *For thus says the Lord God: "I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant. Nevertheless* ***I will remember My covenant with you*** *in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you*" (Ez 16:59,60).

It was not that God had forgotten His covenant with Israel while they were in captivity. Their repentance to renewed obedience enacted the blessings of the covenant that God had promised. Therefore, God acted on His promises because the people turned again to Him (See Lv 26:40-45; Ps 105:8; 106:45). Their repentance in captivity was their cry to Him to remember His promise to restore a remnant to the land of promise.

We must keep the preceding thoughts in mind when we come to the statement that Jesus made in reference to the Supper, that it be kept as a "remembrance." The common translation of the statement that He made was, *"Do this in* ***remembrance*** *of Me"* (Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:24). If this were the only rendering of the Greek phrase that Jesus used, then there would be little difficulty in understanding what He meant. The challenge comes from the fact that the Greek phrase can be translated two different ways. "Do this in remembrance of Me" is only one of two possible renderings.

The Supper was instituted as a remembrance. But to whom in Luke 22:19 does the word "remembrance" refer? The Greek word that is used is *anamnesis*. It is a combination of two Greek words, *an***,** meaning "not," and *amnesis*, meaning "forget." We derive the English word "amnesia" from *anamnesis.*

Literally in Greek, *anamnesis* would mean "not forget." The word can be translated with the English word "remembrance," but it can also be translated "reminder." If we considered the subject of this chapter in reference to God being "reminded" by the signs of His covenants, then another possible rendering of the Greek phrase would be: "Do this as My reminder." But how would this fit into the meaning that Jesus wanted to convey on the night of His betrayal?

There would be a subtle difference between the definition of the words "remembrance" and "reminder." We must keep in mind that the rainbow that God gave

was both a "remembrance" and a "reminder." The token of the rainbow looked backward in order that Noah remember, but it also looked forward to be a reminder to God and humanity of something that He would not do. Noah was to remember what had happened in the flood in order to remind God what He had promised that He would never do again through flood waters.

The same was true of God's covenant with Abraham concerning the future nationhood of Israel. Circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant (Gn 17:9-14). When the Jews circumcised their male children, they remembered Abraham's covenant with God. However, they also were reminding God to remember that He had promised that He would make of Abraham a great nation, and subsequently preserve this nation until the coming of the final Blessing (Gn 12:1-3).

The Supper for the Christian, therefore, is both a remembrance and a reminder. It is our remembrance of the cross in the past, but it is also our reminder to God of His promises that He made to us in reference to the future. Jesus promised that He would come again for us.

The obedient disciple has obeyed the gospel in order to come into a covenant relationship with God. In this covenant he walks in newness of life (Rm 6:4,5). However, his newness of life is more than a new life in this world. Emphasis in obedience to the gospel is also on eternal life to come in fulfillment of Jesus' promise that He will come again and receive us unto Himself (See Jn 14:1-3). Our Supper (communion) with the Lord is a reminder to Jesus that He come again to redeem us from this world.

If we would be literal in the translation of Luke 22:19, therefore, we would translate the Greek phrase, "Do this to My reminder." The Greek word *emos* (My) in the phrase is **possessive**. The meaning would be that the "reminder" refers to Jesus, not to us. The more common Greek word for "my" is *mou*. But this word **is not** used in this statement. The Greek word *emos* was used in Greek for emphasis. If the word *mou* was used, then we might understand that Jesus wanted His disciples to observe the Supper only for the purpose that they remember. But the use of the word *emos* indicates that the Supper was observed in order to be a reminder to Jesus that He fulfill His promises of the covenant, which promises were yet in the future because of what He would have done in the past.

The word *emos* always refers to possession, and thus, the "reminder" was in reference to Jesus, not the disciples. When the disciples partake of the bread, therefore, they are reminding Jesus to take possession (ownership) of His promises that are a part of their covenant relationship with Him. **Thus the disciples' observance of the Supper is an enacted prayer that Jesus remember His covenant and His promises in reference to their future**.

D. Remembrance stirs hope:

We eat of the Supper looking forward. This emphasis was revealed by Luke more than the other writers who give an account of the Supper. Luke recorded Jesus' statement, *"I will no longer eat of it **until** it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God"* (Lk 22:16). *"I will not drink of the fruit of the vine **until** the kingdom of God comes"* (Lk 22:18).

As in the Jews' eating of the Passover meal in order to look back to their former captivity in Egypt, as well as forward to God's promises concerning the future, Christians look back in order to look forward. In the Passover, the Jews looked back in order to remember their bondage in Egypt. They looked back in order to appreciate the freedom of their nation in the land of promise. Christians look back to their bondage in sin in order to look forward to the Paradise of God that is yet to come. They, too, celebrated their freedom in Christ (Gl 5:1). **When Christians eat the bread, they remind Jesus that what He started at the cross has not yet been completed**. There is yet another banquet meal during which we will sit down and eat with the Lord in the heavenly kingdom of God that is yet to come (Rv 19:7-9).

Chapter 3

THE PASSOVER FOUNDATION

The Passover feast of the Jews was the foundation upon which the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus. The actual Passover meal lasted several hours and was the occasion where the Jewish family focused on Israel's deliverance from Egypt, as well as God's promises concerning the Messiah in the future of Israel.

It was during such a family meal with His disciples when Jesus took the bread and cup of the common Passover meal and established a memorial meal that would last until He comes again (Mt 26:26). When we consider the occasion of the Passover, and its meaning, we would correctly assume that Jesus simply changed the

meaning of the Passover. The bread and wine of the Passover were changed to signify different blessings that would result from the revelation of the gospel, which at the time when Jesus sat with His disciples, had not yet been revealed.

Many circumstances and events that surrounded the typical Jewish Passover meal was continued by the early Christians in their love feast/Lord's Supper event. This would have been especially true of the early Jewish Christians. In order to better understand Jesus' institution of the Supper on the night of His betrayal, we must understand the occasion of the Jewish Passover feast.

The significance of the elements of the Supper, as well as what Jesus said during the Supper, depends to a great extent on our understanding of Jewish thinking concerning symbols and events that surrounded the Passover meal. Therefore, in order to increase our appreciation for the Supper, we must go back two thousand years to a time when Jesus gathered several Jews around a Passover meal in order to guide their minds into the future. We must not assume, however, that the love feast/Supper of the early Christians was simply a copy of the Passover meal. We must seek to understand what Jesus said to His Jewish disciples in the context of the Jewish Passover meal.

The Jewish Passover was initially instituted the night before Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage. The significance of the observance of the Passover that would spill over into the love feast/Supper of the early Christians is embedded in God's instructions to Israel on the eve of their flight to freedom.

The text that defines the meaning of the Passover for Israel is **Exodus 12**. In this text are some very important instructions by God in reference to Israel's observance of the Passover that would continue throughout the history of Israel:

A. One lamb per house:

"Each man will take a lamb for himself, according to the house of his fathers, ***a lamb for each house****"* (Ex 12:3). **The Passover was a house event**. It was not an assembly activity of a great number of people at one location. **Israelites were to stay at home**. They ate the Passover lamb as a family. The fact that it was a house meal symbolized the very purpose for which it was instituted in Egypt.

> *It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover who* ***passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses*** (Ex 12:27).

The Passover was a home feast because God passed over each Jewish home and did not bring death to the first-born of that home.

Furthermore, *"It will be eaten* ***in one house****. You will not carry any of the meat outside the house"* (Ex 12:46). The instructions that surrounded the eating of the offering included the fact that the meal was to be eaten in the homes of the people. It is interesting to note also that when Israel entered the promised land, God instructed the people not to eat the Passover within the cities of the Canaanites that He gave to the Levites (Dt 16:5). The eating of the Passover meal was to continue in the homes of the rural culture of the Israelites throughout the land of Palestine.

B. Eating with a neighbor:

"And if the household is too little for the lamb, ***let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the souls****"* (Ex 12:4). If a man's family was too small to consume the entire lamb, then he could join with a next door neighbor for the feast. He could do this in order to make sure that the entire offering was consumed. The Passover was a family meal, but it could be a communal meal with one's neighbor. The reason for this ruling was simply because every household may not have had a lamb or goat to offer. Or, the livestock they had might not be without blemish, or of the first year.

C. The best of the flock:

*"****Your lamb will be without blemish****, a male of the first year"* (Ex 12:5). Only the best would serve. There was to be no cheap and sickly animals offered. A sacrifice was needed, but God wanted only the best to be offered. The Passover feast was to be the best offering that could be provided by the family.

In order to be the best animal that had no blemish, the Jewish family had to raise a special Passover animal. They were to guard this special animal until the Passover meal. This meant that the yearling lamb or goat became a special animal, and thus, one that the family would almost consider a pet by the time of the offering. Every year for the Passover meal, the family would suffer heartache when they had to kill the "pet" for the offering. We can only imagine how the children of the Jewish family cried when their pet animal was annually killed for the sacrifice of the Passover. Regardless of the heartache of the sacrificed lamb, God knew how to prepare the Israelites' hearts for the final killing of the Passover Lamb who was His only begotten Son. There

were not only drops of blood at the foot of the cross, but there were also drops of tears mixed with blood.

D. United nation celebration:

*"And **the whole assembly** of Israel will kill it* [the lamb or goat] ***in the evening**"* (Ex 12:6). As stated before, this was not an "assembly event." The nation did not gather together to one place in order to observe the Passover meal. However, "the whole assembly" of Israel that was at the time scattered throughout Egypt **observed the feast together at the same time in their homes**.

On the night of flight from Egypt, the Israelites ate the Passover in their homes throughout the land. Though they were in their homes, they were all eating it as the whole nation. *"All the assembly of Israel will keep it"* (Ex 12:47). The observance of the Passover meal, therefore, was not to be observed in an assembly. In fact, in the initial institution of the Passover, the instructions were that it must be a home meal. When Jesus changed the meaning of the Passover, **we assume that the Jewish Christians continued with the home environment for the eating of the Lord's Supper**.

E. Unleavened bread and bitter herbs:

"And they will eat it [the meat] *with unleavened bread and bitter herbs"* (Ex 12:8). The Passover meal consisted of the meat of the offered lamb or goat, unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Dt 16:3,4). It was not an ordinary meal, but a special covenant meal with a people who were on their way to nationhood and the establishment of a national covenant with God at Mount Sinai. On the night of their departure from Egypt, it was a meal that was to be eaten by those in a hurry toward the future, their future deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

F. A memorial feast to the Lord:

*"So this day will be a **memorial** to you. And you will keep it as **a feast to the Lord** throughout your generations"* (Ex 12:14). The Passover feast, therefore, was established as a memorial of their Divine deliverance from bondage. It was to be a feast that was directed to the Lord because of His deliverance of His people.

The Passover was a memorial feast that was to be kept throughout the history of Israel, lest the people forget their deliverance from bondage and the promises of peace in the promised land that God gave to them (Dt 16:3). Once in the land, they looked to the future. They looked to the coming of the Messiah of Israel.

After the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, they went to Mount Sinai where they ate the Passover meal a second time (Nm 9:1-5). They ate it at a time when they were looking forward to entering the promised land. However, they were overcome with doubt when the spies returned, giving them a report that the inhabitants were strong in the land (Dt 1:19-44). Because they did not go up immediately and take the land, God condemned them to wandering in the wilderness. The land promised to them was not made void. Their possession of it was delayed. Thus throughout the years of wilderness wandering Israel still looked to the future, knowing that God would keep His promise that they as a nation would inherit the land of promise.

Once Israel entered Canaan, they still ate the Passover as a remembrance, but also as a reminder to God that there was yet a Deliverer in the future, which Deliverer would come as Moses came to them in bondage in order to deliver them from Egyptian captivity (See Dt 18:15-19).

Chapter 4

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Deliverer who came to set Israel free once again from bondage (At 7:34). However, His deliverance for spiritual Israel was from the bondage of sin, for which the forgiveness thereof could never be realized by the offering of the blood of animals (Hb 10:1-4). When Jesus was born into the world, a new Passover lamb arrived who would in His offering be Israel's last Passover lamb.

On the occasion of the Jewish Passover during His earthly ministry, Jesus took the opportunity to change the meaning of what was commonly eaten during the Jewish Passover. He sought also to point the disciples toward the future. *"I have earnestly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer,"* Jesus said to the disciples. *"For I say to you, I will no longer eat of **it until** it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God"* (Lk 22:15,16).

At the time of His last Passover, the disciples were eating the common Jewish Passover with Jesus, which meal they had previously eaten with Him throughout His ministry. As was the custom of the Jews, the Passover

meal Jesus ate with the disciples was a full meal. He made the statement during the meal that He would not **eat** of it again until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God. We are sure He symbolized more in this statement than a simple "chip and sip" ceremony that is common with most religious groups in their observance of the Lord's Supper today.

In Luke 22:16 Jesus spoke of His **eating** the Passover meal in the future as He ate it with His disciples immediately before His death. The time when He would actually eat it again would be when it was **fulfilled** in the kingdom of God. Some have erroneously interpreted the phrase "kingdom of God" to refer exclusively to the church. But there is a difference between the kingdom and the church. The kingdom of God is the totality of the heavenly sovereignty of God over all things, whereas the church is composed of the people of God on earth (Mt 16:18,19). All the church is in the kingdom, but the kingdom is more than the church. Jesus would eat with the disciples as the church in His kingdom reign over all things.

There may be two different ways we could understand what Jesus meant in Luke 22:15,16.

A. The prophetic Passover:

The Passover of Israel was certainly prophetic. The Passover lamb was prophetic of the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (1 Pt 1:19; Rv 5). The Passover was prophetic in offerings and redemption. In the statement Jesus made in Luke 22:16, He prophesied that He would not eat of the Passover again until it was **fulfilled**. We would assume that the Jewish Passover was first fulfilled in the offering of the Lamb of God. But again, Jesus' "Passover" Supper would also be prophetic.

The love feast/Supper of the early church was the fulfillment about which He had referred at the time He instituted the Supper. If this is the case, then Jesus would now be spiritually eating the "Passover" with His disciples as they come together to also eat and drink. Thus His "Passover" Supper is fulfilled in the love feast/Supper that the disciples celebrate as the church.

In the Jewish covenants of the Old Testament, the two parties ate together in a feast of peace. Jesus is now spiritually eating with His body of disciples in a covenant of peace that was established through a covenant relationship between God and man through the peace offering of Jesus on the cross.

B. Heavenly fulfillment:

In reference to the time when Jesus would eat with His disciples, we cannot say that He is now figuratively eating on His throne in heaven as the disciples now eat literally on earth. At least, there is no indication in the passage that His literal eating in the upper room in Jerusalem on the night of His betrayal would somehow be spiritualized to mean that He would somehow eat in heaven as they ate of it on earth. And since there is no interpretive license in His statement to go from literal to spiritual eating, then we must conclude that there will be a time yet in the future when Jesus will again literally eat with His disciples, though it will be His banquet feast and not the Jewish Passover (See Rv 19:7-9). It will be the time when the redemption of the cross will have been fulfilled (completed) at the end of time. This will be the time when the saints will have been redeemed from this world.

Jesus is now reigning in heaven as King of kings over all things (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15). He will reign until He comes again, at which time He will return kingdom reign to God in order that God be all in all (1 Co 15:26-28). It is during this interim period of time—from the ascension to His final coming—when the disciples of Jesus eat the celebration feast that Jesus instituted while He was on earth. We eat in order to remember our deliverance from the bondage of sin (1 Pt 1:3-5,23). But we also eat in anticipation of personally eating the Supper with the Lord in eternal glory when He comes again.

This would be the meaning of John's statement in Revelation 19:7-9. John presents a picture of the future when the bride of Christ—that's us—comes to the marriage feast with the Lamb (Rv 19:7). Because we are the bride of Christ, it was revealed, *"Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper* [feast] *of the Lamb"* (Rv 19:9). **We might say that the Lord's Supper we now eat is a rehearsal meal in preparation for the marriage feast that we will personally eat with Jesus when He comes again**.

The Passover feast of the Jews prepared the minds of the Jews for the Passover Lamb. The Lord's Supper prepares our minds for the Lamb to come again in order to finalize what He started at the cross. The coming banquet meal in the presence of Jesus will be the finalization of the gospel plan of salvation. It will be a time when Jesus once again eats with us in the final celebration after the last enemy, death, has been destroyed. It will be a celebration feast of all that Jesus accomplished through His gospel journey from heaven on our behalf. **In the present Supper/meal we remember our gospel victory. In the final banquet we will celebrate the fulfillment of God's eternal gospel plan of redemp-**

tion that was made possible by the cross and resurrection.

The love feast/Supper, therefore, looks back to the cross of deliverance, but also to the future victory over death (See 1 Co 15:54). The more emphasis we place on the love feast/Lord's Supper, the more we focus on our celebration of the revealed gospel of redemption in the past. In the Supper we eat in expectation of the final feast with Jesus when He comes again to deliver us from this world.

Chapter 5

COVENANTS AND CELEBRATIONS

The Passover feast of the Jews was a joyous occasion of celebration. It was observed in remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and in anticipation of making the journey to the promised land. In view of the atmosphere that surrounded the Passover feast, we can understand why God established the Passover in the history of Israel in order to prepare His people for the coming revelation of the gospel.

Immediately after Jesus instituted the Supper during the Jewish Passover, there would be a brief moment of sadness in the air because of His crucifixion. However, the empty tomb generated in their hearts a tremendous moment of celebration. During the years that followed the revelation of the gospel through His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and reign, the disciples celebrated the revealed gospel. The Passover feast, therefore, was the perfect time to institute a celebratory love feast/Supper, for it would be a time of jubilant rejoicing by the disciples.

When Jesus made the statement to His disciples during the Passover feast, *"This is the **new covenant** in My blood that is poured out for you,"* more went through the minds of the Jewish disciples than what we would normally think. We must keep in mind that it was a Jewish Passover during which Jesus made this statement to Jewish people. Therefore, the statement was first understood by those Jewish disciples who were present when Jesus made the statement of a new covenant.

When Jesus used the word "covenant," the Jewish disciples glanced at one another, and then thought back over more than two thousand years of covenants in their heritage, covenants over which celebration took place. Their understanding of covenants was a part of their heritage as descendants of Abraham. Covenant was a part of the Sinai law, and thus, covenants meant more to them than we commonly think in our society today.

A brief review of the covenants in the Old Testament reveals some profound truths in reference to how we should understand the "new covenant" that God now has with His people. Jesus' reference to the new covenant sparked thoughts of celebration and joy in the minds of the disciples to whom He made the promise. (The following points are abridged from the book, *Authentic Church*, Roger E. Dickson, Book 24, chapter 5, at africainternational.org.)

A. Covenant between Isaac and Abimelech:

In Genesis 26:26-31, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, came to Isaac in order to establish a covenant of peace with him. *"Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and **let us make a covenant with you**"* (Gn 26:28). Abimelech wanted to make a covenant with Isaac in order *"that you* [Isaac] *will do us no harm"* (Gn 26:29).

Once the covenant was established, **a covenant meal celebrated the event**. Genesis 26:30 states, *"**So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank**."* The result of the making of the covenant was celebration on the part of both parties. There was celebration because those who joined in the covenant knew that no harm would come between the house of Abimelech and the house of Isaac. The celebratory feast was a very significant part to bind the covenant. If the two parties could eat together, then they could live in peace with one another.

B. Covenant between Jacob and Laban:

When Jacob secretly left the presence of Laban in order to return to his homeland, Laban pursued after him with the intent of doing Jacob harm (Gn 31:22,23). However, on his way, God came to Laban in a dream and warned him concerning his evil intentions against Jacob (Gn 31:24). When Laban finally overtook Jacob, in fear of the Lord, he subsequently offered to make a covenant with Jacob in order to establish a peaceful relationship between the two families (Gn 31:44).

The covenant between Jacob and Laban was validated in the presence of God who was the witness to the covenant (Gn 31:49,50,53). In order to ratify the covenant, a sacrifice was made. Following the sacrifice,

and as part of the covenant ceremony, a joyous meal of celebration was conducted as both parties ate the sacrificed animal. *"Then Jacob **offered a sacrifice** on the mountain, and called his brethren to **eat bread**. **And they ate bread** and stayed all night on the mountain"* (Gn 31:54).

The eating of the covenant offering was not a time for solemnity, sadness and feelings of guilt. **It was a time of celebration over the fact that a covenant of peace had been made between two parties.** The sacrifice ratified the covenant. The fellowship meal celebrated the covenant. From the time the covenant was made, there was no longer animosity between the two parties. Again, the covenant meal was a central part of the covenant relationship. The meal symbolized the ability of the two parties to eat together in peace.

C. Covenant between God and Israel:

When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, God established a covenant of peace with the nation (Ex 19-24). After the conditions and responsibilities for keeping the covenant were established, Exodus 24:1-11 explains the ratification of the covenant. Israel *"offered burnt offerings and sacrificed **peace offerings** of oxen to the Lord"* (Ex 24:5).

> *Then he* [Moses] *took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "**All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient**"* (Ex 24:7).

Following the ratification of the covenant through sacrifices to God and oaths on both sides to keep the conditions of the covenant, **the nation ate and drank** (Ex 24:11). The eating and drinking after the ratification of the covenant was a time of joyous celebration. There was peace between Israel and God.

The culture of acceptance over a meal was central to the covenant meals of the Old Testament. This culture of a covenant meal was even brought out when Moses, Aaron, and all the elders of Israel came and ate before God on Mount Sinai. When Israel arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, with the seventy elders, went up Mount Sinai to commune with God. It was there that they "**ate and drank**" in the presence of the Lord (Ex 24:9-11).

God did not raise His hand against these men. The purpose for their eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord was to manifest to all that God received them. He accepted them and all Israel into a covenant relationship with Him. The eating of the covenant meal was symbolic of God making peace with the people. The fact that they were able to eat in the presence of God on Mount Sinai was validation that there was peace between God and Israel. If there were no peace, then the elders of Israel would have been obliterated from existence in the presence of God.

It is significant in Acts 2:42 that the concept of eating in fellowship with one another is also brought out in reference to the fellowship of the church. In the Greek text the conjunction "and" is not between "fellowship" and "breaking of bread." The text literally reads, *"... in the teaching of the apostles and in the **fellowship in the breaking of the bread**, and in the prayers."* The fellowship and breaking of bread are together, emphasizing that fellowship is associated with the eating of the meal. There is fellowship between men, and there is fellowship with God.

The early Christians fellowshipped as they ate the love meal together with the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was a covenant meal that reminded them of their peace with God through the gospel of His grace. The gospel had also brought people together into a new covenant relationship that was based on the gospel, and thus the disciples had all things in common. The love feast/ Supper occasion was a covenant celebration of peace between God and man, and man and man.

Throughout the history of Israel, there were times for remembrance and renewal of the covenant that God made with Israel. When the temple was built, it was a time of remembrance, revival and recommitment to the covenant that God had made with Israel (2 Ch 5-7). When the temple was completed, *"the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord"* (2 Ch 7:4). After the sacrifices, Solomon *"sent the people away to their tents, **joyful and glad of heart for the goodness that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel**"* (2 Ch 7:10).

After the Babylonian captivity, Israel returned and rebuilt the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ez 6:13-22). In the remembrance and renewal of their national covenant with the Lord, they offered sacrifices for all Israel (Ez 6:17). Ezra 6:22 states, *"And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days **with joy; for the Lord made them joyful**."*

The returnees from Babylon also rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem (Ne 7,8). Once the walls were rebuilt, it was a time for remembrance, revival and celebration by keeping the Feast of Trumpets (See Nm 29:1-6). On the day this feast of renewal was kept, Nehemiah exhorted the people not to mourn or weep, for it was a day of joy and celebration (Ne 8:9). He exhorted them,

Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. ***Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*** (Ne 8:10).

No better words than the preceding words of Nehemiah could have been spoken to describe the atmosphere that should surround our covenant meals with God. Jesus wanted to establish His Supper that would be surrounded by a time of joy and celebration for the covenant of peace that God had established with His people through the gospel. The covenant feasts of the Old Testament were not conducted with a funeral service atmosphere. Neither was the Passover feast. We would do well to remember this when we consider the atmosphere that should surround the eating of the love feast/Lord's Supper.

The various feasts of the Old Testament law were times of eating. They were times of joy. They were feasts of celebration. We have often assumed that they were simply holidays for Israel to enjoy. On the contrary, they were designated times when Israel was to enjoy fellowship meals with one another in a spirit of celebration.

What is significant in reference to the meal that followed the sacrifice that ratified a covenant, was that the meal was eaten in the **presence of the Lord** (Ex 18:12; see Dt 12:7,18; 14:23,26; 15:20). When the Israelites communed with one another in the celebration of the covenant meal, they did so with the knowledge that the Lord was in their presence communing with them. And so it is with the eating of the Lord's meal. It is a time to reconnect with God by reconnecting with one another around a fellowship meal.

At the time Jesus instituted His Supper at His last Passover, it was certainly a time of apprehension on the part of the disciples. However, this apprehension and fear **did not come to its climax until after the Passover feast was eaten**. It was after the feast that Jesus was betrayed, tried and crucified. But during the actual time they were eating the Passover meal, it was as any other Passover meal of the Jews throughout their history. Jesus wanted us to enjoy His Supper in the same atmosphere of joy and celebration that the Jews had when they ate the Passover in celebration of their deliverance from bondage. How much more should we rejoice and celebrate because we have been delivered from the bondage of sin? The Lord's Supper, therefore, is a time to rejoice in the presence of the Lord.

The celebration that surrounded the making of a covenant should be brought over into the love feast/Supper occasion in order to establish an atmosphere of celebration. The Jews celebrated when covenants were made. The Passover was a celebration. But somehow, we often turn the celebration of the covenant into a funeral service. We need to take another look at this. Paul said that when a brother dies, we *"do not grieve as others who have no hope"* (1 Th 4:13). In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 he wrote, *"For if we believe that Jesus* ***died and rose again****, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."*

We believe in Jesus who died. But we rejoice in the fact that He rose again and is coming for us with the departed saints. The Supper is the occasion to remember and celebrate this fact. The early Christians rejoiced over their deliverance from the bondage of sin. They rejoiced even more that Jesus was raised in order to be the firstborn of all those who have died in Christ.

When the first disciples obeyed the gospel in baptism, they were together in fellowship. They shared with one another. They ate their meals together. *"They ate their food with* ***gladness*** *and* ***sincerity*** *of heart,* ***praising God and having favor with all the people****"* (At 2:45-47). Does this sound like a people who went to a "funeral service" every first day of the week in order to fellowship at the love feast/Supper?

The early disciples celebrated the work of God in their lives (At 4:23-31). They celebrated their covenant of peace with God. We must not consider our coming together as a time for remorse, but for celebration. When joyful people come together in assembly, we would expect celebration! All the celebration is over the gospel of peace that was revealed through the Son of God.

The grace of God was made possible through Jesus' death for our sins, and reaffirmed by His resurrection from the dead. And because He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, we have no need for fear and apprehension in this life. Christians celebrate over life, not death. They celebrate their reign in life with Christ who is now reigning over all things (Rm 5:17).

Chapter 6

THE BREAD OF LIFE

When Jesus said, *"I am the* ***bread of life****"* (Jn 6:48), we wonder what went through the minds of His Jewish audience. On the night of His last Passover, *"Jesus took* ***bread*** *and blessed it. And He broke it and gave it to the*

disciples." After doing this, He made a profound statement: *"This is My body"* (Mt 26:26). Because we are not of Jewish heritage, we often have a difficult time understanding the symbolism that stood behind the Jews' understanding of the bread of the Passover.

There was more to what Jesus said when He took the bread during that final Passover than what we, who are removed two thousand years from the culture of the Jews, would initially understand. In order to understand the Jews' symbolic meaning of "bread," we must go back to Israel's captivity in Egypt, and then come forward to the incarnation of Jesus. We must then make our way to the night of the final Passover when Jesus lifted up the bread before His Jewish disciples and said, "This is My body."

A. Life in Egypt:

Throughout their four hundred years in Egypt, the Jews became Egyptian in reference to many cultural beliefs. One particular belief that they adopted was in reference to the existence of all life in Egypt depended on the Nile River. The Israelites resided in the delta area of the Nile, and thus their dependence on the flow of the Nile waters was especially significant for themselves and their livestock.

Bread in Egypt was a blessing that sustained human life. The bread was made from the grain that grew along the Nile River. The grain came from the plants that were watered by the Nile. The waters of the Nile came from great distances in Upper Egypt, but all Egyptians knew that it came from rainfall. The rain came down from heaven, and thus, according to Egyptian beliefs the god of the Nile River gave rain for the river, which flowed through Egypt, watering the plants that produced the grain that was made into bread. And thus, **bread meant life**. If the Nile River dried up, then there would be no life in Egypt. In Jewish history, the ministry of Joseph gave birth to the necessity of storing grain in order that life might exist during times of drought (See Gn 41).

According to the beliefs of the Egyptians, the bread that meant life came down from the gods in order that the Egyptians might live. Of course the Israelites knew that only the God of heaven sustained life. Nevertheless, the water that flowed into the Nile Delta preserved their lives. For this reason, after Israel came out of captivity, God carried on with the necessity of bread for life when Israel went into the wilderness. It was in the wilderness where God worked with Israel by teaching them to depend on His "bread of life" that came down from heaven as a blessing from Him. He was preparing them for the future.

B. Life in the wilderness:

God led Israel into the wilderness of Sinai for more reasons than simply bringing them out of captivity. After all, He could have led them northeast across the Red Sea, straight to Palestine. They would have been at the southern border of Palestine in less than seven walking days. But He led them for two months through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula until they came to Mount Sinai.

The answer to why God led them south through the wilderness, instead of northeast toward the land of promise, lies in the fact that Israel had to be taught to depend on Him. This was a hard lesson that they had to learn in order to conquer the Canaanites who possessed the promised land.

Their instructions on how to depend on God began shortly after they crossed the Red Sea. Immediately after their crossing of the Red Sea, it did not take long for the people to cry out in complaint to return to Egypt. Their crying out was good in that God had allowed them to go to the point where they had to depend on Him for survival in the wilderness.

In answer to their complaints, and as the first lesson for their spiritual growth, God gave them bread from heaven.

> *And when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "It is manna." For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "**This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat**"* (Ex 16:15).

When the bread was finally given from heaven, Israel was at the point of death from starvation. But God sent down from heaven bread (manna) that they might live. Every morning throughout their wilderness wandering, Israel was reminded that they could live another day only because God provided bread for them. At the end of the wilderness wandering, when they came to the east side of the Jordan River to pass into Canaan, the bread from heaven ceased (Ja 5:12). It was then time for them to live from the sustenance of their hard work in the land of promise that God had prepared for them.

Both from their four hundred years in Egypt, and their forty years of wilderness wandering, Israel never forgot the significance of the bread of life from heaven. To them, bread meant life given from heaven. It was life from God. And when Jesus taught the disciples to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* they understood that they must daily depend on God for life (Mt 6:11).

During His ministry, Jesus reminded His Jewish

audience, *"Our fathers ate manna in the desert, as it is written, '**He gave them bread from heaven to eat**'"* (Jn 6:31). What they understood Him to say was that **God gave them bread from heaven in order that they might live**. Then Jesus said of Himself, *"**For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world**"* (Jn 6:33). And just in case they did not understand, Jesus continued, *"**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).

> ***I am the living bread that came down from heaven**. If anyone eats of this bread, He will live forever. **And the bread that I will give is My flesh that I will give for the life of the world*** (Jn 6:51).

When Jesus took the Passover bread during the institution of the Supper and said, *"This is My body,"* there was more to the symbolism of the bread than His physical body. Paul recorded that Jesus said in reference to the bread, *"This is My body **which is for you**"* (1 Co 11:24). Knowing that bread meant life, the Jewish disciples who were lounging with Jesus on that Passover night would have understood what Jesus meant in reference to the use of bread as a metaphor for life. His body, that was symbolized by the bread, was His life that He was giving that they might have life. Later, they would preach that when one was baptized into the body of Christ, he would live. **Life was in the body of Christ**.

This clarifies the point that Paul was building by the time he came to chapter 12 in 1
s. *"For by one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body**"* (1 Co 12:13). In the John 6 context of Jesus' revelation to His Jewish audience, He stated the same point in the following words:

> *Truly, truly, I say to you, **except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you**. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life. And I will raise Him up in the last day* (Jn 6:53,54).

There is life only in the body of Christ. And since one is baptized into the body for the remission of sins in order to be raised to walk in newness of life, then one cannot have life unless he is baptized into the living body of Jesus (See At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6). When Christians eat of the bread of life at the Supper, they are remembering the life that they have in the body of Christ. They eat the bread to remind themselves that they have eternal life in Christ (1 Jn 5:11).

There is life in the Bread of Life that came down out of heaven. When we partake the bread at the Supper, therefore, we are remembering that the Bread of Life came down out of heaven into an incarnational body that was eventually given as an atoning sacrifice in order that we might have eternal life. The Supper, therefore, is a covenant fellowship of all those who have been baptized into the body of Christ, and thus, have eternal life because of the cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

Chapter 7

FEAST OR FAMINE

The phrase "breaking bread" was a common phrase that was used in the first century to refer to friends and family sitting together and eating a full meal in fellowship with one another. This definition of the phrase was understood when Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile, in the documents of both Luke and Acts. We must keep this in mind when studying the culture in which Theophilus lived. Luke made no unique definition of the phrase when he wrote to Theophilus. Without any explanation, he assumed that Theophilus understood that breaking bread in the culture in which he lived referred to the eating of a common meal.

If Luke, the Gentile writer, had some other definition in mind when he used the phrase "break bread" throughout the books of Luke and Acts, then we would assume that he would have defined the phrase for the Gentile reader, Theophilus. But he did not. We must conclude, therefore, that the phrase would be defined by Theophilus according to its normal usage in his culture of the day.

With the preceding thought in mind, we need to follow Luke's use of the phrase as we study through the documents of both Luke and Acts. In these two documents, Luke sought to explain to Theophilus in the document of Luke the cause of Christianity (Christ), as well as the effect that Christ had on the people of the first century (Acts). We must also keep in mind **that the books of Luke and Acts were the only books that Theophilus had in hand in order to understand the message about which Luke wrote**. Therefore, the words that Luke used in both documents must be consistently defined.

When considering the use of the phrase "breaking bread" in a biblical context, we would correctly assume that a full meal was under consideration. This understanding should be carried over into the love feast/Supper event of the early disciples.

It is significant that reference was never made to the "cup" when the phrase "breaking bread" was used in connection with the love feast. The absence of any reference to the cup would lead us to believe that a common meal was under consideration when the phrase "breaking bread" was used in reference to the love feast, though the early disciples partook of the bread and cup during the feast. This understanding is consistent throughout the following contexts in which the breaking of bread took place:

A. Breaking bread with Jesus:

Luke 24:30-35 is Luke's use of the phrase "breaking bread" in his twin documents to Theophilus in reference to its common use in the Jewish culture. On this occasion, Luke wrote, *"Now it came to pass as He sat at the table with them, He took* ***bread*** *and blessed it and* ***broke it****, and gave it to them"* (Lk 24:30).

The occasion was when Jesus revealed Himself to the two men with whom He had journeyed on the road to Emmaus. Once He came to their house in Emmaus, Jesus ate a meal with them. After eating with Jesus (breaking bread), the two men then returned to Jerusalem and explained to the apostles all that had occurred during their encounter with Jesus. Luke concluded the account, *"And they told the things that had happened on the road, and how He was recognized by them* ***in breaking of the bread****"* (Lk 24:35). (The Greek phrase in this verse is literally, *"in* ***the*** *breaking of the bread."*)

When Theophilus received this document from Luke, we would correctly conclude that he completely understood that Jesus had some type of common meal with these two disciples. He did not have a snack with them after the long journey from Jerusalem. Jesus sat down and enjoyed a full meal, during which He revealed to the two men who He was.

There was at least enough bread on the occasion to eat one's fill after their long journey from Jerusalem. This would have been the same breaking of bread to which Luke previously referred Theophilus in Luke 22:19 when Jesus broke bread during the Passover. Though there may not have been a full meal with all the trimmings when Jesus ate with the two men from Emmaus, there was certainly enough bread present to eat in order to have their fill.

B. Breaking bread from house to house.

Acts 2:42-46 is Luke's report to Theophilus concerning the activities of the early days of the first Christians. We must keep in mind when reading this context that the documents of Luke and Acts were always combined as one manuscript in the early circulation of the New Testament letters. The letters of Luke and Acts **were not** divided by John as they are in our Bibles. We would correctly conclude, therefore, that when Theophilus finished reading the account of Luke 24:30-35, and in his continued reading of Acts, he would conclude that the disciples ate a full meal with one another as new Christians in the context of Acts 2. It would have been a meal as Jesus ate with the two men of Emmaus. Luke's reference to the "breaking of bread" as a full meal in Luke 24 would be the commentary of the disciples' eating a full meal in the context of Acts 2.

Some Bible interpreters fail to see this consistent understanding of the definition of breaking bread throughout the documents of Luke and Acts. It is unfortunately assumed that after Theophilus read the material of Luke 24:30-35, Luke supposedly changed to another definition of the phrase "breaking bread" in Acts 2 and Acts 20:7. But if we are to be consistent interpreters of the two documents, we do not have the liberty of doing this.

Consider the "full meal" definition of "breaking bread" in the context of Acts 2. After about three thousand obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost, Luke recorded their activities as new disciples. His first record of their activities was explained in verse 42: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and fellowship* ***in the breaking of bread****, and in prayers."* If we use Luke 24:30-35 as the commentary to define the phrase "breaking of bread" in this text, then our only conclusion is that the early disciples fellowshipped with one another by eating a meal together from house to house. The eating of a meal together reflected their unity and participation in one another's lives.

In the same context in Acts 2, Luke continued his explanation of the participatory nature of the early *ekklesia* when he wrote in verse 46, *"And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and* ***breaking bread*** [eating a meal] ***from house to house****, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart."* Luke's comments in this verse expand the brief statement in verse 42. He mentioned the breaking of bread in verse 42, but in verse 46 explains where the meals took place. They took place in the homes of the disciples as they celebrated their fellowship over a meal.

It would certainly be inconsistent to change from

one meaning of "breaking of bread" in verse 42 to a different meaning in verse 46. But some interpreters do this. If we simply read the texts of Acts 2:42,46 with Luke 24:30-35, as did Theophilus, then we can come to only one conclusion. **That conclusion is that the disciples, as a part of their early relationships with one another, ate full meals together with one another in their homes**.

Some have unfortunately made a distinction between "**the** breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42, where it supposedly refers exclusively to the Lord's Supper, while in verse 46 the phrase "breaking bread" without the article "the" refers to the common meal of the disciples. But it is certainly questionable that Luke would put Theophilus in such interpretative confusion by making such a distinction simply by using the article "the." Theophilus could have never understood this difference of meaning, and neither can we.

We would suppose that Theophilus was not that familiar with the Lord's Supper. This is especially true when Luke again used the phrase "breaking bread" in Acts 20:7, but **without** the article. If "breaking bread" in Act 2:42 referred exclusively to the Lord's Supper because of the article, then Theophilus would surely have been confused by the time he came to Acts 20:7 where the article is absent.

We would seek to be consistent by understanding that the breaking of bread would have been understood by Theophilus to refer to a meal, as Jesus sat down and ate a meal with the two men of Emmaus. These meals would later be referred to by Jude as "love feasts," which feasts continued throughout the first century.

The bread and fruit of the vine were a part of the Jewish Passover meal. The early Jewish disciples seem to have continued with this tradition in reference to the love feast. Because the Corinthians had corrupted the love feast, it was not possible for them to eat of the Lord's Supper that was commonly observed during or after the meal (See 1 Co 11:20,21,29). **The Lord's Supper, therefore, was associated with the love feast of the early disciples**. The Lord's Supper was not the love feast, but the Supper was observed in conjunction with the love feast. When the disciples "broke bread" on the first day of the week, we must assume that they also observed the memorial of the Supper.

C. Breaking bread on Sunday:

Since the early disciples continued the tradition of the love feast throughout the first century—Peter and Jude confirm this—then we must look for some indication throughout the history of the early disciples about which Luke wrote to Theophilus where we might witness the disciples' coming together for such a feast. We find such a case in the context of Acts 20. The eating of a meal together was so common throughout the early churches that Paul assumed that when he came to Troas there would be a love feast of the disciples taking place in the city in someone's house.

Luke recorded Paul's encounter with the disciples in Troas by writing to Theophilus,

> *Now on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to* ***break bread****, Paul had discussions with them, intending to depart on the next day* (At 20:7).

Now if we were Theophilus, and had only the documents of Luke and Acts in hand, how would we interpret the phrase "break bread" in this statement? If we are to be consistent in our interpretations, then we must conclude that the disciples came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) in order to have a meal together. With this meal, the disciples continued with the practice of partaking of the bread and wine as Jesus did during the Passover meal. Paul took this opportunity to fellowship with the disciples, as well as have discussions with them about matters of teaching.

Because we often have difficulty in understanding that the breaking of bread in the first century referred to a full meal, we have difficulty understanding what happened on the night of Paul's visit to Troas that is recorded in Acts 20. Verse 7 simply states why the disciples came together. They came together to eat a meal (break bread) in fellowship with one another (See 1 Co 11:33). It was on this occasion that Paul took the opportunity to have discussions with them. Verse 11 explains that the occasion was for eating a meal, though the eating was initially on Sunday. However, Paul ate again before continuing his journey on Monday morning:

> *"When he* [Paul] *had come up again* [after raising Eutychus] *and* ***had broken bread and eaten****, and talked a long while, even until daybreak* [on Monday morning], *he departed."*

It was during this lengthy period of discussion that Eutychus had fallen asleep and subsequently fell out of a third story window. When he was raised from the dead by Paul, they returned to the upper room where some food had already been prepared for Paul before he left. Paul initially had eaten with them in their Sunday fellowship meal, and then continued his discussions until the time of his departure on Monday morning when he again ate before the journey.

There is nothing difficult about understanding the context of Acts 20:7-12 if we do not go through some hermeneutical gymnastic in order to separate the Lord's Supper from the love feast in the context. Also, we must guard against inserting into the historical statements of the text our Lord Supper rituals of today. As in the institution of the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal, the disciples, as Jesus, simply continued on with the custom of remembering the blood and body when they had their common meal together on Sunday.

It is interesting to note that some have changed this example of "breaking bread" on the first day of the week into a law. However, they do not make the example of the "upper room" in verse 8 to also be a law. Such inconsistent hermeneutics reminds us that we are in our legalism always subject to inconsistences that we seek to ignore.

Since "breaking of bread" referred to the love feast during which the Supper was observed, then some may be inconsistent in reference to their use of Acts 20:7 to promote the Lord's Supper to be bound to Sunday only. They assume that the Supper must stay on Sunday, but the meal must go. The Supper on Sunday is supposedly binding, but the meal can be discarded.

When the examples of the early function of the body of Christ in the first century are made law, then we find ourselves being inconsistent. It is quite difficult to remain consistent in our hermeneutics when we assume that examples must be law. For example, the early disciples sold their possessions and gave the proceeds of the sales to those who were in need. They even sold their houses and lands (See At 2:44,45; 4:32-37). Should we assume that the example of this selling of possessions should be established as a law for Christians to obey today?

If we are justified to change the example of the breaking of bread in conjunction with the Lord's Supper into a law for Sunday observance, then to be consistent, we must do the same with the selling of our possessions. We cannot be consistent if we extract the Supper from the meal, and then assume that the Supper is binding on Sunday without the example of the meal also being binding on Sunday.

D. Breaking bread at sea:

Continuing throughout Luke's recorded history of the early church brings us to Acts 27:34-36. The occasion was fourteen days after Paul and many others had fought the winds of a storm at sea. Here again Luke used the phrase "break bread."

"Therefore," Paul said, *"I urge you to **take some food**, for this is for your health, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish"* (At 27:34). Luke then recorded of the incident,

> *And when he had spoken these things, **he took bread** and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all. And **when he had broken it**, he began to **eat**. They were all of good cheer, **and they also took some food*** (At 27:35,36).

Luke's reference to breaking bread in this context also finds its definition in the occasion. Paul and the other occupants of the ship ate food. They ate in a meal what food they had on board. This is precisely what Luke expected Theophilus to understand when he came to this historical statement concerning the "breaking of bread."

The breaking of bread in the first century was the occasion when people ate a common meal. We, as well as Theophilus, can come to no other consistent conclusion that is based on the use of the phrase by Luke throughout the letters of Luke and Acts. To state otherwise would be reading our own prejudices, if not traditions, into the texts of the Scriptures.

It seems that the early disciples did as Jesus had done when He instituted His Supper during the Passover meal. This is clearly brought out in Paul's record of the Corinthian problem in 1 Corinthians 11. The Corinthians came *"together to eat"* a full meal, after which they partook of the bread and wine (1 Co 11:33). When they came together for their love feast, the unrighteous attitudes of some disrupted the very purpose for their coming together as the *ekklesia*. In the breaking of bread as a full meal, some Corinthians used the occasion to manifest anything but a Christ-like spirit.

We could assume that during the year and a half that Paul was originally with the Gentile Christians of Achaia, he instructed them concerning the love feast/Supper (At 18:11). They would certainly not have known of the celebratory event without his instructions. Therefore, we do not in our interpretation of the phrase "break bread" seek to separate the love feast and the Supper as it was eaten in Acts 20:7. The early church had a love feast on the first day of the week, during which or after they partook of the bread and cup of the Supper. This continued on for at least three centuries after Jesus had instituted the Supper on the night of His sacrificial offering.

This does not mean that the Supper must be observed in connection with a meal as was the practice of many in the early church. It is only our concern to understand how the early Christians responded in their lives to the mandate of Jesus to remember the blood of the

covenant and His sacrificed body which resulted in His spiritual body, the church. The early disciples remembered these gospel truths on the first day of the week during a love feast/Supper event in which everyone participated. Since the combination of such was their response to Jesus' instructions to remember, we must be cautious about turning their example of how they remembered into a law that we must obey according to their example. We must remember that Jesus mandated that we remember Him only with bread and wine, not with the full meal.

We must also be cautious about assuming that their example of response was dictated by the Holy Spirit. If we have no direct statements concerning the details of how they fulfilled the mandate of Jesus to conduct the Supper in remembrance of Jesus, then we do not have the right to assume that the first century disciples' example constitutes divine law. We must keep in mind their example of selling their possessions, lands and houses. But in doing such they did not establish a law for the church to do the same throughout history.

Neither can we assume that the Holy Spirit directed them to sell their possessions in order to establish a law for us to do the same simply because we assume the Holy Spirit so directed them. Examples of obedience of the early Christians are simply examples of how they responded to the gospel in their own lives. If we assume that their response to the gospel has as much authority as the direct commands of the word of God, then we would be left in confusion, or at least not consistent in our application of all the examples of the early disciples.

We must not forget that gospel-motivated people do not need to be instructed to do the commandments (See 1 Tm 1:9). They simply need to be given the commandments. Jesus gave the commandment to remember Him through the bread and cup. Gospel-motivated people simply do what they are instructed, knowing that obedience to the commandments is not a burden (1 Jn 5:3). **There needed to be no commandments on how to do what they had to do**.

Chapter 8

EVANGELISTIC FEASTS

The early disciples came together regularly on the first day of the week to fellowship with one another and to partake of the Lord's Supper during or after a love feast. They celebrated the gospel of Jesus with the bread and fruit of the vine. They celebrated one another during the love feast. In view of these participatory events, we need to approach the context of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 with the understanding that the love feast was a meal upon which the Supper was based. Seated in the love feast, the Supper of the Lord was observed in order to celebrate the Redeemer of the one redeemed body.

We must insert in this discussion at this point a very important historical factor in reference to the ordinary assemblies of the early church. **The early disciples met in their homes**. This meant that their normal assemblies were usually small. This presented the assembly platform where a regular love feast could be conducted. We must caution ourselves, therefore, about assuming that the early assemblies were large public meetings that are commonly conducted today. For this reason, the biblical historian must take himself or herself out of the large assembly context of the typical assembly today and place themselves in a house somewhere in the province of Achaia. Occasionally, the Achaian disciples evidently came together in a large assembly in the city of Corinth, but this was not their common weekly assembly.

It was in the context of the celebration of the love feast in Corinth where we discover that some of the Corinthian disciples of Achaia were reflecting their divisive and competitive attitudes. There is justification to consider, therefore, that the particular love feast/Supper that Paul addressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 was an occasional regional assembly during which rude behavior and inconsiderate attitudes were revealed on the part of some of the participants. In fact, when we consider their rebuking by the Holy Spirit through Paul, we can actually better understand the purpose of the love feast and Supper encounter for which both were conducted by the early church.

A. The historical setting:

Many Bible students make an unfortunate interpretive error by lifting the events discussed in 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 out of the historical context of the early church, particularly the church of Achaia. For this reason, we must caution ourselves about reading into the context our own rituals that we traditionally maintain today that surround the love feast/Supper. It is simply our quest to understand the teaching of the word of God and the examples of how the disciples of the first century responded to the gospel. We must do this with the

historical background of the early disciples, and not our own.

Since the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians were **written to Christians throughout the province of Achaia**, we must understand that the assembly for the love feast/ Supper about which Paul addressed was probably an occasional provincial assembly of the Achaian church in the city of Corinth (1 Co 16:15; 2 Co 1:1; 9:2; 11:10). If we bring the discussions of this chapter into the context of the weekly love feast that was likewise observed by the Troas church in Acts 20:7, then we must understand that the Achaian disciples were in some way locally and provincially coming together in fellowship to eat the love feast and celebrate the Lord's Supper. But the specific love feast/Supper that gave rise to some unique problems in Corinth was not the weekly event. It seems to be a forced interpretation to assume that the assembly about which Paul addressed was any particular weekly house assembly. He seems to be addressing the dysfunctional behavior of some in an assembly that was much larger than a house assembly.

B. The regional assembly:

We are not told in the context whether the assembly that was addressed in 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 was a weekly event, or a periodic event when all the house groups of all Achaia came together in one place in Corinth. However, it is more reasonable to believe that this specific disruptive occasion, wherein the competitive behavior concerning languages and prophecy that are discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 was actually an occasional provincial assembly. This is indicated in the statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:18: *"For first of all,* ***when you*** [throughout Achaia] ***come together in assembly****, I hear that there are divisions among you."* Or more specifically, *"Therefore, if the whole assembly gathers* ***in one place*** [in Corinth]*"* (1 Co 14:23).

It seems more likely that Paul's reference to the assembly was not to the small weekly house assemblies, but to something far greater to which everyone in the province was gathered, and during which the problems of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were addressed.

An occasional large provincial meeting was where the "I am of Paul," "I am of Cephas," and "I am of Apollos" sectarianism would most likely have been revealed (1 Co 1:12). Such an assembly would present the opportunity for competition to arise between those who were gifted in languages and prophecy (teaching).

It would certainly be unreasonable to conclude that their sectarian behavior that was revealed in a large provincial assembly would be manifested in the weekly house assemblies throughout the province. Claiming allegiance to a specific personality in a group of 25-30 people would seem questionable, especially since each particular "loyalty sect" may have been meeting in a different house. And the use of the gift of languages (tongues) would have been unnecessary if everyone in the weekly house assembly spoke the same language.

People of a common language throughout Achaia would certainly have met in a group that spoke their particular language. But we must not forget that throughout Achaia, everyone spoke Greek. There was no need for the gift of languages in the house assemblies. Only during the Isthmian Games did people come into town who spoke other languages. During an assembly with diverse language groups, there would be the necessity for the use of the gift of languages.

The disruptive behavior that Paul confronts in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 seems to fit better in the context of an occasional fellowship assembly of all the Christians in Achaia when they came together in the city of Corinth. It was in such an assembly that favorite personalities divided the one body of Achaia into "loyalty sects."

C. The Isthmian Games assembly:

If the assembly of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were indeed an occasional meeting of all the disciples in Achaia, then we might wonder from where this tradition originated. Here is a possibility: The Isthmian Games were conducted in the spring every two years in the city of Corinth. These games originated several centuries before the arrival of Paul on the scene on his second mission journey. Paul wanted to be present in Corinth in the spring of A.D. 51 because he knew that **this was the ideal opportunity to preach the gospel to the world through the athletes who participated in the Games**. Since athletes from throughout the Roman Empire were gathered for these games, Paul wanted to seize the opportunity for world evangelism. It was during this opportunity that Paul used a diversity of languages to communicate the gospel to attending athletes (1 Co 14:18).

In order to support this view, it is interesting to note the "athletic language" that Paul used throughout the Corinthian letters (See 1 Co 9:24-27; 10:1-13; 15:55-57). He knew the athletic culture of the Greeks and others who prepared for the Isthmian Games. Words as "crown," "race," "self-discipline," "boxing" and "victory" were commonly used words in the competition of the Games. Paul simply coined the words when he wrote of spiritual matters to the Achaian disciples.

It is also interesting to note that there were no public housing for the athletes who came from great distances to participate in the Games. The visitors camped in tents in the open fields that surrounded the facilities for the events. Not only did Paul see the Isthmian Games as an opportunity for evangelism, but he also saw them as an opportunity for his tentmaking business. Evidently, Aquila and Priscilla also took advantage of the opportunity, for it was in Corinth where Paul first encountered this tentmaking couple who had recently fled from Rome (See At 18:1-3). This common tentmaking business in the context of the Isthmian Games explains how Paul could have contacted the other two tentmakers.

It would not be difficult to assume that since the first disciples of Achaia may have been in Corinth for the occasion of the Isthmian Games, the members of the body throughout Achaia continued the tradition of an "Isthmian assembly." They possibly had such an assembly every two years in order to take advantage of the evangelistic opportunity that the international event presented. However, in their behavior, they may have been blundering the opportunity.

At least this possibility explains why the gift of speaking in languages would have been so valuable during this biannual assembly. Since there would have been present at the games athletes of different language groups from throughout the Roman Empire, it would have been a tremendous opportunity for world evangelism. The opportunity was similar to that which was presented by the annual Jewish Passover/Pentecost feast in Jerusalem where the apostles stayed for at least fifteen years after the establishment of the church in Acts 2. The Achaian brethren may have simply scheduled an "Isthmian assembly" at the time of the Games. At least it would have been quite negligent on their part not to have taken advantage of such an opportunity.

Though the Isthmian Games presented the opportunity for world evangelism as the Passover/Pentecost feast in Jerusalem, the Achaian brethren were squandering the opportunity for evangelism because of their lack of love and immature behavior. They should have been manifesting the same spirit of love that the early Jewish disciples did in Jerusalem a little over twenty years before:

> *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. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart* (At 2:44-46).

The Achaian brethren were portraying the opposite of the above description of the first disciples in Jerusalem. It may have been a Greek cultural problem. Nevertheless, they needed to learn a great deal from the first Jewish disciples.

When we read the statement by Paul to the Achaian brethren, "*if the whole assembly* [of Achaia] *gathers in* ***one place*** [in Corinth]" (1 Co 14:23), then in the historical context, we would probably be correct to assume that this was a biannual assembly of the saints from throughout Achaia who came together in Corinth for the mission opportunity of the Isthmian Games (See 1 Co 11:18). During their presence in Corinth at the time of the Games, they simply took the opportunity to assemble on Sunday in Corinth, having invited athletes of the games to come to the unique spring Sunday assemblies during the Games (See 1 Co 14:23).

Based on this possibility, Paul asked a specific question concerning the disciples' chaotic behavior that took place during this regional assembly. We quote the entirety of his question below with our assumption that his question was indeed made in the historical context of the biannual event of the "Isthmian assembly."

> *Therefore, if the whole assembly* [of the disciples from all Achaia] *gathers in one place* [in Corinth during the Games], *and all speak with languages* [of the different nationalities that are present during the Games], *and there come in the uninformed* [who know little or nothing about the church], *or unbelievers* [who are attending out of curiosity], ***will they not say that you are mad*** [if you conduct your assembly in confusion as in the idolatrous temple]? (1 Co 14:23).

Unbelieving athletes assuredly attended the assemblies of the saints during the Games. But if they witnessed the rival competition between the tongue speakers and prophets, then they would assume that these people (Christians) were mad. It may have been that some of the brothers brought the competitive spirit of the Games into the assembly of the saints.

It would not be outside a relevant historical context to understand Paul's teaching concerning the assembly in 1 Corinthians 11-14 with the background of an occasional meeting of the Achaian saints in Corinth. Such an interpretation would certainly answer a great deal of questions concerning the nature of his instructions about problems that arose during this unique assembly.

D. The meal and the Supper:

It seems that only the disciples of Achaia had the problems in their regional assembly that are discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14. It seems that they had the problems because the disciples of Achaia had a large provincial assembly during the Isthmian Games. Paul's instructions concerning the women keeping silent in this large combined provincial meeting would be appropriate. The instructions concerning the women keeping silent in such a combined assembly would answer some of the problems that came from women speaking out of order. Their speaking out of order was causing more confusion than what existed between the competitive language-speakers and teachers (prophets) (1 Co 14:34,35).

However, in their ordinary weekly small house meetings, the women would simply remain in their subjective relationship with their own husbands in the presence of visiting neighborhood families who assembled in their homes on Sunday. It would be unreasonable to think that the wife should become silent in the home assembly at the point when another family stepped into her living room for a time of praise and worship. If indeed a wife was not submissive to her own husband before the assembly, then she would be out of order in her relationship with her husband, as well as with guests, who would be attending the couple's house assembly (See 1 Tm 2:12).

We are told that the Corinthians in their regular weekly house fellowships came together on the first day of the week throughout Achaia (1 Co 16:2). However, we are not told that the meal of 1 Corinthians 11 was a combined weekly gathering of all the house groups. Throughout Achaia such would have been impossible on a weekly basis simply because people could not have walked across the province of Achaia to attend the assembly.

The 1 Corinthians 11 meeting may have been a periodic regional meeting in Corinth wherein the division that was occurring among the individual house fellowships manifested itself in the general love feast that took place in the city of Corinth. Add to this the problem of some disciples in Corinth not waiting for those who came from great distances from throughout Achaia. Their lack of love for one another was revealed by their gluttony of eating all the food before everyone arrived from throughout Achaia.

Whatever the historical setting, we must be careful that we do not read our modern-day system of institutional assembly behavior into the context. We do know, however, that the Corinthian disciples were continuing the Passover meal tradition through the love feast/Lord's Supper as part of a celebration feast, just as the disciples in Troas. We assume that they were so committed to the love feast/Supper that they were willing to keep such even during an occasional large provincial meeting in Corinth.

E. The connection:

In the local context of the Corinthian culture, some during the assembly were still following the drunken behavior of the pagan temple culture of Corinth. They had made the general love feast an opportunity to manifest their pagan temple culture and arrogant attitudes. The love feast, therefore, became a reflection of their immature attitudes and lack of love for one another, rather than a reflection of the united nature of the *ekklesia* of Christ. Some who were possibly Christian athletes who participated in the Games may have been bringing their competitive spirit into the assembly of the saints.

Paul was harsh in this context with the immature behavior of those who competed for recognition during the assembly. **The reason for his harshness was in the fact that the Achaians, when they came together in Corinth, were attacking the unifying nature of the gospel**. The members of the body are bound together as one body through the gospel, just as the Father and Son are one (Jn 13:34,35). However, the Corinthian love feast manifested everything but love and unity. Their inconsiderate and competitive behavior was subsequently manifested to the unbelievers who may have showed up at the "love" feast. For this reason, their unbecoming behavior could lead to the loss of souls. At least those who judged them to be mad would certainly turn away from their assemblies, and thus, turn away from Christ. Mad assemblies offer no gospel appeal to the unbelieving public.

Paul's rebuke was not that they were violating some ceremonial rituals of either the love feast or the Supper. His rebuke was stern because the arrogant and competitive spirit among them was destroying the communal and participatory gospel nature of how Christians are to fellowship with one another when they came together in assembly. Though he initially addressed them as the "church (assemblies) of God in Corinth" (1 Co 1:2), they would cease to be this united body of Christ if they continued in their disruptive assemblies that manifested before the world an unloving spirit.

If indeed the specific assembly about which Paul wrote was a provincial assembly during the Isthmian Games, then we can only imagine what attending athletes would be saying about the Christians of Achaia when they returned home after the Games. This may explain why the Holy Spirit focused specifically on this

problem among the Achaian Christians. Their behavior was simply bad advertisement for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the love among disciples is lost, as was typical with some in the regional assembly of Achaia in Corinth, then the lampstand of the gospel is taken from the city. The members of a loveless church may continue to meet, but because they manifest immature behavior with which they surround the love feast of celebration and the Lord's Supper, they no longer reflect the gospel in their assemblies (See Rv 2:4). Paul saw this happening in Corinth, and thus, in his rebuke he identified and corrected such unbecoming behavior among the disciples.

One lesson is strikingly clear from Paul's revelation surrounding the Corinthian problems: **If any assembly of disciples in any area manifests disorderly behavior in the love feast and the Supper, then the members are bad branding examples for the gospel.** The love feast/Supper is the perfect opportunity to determine if each member of the body has the heart of God. If members cannot sit down and eat together in harmony with one another, then they are not together as the one body of Christ wherein the gospel brings unity. The gospel of unity thus had little affect on the lives of some among them. If the members are competitive in their individual ministries, then they destroy the unity by which the organic body must function in harmony according to the gospel.

If the members' autonomy from one another throughout a province or state has divided them to the point that they cannot come together in a common meeting in "Corinth," then they are sectarian. One of the greatest lessons learned from regional love feasts, or lectureships, is that such events provide everyone with the opportunity to manifest the unifying nature of the gospel of Christ. Regardless of where each member of the body sits on Sunday morning throughout the province or state, he or she is still a member of the one body of Christ. Regional assemblies must never be used as an opportunity to divide members from one another. We are all "of Christ."

Chapter 9

THE CORINTHIAN ORDEAL

We must keep in mind that the Achaian disciples were young in the faith. They were probably five years or less in the faith, and thus, there were many young members among them who were still behaving as they did in the temple feasts from which they supposedly turned when they obeyed the gospel. In the 1 & 2 Corinthian letters, Paul rebuked some who were still involving themselves in the temple feasts, or at least behaving in the assembly of the saints as they had previously behaved in the temple feasts. He wrote in the first letter,

> *But I say that the things that the Gentiles sacrifice,* ***they sacrifice to demons*** *and not to God.* ***And I do not want you to have fellowship with demons****.* ***You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons*** (1 Co 10:20,21).

The Christians in all Achaia were the temple of God (1 Co 3:16). They had no business yoking themselves with the temple of idols in the city of Corinth, especially in participating in the pagan temple feasts (2 Co 6:14-17). The problems addressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 evidently originated from some who were bringing the behavior of the pagan temple feast into the love feast/Supper of the special Corinthian assembly.

The love feast/Supper is to be the reflection of the spiritual nature of the body of Christ. As we focus on this theme, we must not overlook Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Throughout his discussions of the problems that prevailed around the Corinthians' love feast/Supper, he focused on problems that were carried over into their fellowship around the fellowship meal and Lord's Supper. The pagan temple behavior that some brought into the love feast made it impossible for them to be in a correct state of mind to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner. Thus, the very opposite of what the love feast/Supper was to represent and accomplish in reflecting unity and love, was actually reflecting rudeness and division.

A. Covenant celebration (vs 17):

Because some of the disciples were ungodly in behavior before they came to the love feast assembly, their ungodliness was reflected in the love feast, and subsequently, their attitudes and behavior made them spiritually unworthy to partake of the Supper. Therefore, they did *"not come together for the better but for the worse."* They did not come together to better their relationships

with one another. Their coming together actually moved them further apart from one another, or at least, the love feast became an occasion that revealed division and inconsideration.

We discover in this judgment of Paul, however, the purpose for the love feast/Supper event. **It is to be an opportunity to bring the members of the body together in unity over a full meal of celebration, and to celebrate the sacrificial offering of the Son of God who made such possible**. This was as the purpose of the covenant meals of the Old Testament. The participants of the covenants celebrated their covenant relationship with one another by eating a meal together. In the love feast/Supper, the participants are to celebrate their covenant relationship with God, who through Jesus, were brought into a blood-bought covenant with God. In this case, the love feast/Supper is a celebration of our covenant with God.

B. Divided assemblies (vs 18):

Before they even arrived at their common assembly, some were saying, *"I am of Paul,"* others, *"I am of Apollos,"* and still others, *"I am of Cephas"* (1 Co 1:12). They had divided loyalties outside the assembly, which division was reflected in the regional assembly of the love feast. The purpose of a covenant feast was to bring people together. But in the Corinthian love feast, sectarian loyalties were revealed, and subsequently, they were driven apart from one another.

In considering Paul's statements concerning their abuse of the love feast/Supper occasion, we must always keep in mind that the Corinthians were doing the opposite of what was to be accomplished. The love feast/Supper was to build unity, not division among the disciples. Churches that have love feasts with the Supper, are seeking to encourage unity among the members over a covenant meal. The covenant meal is a celebration of unity, and the Supper is the reason why the members are brought together in Christ. There is purpose in the love feast with the Supper, which purpose had unfortunately been abandoned by many in Corinth because the love feast was corrupted.

C. Factions reveal immaturity (vs 19):

Those who were identified to have a loving heart that sought peace were those who did not manifest a spirit of division in their assembly during the love feast/Supper event. Assemblies often present an opportunity for factious people to be revealed to everyone. A love feast/Supper event is an opportunity to promote love and unity. If there are those among the members who are divisive in their spirit, such behavior will be manifested during a love feast/Supper event.

The unfortunate result of a simple ceremonial "chip and sip Supper" is that divisive personalities can often remain hidden. The divisive disciple is thus allowed to harbor resentment and division in his or her heart for years without being confronted and corrected in the spirit of eating together with the whole church.

D. Eating with a spirit of unity (vs 20):

Because some had a divisive spirit before they even came to the love feast/Supper assembly, meant that they were not coming to the table of the Lord in order to promote the unity that is to be celebrated in eating the Supper. If they did eat at the table, then their hypocrisy would be manifested to all, for all knew who the divisive brothers were among the members. Their divisive spirit, therefore, meant that the meal they were eating was not the Lord's meal. They had made it their own common meal by their divisive spirits. Whenever the love feast/Supper is conducted with wrong attitudes, then it becomes a common meal with no spiritual connotations.

E. Rudeness must not prevail (vs 21):

The Greek word "supper" that is used here is *deipnon*. It is the Greek word that was used to define a full meal. (More later.)

Everyone brought their food to the *deipnon* (love feast), but some who lived in the city selfishly ate their food before the arrival of others from throughout the province. As a result, there was no food left for those brethren who came from great distances across Achaia. The rude and inconsiderate local brethren who brought their own food ate it before others arrived. They brought wine for the greater assembly, but drank it all. They subsequently became drunk because they drank all the wine that was meant for everyone for the Lord's Supper.

The rude and selfish behavior of some was based on their turning the love feast meal into their **own** common meal. They made it a common meal as they would eat at home. The Lord's covenant meal was thus changed to their own common meal by the manner in which they marginalized those who came late. Instead of recognizing that the love feast/Supper was a covenant meal that all present ate in communion with fellow covenanted people, they were eating as if they were at home during their own meal.

We need to view what happened in Corinth in ref-

erence to Paul's explanation of the unity that should be reflected in the meal. The Corinthians had made the covenant meal of the Lord their "own supper." But Paul had already explained what eating the "one bread" symbolized. *"The bread that we break,* ***is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ****? ... we are one bread and one body,* ***for we are all partakers of that one bread****"* (1 Co 10:16,17).

In order to emphasize the unity that the bread symbolized, some brethren sometimes use one loaf of bread with the fruit of the vine. The one loaf of bread is meant to symbolize the one body of all partakers. What we see today, however, is often a small pile of broken cracker crumbs in a plate that more often symbolizes a broken and fractured body. Division and individuality are portrayed more than fellowship and unity. At least the lack of bread teaches that the participants are maintaining more of a ritual than a celebratory supper.

The use of a crumbled cracker does symbolize something, however. It symbolizes the fact that the brethren put so little time in preparation for the Supper that they do not take the time to prepare the bread for the Supper. In the urban context, we simply drive by the food store and conveniently buy crackers for the Supper. Our little consideration and legal ceremonial "act" of the Supper reflects our little consideration for one another and the One we struggle to remember. We ceremonially keep the Supper, therefore, not as an opportunity to promote love and unity, but to satisfy our own consciences because we have fulfilled some legal act of law.

We are often no better than some Corinthians who made the love feast/Supper their "own meal," for we partake for ourselves in order to satisfy our own consciences. There are few who have restored the love feast/Supper in order to encourage the members to come together in order to think about others. It is the nature of true discipleship to put others before one's self (Ph 2:3). In preparing food for others, the love feast is the ideal opportunity to manifest our servanthood of others.

We must be somewhat patient with ourselves in this matter. We are still struggling with the leftovers of the Reformation Movement over five hundred years ago. The Reformers failed to restore the love feast/Supper that was not a part of Roman Catholicism. The Catholic Church had centuries before discarded the love feast of the early church. The Lord's Supper was minimized to a small wafer, and the priest drank all the wine. The Reformers also forgot the love feast of the first day of the week. The wine was restored for every individual, but the brevity of the ceremony seemed to be more relevant to those who had not yet moved out of religion into honoring the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As "church" moved through the Industrial Revolution of the West, the "chip and sip" ceremony for the Lord's Supper was more convenient to those who lived in a busy business world. When large assemblies became the proud goal of the "successful" church, there was simply no room for the tables of the love feast, or time for a complicated Lord's Supper that was served with a love feast. Serving hundreds, if not thousands in a Sunday morning assembly demanded brevity as opposed to a fruitful time with one another around a love feast table.

There are certainly no instructions in Scripture concerning how long we must be at the table or how much bread and fruit of the vine we must eat and drink. The lack of information on this subject leaves the matter to our own opinions. We must, therefore, determine if the brevity of our "breaking of bread" has gone beyond having too little bread to "eat" and too little fruit of the vine to drink. On the other hand, it seems that some in Corinth could not get enough food to eat and wine to drink. At the same time, it seems that we cannot serve too little bread. We are down to a sip of the fruit of the vine in a small container. There is seemingly nothing wrong with such a brief "supper," but we must keep in mind what the early Christians sought to accomplish with the love feast and Supper. It may be that we have faded into focusing more on ceremony than on celebration.

F. Satisfy hunger at home (vs 22):

The love feast was not a common meal. It was a covenant meal among covenanted people, and thus, it was not to be eaten as a common meal. The disciples' eating together manifested a common covenant relationship they had with God. If some were not providing the opportunity for everyone to eat of the meal, then they were in their gluttonous and inconsiderate behavior manifesting to all their lack of desire to fellowship with all the members in celebrating their common covenant together.

Some of the Corinthians were doing everything but reflecting the oneness of the body of Christ in the common salvation that every member has in Christ (Jd 3). Therefore, in order for the glutton to be able to contain himself, he must eat something at home before he arrived at the covenant love feast wherein the Lord's Supper was observed to remember his covenant with God.

The rude and immature behavior of some brought shame on the *ekklesia* of God. Instead of reflecting the loving fellowship of the *ekklesia*, they revealed that there was little difference between the behavior of some at

the pagan feast of the local temple and the love feast at the assembly of the people of God.

Paul revealed an important point when he questioned that they brought *"shame to those who have nothing."* One of the reasons for the love feast was to provide an opportunity for the poorer families to eat at least one good meal during the week, and possibly take food home for the week. If the church as a whole did not have a love feast, then they would not be taking care of the poorer brothers and sisters, especially the widows and orphans. If they had the love feast, and yet behaved as they did by eating all the food as if they were in their own homes, then they were shaming the church by marginalizing the poor.

Paul's advice is that the ones who have plenty of food should satisfy their hunger at home in order to be able to provide for the poor at the love feast. His exhortation revealed two purposes for the feast in reference to food. It was an opportunity for those who lived in Corinth to provide food for those who traveled great distances back to their homes throughout Achaia. Second, it was an opportunity to provide for the poorer members who attended. Enough food should be brought in order that enough leftovers could feed both the sojourners and the poor.

G. Reflection of unity (vss 23-25):

The Lord instituted His meal for the purpose of reflecting the unique unity of His body, the *ekklesia*. And by unity, we mean more than doctrinal agreement. The unity that is discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is unity in behavioral relationships. Nothing is said about doctrinal matters. So in verses 23–25 Paul revealed to the Achaians what the Lord had personally revealed to him in order that the members of the body renew their common fellowship in Christ on a regular basis.

1. *Bread* (vss 23,24): We must not forget the life that the Jews connected with bread. In 1 Corinthians 10:17 Paul said, *"For though we are many, we are **one bread and one body**, for we are all **partakers of that one bread**."* There is life in the bread, that is, there is life in the one universal body of Christ. Every Christian is a partaker of this life because he or she has been baptized into the body (1 Co 12:13). What Jesus said in reference to the bread in 1 Corinthians 11:23 was to remind the members that He wanted them to understand that **Jesus' one body was given for them in order that they become one living spiritual body**. By their behavior, however, the Corinthians were denying the very thing for which the bread symbolized, that is, the one living organic body.

The subject of the Lord's meal and Supper should never be a subject of contention among the members of the body. If either becomes such, then the very purpose for which Christians come together to eat the meal, or partake of the Supper, reveals hypocrisy on the part of those who partake. Some would partake of both the bread and wine, but at the same time in their contentious actions reveal that they are hypocritically denying the unifying purpose for which the meal and Supper are to promote. Partaking of the "one bread" symbolizes that we are all one united body.

2. *The cup* (vs 25): Only Luke records that Jesus took the cup **before** the bread, and then again **after** the bread (Lk 22:17,19,20). We have often asked people why they partake of the bread before the fruit of the vine, and not after as did Jesus. The reply is usually, "Because this is what Jesus did when He instituted the Supper." But this is not entirely true.

When Luke recorded the event of the last supper of Jesus, he recorded that Jesus partook of the cup both **before** and **after** He partook of the bread (Lk 22:14-20). Actually, during a typical Jewish Passover meal the participants partook of the cup several times. Therefore, at least from Luke's account of the Passover meal, there is no established ("legal") order of serving the fruit of the vine and the bread.

In reference to the cup, both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus said, *"This is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many"* (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24). But here in the 1 Corinthians text, Paul says that Jesus personally told him, *"This cup is the new covenant **in My blood**"* (See also Lk 22:20). "Blood of the covenant" and "covenant in My blood" emphasize two things in reference to blood and covenants. Covenants of the Old Testament were ratified by the offering of blood. Thus the blood of an innocent offering was attached to the ratification of the covenant. A ratified covenant and the blood could not be separated.

In the case of Jesus' new covenant, **remission of sins resulted when one obeyed the conditions that were necessary in order to bring one into a covenant relationship with God**. As Jesus was crucified for our sins, so one must crucify himself and die with Christ in order to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:6). But then we must bury the old dead man of sin in order that he be raised with Christ (Rm 6:4,5). This is what happens when one obeys the gospel by being baptized for the remission of sins (At 2:38; 22:16). In obedience to the gospel one comes into contact with the sin-cleansing blood of Jesus. And thus, in baptism one comes into the blood-bought covenant of Jesus.

There is no cleansing power in the water of baptism. The cleansing power is in the blood of Jesus. One comes into a blood-bought covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through obedience to the gospel (See Mt 28:19,20). There is no remission of sins, therefore, outside the new covenant of Jesus because there is no cleansing blood outside Christ. The cleansing blood of Jesus, therefore, is accessed only when one obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in baptism (At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6). The blood-sanctified life is for those who have been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13; 1 Jn 1:7).

The blood in reference to the new covenant both ratified the covenant, as well as brought remission of sins to those who came into a covenant relationship with God. When one obeys the gospel, therefore, he receives remission of sins because of the blood of Jesus that ratified the new blood-bought covenant. If one is not baptized, he has neither remission of sins, nor has he come into a blood-bought covenant relationship with God.

H. Observe often (vs 26):

The disciples in Corinth observed the provincial love feast/Supper, possibly when the Isthmian Games were conducted every two years in Corinth. However, the Troas brethren "broke bread" with the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (At 20:7). It does not seem reasonable to conclude that the Corinthians observed the meal/Supper only every two years. Such a conclusion seems unreasonable in view of the purpose for which the meal and Supper were to be observed.

It is true that the problems of division among the Corinthians were revealed when they had the special provincial meal/Supper of Achaia in Corinth. Their dysfunctional behavior possibly revealed itself only every two years during the provincial assembly. However, since Christians do not establish their time of partaking through law—Acts 20:7 is not a law, but an example—then we would conclude that they partook **because they wanted to partake every first day of the week when they came together in their homes** (1 Co 16:1,2).

The church in Troas wanted to remember the gospel of grace **every first day of the week**. Therefore, when the house fellowships came together in their respective house assemblies, they wanted to remember the One who brought them all together as one church throughout the whole city and the world. It was as the Jews who partook of the Passover meal in their individual homes throughout Palestine. When they ate the Passover meal, **it was the whole nation eating together** (Ex 12:6). They could eat the Passover meal together without sitting in one another's presence in a house.

The example of the church in Troas reveals that they wanted to keep the Supper every first day of the week because they simply wanted to do so. It is only natural for gospel-obedient people to remember the gospel through the Supper when they come together in their gospel fellowship every first day of the week. This explains why religionists have little concern for the Supper in their assemblies. Religionists who have not obeyed the gospel have little concern for observing the Supper that reminds us of the gospel. On the other hand, it is not possible for gospel-obedient people to ignore a regular opportunity to sit at the table of the One who made it possible for them to sit at the table.

We must conclude that when the early Christians came together in their homes on the first day of the week, they sought to remember the sacrificial blood that brought them individually into the family of God, and thus into one universal nation of God.

In reference to the frequency of the disciples' observance of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul does not give a specific time when they should partake of the Supper. Nevertheless, it should be **often**. "As-often-as" certainly means more than once a year. It is "as-often-as" because such is only natural for those who are in a gospel covenant relationship with God.

There is no command in the New Testament in reference to the frequency for the observance of the Supper. There is only the example of the church in Troas. Since the command is not present in the New Testament, we make a deduction from the assembly behavior of the early church. We conclude that the disciples came together on the first day of the week in order to break bread, that is, to celebrate their salvation in the love feast/Supper event (At 20:7). It was the gospel that motivated them to do so.

We conclude, therefore, that because the Supper was connected with the breaking of bread (a meal), then the early disciples observed the Supper every first day of the week with a meal in order to remind themselves of the blood-bought covenant they had with Jesus, as well as to remind Jesus to come again for them.

The early disciples observed this "reminder" every first day of the week because they wanted to. We might conclude, therefore, that those who do not want to remember the covenant and coming, have forgotten this part of the gospel. Or at least, these two aspects of the gospel have little importance when they come together. When assemblies exist because the attendees narcissistically want to get something out of them, remembrance of the gospel through the Supper takes second place.

Partaking of the bread and cup was, as the Jewish Passover, an enacted message of something of the past, as well as something that was yet to come in the future. The Passover was instituted in order that Israel remember her Egyptian bondage of the past, but also to remember the promises of the future.

In the Supper, Christians remember their bondage in sin in the past, but also the promises of things in the future that are connected with the covenant relationship they now have with Christ. The "proclamation" of this truth continues throughout the existence of the church until Jesus comes again. The redemption that is remembered in the Supper, therefore, has not yet been completed. The final event of the gospel is yet to come. The proclamation of the redemption of the cross through the observance of the Supper will continue until Jesus comes again to redeem His people from this world.

The weekly partaking of the Supper, therefore, was also evangelistic. We can only imagine that if the Achaian disciples did indeed have a special gathering for a love feast/Supper during the Isthmian Games, they had a tremendous opportunity for world evangelism. If some unbelievers did attend the Sunday love feast/Supper event, and then saw someone stand up in the assembly with a cup in his hand—as Jesus did during the Passover meal—and say, "This is His blood," someone would certainly ask, "Whose blood?" Then truly another purpose for publicly observing the Supper would be as Paul said, *"You proclaim the Lord's death* [to the world] *until He comes"* (1 Co 11:26).

The "proclaiming" (preaching) of Jesus' sacrificial death would be to the unbeliever, not to the believer. The believers already know the purpose of the Lord's death. This is why they assemble to remember. But the unbeliever needed the gospel preached to him. The Lord's Supper, therefore, is evangelistic in reference to reminding the world that the Son of God did die on a cruel cross for our sins. We thus continue to observe the Supper "as-often-as." We do so in order to preach to the world who we are and who is coming for us.

I. Unworthy behavior (vs 27):

Unworthiness in behavior negates the opportunity to partake. The phrase "unworthy manner" is an adverb of manner. In other words, it is the manner of behavior and state of mind **at the time when one partakes of the Supper**. It does not, and cannot, refer to our life in general before we come to the table. All have sinned, and thus we would all be considered unworthy in reference to being unable to lead a sinless life.

If we do not eat of the Supper because we had some sin in our life during the previous week, then we must understand that most of us could not partake of the Supper, for all have sinned (Rm 3:23). The problem would also be that if we believed that a "sinless week" gave us the right to eat the Supper, then we would sin because of self- righteous arrogance when we partake. We would be self-righteous and congratulating ourselves for living a supposedly sinless week. We would be as John wrote, *"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). Even worse, John continued, *"If we say that we have no sin* [and thus feel we can partake of the Supper], *we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 Jn 1:8).

What is meant in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:27 is the Corinthians' corruption of the love feast event itself. Some even became drunk. They become inconsiderate and rude in their drunkenness because they ate all the food before the arrival of those who came from great distances across Achaia. In other words, they were drunk when they partook of that which was meant for them to reflect on the sacrificial death of the *ekklesia* of Christ.

They were thus *"guilty of the body and the blood"* because they reflected in their behavior the exact opposite of what the love feast/Supper was to proclaim. The loving unity of the body and the common blood-bought covenant of the body was disgraced. Paul's severe condemnation of these ungodly drunken brethren was not because they violated some ceremonial procedure that supposedly surrounded the feast and Supper. His focus was directly on the attitudes and immature behavior of the unholy hearts of those who marginalized others in the body, as well as shaming the body because of their drunkenness.

J. Opportunity for self-reflection (vs 28):

The Supper is an opportunity for self-evaluation. A man should examine his attitudes and behavior at the moment he joins with his fellow brothers and sisters in the Supper. If he is drunken, then he cannot do this. One of the reasons why the early Christians kept the love feast connected to the Supper was that the love feast laid the foundation of attitudes and behavior for the eating of the Supper. It is difficult for two brethren to continue an argument with one another when they are sitting across the same table and eating together. It is difficult to engage in quarrels when one's mouth is full of another brother's food.

Breaking bread was an occasion that naturally encouraged celebration and joy, as was the occasion of the

Jewish Passover meal. The love feast, therefore, was the perfect social stimulus to prepare people's minds to join together in partaking of the bread and cup. The love feast reflected the unity of the body that was remembered through the Supper. **The Achaians could celebrate the unity of the provincial body of Christ in the Supper because of the unity by which they ate together during the love feast**.

K. Forgetting (vs 29):

If we do not remember, we judge ourselves. If one has lost his senses in drunkenness, then certainly he would have no recollection of what he was doing at the time he ate the Supper with his fellow members. Through his behavior, therefore, he judged himself unworthy to partake of the Supper. In his drunkenness he would not be able to discern the brotherhood of the one body of disciples.

One becomes drunk because he is thinking of himself. But the Supper was a communal occasion where everyone was to be thinking about others. We eat and drink to remember one another. Some in Corinth were doing the opposite. They had denied one of the very purposes for which the Supper was instituted. They did so by selfishly eating and drinking before everyone had arrived. They were thus not remembering the one body because they were thinking about their own physical body (1 Co 10:20,21).

L. Behavioral judge (vs 30):

Our behavior is our judge. Some have affirmed that Paul's reference here was to physical matters. This could possibly be the case in reference to God's **direct** judgment in the early establishment of the church, which judgment was immediately measured out on Ananias and Sapphira (At 5:1-11).

However, we would affirm that what was happening in Corinth could also happen today. And since God does not render physical judgment immediately upon ungodly brethren today who defile the Supper, then we would assume that in this context the immature had judged themselves spiritually sick, if not spiritually dead. And if spiritually dead, it was time for them to grow up. This would provide one reason why the Holy Spirit directed this stern message to these disciples.

M. Self-judgment (vss 31,32):

We have the opportunity to judge ourselves at the Supper. Paul's point is that if those who assembled judged their attitudes and behavior to be spiritually immature, and then corrected their attitudes and behavior, they would not be judged by the Lord. When we are judged by the Lord, the Lord disciplines us in life in order that we not be condemned with the world at the end of time. *"For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives"* (Hb 12:6). Therefore, we do not despise the disciplining of the Lord (Hb 12:5). Such discipline leads the sincere to repentance.

N. Coming together (vss 33,34):

We come together to eat in fellowship. Some have erroneously concluded from the statement made in verse 33 that Paul banned brethren from coming together to eat the love feast. But nothing could be further from the truth. Both Peter and Jude mentioned the existence of the love feast many years after Paul wrote the instructions of 1 Corinthian 11. Under no circumstances did any writer of Scripture forbid Christians from coming together to eat a fellowship meal. In fact, **the nature of the true *ekklesia* assumes that Christians will eat their food together** *"with gladness and sincerity of heart"* (At 2:46).

What Paul does instruct in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is that they *"wait for one another"* when they decide to eat a love feast together. Waiting for one another symbolizes consideration for one another. It presents the opportunity for everyone to have food to eat, especially the poorer families. This is the reflection of the true church of Christ. The love feast/Supper is the opportunity for the *ekklesia* to proclaim before the world the sweet fellowship that all Christians enjoy in Christ.

Now if one cannot contain himself before everyone shows up for the love feast, then he should eat something at home before he comes to the assembly of the saints. He should do this lest on a hungry stomach he cannot control his hunger, and thus manifests an inconsiderate behavior by eating before everyone is present.

When Paul made the statement, *"when you come together to eat,"* we discover at least one reason for the coming together as the body of Christ. It was to come together for the love feast/Supper event. The word is "**eat**," not snack. **They came together for the purpose of eating a meal**. In conjunction with what is stated in Acts 20:7, the early disciples had the practice of coming together to eat a meal in fellowship with one another. During or after this meal, they partook of the bread and fruit of the vine in order to celebrate their salvation through the gospel, as well as proclaim that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

One of their primary purposes for coming together was to eat a meal, and by such to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:33 were that they must wait for one another before they started eating. In this orderly manner, the poorer brothers and sisters, and those who came from great distances, would have the opportunity to eat as much as everyone else. In the love feast, Christians must have all things in common (At 2:44). And the motivation for having all things in common is the gospel. Paul then brings his readers to a "*move excellent way*" in chapter 13.

Chapter 10

THE BREAD

The Jewish definition of unleavened bread is defined as bread that was void of yeast in the making of the bread itself. It is the type of bread that was used for the Passover meal, and thus commonly used in the Lord's Supper in most assemblies of the church today. We arrive at this conclusion simply because the leaven was cast out of the Jewish home for the seven days of the Passover week (Ex 12:14-20). And since the bread that the Jewish disciples were eating during their last Passover with Jesus was unleavened, we copy the example for ourselves in using unleavened bread for the Supper that Jesus instituted. This may be a hermeneutical stretch to use only unleavened bread during the Lord's Supper, but at least the using of such indicates our desire to continue with the symbolism that surrounded the unleavened bread during the Jewish Passover meal.

A. Surrounding circumstances:

It is true that the bread that Jesus used to institute the Supper was unleavened. However, throughout all the biblical accounts of the institution of the Supper, there is no emphasis placed on the bread being unleavened. Therefore, one could not argue the use of unleavened bread on the basis of command. Jesus simply did not command the use of unleavened bread. We can only deduct from His use of the Passover unleavened bread that was present at the time He instituted the Supper, that it was unleavened, which it was.

If we assume that the Jewish Christians used unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper in order to metaphorically symbolize our deliverance from sin as the Jewish nation was delivered from the bondage of Egyptian captivity, then the Egyptian Christians might have some difficulty with the substance of the metaphor.

Likewise, the Gentile Christians throughout the world who knew nothing about Israel's deliverance from Egyptian captivity would see no significance in the unleavened bread, for they would have known little or nothing about the Passover event of Israel. The hundreds of thousands of Gentiles around the world who had no Old Testament Scriptures would have known little about the unleavened bread of the Passover. To them, the simple gospel message of Jesus Christ was preached. They carried on with simple Christianity without all the Jews' metaphorical understandings of either the Passover or Jewish history.

Therefore, to affirm that the circumstances and elements surrounding the institution of the Supper are binding law may lean toward binding something that was never intended to be bound on the church by the Holy Spirit. This would be true because the Spirit knew that the gospel would go to places throughout the world where Gentiles knew nothing about the Jewish Passover. Therefore, if we bind something that was only part of the circumstances and elements of the Jewish Passover that surrounded the institution of the Supper, then we will run into a few problems in reference to consistency. In fact, we may be a little historically naive concerning the Gentile world that had no copies of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Then consider also all the circumstances surrounding the institution of the Supper. If these were binding, then we have proved too much in reference to how we should partake of the Supper. For instance, when the Jews observed the Passover, they were to have bitter herbs in the presence of the bread (Ex 12:8). Must we also have bitter herbs in the presence of the bread of the Lord's Supper? Also consider the fact that the Supper that was instituted by Jesus was conducted at night in an upper room. Are these circumstances during the institution of the Supper to be binding on us when we partake? When the Passover meal was first instituted before Israel was released from captivity, God instructed the participants to have a staff and to be wearing sandals (Ex 12:11). Are we also to have a staff in hand and be wearing sandals when we partake of the Supper? Must we obey these instructions when we eat the Supper simply because these were the circumstances surrounding the Jews' observance of the Passover, which circumstances

were commanded by God in the first Passover?

The conclusion to our reasoning is obvious in reference to the use of unleavened bread. If unleavened bread must be the bread of the Supper simply because such was circumstantial at the time of the institution of the Supper, then we must consistently include all other circumstances that surrounded the institution of the Supper. This would include such things as eating the supper in an upper room at night, and having a staff in hand and sandals on our feet. These were all incidental circumstances that surrounded the Passover when Jesus instituted His Supper with His disciples. Therefore, our use of unleavened bread must find some other justification for its use other than the fact that it was a part of the circumstances that surrounded the Jewish Passover when Jesus instituted His Supper.

B. The leavening of sin:

What we should do is consider the use of unleavened bread from the viewpoint of the blood-cleansed "body" of Christ. When Jesus said, "this is My body," we would ask to which body was He referring? His physical incarnate body was sacrificed on the cross. But the word "body" is also metaphorically used throughout Scripture in reference to the body of believers, the church (Cl 1:18).

The body of believers is one blood-bought body, though there are many sanctified members (1 Co 10:16,17). Though each member in the body of believers has various ministries, each is a part of the one body (1 Co 12:12-27). When we come to Paul's account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, therefore, we must understand that his metaphorical use of the word "body" does not exclusively refer to the sacrificed physical body of Jesus for the sanctification of the spiritual body. He is referring to the sanctified members of the body.

If we conclude that the word "body" in 1 Corinthians 11 refers to the spiritual body of Christ, then we understand that His sacrificial offering for our sins brought us into a spiritual body of sanctified disciples. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul explains that Jesus was the Passover lamb for this body. Under Sinai law, the Passover lamb was to be without blemish (Ex 12:5). Jesus was the Passover lamb who was without sin (Hb 7:26; 9:14). He gave Himself as an offering for us in order that we too be a body sanctified of sin because of His cleansing blood that flows from Calvary. Because the individual members of the body walk in the light, they are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

In the thinking of the Jews, leaven was usually a symbol of evil, though in two parables of Jesus leaven was used as a symbol of the spreading influence of the kingdom reign of God (See Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20,21). But generally throughout Scripture, leaven is used as a figure to represent the influence of unrighteousness.

In the institution of the Passover, God's command that they cast out the leaven from their houses would symbolize the clearing of unrighteousness from their hearts in order to accept the command of God to flee Egypt. The clearing of their homes of leaven for seven days before the Passover meal was symbolic of clearing one's heart and mind of unrighteousness before eating the Passover lamb.

The concept of purging the leavening influence of evil from the body of Christ is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 5:5-8. The Corinthians were to purge out the sinful brother who was maintaining fellowship with them in their love feast. Paul exhorted the church, *"**Purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened**"* (1 Co 5:7). In focusing on the hearts of the Corinthians when they came to their love feast, during which they ate the Supper, he wrote,

> *Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness,* ***but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*** (1 Co 5:8).

Christians are to live the Christ-centered life of righteousness. They are to continually purge unrighteousness out of their hearts. As the body of Christ, they are to purge out the wicked in order that they remain the new lump, unleavened of evil. Unleavened bread, therefore, would symbolize that they as the body of Christ eat *"the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"* (1 Co 5:8).

Jesus gave His body in order to cleanse His spiritual body, the church. In partaking of the Supper, we are individually examining ourselves in order to discover any unrighteous attitudes that we must purge from our hearts. Using unleavened bread follows the metaphorical use of such bread in the Jewish Passover, as well as the Holy Spirit's reference to purging out the leaven of unrighteousness from ourselves. The depth of the metaphor, therefore, makes unleavened bread the natural symbol to reveal that at the Supper, Christians are recognizing again that they were purged of sin through the sacrificial offering of the Son of God on the cross. Partaking of the bread is a time of self-reflection in reference to the cleansing power of the blood.

Since partaking of the bread is a time of self-reflection as the family of God, then it can never be a time of self-righteousness. If we partake because of law, then we have the feeling of self-righteousness when we walk

away from the table. We have been in assemblies where some people, after they had partaken of the Supper, arose up and left the assembly. They had assumed that since they had been obedient to the "law of the Supper," they could leave the presence of their brethren.

But the Supper is not something to leave after we have supposedly performed a legal act of worship. In reference to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:17 that *"we are all partakers of that one bread,"* we understand that we partake together in order to celebrate the one body. There is a communal emphasis to the partaking of the bread in which we celebrate our fellowship with one another. Partaking together of the bread of the Supper is a celebration through which we cleave to one another because of the reconciliation of the cross. We remember that Jesus brought us near to God in one body through the atonement of the cross. We cleave to one another in one body because He became as we are in the flesh in order to bring restoration where there was separation. We will not, therefore, quickly walk away from the experience of eating (cleaving) with our brothers and sisters at the table.

The wisdom of the Holy Spirit in these matters is revealed in the simplicity of making unleavened bread. He knew that the Jews in their travels would be in places where the acquiring of the elements of the bread would be difficult to find. The same would be the case in reference to the Christians being scattered throughout the world during and after the first century.

Making unleavened bread for the Lord's Supper, therefore, is not difficult. With some flour of some grain, mix in a little oil and water, and a pinch of salt. Add a raw egg if desired, and according to the amount of bread one is making. Roll the mixture flat, and then bake slowly in a pan over an open fire, occasionally turning the bread in the pan. If there is an oven available, then bake slowly until the bread is lightly browned on the outside.

Chapter 11

THE FRUIT OF THE VINE

After no more than three days, the juice of squeezed grapes has started to ferment into wine with an alcohol content. Therefore, after three days all the fruit of the vine in Palestine that had been extracted from the grapes after harvest was wine. It is senseless, therefore, to argue over points concerning the contents of the cup that Jesus held up before the disciples. The fruit of the vine in the cup was wine at the time of the Passover.

The fruit of the vine was very symbolic when it was used in reference to the "blood of the covenant" to which Jesus referred. Its symbolism ran historically deep in the culture of the Jews when Jesus held up the cup of wine. In fact, to argue that the cup contained grape juice would mean that the symbolism of the contents would lose all its cultural meaning in reference to the use of wine in the history of the Jews, but also for the rest of mankind at the time of the last Passover.

A brief review of history and science in reference to fermentation is very helpful. 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 to a great extent in settling 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, settling stomachs and purifying water.

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 fierce battle to rescue Lot, his family, and many others who had been taken captive by the marauding kings. Melchizedek's gift of bread is understandable. The men had to eat. But what about the wine?

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 that 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 Messiah of Israel. In describing what the Messiah 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. Cleansing would be associated with the coming of the Christ (Messiah).

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 someone who was simply drunk. But why would the Christ "wash his garments in wine"?

A good Samaritan might enlighten our understanding. There was a traveler 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 wounds. The text does not say that the wounded traveler drank the oil. Neither does it say that he drank the wine. What we are not told is that the wine was used as an antiseptic to clean his wounds.

The cases of Melchizedek and the good Samaritan may present a window through which we can understand the use of wine throughout the Old Testament era, and into the New Testament. It was certainly consumed 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 starts to ferment 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 kill 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 traveler, whose wounds the Samaritan treated, Abraham's men needed the antiseptic qualities of the wine for their wounds. Added to this is the possibly 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 impossible. 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 to Timothy, **is not** the word for drink. Of course Timothy would drink the wine in his drinking of water that had been purified with wine. But 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 purifying agent 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 the 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 beginning to be fulfilled in Him.

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 water mixed with 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 "unmixed (good) wine," of which Jesus provided in abundance.

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, cure 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 outside Jerusalem. Maybe there is more meaning to what Jesus said when He held up a cup of wine 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 (wine) would symbolize the cleansing blood of the covenant**. For His disciples who now 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 Jesus' blood is mingled with our souls, we too are cleansed. **The cleansing power of the contents of the cup was on the minds of the disciples when Jesus held up the cup**. They knew that wine cleansed water and disinfected wounds. They would later understand that His blood would cleanse their souls of sin and continually disinfect us of sin when we wound ourselves.

The next time we 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 flows continually through our veins in order to keep our souls disinfected of sin.

Chapter 12

CONTAINERS AND CONTENTS

In Matthew 26:29 Jesus said, *"I will not drink of this* ***fruit of the vine*** *from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom"* (See also Mk 14:25; Lk 22:16). The phrase "fruit of the vine" (Gr., *genemata tou ampelou*) is used only by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their record of the words of Jesus at the time Jesus instituted the Supper. It is a phrase that was used by the translators of the Septuagint in Isaiah 32:12. It is also a phrase that is used for the wine at the Passover meal of the Jews (*M. Berakoth* 6:1).

In their accounts of the Supper, both Luke and Paul use the word "cup" as **a metonymy to refer to the contents of the cup** (Lk 22:17,20; 1 Co 10:16; 11:25,26). A metonymy is the use of the name of one thing in order to refer to something else. In the context of Jesus' use of the word "cup," **He was using the word to refer to what was actually contained in the cup**. His emphasis, therefore, was on the fruit of the vine, not the physical cup itself.

Because the word "cup" was used as a metonymy by Jesus to refer to the contents of the cup, we must not confuse ourselves in thinking that there is something significant about the container itself. The cup was only incidental in making it possible for the participants to drink its contents. There is no legal command by Jesus in the institution of the Supper to focus on incidentals that were present at the Passover meal. Even the contents of the cup were incidental in the sense that there was wine in the cup. He thus took the opportunity to place great spiritual significance on the contents, not the container.

The fact that the wine and cup were incidental to His pronouncement would assume that both the one cup and the fermented grape juice (wine) were incidental. In other words, if more cups are needed to distribute the fruit of the vine to many people, such does not contravene any mandate of Jesus. We are also assuming that the contents of the cup was wine. But since Jesus used the generic phrase "fruit of the vine," then the contents could be any fruit of the vine, including grape juice.

Some have wondered concerning the contents of the cup, whether it was actual wine or grape juice. It goes without question that the contents of the cup at that time was wine. If we set grape juice out for any long period of time, it naturally ferments into wine. If we would make an argument that the contents of the cup must be wine, then we have proposed a very questionable argument. That is, if we have only grape juice present, must we wait until it ferments into wine before it is "scriptural"? And as previously stated, must we also bind on ourselves the many other incidentals that were also present when Jesus instituted the Supper? **We must keep in mind that if we bind one incidental circumstance in reference to the Passover meal when Jesus instituted His Supper, then we must consistently bind all other incidentals**.

The history of the phrase "fruit of the vine" began with William Tyndale's English translation of the Greek

text. He translated *genematos tou ampelou* with the English phrase "fruits of the vine tree." When the Geneva Bible was translated, the translators rendered the phrase "fruit of the vine." This rendering subsequently became the common translation of the phrase in most English versions.

The word for wine also has an interesting use in the Bible. It is used both figuratively and literally. The English word comes from the Greek word *ampelos* (vine). It is used in James 3:12: *"Can ... **a vine** produce figs?"* In Revelation there was the call to gather the grapes from the vine, for they were ripe (Rv 14:18,19). In Revelation, as well as Matthew 7:16, *ampelos* is used to refer to the product of the vine, that is, the grapes. Thus *ampelos* is used literally to refer to the vine that produces the grapes. But it can also be used as a metonymy to refer to the product of the vine.

The use of the phrase "fruit of the vine" does not in and of itself define either grape juice or wine. But in reference to the spring of the year when Jesus instituted the Supper during the Passover, which was long past the grape harvest, we would certainly conclude that it was wine that was present at the Passover feast when He ate and drank with the disciples.

During the time of a Jewish Passover, rabbinical tradition assumed that each participant of the Passover was supplied with enough wine that would fill four cups. We would certainly disagree with some artist's conceptions that there was only one cup on the table when Jesus instituted the fruit of the vine as a memorial of the cleansing blood of the covenant. There was a cup for everyone present, and there was a great deal of wine. Arguments that surround the use of only one cup to serve the fruit of the vine, therefore, are superfluous.

Arguments that result in unrealistic conclusions can never be correct. Suppose we use only one cup in a large assembly in order to observe the Supper. Now in a small house assembly there would be no problem. However, suppose we have a general meeting of all the saints in an area, for example, as the large assembly that took place in Corinth. Suppose there were 1,000 Christians present and everyone wants to observe the Supper together. If we were allowed to use only one cup during the meeting, we would run into some problems with time. If we used only one cup to serve the fruit of the vine to 1,000 people, taking about eight seconds for each individual to partake, including time to refill the cup, then consider how long it would take to serve everyone. The total time for everyone to drink from the one cup would be a little over 133 minutes or about two and a half hours. That which makes no sense cannot be binding as law. Sometimes common sense is the best hermeneutic.

Chapter 13

THE LORD'S *DEIPNON*

Bible scholars do not question the fact that the early church celebrated a love feast when they came together on the first day of the week. Today, having such a feast is not common among churches throughout the world on a weekly basis. As the disciples of Jesus, we seek to understand the reason why the early disciples had a regular love feast as the foundation for the Lord's Supper. Was there something in the teachings of Jesus that led them to believe that love feasts, during which the Lord's Supper was observed, was a natural event for which they assembled as disciples of Jesus?

What is common among churches today are periodic love feasts. The partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine have been reserved for the weekly Sunday assembly, but the love feast has basically been reserved as occasional activity. Since many assemblies are urban, and constitute a large number of members, the love feast at a large assembled body is certainly difficult. On the other hand, since the early church met in the homes of the members, it was normal that a common meal be eaten among all attending members. In fact, it would have been very inhospitable for a meal not to be offered. Jesus was invited to many such feasts. The early disciples simply carried on with the home love feast on Sunday.

Nevertheless, we invariably read into the text of the Scriptures our common practices in religious matters today. This is especially true in reference to the definition of some key words. We often attach our own life experiences, or "church ordinances" to the definition of words that an author uses to express his point. There is nothing unusual about this. It is simply a human characteristic of interpreting the thoughts of an author by our own beliefs, behavior and background.

For this reason, we must be on guard against interpreting the Scriptures with the influence of our own religious rites. We must always be cautious about reading our definitions of words into the words of the inspired writers. If we did read our beliefs and behavior into a text of Scripture, we must then judge this to be an opinionated and biased interpretation of what the Holy Spirit

wrote. It is the task of the objective translator, as well as the reader, therefore, to put himself in the shoes of the original writer in order to understand what the writer sought to communicate to his immediate readers. This principle is the task of the honest biblical interpreter. And it is with this principle in mind that we tackle the definition of a Greek word that was used in reference to the definition of the love feast/Supper event of the early church.

The old English word "supper" finds its original definition in a rural family meal centuries ago that occurred in the evening after every one of the family came in from the fields. The word was based in a rural, farming culture. The laborers of the field could not enjoy a sumptuous feast in the middle of the day while they were in the heat of their manual labors. The consumption of a great amount of food in the heat of the midday sun, and in the midst of great labor, was not customary in the farming culture from which the word "supper" was originally born. Farmers ate in the middle of the day, but their "fellowship" supper, or full meal was in the evening.

The evening supper was a time for the family to come together for communication and reunion after a hard day's work in the fields. Having grown up on a farm, we can personally testify to the importance of family time during the evening supper. This was a time of communication about the events of the farm that had taken place during the day. It was a time for family renewal and the enjoyment of one another before bedtime. The word "supper" finds its definition, therefore, in this very important evening meal culture where a family came together to celebrate family and to discuss the work of the farm.

After a hard day of work in the fields, you can only imagine the type of suppers we enjoyed on the farm. A snack was often enjoyed during the day, but a full meal with all the trimmings was enjoyed around the family table at supper time. There was no snack in the evenings. As farmers who had put in a twelve hour day, we were hungry, and the table was spread with the best that could be eaten by those who had labored strenuously in the field. To farmers, therefore, the word "supper" always meant a **full meal** from which no one went away hungry.

The translators of our English Bibles did well when they used the word "supper" to translate the Greek word that had a similar setting and meaning in the first century. This was the Greek word ***deipnon***. **This word refers to a full meal, and was defined after the rural culture of ancient peoples**. Food was certainly the primary substance of the definition, but as the English word "supper," there was more to the definition of the word than food. **The *deipnon* was an event. It was an event of fellowship and communication**. It was a time of renewal and a conscious remembrance of the family. It was a feast around which friends and family came together to renew their common bond. In reference to food, there was no concept of a snack in the definition of the word *deipnon*. The great amount of food that was necessary for a supper took a great deal of time to prepare and eat, and thus, the opportunity for great communication. The *deipnon* was a rural social event.

The use of the word *deipnon* in the New Testament verifies this definition, and thus to a great extent, finds a good definition in the old English word "supper" as it was used in rural English culture. The use of the word in reference to the Lord's Supper helps us understand what God intended to be accomplished when Christians came together as an assembly of His people. With this in mind, consider the use of the word *deipnon* as it is defined by its use in the New Testament:

A. Herod's *deipnon:*

> *"Finally, an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday made a* ***supper*** [deipnon] *for his lords, high captains and chief men of Galilee"* (Mk 6:21).

Now we can imagine what type of *deipnon* this was. The *deipnon* was made for the highest ranking officials of Herod's kingdom. But more importantly, it was Herod's birthday *deipnon*. Every effort was thus made to make this a special event. Food was the physical adhesive that held the event together. The lords, high captains, and chief men did not just come together for food. This was an event of Herod's birthday, and thus they came together to celebrate and give honor to Herod while eating a sumptuous full meal.

There was no "snack" food. Such would have been an absolute insult to the guests. Herod would have been insulted, and the officials who attended would have been snubbed. A true *deipnon* (supper) was prepared in order that honor be given to Herod, as well as to those who attended.

The duration of this *deipnon* was not determined by how fast the food could be consumed. As the Jewish Passover meal, it was an event that carried on for hours. The amount of food, therefore, was determined by the duration of the event. If the affairs of the celebration carried on past the time when all the food was consumed, then the host would have been embarrassed. Enough food was prepared for the *deipnon*, therefore, in order to guarantee that the guests could eat during the entire sequence of events that took place during the feast.

And there were certainly a great deal of things that took place during this particular historical event. Though our record of this event in Mark 6 was the occasion for the beheading of John the Baptist, the number of events that took place emphasize the fact that a great period of time transpired during the feast. Dancing by the daughter of Herod, took place. Conversation and a command for the beheading of John took place. The actual beheading of John took place. There was enough time for the head of John to be presented to Herod during the *deipnon*. This *deipnon* went on for hours. It was not a "snack-and-run" event.

In the event of Herod's birthday *deipnon*, the Holy Spirit established an initial definition for His use of the word *deipnon* in the New Testament. The Spirit wants us to understand that the *deipnon* was an event where food was the adhesive around which several other events took place. There was celebration, honor given, activities carried out, conversation, and a renewal of Herod's kingdom position.

Today, the English word "feast" could also be used to translate the word *deipnon*, though many of our English translations have stayed with the word "supper." But keep in mind that the New Testament definition of *deipnon* is **first determined by the context of the event in which the word was used**. It was used in reference to Herod's birthday feast, and in a similar manner, it was used in the following events of the New Testament that are mentioned throughout this chapter. The use of the word in the following events clearly defines the word according to its common use in the first century.

B. Jesus' *deipnon*:

> *Then He* [Jesus] *said also to him who invited Him, "When you prepare a dinner or* ***supper*** [deipnon], *do not call your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you prepare a feast* [deipnon], *call the poor, cripple, lame and blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just"* (Lk 14:12-14).

The social environment of the *deipnon* that Jesus sought to institute among His disciples was different than the previous *deipnon* that was conducted by Herod. Herod's *deipnon* was worldly and exclusive. Where Herod sought to receive honor from his guests, Jesus on the other hand wanted the poor, cripple, lame and blind to be honored by an invitation. He wanted His disciples' suppers to be an inclusive occasion, especially for those who were financially and physically disadvantaged. Where Herod sought to be repaid with loyalty from his guests, Jesus taught that we must be loyal to those who cannot repay our good deeds. However, regardless of the difference in the special environment of the two feasts, the definition of the word *deipnon* in reference to the meal was the same.

The *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke was to be an event of feasting and fellowship. It was an inclusive *deipnon* where a full meal was served. Now imagine inviting the poor, cripple, lame and blind just for a snack or cup of soup. Was this what Jesus had in mind? The very purpose for which the *deipnon* was to be held would be totally reversed if only a snack was offered to the guests. When Jesus wanted us to give honor to the poor, crippled, lame and blind, what message would we be giving to these guests if we served them only a snack? After the snack, would we then go somewhere else and enjoy a full meal by ourselves at the local restaurant, or with our own family by ourselves? There is something about the thought of doing this that is contrary to the spirit of living the gospel of Jesus.

Jesus' *deipnon* that is defined in the text of Luke 14:12-14 was a meal during which one was involved in fellowship and communication with no strings attached. In other words, the host, through the *deipnon*, sacrificed without expecting something in return. In order to manifest this sacrifice, a full meal of food was prepared. No snack would have ever communicated to the guests that the host was sincere in his or her efforts to fellowship and communicate with the disadvantaged.

We must not assume by Jesus' reference to those who were not invited that a *deipnon* could not be held for friends, family and relatives. His point in the context is that we must conduct a *deipnon* experience beyond our friends, family and relatives. Our feasts with friends and family, to the exclusion of the financially and physically disadvantaged, is the type of feast that Herod conducted. Jesus wanted us to invite everyone.

We must understand the historical context in which Jesus' instructions were given. The culture of the rich and famous at the time was defined by Herod's *deipnon*. Only friends and officials were invited to Herod's supper. There were thus too many in the culture of the time who wanted to do as Herod. They practiced exclusive suppers. The *deipnon* among the rich and famous became a meal of exclusion. Jesus initiated a gospel paradigm shift in reference to having a *deipnon*. And it seems that the first Christians carried on with Jesus' instructions (See At 2:44-46).

Jesus wanted to reverse the exclusive sentiment in reference to the *deipnon* that would be conducted by His disciples. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was

to be inclusive of all, not only of friends, family and relatives. The poor, cripple, lame and blind were to be included.

Culturally speaking, therefore, Jesus added a new definition to the *deipnon* of the times. Everyone was to be invited. There were to be no restrictions if one were not of the financial status of the host. There were to be no restrictions because one was physically disadvantaged. There were to be no restrictions because one was not of the same social status with others. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be totally inclusive. We see in Jesus' instructions of Luke 14:12-14 that He was laying the foundation upon which He would eventually establish His *deipnon* that was to be practiced by His disciples. **It was a *deipnon* that would reflect the gospel character of those who had obeyed the gospel**.

Unless we confine Jesus' teaching on this matter to the culture of His immediate time, we must read again verse 14 where He stated, *"For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."* The resurrection of the just and unjust will take place in the last day when Jesus comes again (Jn 5:28,29; At 24:15). We assume that this applies to us also. Therefore, until He comes again at the end of time of all things, Jesus expects His disciples at any time in history to conduct the *deipnon* about which He spoke in Luke 14.

Now as a reminder, and because Jesus' instructions concerning His *deipnon* are to be practiced among His disciples until His final coming, we must not forget that this *deipnon* was not a snack for the poor and physically disadvantaged. Jesus' *deipnon* was a full meal as would be given to one's friends, family and relatives. As one would prepare for friends, family and relatives, he or she should also prepare a *deipnon* (supper) for the poor, crippled, lame and blind.

We must have these special feasts until Jesus comes again. This may be a real paradigm shift for some, but it is a shift that we must seriously consider in order to restore the gospel fellowship of the love feast/Lord's Supper event.

Lest we stray from the point, we must not assume that the Lord's Supper is the *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke in the context of Luke 14. All that we want from the event of the Luke 14 *deipnon* is the definition of the word. And the definition of the word *deipnon* as it was used by Jesus is that it was a full meal around which communication and fellowship took place. We would conclude, therefore, that the early Christians founded their love feasts on the principles that He explained in Luke 14.

C. A *deipnon* for Jesus:

> *Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a* ***supper*** [deipnon] *and Martha served* (Jn 12:1,2).

We can only imagine the atmosphere of this *deipnon*. It was certainly an occasion of great celebration and joy. It was a supper that was specifically prepared for Jesus to celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus. The occasion was a time of celebration, for it was probably the first meal that Jesus enjoyed with Lazarus, Mary and Martha after Lazarus' resurrection. In fact, Mary was so overcome with thanksgiving that she bowed to her knees and anointed the feet of Jesus with a very expensive ointment (Jn 12:3). Though an impromptu action on her part, the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary manifested that the event was not a snack-and-run event.

Mary did not anoint Jesus' feet at the time of Lazarus' resurrection. She did not anoint His feet at any time between Lazarus' resurrection and the event of the *deipnon* in the context of John 12. The fact was that the atmosphere of the *deipnon* presented an opportunity for her to reveal her extreme gratitude to Jesus for raising her brother from the dead. From what took place during this *deipnon*, we would assume that a *deipnon* is a time when unusual things can take place as people manifest their extreme gratitude for what Jesus has done in raising all of us from our spiritual death in sin. For the Christian, the *deipnon* is a sacred event of the week. It is a time for expressing gratitude and manifesting celebration that is centered around the eating of a meal together.

D. The last *deipnon* of Jesus:

> *Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during* ***supper*** [deipnon], *the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and was going back to God, rose from the* ***supper*** [deipnon] ... (Jn 13:1-14).

The context of this event was the last *deipnon* (the Passover meal) that Jesus ate with His disciples. This *deipnon* carried on for several hours. During this time Jesus rose from the table and washed the disciples' feet. Sometime during this particular occasion, John, the brother of James, was leaning on the breast of Jesus (Jn 21:20). Also during this *deipnon* Jesus rebuked the dis-

ciples concerning their competitive discussions with one another (Lk 22:22-30). There was much eating, much speaking, and a great deal of events that took place. The *deipnon* was the occasion for all this conversation and events to occur. Though the washing of the feet of the disciples, and the institution of the "Lord's Meal" took place on this occasion, it was common for those who ate the Passover meal to enjoy a great feast.

It was customary that those who ate at the *deipnon* of the Passover, and other feasts, to recline or lounge on carpets or pillows around the food that was placed on a low lying table before everyone. In this relaxing posture they could stay a great deal of time in eating and enjoying one another's company.

On this particular occasion, Jesus metaphorically took ownership of the "table." He claimed the common table that was used for the food. He did so when He said to the disciples that they would eat and drink *"**at My table**"* (Lk 22:30). Jesus' emphasis was not on the physical wooden table. Neither was His primary focus on the food. However, the food played a significant part in establishing the environment around which the events of this meal took place, and thus, it became the definition of "My table" that He claimed.

When Jesus said "My table," His emphasis was seated in the events that took place on this occasion. There was much food, much talk, and many events that surrounded "His table" meal with the disciples. Therefore, when we later read in the New Testament concerning the table of the Lord, we must not forget that the table was at the time of its original establishment an opportunity for conversation and eating.

When Luke recorded the statement of Luke 22:30 in his letter to Theophilus over thirty years after the actual event, "the table of the Lord" was known as a time when the disciples feasted. Theophilus would thus interpret this statement of Luke to refer to a table meal of the disciples of Jesus during which Jesus took a portion of the fruit of the vine and bread in order to establish a memorial of His body and blood.

As we read this statement in our Bibles today, we would also interpret "My table" to refer to what took place during the last Passover meal that Jesus had with the disciples. There is no reason why we should change the environment or substances of "the table." It was a table of food then, and now the "Lord's table" is still a time for feasting, fellowship and remembrance during which a memorial is made in reference to the body and blood of Jesus.

Our traditional practice has been to separate the *deipnon* that took place on the Passover from the event of Jesus using the fruit of the vine and bread of the *deipnon* to establish a memorial of His body and blood. We thus establish two "tables." One "table" was the meal during which the "table" of the Lord was established. The other "table" was the abbreviated "chip and sip" of the *deipnon*.

But as we dig deeper into the practice of the New Testament church, it is evident that the early Christians did not make this separation. They continued with the events of the occasion of the Passover *deipnon*. A full meal was prepared and eaten, during or after which the Lord's Supper was eaten as a part of the meal. There was only one table meal, during which Jesus changed the Passover table meal into His own table meal.

E. The final *deipnon*:

> *"Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage **supper*** [deipnon] *of the Lamb..."'* (Rv 19:9).

> *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun. And he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together for the great **supper*** [deipnon] *of God ..."* (Rv 19:17).

Described in the preceding two statements of Revelation 19:9 & 17 is the great marriage *deipnon* that is yet to come. The metaphor of this final *deipnon* is based in the real and actual marriage meal that was conducted at a marriage celebration. During such a feast there was great celebration, much food, loving fellowship, and many events that brought rejoicing to the parties who were brought together in marriage. The meaning of the metaphor, therefore, is what we will experience in the great marriage banquet to come.

A metaphor derives its meaning from that which is earthly and literal. What is earthly and literal with the supper (*deipnon*) that is mentioned in these texts of Revelation is a full meal of celebration. The angel in Revelation metaphorically encouraged the saints with a "great *deipnon*" that they will have with the Lord when He comes again. It will be great because it will be the *deipnon* of God. We cannot imagine that the "great *deipnon*" that God will provide for the faithful will be only a snack. It will be a great celebration feast with the Lord because the gospel will have been completed through the resurrection of the righteous into eternal glory

Chapter 14

FELLOWSHIP IN BREAKING BREAD

We have studied through the preceding texts of the New Testament where the word *deipnon* is used in order to bring ourselves to the subject of this chapter. In view of the definition of the word *deipnon* that is contextually defined in the New Testament, we do not think much discussion is necessary to be continued as to what reference is made in the context of 1 Corinthians 11. Speaking against the Corinthians' immature attitudes and behavior with which they conducted themselves during the Lord's *deipnon*, Paul wrote,

> *Therefore, when you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's* ***supper*** [deipnon]. *For in eating, each one takes before others his own* ***supper*** [deipnon]. *And one is hungry and another is drunken* (1 Co 11:20,21).

Paul rebuked the Corinthians with the words, *"But in giving these instructions* [concerning the love feast] *I do not praise you because you do not come together* [for the love feast] *for the better* ***but for the worse****"* (1 Co 11:17). *"Therefore,"* Paul continued, *"when you come together* [for the love feast], *it is not to eat the Lord's supper* (deipnon) [because of your immature attitudes and behavior]*"* (1 Co 11:20). In this context, therefore, Paul was writing about their love feast (*deipnon*) during which their dysfunctional and divisive attitudes were revealed. The eating of the meal together had become an occasion where the rude behavior of some was revealed (See 1 Co 11:19).

Paul then wrote of a personal encounter that he had with Jesus during which he received the following information,

> *For I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread. And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "****This is My body which is for you****. This do in remembrance of Me." After the same manner He took the cup also after* ***supper*** [deipnon], *saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood"* (1 Co 11:23-25).

The Corinthians had messed up a completely good *deipnon* event by their inconsiderate behavior. In their eating of the Lord's *deipnon*, they had made it their own meal in that each one ate his own food before others arrived. They were inconsiderate and immature. Paul exhorted them in the conclusion of his exhortations concerning their behavior: *"Brethren,* ***do not be children in thinking****. However, in malice be babes, but in thinking* ***be mature****"* (1 Co 14:20).

In a negative way, the Corinthians' dysfunctional and immature behavior during the love feast explains what a love feast should not be. Some were being gluttons and drunks, for some were consuming all the food and drinking all the wine. Therefore, it is evident from the statements that Paul made in 1 Corinthians 11 that the early disciples sat at the "Lord's table" during their love feast. There was no separation between the table feast and the "Lord's table." The love feast laid the spiritual and emotional foundation upon which the Supper was better understood.

The following sources of this chapter are given, not to establish authority, but to present a historical consensus of thought of scholars concerning the meal fellowship of the early disciples in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. These are obvious conclusions to which many Bible students have come. Therefore, the Bible student must not forget that with his particular translation of the Bible, he too can arrive at an understanding of those Bible subjects that are necessary to obey in order to please God.

Both Jesus and the writers of the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. But neither Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of the New Testament, resorted to the "original" Hebrew words and phrases of the Hebrew text in order to give "authority" to what Jesus personally spoke, or what the Holy Spirit inspired the early New Testament writers to write.

Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that the text of the New Testament was first written in the common Greek language of the day. For this reason, we must to the best of our ability understand what the first recipients understood through the common words that were originally used by the Holy Spirit. Most translators of the text have done well by bringing essential interpretations of key words into the language of our native tongue. Because of this readers can trust their current translation of the Greek texts.

God is pleased that any disciple can use the translation in his hand to come to an understanding of the message of the gospel and fundamental teachings that are necessary for salvation. **Every teaching that is difficult to understand, or must be understood only by**

scholars and dictated to the church, therefore, cannot be made a requirement for salvation and fellowship of the saints. This principle must be understood when studying the subject of the Lord's Supper and love feast.

A. *New Bible Commentary*, 2nd Edition, *"The Breaking of Bread"*:

"In the early church of the Acts there are scattered references to table-fellowship. '*E.g.* Acts 2:42,46 where the phrase is 'breaking of bread'. In Acts 20:7 (but not 27:35, which describes an ordinary, non-cultic meal) there is a reference to a fellowship meal, using the identical phrase. The fact that no mention of the cup is ever made in Acts leads H. Lietzmann ... to the elaborate thesis that this Jerusalem communion in one kind is the earliest and most original form of the sacrament, ... It was, *ex hypothesi*, a fellowship meal beginning with the familiar Jewish custom of breaking of bread—a continuation, in fact, of the common meals of the Galilean ministry when the Lord fed the crowds and in which the Lord and his disciples formed a *haburah*."

"... the name 'breaking of bread' may be a quasi-technical expression for the whole meal. What is significant about the early form of the Eucharist is the note of *joy* which stems directly, not so much from the Galilean meals as from the post-resurrection appearances, many of which are associated with a meal between the victorious Lord and his own (Lk. 24:30-35,36-48; Jn. 21:9ff; Acts 1:4 (RV mg.); 10:41; Rev. 3:20)."

B. *New Bible Commentary*, 2nd Edition, *"Love Feast"*:

"St. Paul's account [in 1 Cor. 11:17-34] of the administration of the Eucharist [Lord's supper] shows it set in the context of a fellowship supper. His farewell discourse at Troas which continued till midnight was delivered at a fellowship meal on the first day of the week which included the Eucharist (Acts 20:7ff)."

"Although the common custom of fellowship meals among the Jews may have been sufficient ground for the primitive Agape [feast], some would trace the practice to the actual circumstances of the Last Supper. The sacrament was instituted at a Passover meal. Some scholars contend for another type of fellowship meal customary in the *qiddush* and *haburah* gatherings. The early disciples probably reproduced the setting of the first Eucharist, preceding it with such a fellowship meal. The separation of the meal or Agape from the Eucharist lies outside the times of the NT."

C. John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table* (Fairmount, CA: Leafwood Pub., 2003), p. 80:

"Jesus instituted a supper where his people might remember him. His model for this supper was the sacrificial meals of the Hebrew Bible. In particular, he instituted his own supper in the context of a Passover meal. Jesus instituted a meal, not just bread and wine. The meal (in Luke, cup-bread-supper-cup) fulfills the Passover in the kingdom of God and anticipates the full messianic banquet in the new heaven and new earth. If the Old Testament festivals involved a full meal (like the Passover) and the future messianic banquet involves a full meal, the new covenant meal, the Lord's supper, also involves a full meal."

D. F. F. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1951:

"'The breaking of bread' referred to in Acts 2:42,46 may describe a common meal which included both the Agape [feast] and Eucharist [Lord's supper]."

E. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Canon Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, (1976: Inter-varsity Press, p. 158):

1 Corinthians 11:21 "reveals that at Corinth the Holy Communion was not simply a token meal as with us, but an actual meal. Moreover it seems clear that it was a meal to which each of the participants brought food."

F. *The New Lion Encyclopedia*, John Drane:

"The early church observed the Lord's supper as an exclusive community meal."

G. *The Dictionary of the Bible*, J.G. Simpson, James Hastings, ed. "Eucharist" (1909: T & T Clark, Edinburg), p. 244:

"The name Lord's supper, though legitimately derived from 1 Cor 11 vs 20, is not there applied to the sacrament itself, but to the Love Feast or Agape, a meal commemorating the Last Supper, and not yet separated from the Eucharist when St. Paul wrote."

H. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Bread" (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), p. 543:

"The idea of hospitality developed into the ancient Christian custom of connecting the *agape* [feast] (Jude 12; cf. 1 Cor. 11:21) with the Lord's supper. Community by partaking of the same bread is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:17. But the first idea in the Lord's Supper is still another symbolism: the conception of the bread of life, the spiritual food given to mankind when Christ surrendered Himself unto death in order that His followers might find life eternal. This institution of holy communion (Mt. 26:26), has been expanded largely in Jn. 6:32-58, words spoken when 'the Passover ... was at hand' (Jn 6:4), and when Christ had shown Himself the divine host by the multiplying of bread. So the symbolism of bread in Israel's religion and the symbolism of bread in the common life of the eastern countries were joined to the central theme of the Lord's Supper: the sacrifice of Christ as the life-bread for His people."

I. I. Howard Marshal, *Christian Beliefs: An Introductory Study Guide* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 80:

"This simple rite [the Lord's supper] was observed by His disciples, at first as part of a communal meal, Sunday by Sunday."

J. *Christian History*, John Dooch, ed. (Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House), Issue 37, p. 3:

"In the first century, the Lord's Supper included not only the bread and the cup but an entire meal."

K. In A.D. 112, Pliny wrote to Caesar Trajan of the Roman Empire concerning one of the Sunday habits of Christians.

"It was their [Christians'] habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing .... After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food."

Chapter 15

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MEAL

Few people question that the early disciples had a weekly celebration feast, during which they observed the Lord's memorial. At the end of the first century, Ignatius, whom tradition says was a disciple of the apostle John, wrote,

"And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day **as a festival**, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days" (*Epistle to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX).

Ignatius' statement seems to indicate the events of the first day of the week assembly of Christians throughout the first century. Other than the records of this occasion that we find in the New Testament, there is also the testimony of the *Didache* (or, "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"). The *Didache* was written around the end of the first century. In the teaching of this document, the love feast and Lord's memorial were still celebrated as one event.

When Ignatius was martyred around A.D. 115, he too mentioned in his writings that the love feast and Supper were still celebrated as one feast. But by the late second century and early third century there was discussion concerning the separation of the two celebrations. By the middle of the third century and first of the fourth century, the separation was complete. During the fourth century the love feast was actually forbidden in some assemblies.

There have been several suggestions concerning why this separation occurred. Some have suggested that when pagan practices in reference to the assembly made their way into the early assemblies of the disciples, the celebration of the love feast had to go. The primary reason for this change, however, was probably the result of a change from small home assemblies to large assemblies in purpose-built "church buildings." When the early church turned from small assemblies that were primarily home oriented to larger assemblies in public buildings, it was difficult to continue the love feast. The result was that the love feast gave way to the observance of the Lord's Supper that was customized to a small wafer of bread and a sip of wine in order to accommodate larger gatherings of people.

In the large assemblies the atmosphere of the fellowship of the members changed. The contact of the members with one another during the weekly assembly turned from being communal as it was in the homes, to more formal assemblies where the attendees changed from being participants to becoming spectators. Subse-

quently, the manner by which the saints communed with one another was abbreviated to what is commonly practiced today in large assembly churches.

By the middle and end of the fourth century, the love feast lost out as a part of the assembly of the disciples on the first day of the week. When church buildings that were first introduced by Emperor Constantine of Rome, became the common place of assembly in urban centers, the love feasts were banned from the buildings. In fact, at the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 363 the love feast was forbidden in the church buildings. Though this banning was the ruling of an apostate religious movement, the tradition of the abbreviated "chip and sip" supper has continued to this day in the assemblies of most churches.

No Bible historian denies the fact that the Lord's Supper was observed in the first century by the early Christians in their homes and during a full meal. The environment surrounding the Supper was a full meal of fellowship among the disciples who met regularly on the first day of the week as the disciples did in the breaking of bread in Troas (At 20:7). However, things have unfortunately changed. When the love feast began to disappear from the Sunday fellowship of the saints, the terms "breaking bread" and "Lord's Supper" were used less frequently in historical records from the second century.

One of the first terms to be used to replace this terminology was the word "Eucharist." This is a Greek term that means "giving thanks." It should be noted that this term is nowhere used in Scripture to refer to the Lord's Supper. The common use of the term in reference to the Supper reflected the change many began to make in their understanding of the purpose of the Supper.

Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) was one of the first historical writers to use the term "Eucharist" in reference to the Supper. What was a memorial remembrance, or reminder in reference to Jesus coming again, became a "sacrament" where the sinner offered his obedience in a self-sanctifying performance to merit the grace of God. Partaking of the Supper changed from remembering the sanctification of the blood of the cross to obtaining our own self-sanctification by obediently partaking of the Supper. It was a subtle change. This Roman Catholic view of the Eucharist has subsequently been retained by many religious groups, and thus, the Supper ceased being a communal meal of remembrance. It became to many a self-sanctifying religious ritual.

The Eucharist became a somber ritual that was performed by the priestly class of the Catholic Church. As the administrators of the sacrament, therefore, the Catholic priests became the official officers before whom the people had to appear in order to have the sacrament administered on their behalf. The Eucharist became a legal ritual of the church that was performed only by the clergy.

The Eucharist was not an occasion to celebrate the sanctification that the participants already had through the cross of Christ. It became a ritual by which the participants would obtain sanctification. The leaders in the Reformation Movement moved away from the Catholic priest being the center of reference in performing the self-sanctifying ritual of the Supper. However, the move in the Reformed churches was to the individual member who was to assume his own responsibility of performing the ritual of the Supper in order to sanctify himself.

We must never forget that in the early church the love feast/Supper was an occasion of mutual celebration when the disciples came together to remember and remind the Lord. But when many of the church went into apostasy, all this changed. When the apostasy came, so also did the change in reference to the purpose of the Supper. The love feast was abandoned and the Supper became a self-sanctifying sacrament of sacrifice for the sins of those who submitted to the control of the religious leaders. During the Reformation Movement five hundred years ago, the individual member took the place of the Catholic priest. As a result, the self-sanctifying ritual of the Supper continued within the four walls of denominational churches throughout the world.

The change of the Supper from an occasion to remember the sanctification of the cross and a reminder to Jesus that He come again, changed to a legal ritual. The change of the Supper to such a ritual eventually gave rise in the fourth century to the doctrine of transubstantiation. This was the belief that the bread changed into the literal body of Jesus and the wine into His blood. When adherents were administered the bread they were supposedly given the literal offering of Jesus' body. When the priest drank of the wine, he was drinking of the blood of remission on behalf of the people. The result was that the people came to the sacrament with fear, hoping for the forgiveness of their sins through the wine that had transformed into literal blood, and which the priest drank on their behalf.

In this way, the Roman Catholic priests maintained control over the people. Unless the people showed up for the administration of the Supper by the priests, they received no forgiveness of sins through the priest's administration of the Supper on their behalf. This centrality of the priests in the forgiveness of the people was recently revealed in the movie, *Silence*. The movie was set in the seventeenth century of Japan. The power of

the Roman Catholic priests over the persecuted Japanese Catholics of that century was revealed in one statement of the movie: "The people honor you, the priests, above the Christ." They honored the priests because the priests had the power of administering the sacraments of the church.

This belief concerning the priests and Lord's Supper has prevailed for centuries. Many of the Protestant churches that pulled away in protest against the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century carried with them the belief that the Supper event itself was a "self-sanctifying offering" for the sins of the people. Today, many Protestant churches carry on with a ceremonial "chip and sip" ritual that is referred to as "Holy Communion." Emphasis is on the "sacrament" and "elements." It is observed in the atmosphere of something similar to a funeral service wherein the pastor exhorts the prospective partakers to examine themselves in order to determine if they are "worthy" in character to be able to partake of the "holy emblems." As the priests of the Catholic Church, some pastors of Protestant churches today have become the administrators of the "sacrament," and the people continue to be subjected to the pastor's control, thinking that they have no offering for sin if they do not partake of the symbolic cracker and sip of grape juice, or wine.

The Lord's Supper, therefore, has to some continued to be a religious ritual of self-sanctification whereby one justifies himself before God in his obedience to "the law of the Supper." The forgiveness of one's sins is supposedly based on performing the legalities of the Supper. Once the ritual is performed, then the attendee can walk away with the feeling that he has somehow cleansed himself because he has performed a legal law of worship.

Churches continue to have occasional love feasts. However, the emphasis of the feast seems to be more on the food than on the love that surrounds the mutual covenant that the participants have with one another, which covenant was celebrated by partaking of the blood of the covenant. When the Lord's Supper was removed from the love feast, the feast lost much of is spiritual connectivity between the participants and Christ. As with the Passover meal that Jesus enjoyed with His disciples, the full spiritual significance of the Supper is revealed best when it is seated in the environment of the love feast. Our communing at the love feast prepares our minds to commune with Jesus after the feast through the Supper.

The early disciples believed that it was best that the Supper should be eaten in conjunction with a love feast in order that the participants enjoy the love and appreciation that identifies the disciples of Jesus (See Jn 13:34,35). When the Supper is so observed it seems to retain its significance as an occasion when Christians join in and celebrate their gospel fellowship that comes from the cross. It seems that this was the purpose of the love feast/Supper of the first century Christians.

Because the Supper has been separated from the environment of the love meal, it has often turned into a cold legal ritual similar to the rituals of the religions around us. Whether priests, pastors or official administrators, some have often subjected the people to a morbid ceremony wherein they make the offering for the people. If we compared the typical modern-day medieval performance of the Supper with the celebration of the love feast/Supper that was characteristic of the early church, we would have to confess that there are some significant differences in the atmosphere surrounding the Supper. At least we must recognize that the typical Lord's Supper that is commonly practiced today in assemblies is quite different from that which we read about in the New Testament. This does not assume that what is practiced today is wrong. However, it does indicate that in the area of our observance of the Supper, we are somewhat removed from the custom of the love feast/Supper of the first century.

Chapter 16

CHEATING OURSELVES

Was it wrong to abolish the love feast as a part of the Sunday assembly of the saints? Unless one can find a command in the New Testament that instructs the saints to have a love feast every Sunday, the answer to the question is "No." Especially among those church groups that were more Jewish oriented, the early love feast/Supper was carried over into the early church from the Passover meal. For almost three centuries, many Christians enjoyed their Sunday assemblies as an opportunity for a celebratory meal together. It was a joyous occasion and an opportunity to enjoy one another's fellowship. And since Christians were the minority faith in a harsh idolatrous world, we can understand why they placed a great deal of emphasis on the fellowship of the love feast.

However, we would be presumptuous to affirm that every church of disciples in the first century had a love feast at every assembly.

The Lord's Supper with a full meal was a joyous occasion that was combined as one event in the week for many of the early disciples. There was much food present during these feasts. In fact, there was enough wine available during the occasion that would allow some in Corinth to become drunk. Nevertheless, the picture we see of the Sunday feast of many of the early Christians was certainly different than the typical Sunday assembly that is witnessed today in the typical gathering of Christians. This is particularly true in reference to urban churches.

A. Feasting together:

Since there are no commands in reference to the frequency and location of the love feast, then we would conclude that the further we move away from the example of the early church, the more we realize that we are missing something in our relationships with one another. Since all of us seek better relationships with one another in Christ, we realize that we are cheating ourselves. We are cheating ourselves of the blessings that the early Christians enjoyed from their fellowship around the table of the Lord in a love feast environment.

Since most churches today have removed the love feast from their regular Sunday assemblies, they have deprived themselves of a weekly fellowship of love that naturally prevails during a fellowship meal. They have deprived themselves of a fellowship meal of unity that would help take our minds off our busy world and into being worthy in mind to partake of the Supper.

God made us creatures who love to rejoice together over a good meal. But if a good meal has not been prepared on a regular basis for all the saints, then we cheat ourselves by not being able to enjoy food together as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not that we violate any commandment. We simply cheat ourselves as the *ekklesia* of Christ by not presenting the opportunity for the saints to enjoy the loving fellowship around a feast. Most churches realize this, and thus they plan for occasional love feasts for themselves.

However, when most churches gather on Sunday there is often a ceremonial Lord's Supper. It is quick and simple, and can easily be carried out to serve a great number of people in a large assembly. The elements have almost become a symbol to symbolize the symbols. Jesus meant for the **eating** and **drinking** of the bread and fruit of the vine to symbolize His body and blood. But we now symbolize the **eating** and **drinking** with a small piece of cracker and sip of juice. But again, unless we can find a command that is violated, then certainly such a ceremonial observance is not wrong. The point is not that something is violated, but opportunities are lost. The spirit of eating and drinking together at a meal as the family of God is lost in our efforts to hurry on with the rest of our busy schedules.

The typical "fast-food Supper" that is observed by most churches today reflects the nature of the industrial/business urban culture in which many Christians live. We simply do not want to take the time to enjoy a meal together on Sunday. Some churches take pride in the fact that they can serve the Lord's Supper to a great number of people in a very short time on Sunday morning. In fact, since the attention span of the average Western citizen in listening to a lesson is now less than twenty minutes, it is difficult to confine the "eating and drinking" of the Supper within the typical "hour of worship."

Such behavior is a reflection of the nature of our fellowship. An "hour of worship" is something that we have created after our own desires, and according to the hustle and bustle of our life-styles. We thus deprive ourselves of ourselves. We deprive ourselves of a loving fellowship with those with whom we have a common salvation.

What is commendable, however, is that many Christians realize the dilemma they are in, especially in an urban setting. Admittedly, it is quite difficult to have a "congregational love feast" in an urban setting. It is simply impossible to have a love feast of five hundred people or more in the building that was designed for attendance only. Also, when the church is meeting in a school hall, congregational love feasts are virtually impossible.

Nevertheless, many members have not lost their desire to restore the loving communicative atmosphere that is characteristic of a love feast. These are those members who are searching after every assembly to find visitors they can take home with them for their family love feast. Others are looking for someone to take out to eat at a local restaurant. We have found that those members who are filled with gospel love will find some way or means by which to release their love around a plate of food.

Some assemblies in the rural African context have been quite creative in their efforts to restore the love feast. A large pot is set on the fire (coals) close to the place of assembly. Those who seek to donate to the food of the love feast bring their mealie (corn meal) and put it in the pot of boiling water. Others bring "greens." During the assembly, the food cooks. By the time the assembly is over, the food is cooked and the love feast

begins. Everyone must eat on Sunday, and everyone usually eats the same thing. African brothers and sisters have just decided to eat the same thing with one another on the first day of the week.

The preceding is in contrast to some situations in which we have found ourselves. In fact, some have a traditional Sunday meal with their immediate families only. There is nothing wrong with this. The problem comes when some members seek to speed up the assembly of all the members in order to rush off to their own family meal. In house churches this can present itself sometimes as rude behavior. For example, some host families have often become inconsiderate in this practice. They will be preparing food for their own family in the background of the assembly, waiting for the assembly to conclude in order that the attending members leave the house. Once everyone is gone, then the family can eat their own exclusive meal together.

It is obvious that such behavior is inconsiderate, especially in the context that some attending members have had little food for the week. The Christians who lived in Corinth reversed this practice. They ate all the food before the arrival of those who came from great distances throughout the province of Achaia. When conducting a love feast, such behavior is both rude and inconsiderate, and thus, defeats the purpose of the love feast. When no love is manifested in the event, then the love feast is simply a feast.

The Scriptures say nothing about how many people or where, or how love feasts are to be conducted. In a house setting Jesus took the cup after the Passover meal. What many today do is first partake of the cup in the assembly, and then they have a love feast with some invited guests at their home, or at a local restaurant. The beautiful thing about the law of liberty is that God allows us to use our ingenuity in order to accomplish the purpose of a love feast. As long as we are motivated by the gospel of God's love for us, and we are inclusive in our love feasts, then God is pleased.

It is always good to read the spirit of the early church that was recorded by Luke in Acts 2:41-47. If we can capture the spirit of celebration of the early disciples, we can understand why the Sunday love feast was such an opportunity for rejoicing among the early disciples. The spirit of the early *ekklesia* was reflected in their Sunday meal with the Lord. Are we missing something by seeking to minimize "church" to the point that we cannot spend time with one another around a meal? However, this does not mean that the whole church must celebrate a love feast all together at the same place. It seems that the first disciples in the urban setting of Jerusalem celebrated their love feast from house to house, not as one congregational meal. They could not go out to a restaurant together, for there were no restaurants. They simply continued *"daily with one accord in ... breaking bread* ***from house to house****"* (At 2:46). Those churches that meet in the homes of the members need to closely review this inclusive relationship in reference to the love feast.

B. Lack of elements:

There are different scenarios around the world in reference to our present observance of the Supper. There are the "full meal" brethren where the Supper is observed either during or after a meal. This would be the more fulfilling by which to reflect the participatory fellowship of an entire group of people. Then there are the "chip and sip" brethren who eat the Supper and run because of a lack of time. Or, these may be those who run home or off to a restaurant by themselves.

But then there are the "no element" situations where there is neither fruit of the vine nor bread, or both, available in order to celebrate the Supper. What should brethren who are in such situations do in reference to partaking at the table of the Lord? This is not an uncommon occurrence throughout the world, especially in the desert regions of the world, or during times of famine and war. Thousands of brethren go for months without any fruit of the vine, or even bread. Should such brethren in their assemblies simply forsake the opportunity to remember the significance of the fruit of the vine and bread that are used to stimulate remembrance of their gospel atonement? It may be for this reason that Paul, in reference to the Supper, said, *"For* ***as often as*** *you eat this bread and drink this cup"* (1 Co 11:26).

For many brethren throughout the world, "as-often-as" is very infrequent because they have no fruit of the vine or bread, or both. What they do during their time together is take time to remember, though they do not have the elements to eat and drink. We see nothing wrong with this simply because in the institution of the Supper, Jesus wanted us to focus on the spiritual aspects of the physical props of the bread and wine, not on the elements themselves. There is nothing holy about bread and wine. What is holy is that which is signified. If there is no bread and wine available, then we can still take time to focus on the holy significance of the body and blood. The lack of bread and wine does not negate the fact that we are the holy nation of God (1 Pt 2:9). (As will be seen later, we must not forget the Israelites in the wilderness.)

C. Necessity to eat:

In reference to the love feast, people must eat food on Sunday. When even the most destitute of people come together, they can eat together. Sunday is not an established day of fasting. If it is not, then everyone can come together in order to eat together, or at least go to their homes in small groups in order to have love feasts from house to house as did the early urban Christians in Jerusalem. The food that would have been prepared to eat in the home after the Sunday assembly can be shared with others who likewise prepared an after-assembly meal for their families. As the Passover meal could be shared with another family in one's home, it seems that the early Jewish Christians continued with this tradition.

We have found that too many Western commentaries have established the rules for eating the Supper and love feast. It is easy for the West to have plenty of food for consumption. But this is not a reality in much of the developing world. The assembly of the saints on the first day of the week, therefore, is an opportunity to share. At least the poor have an opportunity to eat on this day, or to be invited to someone's family meal to eat. Those who have much have an opportunity to share with those who lack. Jesus shared with us, and it is possible that the early disciples realized that the Sunday assembly was an opportunity to have all things in common as Jesus had all things in common with us (At 2:44). Their home meals were changed from exclusive family meals on Sunday to inclusive love feasts for invited guests (At 2:46).

Chapter 17

FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

In the New Testament there is no command concerning the time when Christians should assemble on a regular basis. We have only the example of the early Christians as to when they assembled, assuming that verbally the apostles had communicated to them that the first day of the week was the day of regular assembly (At 20:7; 1 Co 16:1,2). However, we must keep in mind that the early Christians also met daily in some situations (At 2:42). We can understand why they met daily if the opportunity was available for them to gather either in small groups or as the entire number of disciples in a particular city. But in the first century, their meeting on the first day of the week was unique as a group of religious people.

We also assume that they made the decision to meet on Sunday simply because **Sunday was a day for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus** (Mk 16:1,2). It was also the day when the gospel was first officially announced to the world (At 2:1 – Pentecost was the first day of the week).

The foundational purpose of their assembly was fellowship, joy, celebration and continual mutual edification. These reasons for assembly were carried over into the love feast/Supper atmosphere of their Sunday assembly. If their emphasis was only on the atoning death of Jesus, then we would expect them to have met regularly on Friday, the day Jesus was crucified for our sins. But they met on Sunday, the day Jesus was raised from the dead. Sunday, therefore, was a day of joy and celebration. It became their special "Lord's Day" meeting when they came together to celebrate, not to mourn (See Rv 1:10).

In discussing the subject of this chapter, we assume that everyone understands that there was no special Sunday holiday in the Roman calendar of the first century. Christian slaves, and employed people, had to work all day Sunday, just like any other work day of the week. For this reason, the Lord's Supper was truly a "supper," a meal that was eaten in the evening when everyone came home from their work.

In reference to the observance of the Supper, Jesus said that His disciples should do this in reference to the body and blood. Therefore, the question arises concerning how often should we observe the Supper.

We would first consider Acts 2:42 in reference to the disciples' continuation of certain practices immediately after the baptism of about 3,000 people, and thus, the beginning of the church. *"And **they continued steadfastly** in the apostles' teaching, and fellowship **in the breaking of bread**, and in prayers."*

They continued in the breaking of bread, though in this context of Acts 2 we are told only that they continued daily in their evangelistic outreach in the temple courtyard. The breaking of bread was from house to house. When we refer to Paul's statement to the Corinthians concerning the frequency of the early disciples' observance of the Supper, we discover again that there was no specific time. He simply stated, *"For **as often as** you eat the bread and drink this cup"* (1 Co 11:26).

"Continuing steadfastly" and "as-often-as" do not

give a specific day of the week when the early disciples partook of the Supper. In fact, there **is no command** in the New Testament concerning when the early Christians should partake of the Supper. We have only deductions from examples to draw conclusions.

Since we have concluded that "breaking bread" referred to the eating of a full love feast meal, and that the Supper was a part of the love feast, then we could conclude that the disciples partook of the Supper during a love feast when they came together. We must now determine when they came together for the love feast/Supper. This day of the week is not stated in the house to house meetings of Acts 2.

A. Textual evidence for Sunday:

The disciples did come together for the love feast, during which they partook of the Supper (1 Co 11:21). In the Corinthian context, they came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) (1 Co 16:1,2). The Christians in Troas also came together on the first day of the week to break bread in a love feast/Supper celebration. In the Acts 20:7 statement concerning their coming together, the occasion was specifically for the purpose of eating the love feast with the Lord's Supper. We are assuming, therefore, that the Supper was observed on the first day of the week when the Troas Christians came together to eat the love meal.

The Acts 20:7 statement by Luke affirms that the disciples in Troas *"were gathered together."* The verb Luke used is in the passive voice. The indication is, therefore, that their coming together was a mutual decision on the part of every member. The majority, at least, had made a decision to eat together in a communal meal on Sunday. The phrase in the verse, *"to break bread,"* is an infinitive. The phrase could therefore be rendered "for the breaking of bread." In other words, the primary purpose for their coming together was the celebration of the love feast/Supper event. If we were to use the example of the Troas disciples, then we would also come together for a love feast on the first day of the week, during which we would partake of the Lord's Supper. What many churches do today is come together for the Lord's Supper, but they forget the example of the love feast, if indeed either the love feast or Supper is restricted to the first day of the week because of an example.

Sometimes we are not consistent in our interpretations. For example, if the Acts 20:7 establishes a mandate for the day on which the Supper is to be observed, **then it also establishes a "law" for the day on which the love feast should be conducted**. Some bind the Supper on Sunday, **but reserve the love feast for any other day of the week**. It seems that some have simply ignored this apparent inconsistency since we have already established that the early disciples partook of the Supper during their breaking of bread in a love feast.

To evade this inconsistency in interpretation and application, we have conjectured that the phrase "breaking bread" refers exclusively to the Lord's Supper. But we are not the ones who must be convinced that the "breaking of bread" in Acts 20:7 refers **exclusively** to the Lord's Supper. This is an understanding of which Theophilus, the recipient of the document of Acts, must be convinced. As stated previously, Theophilus' understanding of the phrase "breaking of bread" was based on the common usage of the phrase in the culture in which he lived. Luke assumed that Theophilus would interpret the phrase to mean a full meal, which was consistent with its use throughout the documents of Luke and Acts.

The frequency of the disciples' coming together to "break bread" is historically stated in Acts 20:7. Their coming together on the first day of the week is factually stated in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Since the Troas and Corinthian Christians came together on Sunday for the love feast, we would not be presumptuous to conclude that it was their common practice to come together also on the first day of the week in order to partake of the Supper that was celebrated in conjunction with the love feast. Unfortunately, what began in the fourth century was a scaled down "breaking of bread" to the Supper only. "Breaking bread" became a simple partaking of a piece of bread and a sip of the fruit of the vine. Today, we are left with a legacy of what is an abbreviated celebratory event that was originally on the first day of the week in the first century a celebratory meal and Supper event.

In this context, we should also consider the Acts 2:46 historical account in reference to the daily breaking of bread by the early Christians in Jerusalem. *"And continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple, **and breaking bread from house to house**, they ate their **food** with gladness and sincerity of heart."*

In the context of daily fellowship meals from house to house, also consider the Jerusalem disciples' daily evangelistic work in the temple courtyard. This is brought out in Acts 5:42: *"And **daily in the temple**, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus **as the Christ**."* Since this daily activity refers to preaching Jesus as the Christ, then their ministry in the temple was for evangelistic purposes. The believers already accepted Jesus as the Christ. They did not need to be reminded every day from house to house that He was.

Since Acts 2:46 refers to their evangelistic outreach

in the temple courtyard, the reference to the breaking of bread from house to house indicates that there were also daily fellowships in their homes as they came together to eat with one another. Acts 2:46 is stating that the early disciples were not only evangelistically active on a daily basis in the temple courtyard, but also daily active in having meals with one another in their homes.

We would suggest, therefore, that in every context where the phrase "breaking bread" is mentioned, **we do not have to include that the Lord's Supper was observed**. In fact, Luke wanted us to be clear on this because he specifically mentioned "food" in Acts 2:46 when using the phrase "breaking bread." But he did not refer to food in verse 42.

B. Historical evidence for Sunday:

We add here some quotations of the early church writers only as evidence to point out the fact that the first Christians established a Sunday heritage of observing the Supper. Just a few quotations of the early church writers of the second century confirms the fact that the early Christians assembled on Sunday for the love feast and Lord's Supper.

1. *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (written around A.D. 120):

> "But every Lord's Day you do gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure" (Ch. XIV).

2. *First Apology*, Justin Martyr (around A.D. 140):

> "And on that day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits .... Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks has been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors [helps] the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead" (Ch. LXVII).

3. *Stromata*, Clement of Alexander (around A.D. 194):

> "He in fulfillment of the precept, according to the gospel, keeps the Lord's Day, when he abandons an evil disposition and assumes that of the Gnostic, glorifying the Lord's resurrection in himself" (Book VII, Ch. XII).

4. *On Idolatry*, Tertullian (around A.D. 200):

> "To the heathens each festive day occurs but one annually; you have a festive day every eighth day [Sunday]" (Ch. XIV).

A few years ago in our travels we came across a group of disciples who were meeting and praising God, thinking they were the only Christians in existence in their area. They were meeting together on the first day of the week and partaking of the Lord's Supper. They did not know all the arguments in reference to meeting on the first day of the week in order to partake of the Supper. We asked them why they believed that the eating of the Supper on every first day of the week was important. They simply replied, "Well, that is the only natural thing to do." Gospel-obedient people seek to remember the gospel of the grace of God when they come together. They need no commandment to remember the gospel that motivates them to come together in order to celebrate their salvation.

Christians meet to partake of the Supper, not because of some law they have devised to support their case, but because of the gospel. It is the gospel of the incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, present reign, and coming again of Jesus that motivates Christians to regularly partake of the Supper in order to proclaim to the world that they are gospel-obedient people. It is the gospel of His coming again about which Christians seek to remind Jesus to come for them. Gospel-driven Christians, therefore, partake of the Supper, not because they must according to law. They do so because they want to reveal their appreciation to God for His grace that came through Jesus. It is because of this grace that Christians have been baptized into one body (1 Co 12:13). It is as Paul wrote,

*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? For though we are many, **we are one bread** and **one body**, for we are **all partakers of that one bread*** (1 Co 10:16,17).

In this revelation of Paul to all of us, the partaking of the bread and cup is more than a memorial of Jesus' incarnate body that was offered and the blood of the covenant that was poured out for the remission of sins. 1 Corinthians 10:16,17 is about us and our fellowship with one another as the *ekklesia* of Christ. Eating and drinking during the Supper, therefore, is the natural thing to do. In eating together, we commune with one another. We fellowship as the one body of Christ. We manifest our oneness by partaking together in assembly of the one bread.

It is only natural that we reflect on the one body of Christ when all of us eat and drink together at the table of our Lord on the first day of the week. It is not something that we must be commanded to do. It is something that naturally happens when gospel-obedient people realize that they have a common salvation in the body of Christ. Who would not want to do this as often as possible when Christians come together on the first day of the week?

Chapter 18

THE REAL WORLD

This final chapter is centered around common sense and the repetition of some very important conclusions that have already been stated. God did not issue any commands that violate common sense, or binds on His people things they could not do in unfortunate circumstances. In all our discussions and disagreements surrounding the Lord's Supper we must always resort to common sense. Unfortunately, there are times when it is difficult to comply with that which we seek to do. But we must remember that God is a God of understanding, mercy and grace. So when it comes to discussing anything concerning the Lord's Supper, everyone must manifest a spirit of understanding, mercy and grace, just as God did toward Israel in their wilderness wanderings. It is this spirit of understanding, mercy and grace that gospel-obedient people seek to remind themselves of when they surround the table of the Lord.

A. Following the instructions:

We need to exercise common sense in following the instructions of Jesus when He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." When He personally revealed to Paul instructions concerning the institutions of the Supper, Jesus did not reveal a particular day of the week when the disciples should observe the Supper. After quoting the Lord's personal instructions to him concerning the Supper, Paul only stated, *"as often as"* (1 Co 11:26).

Under normal circumstances, "as-often-as" was interpreted to be on the first day of the week by the early disciples. We assume that they partook on this day because of a verbal command of the apostles, for there is no written command in reference to the Supper on the first day of the week. It is for this reason that Christians today partake when they come together on the first day of the week.

But there are a few things we must consider because there are two physical elements involved in partaking of the Supper. The Passover of Israel would illustrate that we too have some difficulties in reference to the elements. Consider the time between the Israelites' second and third observance of the Passover. Immediately before they left Egypt they observed the Passover to initiate its institution (Ex 12; Nm 33:3). They did not keep the Passover again until they were in the wilderness of Sinai (Nm 9:1-5). When Israel first came into the land of promise, God instructed them that they must restore the Passover (Dt 16). But this was about thirty-eight years after they left Mount Sinai, the last time they had kept the Passover. It seems, therefore, that they did not keep the Passover throughout their years of wandering in the wilderness.

We are not told why Israel did not keep the Passover during their thirty-eight years in the wilderness. However, we could certainly assume why they did not. They could not make unleavened bread in the wilderness, for they had no grain out of which to make flour. They were wandering from place to place, not farming in one location. It was a wilderness area. God fed them with quail and "manna" from heaven. The Hebrew word "manna" means, "what is it?" Though they did not know what it was, it was surely not unleavened bread.

When we have no "elements" for the Lord's Supper, then it is impossible to **eat** the bread and **drink** of the fruit of the vine after the example of the Lord during

His last Passover. God never condemned Israel for not keeping the Passover for thirty-eight years. So when we do not have the "legal" elements for the Supper, would it not be fair that we use what we have? After all, the sanctification that we remember is not in legally partaking of the elements, nor in our self-sanctifying efforts to legally comply with some prescribed physical elements. The sanctification is in the blood of the cross, not in our efforts to self-sanctify ourselves through legal "bread" and "wine."

We must not forget that if any circumstances surrounding the Supper are legal, then we are observing the Supper on the basis of justifying ourselves through the keeping of legalities. And if we are partaking simply to keep law, then we may be partaking in order to justify ourselves through the practice of perfect law-keeping every first day of the week. It might be good here to read again Paul's statement on matters as this:

> *"... **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).

When Jesus commanded us to keep the Supper in remembrance of Him, He was not referring to keeping the Supper as a legal statute of law in order that we justify ourselves through law keeping. If He were, then we would be partaking of the Supper in remembrance of our own self-justification through the keeping of law. We would be worried about "keeping the law of the Supper." This is self-justification, which self-justification sets aside the justification of Jesus we have through the cross that we seek to remember in the Supper.

There is no paradox in reference to the Christians' observance of the Supper. Paul's statement of 1 Timothy 1:9 possibly helps us understand this point: *"Knowing this, that **the law is not made for a righteous man**."* Gospel-driven people need no law in order to do that which is right. They are righteous according to God's righteousness, not according to their own righteousness that they presume to accomplish for themselves through perfect law-keeping (See Rm 10:1-3). Therefore, Christians come to the table of the Lord **because they already have been made righteous by the gospel of God**. They are righteous before they arrive at the table. They are not made righteous because they have come to the table in order to accomplish righteousness through the perfect performance of law.

The self-righteous religionist assumes confidence in his weekly obedience to the "law of the table." On the other hand, those who are imputed with the righteousness of God go away from the table truly thankful for the One who made them righteous through the cross before they arrived at the table. They came to the table because of the righteousness of God through the cross. They did not come to become righteous.

B. The elements:

There are times when the Supper simply cannot be kept. Many brethren throughout the world are often "in the wilderness" when it comes to the bread and fruit of the vine of the Lord's Supper. Does the absence of the physical elements for the Supper make them lawbreakers? The vast number of the saints today live in developing countries of the world. They cannot get up on Sunday morning and drive by a food store on their way to the assembly in order to purchase bread and wine.

In many situations in economically depressed areas no one has any money to buy the elements for the Supper. In such situations we have noticed that the contribution is taken up on Sunday just to buy the elements for the Supper for the following Sunday. The purpose of the contribution has thus changed from benevolence and evangelism to buying the elements for the Supper.

Too many of the books and articles that are written on the Lord's Supper have been written by blessed Western brethren who have no struggles with acquiring bread and the fruit of the vine for the Supper. And too many brethren in the developing world extract their research from Western-published books. Western writers usually have little understanding of the real world in which the brethren of the developing world (Third World) live. They subsequently impose guilt on brethren in the developing world who cannot comply with some supposed legal requirements for observing the Supper on a regular basis.

We were once in the country of Guyana in South America on an evangelistic mission shortly after the termination of eight years of communistic rule in that country. During the years of communist rule, there was no bread in the country. Guyana is a very tropical country, and thus, the people could not grow their own grain to make bread. They simply went without bread for almost eight years. How would we suppose the brethren in Guyana partook of the "bread" during the Supper during those years?

If several disciples were living in some isolated place in Mongolia, or somewhere in a desert region, it would be difficult for them to have any fruit of the vine, or even bread for the Supper. In some places of the world, people have no knowledge of the fruit of the vine. Wine

simply does not exist. And in Islamic countries as Saudi Arabia, not only is drinking alcoholic beverages forbidden, but to have alcohol in one's home is against the law. This is true in most Islamic countries of the world. For those brethren who feel that only wine can be used in the Super, then we would assume that the Supper with wine would always be against the law in Islamic countries.

In some places of the world there is no grain from which to make flour in order to make bread. The Holy Spirit knew that Christians throughout history would sometimes live under such circumstances. For this reason, some who are quite naive about such matters should be a little more cautious about binding laws surrounding the Supper where God has bound no laws.

In our hermeneutics to interpret all passages that refer to the Supper, we must understand that in some circumstances the Holy Spirit simply left the matter to us to determine what to do. If we make suggestions on the matter, some would take our suggestions and consider them to be law. Therefore, we will make no suggestions lest our opinions become matters of law. When circumstances arise that make it impossible to comply with all matters surrounding the observance of the Supper, then it would be good to at least take a moment to remember what we are to remember in the Supper. We are cross-justified saints of God because our sanctification was accomplished two thousand years ago.

Those who live in urban centers of the world sometimes need to have a reality check on these matters, and thus, allow those brethren who live in those isolated areas of the world where bread and fruit of the vine are virtually nonexistent to determine for themselves what they will do in reference to the elements of the Lord's Supper.

When the early disciples of Judea were scattered because of the persecution (At 8:4), we are sure they did not go forth with grapes in their pockets or grape vines attached to their belts. There would have been many occasions when they did not observe the Lord's Supper for extended periods of time. If one assumes that the observance of the Supper validates the existence of his Christianity, then he will have difficulty in dealing with this common problem that is so prevalent throughout the developing world today. At times, there are simply no grapes, and sometimes no grain to make bread. What would Jesus advise in such situations? Use common sense. He would probably say the same thing He said to an early evangelist on his travels, "as-often-as."

We have found that brethren have a great deal of ingenuity in reference to the fruit of the vine in the Supper. We have drunk the juice of boiled raisins, squeezed grapes, diluted wine, undiluted wine, and some liquids about which we asked no questions. Out of necessity, we have eaten about every sort of "bread" there is, if indeed some of it could be called "bread." The word "manna" ("what is it?") would be more appropriate to describe the "bread" that some have used. Brethren have simply done the best they could in situations where acquiring the elements for the Supper on a weekly basis is a challenge.

The brethren in these difficult areas of the developing world, or isolated and depressed circumstances, must not burden themselves with guilt by reading the essays of some First World "scholar" who can easily go to the nearest food center for the elements of the Supper. We must simply resort to common sense in these matters, realizing that God is pleased with our efforts to do the best we can. Jesus instituted the Supper on the foundation of knowing every situation in which His disciples would be throughout the world and throughout history. Common sense, therefore, must prevail.

C. Cheated:

Now in reference to the partaking of the Supper, some have cheated themselves by the infrequency by which they keep the Supper. If churches have access to the elements for the Supper, it is difficult to understand why they have only an "Easter Supper" or "Christmas Supper." If churches have access to the bread and fruit of the vine, their infrequent observance of the Supper betrays their lack of motivation by the gospel.

Since the Supper is the center of reference during a covenant meal that the disciples celebrate in fellowship with one another, we wonder about the infrequent observance of the Supper by some churches. We sometimes question whether those who call themselves disciples of Jesus are actually motivated by the gospel in appreciation of what Jesus did on the cross. It is only natural that gospel-obedient disciples remember through the Supper the gospel by which they are saved. However, if one has not obeyed the gospel in baptism, then we can understand why there would be little emphasis in churches that teach one is saved by faith only apart from obedience to the gospel.

There are also those who cheat themselves of extended fellowship together with a simple "chip and sip" ritual. Most churches today observe the Supper after this manner. It is not something that is wrong. It is only something that deprives us of observing the Supper on the foundation of a unifying fellowship meal. We have found that though some brethren yearn for the foundational love feast, out of convenience, they desire to con-

tinue with the abbreviated Supper. This is especially true in urban centers where individual Christians have little time for one another in their busy schedules. But also, it is difficult to have a weekly love feast, especially among churches in large assemblies.

It was interesting to note a recent social study in the United Kingdom concerning social interaction. The results revealed that about 60% of the people from their late teens to twenty-five identified themselves as being lonely. We would assume that this percentage is not far off from what exists in many urban centers around the world. Because many churches have ignored any weekly fellowship love feast, regardless of the day on which it is conducted, they may be missing a great opportunity for evangelistic outreach with the gospel of hope.

In order to offer fellowship to the lonely, there are those brethren who seek to restore the foundational love feast in order to enjoy the spirit of celebrating fellowship around the Lord's meal. This may not always be possible on a regular basis, but at least it is an effort on the part of some to bring the members of the body together in the spirit of fellowshipping over a full meal. Regardless of the regularity of the fellowship love feasts, it is certainly commendable to see churches restoring such in their fellowship with one another.

Someone once complained to us that they could not have the full fellowship meal because there were too many poor members in the church. We truly do not think this brother understood the nature of the *ekklesia* of Christ, nor one of the purposes for the love feast. Some of the Corinthians used the opportunity of the absence of the poor to eat all the food and drink all the wine before the poorer brethren arrived at the general assembly. Would we be this way as the church of Christ by simply not having a love feast at all? Is not one purpose for the fellowship meal to make sure that poorer brothers and sisters, with their children, have at least one good meal a week? What have we become when we forsake the love feast because we have too many poor brethren among us?

If a church forsakes the feast because of the poor, then that is a church that has lost its identity as a body of Christ. It has simply become an institution of religionists who assemble under the name of Jesus, but have forgotten the function of the gospel in their lives. It might be good to remind ourselves of what James said on this matter, for those to whom he wrote had some problems in their relationship with the poor.

> *My brethren,* ***do not show favoritism and hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ****. For 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, and you show respect to the one who wears the fine clothing, and you say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor, "****You stand there****, or sit here at my footstool,"* ***have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts***? (Js 2:1-4).

The Lord's Supper is not a ritual to validate who we are. We are not keeping a ceremonial act to identify ourselves as a church. The Lord's meal is a reflection of who we are in our obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. We observe the Supper, therefore, not out of obedience to law, but out of our response to the gospel of God's grace that was revealed on a cross outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. It is for this reason that there never was any need for a commandment as to when we should keep the Supper. It is a gospel response to keep it "as-often-as" we can in our appreciation for all that we have in Christ. To many of the first Christians, the occasion was every first day of the week when they came together for the purpose of eating the love feast. It would be best to continue this example lest we forget what we are to remember, and specifically forget to remind Jesus to come and deliver us from this world.

When the early disciples came together to eat, they did not come to a funeral service. The love feast was a joyous covenant meal that was different than their common meals they ate daily at home. It was different because it was eaten with covenanted people in order to proclaim Jesus, and in preparation for the final banquet meal that will be eaten when Jesus comes again (Rv 19). And thus we look forward to eating the banquet meal with Jesus upon His return. Until that celebration, we will continue to proclaim the gospel through the eating of the Supper.

Book 40

Fundamental Messages

Christians proclaim a unified message of the gospel that was revealed by the triune God. In this last book of this volume, we would urge every reader to proclaim the fundamental truths of the following chapters. It is our mission to preach a message of truth and salvation to a world that must hear the gospel. It is upon the foundation of these truths that disciples are brought together in unity throughout the world in order to give all men the opportunity for eternal life. The early Christians knew these truths. The result was Luke's record of what happened in the first century. *"Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (At 8:4). As we go about everywhere in the world, we must be preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1

THE ONE GOD

Christians believe in the loving and merciful God of heaven. He is not harsh or unjust. He lovingly encourages His people to behave after His character of love, for He is love. There is only one God and He has revealed His love to man. He has revealed Himself through three manifestations, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in order to work His eternal plan to bring those who love Him into heaven.

In the Bible the plural Hebrew word *elohim* is translated "God". This plurality of the one God was revealed when God said in the beginning, "Let Us" create man (Gn 1:26). The fact that God is one, and yet plural in manifestation, is something that is not possible for humans to understand. We cannot produce a complete understanding of God by human reasoning lest we create a god after our own imagination. If we create a god in our minds that we can fully understand, then we know that such a god does not exist, for the nature and work of this god would be limited to our human thinking.

The only God that exists is the one above our imagination. This God exists in spirit (Jn 4:24). He is the God unto whom Christians call all people to be obedient, for we are His creation. God desires that we live in eternity with Him. His appeal to us is to seek Him first in all things (Mt 6:33), and submit to His will (1 Pt 5:6). He works to give us eternal glory in His presence (Mt 25:34).

I. THREE MANIFESTATIONS OF ONE GOD:

There is only one God (Dt 4:35; 6:4,5; Is 43:10,11; 45:5; 46:8-11). He could manifest Himself in many ways. But in the Bible it is recorded that He manifested Himself in only three ways.

A. The Godhead at the baptism of Jesus:

At Jesus' baptism, God the Father spoke from heaven. As a dove, God the Holy Spirit descended upon God the Son, Jesus, who was on earth in a bodily form (Mt 3:16,17; Jn 1:33).

B. The Godhead at in the ministry of Jesus:

While Jesus worked by the power of the Holy Spirit on earth, He found favor with the Father in heaven (Lk 1:30-35; 4:14).

C. The Godhead revealed to the early church:

Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment of his death. At the same moment, he saw the Son and the Father together in heaven (At 7:55-59; see also Mt 28:19,20; 1 Co 11:2; 2 Co 13:14).

II. THE ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD:

God has revealed his nature to all men through His word. In order to know the one true and living God, therefore, we must know Him through the revelation of His word. Those who do not know the word of God, cannot know the true God of heaven.

A. God is love.

The central attribute and character of God is love (1 Jn 4:16). In all His work with people, He manifests love (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 3:1,16). He commands that His obedient believers manifest love for one another (Jn 13:34,35; 1 Jn 3:14). Those who are true believers in the true God of heaven, work to serve Him with a spirit of love and mercy (1 Jn 2:10,11; 4:7-21). We know that if anyone creates an idea of God that promotes an unloving attitude of violence or terrorism, then that person has imagined a false god who behaves according to one's own carnal ambitions.

B. God is eternal.

The central nature of God is that He is the only eternal spirit who is without beginning or ending. He is eternal (Dt 33:27; Is 57:15). Since all things have not existed for eternity, it is logical to conclude that we were created by the eternal God (1 Co 8:6; Cl 1:16; Rv 4:11). And since nothing can exist outside the presence and power of God, we must also conclude that God is the only eternal power who maintains the existence of all things. God has now given this power and authority to God the Son who reigns over all things (Mt 28:18; Rm 5:17; 1 Tm 6:15,16; Hb 1:3).

C. God is unchanging.

He is **unchanging** in His behavior, character and nature (Nm 23:19; Ps 33:11; Ml 3:6; Hb 6:17,18; Js 1:17).

D. God is all-powerful.

He is **omnipotent** in that He can do all that can possibly be done (Gn 18:14; Jb 42:2; Mt 19:26; Rv 19:6).

E. God is present everywhere.

He is **omnipresent** in that He is not confined to any specific place (1 Kg 8:27; Ps 139:3-10; Jr 23:23; At 17:28).

F. God knows everything.

He is **omniscient,** and thus knows all things in nature (Gn 15:5; Ps 147:4,5; Is 40:26), all the works of man (Ps 119:168; 139:2,3), the heart of man (1 Sm 16:7), and the future (Is 42:9; 46:11). Only God can be omniscient, for such identifies Him as God. He knows all that can be known.

III. THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD:

From the time of the creation until the final coming of Jesus, God's work among men on earth was first manifested through Jesus, who was God manifested in the flesh (incarnation) (Jn 1:1,14). From the time of the incarnation, God the Father has existed as the head of Jesus (1 Co 11:3). God the Holy Spirit initially worked through Jesus on earth. He now dwells in obedient believers. The inseparable relationship between the Father and Son, while the Son was on earth, reveals the oneness of the Father and Son in nature and work throughout this earthly ministry of Jesus on earth.

A. God works as the Father.

1. The Father is the "Father" in the Godhead (Gl 1:1; Cl 1:2,19; 2:9).
2. The Father is the head (center-of-reference) of Christ (1 Co 11:3; Cl 2:9).
3. The Father is the Father of all things (Ep 4:6).
4. The Father gave all authority (power) to the Son (Mt 28:18; 1 Co 15:24-28).
5. The Father's will was done by the Son on earth (Jn 4:34).
6. God created all things through the Son (Jn 1:1-3; Cl 1:16; Rv 4:11).

B. God worked on earth through the Son.

God, the Son, existed before the creation of the world (Gn 1:26; Jn 1:1). However, the Son was manifested as the incarnate Son of God in order to bring man, the creation of God, into eternal glory. It was the purpose of the incarnation, therefore, to bring the obedient into an eternal dwelling with God.

1. The Son chose to give up an equality with God (Ph 2:5-11).
2. The Son was sent into the world by God (Jn 1:14; 4:23,36; 5:23,36; 8:17,18).
3. The Son was less than the Father while on earth (Jn 10:29; 14:28).
4. The Son did the will of the Father on earth (Jn 4:34; 6:38; Hb 5:8).
5. The Father miraculously bore witness to the Son on earth (Jn 5:31-37).
6. The Father and the Son remain as one (Jn 10:30; 17:11,21-24).
7. The Father loves the Son (Jn 15:9; 17:24).
8. The Father glorified the Son through the sacrificial death of the Son (Jn 8:54).

C. God works until now and in the future.

The Son has now gone into eternal glory with authority over all things. He has done so in order to reign over all things until the conclusion of all things in reference to the existence of the world.

1. The Son went back to the Father at the ascension (Jn 14:12; 20:17).
2. The Father gave all authority to the resurrected Son (Mt 17:1,2; 28:18).
3. The Father now dwells in His people on earth through God the Holy Spirit (2 Co 6:16; 1 Jn 4:12-15; see Ep 2:18-22).
4. The Spirit dwells in believers on earth (At 2:38; 1 Co 3:16; 6:19).
5. The Son now reigns over all things (1 Tm 6:15; Rv 4:9-11).
6. The Son is now head of all things from heaven (Ep 1:22; 1 Pt 3:22).
7. The Son is coming again to judge all men (Jn 12:48; 2 Co 5:10; 2 Th 1:6-9).
8. In the end the Son will restore all authority to the Father (1 Co 15:28).

Recognizing the awesome power and authority of God should motivate sincere people to obey the gospel by baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15,16; At 2:38). Only through obedience to His will do we proclaim our faith in Him.

Chapter 2

JESUS: THE INCARNATE OPPORTUNITY FOR SALVATION

The greatest personality of human history who has affected the lives of millions of people, was born in the humble environment of a Bethlehem manger two thousand years ago. This is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. He is the only begotten Son of the God.

The explosion of Christianity into history, and the rapid growth of the church of Jesus' disciples could not have been the invention of mere men. The only answer for the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the first century is that it had a Supernatural beginning. As a historical character, Jesus is who He said He was, the Son of God. Nothing else answers the questions as to why Christianity has grown to the point of captivating the hearts of millions of people for centuries.

Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies. He proved the divine origin of His teachings by the evidence of His miracles. He taught a way of life that has been unmatched by any man-made religion. And finally, He was proved to be the only Son of God by His resurrection from the dead in order to reign in heaven.

The existence, work and character of Jesus Christ could not have been dreamed up by over zealous disciples. He was God revealed in the flesh, and thus, He demands and deserves the obedience of all people. Understanding that Jesus is not an invented historical personality by a group of men, but the actual Son of God, should move all of us to serve Him. Those who truly know Jesus, therefore, are those who are obedient to His word. The disobedient can never truly know the Son of God.

I. THE PERSON OF JESUS:

Our attraction to Jesus is caused by who He is. Since He is truly the Son of God and all that the Bible says He is, then He can be and is the solid foundation for the faith of millions of people who have believed on Him for their salvation.

A. Jesus was indwelt by the fullness of God (Cl 1:19; 2:9).

B. Jesus is the incarnate Word of God (Jn 1:1,14; 1 Jn 1:1,2; 2 Jn 7).

C. Jesus is the only Son of God (Jn 1:14,18; 3:16,18).

D. Jesus is one with God (Is 9:6; Jn 1:1,2; 10:30; Ti 2:13; 1 Jn 5:20).

E. Jesus is eternal in existence (Rm 9:5; Hb 7:3; Rv 1:8).

F. Jesus is all-knowing (Mt 9:4; Lk 5:22; Jn 2:25).

II. THE PROOF OF JESUS:

The Bible and history are both evidences that Jesus is who He said He was. If one believes in the Bible, he must believe in Jesus as the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). If one believes historical documents, men must believe that Jesus existed in history.

A. The proof of prophecy:

There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Jesus and His work. These prophecies were written hundreds of years before Jesus lived.

1. He would be a descendant of Abraham (Gn 12:1-3; see Gl 3:16).
2. He would be a descendant of Isaac (Gn 21:12; see Hb 11:18).
3. He would be born of Judah (Gn 49:10; see Lk 3:33).
4. He would be a descendant of David (2 Sm 7:12-16; see Rv 22:16).
5. He would be born in Bethlehem (Mc 5:2; see Mt 2:1,3; Jn 7:42).
6. He would be betrayed (Ps 41:9; 55:12-14; see Mk 14:66-72).
7. He would be raised from the dead (Ps 16:10; see At 2:32).

B. The proof of His existence:

Many ancient historical documents refer to Jesus and events surrounding His ministry.

1. Julius Africanus quoted Thallus, who lived in Rome around A.D. 52. Thallus was familiar with the darkness that came over the earth at the time Jesus was crucified (Mt 27:45).
2. Mara Bar-Serapion in a letter to his son referred to the Jews' execution of "their king," a reference to Jesus.
3. Tacitus, who was born around A.D. 52-54, referred to "Christus" (Christ) who was executed during the reign of Tiberius.
4. C. Plinius Secundus (Pliny, the younger), governor of Bithynia around A.D. 112, wrote to Caesar Trajan concerning the problem of "Christians" in his province.
5. The Jewish Talmud (Jewish teachings that were compiled from A.D. 70 - 200) makes many references to "Yeshu'a of Nazareth," though the references are made in a negative context.
6. Josephus, a Jewish historian at the end of the first century refers to "Jesus, a wise man, ... a doer of marvelous deeds."

C. The proof of His miracles and resurrection:

If Jesus were who He said He was, then we would expect Him to have control over the supernatural and natural world. He would not be subject to a death without a resurrection. While religions of men focus on the tombs of their founders, Christians focus on the reign of a resurrected Savior. The rapid growth of the church in the first century in only a few years is answered in the fact that Jesus was actually raised from the dead.

D. The proof of persecuted disciples:

The suffering and death of the early Christians can be answered only in the fact that they believed Jesus was the resurrected Son of God.

1. The disciples willingly suffered for Jesus (At 4:18,19; 14:22; 2 Tm 3:12).
2. The disciples willingly died for Jesus (At 8:1-3; 12:1-4; 1 Pt 4:16; Rv 2:10).

E. The proof of the New Testament documents:

The existence of the ancient New Testament documents proves that Christianity was a powerful movement in the first century. Because these documents were written without contradiction by several men over a period of many years, proves that neither Jesus nor the church were the invention of men (See Jn 20:30,31).

III. THE POWER OF JESUS:

No man on earth ever claimed to be God as Jesus claimed to be (Jn 10:30-33). Therefore, He was either the greatest liar and deceiver who ever lived, or truly the One He claimed to be with the authority and power He now has over all things. Who Jesus claimed to be makes Him greater than all men.

A. Jesus was the creator of all things (Cl 1:16; Hb 1:2).

B. Jesus is now head of all things (Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; Ep 1:20-22).

C. Jesus is King of all earthly rulers (1 Tm 6:15; Rv 19:16).

D. Jesus now reigns over all things (Rm 5:17; Ph 2:9-11; 1 Pt 3:22).

E. Jesus is our Savior and Redeemer (Jn 14:6; At 4:12; Ep 1:7; Ti 2:14).

F. Jesus is our High Priest before God (Hb 3:1; 4:14; 7:26).

G. Jesus is the foretold Prophet (Lk 13:33; Jn 1:21; At 3:22-26).

H. Jesus is our only Mediator with God (1 Tm 2:5; Hb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

I. Jesus will be the final judge of all (Jn 12:48; 2 Co 5:10).

IV. THE PLEA OF JESUS:

Because Jesus has universal authority, He is the only one who has a right to make a universal plea to all men to come to Him for eternal existence in the presence of God.

A. Jesus says He is the only way, truth and life (Jn 14:6).

B. Jesus pleads that all come to Him (Mt 11:28,29).

C. Jesus says that all people must believe in Him (Jn 8:24).

D. Jesus says that everyone must believe and be baptized in order to be saved (Mk 16:15,16).

The reason for God's coming in the flesh of Jesus was to become the atoning sacrifice for our sins (Jn 3:1-21). Through His sacrifice one can be reconciled to God (2 Co 5:16-21). All those who join with Jesus in His death and resurrection through baptism will live forever in the presence of God (Jn 5:24,25; Rm 6:3-6; 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 3:21). When we die we want to be with Jesus (Ph 1:23). Our journey to be with Jesus in eternity begins by being with Him in His death on the cross, in His burial and in His resurrection (Rm 6:3-6).

Chapter 3

LIVING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

God is working on earth by the manifestation of Himself through the Holy Spirit. When the Son of God ascended to assume headship over all things, the Holy Spirit was sent to work through the inspired word of God in order to continue the work of the Son on earth.

Though there is much confusion today concerning the work of the Spirit, one thing is certain. The Spirit will do His work among God's saints regardless of our understanding of all His work. The Spirit's work is not controlled by our knowledge of His work.

We know that the Spirit works to produce unity among believers. He works to produce unity among those who have obeyed the gospel, for obedient believers have received the Spirit. The Spirit works today through those who are in a covenant relationship with God in order to accomplish God's work of world evangelism.

In order to prevent confusion through misguided emotions, believers look to the word of God for an explanation of how the Spirit works in their lives. Our minds can be deceived by our own desires. For this reason, the Spirit seeks to lead us through the word of God which He inspired to be written for our direction. Since Christians have the Spirit, they desire to work, therefore, by the direction of the Spirit-inspired word of God. Knowing the word of God is our opportunity to know where the Holy Spirit wants to lead us. The word of God keeps us going in the right direction.

I. THE WORK OF GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT:

Christians must understand that God is still at work among His people and in the world. He has not left us alone to suffer at the mercy of the world.

A. The Spirit is God.

God the Spirit manifested Himself in the history of man to accomplish the work of the Godhead among men. He is thus referred to in the Bible to be one with God.

1. As a part of the Godhead, God the Spirit, was in existence before the creation of the world (Gn 1:1,2,26).
2. The eternal Spirit was working in the beginning in creation as a part of the Godhead (Gn 1:1,2; Jb 26:13; Ps 104:30; Hb 9:14).
3. If one lies to the Spirit, he is actually lying to God the Spirit (At 5:3,4).

B. The Spirit is God at work.

The one true God manifested Himself to man through the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God, the Spirit, works as one with the Father and Son.

1. The Spirit worked through the Son while the

Son was on earth (Mt 3:16; 4:1; 12:28; Lk 4:1,14,18,21; Jn 3:34).

2. The Spirit glorifies the Son, not Himself (Jn 16:13,14).
3. The Spirit gives testimony to God the Son (Jn 15:26).
4. In the first century, the Spirit was first sent by the Father and Son to the twelve apostles (Jn 14:26; 15:26).
5. The Spirit revealed truth to the apostles which He heard from the Father and Son (Jn 14:26; 16:13,14).
6. The Spirit revealed the mind of God to the first century apostles and prophets (1 Co 2:10-13; 2 Pt 1:20,21).
7. The word of God was written by inspiration of the Spirit to continue the work of God among men (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21; see At 20:32).

II. THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

Since the Holy Spirit is God, then He has the same attributes as God the Father and Son. Though His attributes have not been revealed in incarnation as the Son, He has revealed them through written word.

A. The Spirit has the nature and attributes of God.

1. The Spirit is eternal (Jb 26:13; Hb 9:14).
2. The Spirit is all-powerful (omnipotent) (Gn 1:2; Lk 4:1,14).
3. The Spirit is all-knowing (omniscient) (Rm 8:26,27; 1 Co 2:10-13).
4. The Spirit searches all things (1 Co 2:10).
5. The Spirit loves the saints (Rm 15:30).
6. The Spirit is a personality that can be **grieved** (Is 63:10; Ep 4:30), **lied to** (At 5:3), **resisted** (At 7:51; 1 Th 5:19), **despised** (Hb 10:29), **blasphemed** and **sinned against** (Mt 12:31,32; Mk 3:28,29; Lk 12:10).

III. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT:

When the prophecy of Joel 2:28 was fulfilled at the time the Spirit empowered the apostles on Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4, the Spirit's work on earth began among Christians. The miraculous work of the Spirit continued until God's messengers and their spoken and written word were confirmed before the world. Upon reception of the Spirit when one is baptized, the Spirit continues His presence among Christians today.

A. The Christian and the Spirit in the first century:

1. In the first century, the inspired spoken word was miraculously confirmed before unbelievers by the Spirit (Mk 16:17-20; Hb 2:3,4).
2. In the absence of the written word, the Spirit guided Christian teachers, whose teachings were inspired by the Spirit (1 Co 12-14).
3. In order to mature the church, miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given by the laying on of the apostles' hands (At 8:18; Rm 1:11; 2 Tm 1:6).
4. The confirming work of the Spirit before unbelievers ended with the completion of the word in the first century (1 Co 13:8-13).
5. All necessary truth was revealed in the first century (2 Tm 3:16,17).
6. Christians must now rely on the written word of God for direction from God (At 20:32; Ep 3:3-5; 2 Tm 3:16,17; see Gl 1:6-9; Jd 3; Rv 22:18,19).
7. Christians are warned not to change, add to or subtract from the Spirit-inspired written word of God (Gl 1:6-9; Jd 3; Rv 22:18,19).

B. The Christian and the Spirit today:

1. The Spirit indwells the Christian (1 Co 3:16; 2 Co 6:16; Ep 2:22; 2 Tm 1:14).
2. The Spirit sanctifies (2 Th 2:13,14; see Jn 17:17; At 15:9; Ep 5:26; 1 Th 5:23; 1 Tm 4:4,5).
3. The Spirit strengthens (At 20:32; Ep 3:16,20; Cl 1:10,11).
4. The Spirit comforts (At 9:31; see 2 Co 7:6,7,13; Rm 15:4; 2 Th 2:16,17).
5. The Spirit leads (Rm 8:14; Gl 5:18,25; see Is 48:17; Ps 119:105; 2 Th 3:5).
6. The Spirit seals the Christian (2 Co 1:21,22; Ep 1:13,14; 4:30).
7. The Spirit seeks to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Gl 5:22,23).
8. The Spirit works today through the impact of the word of God on the heart of man to **produce faith** (Jn 20:30,31; Rm 10:17), **convert** (Js 1:18; 1 Pt 1:22,23), **save** (At 11:14; Js 1:21), **cleanse** (Jn 15:2; Ep 5:26), **quicken** (Ps 119:40,93; Jn 6:63), **give understanding** (Ep 3:4; 2 Tm 3:15), **admonish** (1 Co 4:14; 10:11), **guard** (2 Tm 3:13-15), **exhort** (1 Pt 5:12), **instruct** (2 Tm 3:16,17), **stir up** (2 Pt 1:12,13), **purify the soul** (1 Pt 1:22), and **enlighten the mind** (Ps 19:8; 119:130).

IV. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TODAY:

The Spirit works today in ways that are beyond our complete understanding. However, He does explain in the Bible that He wants the Christian to maintain a life of self-control and dignity. To live in this way, the Spirit desires that we ...

A. ... maintain emotional control of our free-moral choice, because we will give account of our behavior before Christ (2 Co 5:10).

B. ... maintain unity upon the foundation of God's word, because we must speak the oracles of God (1 Pt 4:11; see 1 Co 1:10; Gl 1:6-9; 1 Jn 4:1-4).

C. ... maintain unity in purpose and work, because the church must work as one body (1 Co 12:12-31; Cl 3:12-17).

D. ... maintain control of our speech in order to speak with grace in our hearts, because we must give account before God of every idle word we speak (Mt 12:36,37; Cl 4:6).

E. ... maintain a studious life, because we are responsible before God to know the Scriptures (At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15; see 2 Pt 3:15,16).

One blasphemes the Spirit by saying that the Spirit's instructions for salvation are not from God. One sins against the Spirit by rejecting the Spirit's instructions in the Bible as to how he or she must be saved (Mt 12:31,32; Mk 3:28-30; Lk 12:10). But the Spirit seeks to convert people today through the preaching of the inspired word (Js 1:22), by which one is born again (1 Co 4:15; 1 Pt 1:22,23). And one is born again when he or she obeys the Spirit's written instructions that in order to be saved, we must believe and be baptized for remission of sins (Mk 16:16; At 2:38).

Chapter 4

THE BIBLE: GOD'S MESSAGE TO MAN

A man has deprived himself of the best knowledge there is in the world if he has deprived himself of a knowledge of the Bible. On the foundation of this book, civilizations have been built and sustained. Only through the medium of the Bible can we understand who God is.

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *Biblia* which means "book." The Bible is God's book of instruction for all people. No other written words have affected so many people for so long in history. The reason for this is that men know the Bible is God's truth that was revealed to direct our beliefs and behavior.

The Bible is a library of sixty-six Holy Spirit inspired books and letters. Contrary to man-made religions that are usually based on the writings of one man, the Bible was written by over forty inspired men over a period of about 1,500 years. Though written by so many different people over a period of many centuries, there are no contradictions in the Bible. There is one united theme throughout the entire Bible, the eternal salvation of man through the sacrificial offering of Jesus, the Son of God.

Thirty-nine of the Bible books make up the Old Testament. These books were first given to the nation of Israel. The New Testament contains twenty-seven books that were written to Christians. Today, Christians receive their instruction for living through the New Testament, but learning and admonition from how God worked with Israel in the Old Testament.

I. THE BIBLE IS GOD'S BLESSING FOR MAN:

The Bible came to us through years of God's work to inspire men as to how we can please Him.

A. The Bible is God speaking through words (Mt 22:43; At 1:16; 2 Tm 3:16).

B. The Bible is God speaking through the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13; 1 Co 2:10-13; Hb 3:7; 9:8; 10:15; 2 Pt 1:20,21).

C. The Bible is God speaking through the Holy Spirit through inspired words of truth (Jr 36:4; 1 Co 2:13).

D. The Bible is God speaking through the Holy Spirit to men who spoke and wrote inspired words of truth (Ex 24:4; 35:1; 2 Sm 23:2; Is 51:16; Jr 36:4-6; Ez 11:5; 1 Co 14:37).

E. The Bible is God speaking through the Holy Spirit through men to men (Lk 1:70; At 28:25; Rm 1:2; 16:26).

F. The Bible is God speaking through the Holy Spirit through inspired men to all men of all history (Ez 2:7; 3:4,10,11,17; 2 Th 2:14; 2 Tm 3:16,17; Hb 1:1,2).

II. WE CAN TRUST THE BIBLE:

God gave the Bible to people upon the foundation of miraculous proof. He not only inspired men to preach and write His word, but He also sent confirming miracles to prove that His word was more than the mere word of men.

A. The Bible was confirmed by miracles. The word of God that was first spoken by the early messengers of God was proven to be from God by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit (See 1 Kg 18:30-40; Mk 16:20; Jn 20:30,31; At 2:33; 4:29,30; 1 Co 2:1-5; 12:7; Gl 3:5; Hb 2:3,4).

B. The confirmed and spoken word was written. The inspired writers of the Bible recorded their miraculously proven word (Rm 15:4,18,19; 1 Co 2:4; 10:11; 1 Th 1:5).

III. THE BIBLE WILL CHANGE LIVES:

We must give the Bible a chance in our lives. If we believe it to be the word of God, then we will treasure its message. Our lives will thus be transformed into lives that are pleasing to God.

A. **The Bible can dwell in our hearts** (Cl 3:16; 1 Jn 2:14,24; 3:9; 2 Jn 2).

B. **The Bible can be laid up in our hearts so that we not sin against God** (Ps 37:31; 119:11).

C. **The Bible can be written on our hearts when we honor its principles** (Ps 40:8; Jr 31:32,33; 2 Co 3:3; Hb 8:10; 10:16).

D. **The Bible changes our lives when we sincerely obey its principles** (Js 1:22-25; 1 Jn 1:6,7; 2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3,4).

IV. THE BIBLE IS SUFFICIENT FOR ALL:

The Bible is all-sufficient to furnish the Christian with all direction that is necessary to be acceptable to God. The Bible has the power to accomplish the following in our lives:

A. **Power to change lives** (1 Pt 2:1,2; 2 Pt 1:3; 1 Th 4:1,2; 3 Jn 3,4).

B. **Power to give eternal life** (Jn 8:51; see Jn 5:24; 11:26).

C. **Power to eternally save** (At 11:14; 20:32; Hb 4:12; Js 1:21).

D. **Power to give freedom** (Jn 8:32; Js 1:25).

E. **Power to minister to others** (Ep 4:11-16).

F. **Power to teach** (Pv 22:6; Ps 119:103,104; Rm 15:4).

G. **Power to admonish** (1 Co 4:14; 10:11; 2 Tm 4:1,2; Ti 1:9).

H. **Power to live a godly life** (Cl 1:5-10; 1 Tm 3:14,15; 1 Pt 5:12).

I. **Power to reprove, rebuke and correct** (2 Tm 3:16; Ti 1:9).

V. THE BIBLE IS GOD'S FINAL REVELATION:

The Bible claims to be God's only and final revelation of truth to man. With the writing of *Revelation*, the last book of the Bible, God stopped all revelation of truth that He desires men to know in these times of existence.

A. God revealed His will to the fathers of extended family groups in the Old Testament times before the giving of the Old Testament law on Mount Sinai (Hb 1:1,2).

B. God revealed His will to Israel on Mount Sinai through the Old Testament books (Dt 4:1,13; 5:1-5; Ex 19:4-6; Ne 8:1; Rm 3:1,2).

C. God revealed His will to the Old Testament writers who recorded examples for the Christian's learning (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

D. God revealed all truth to the New Testament apostles in the first century as specific instruction for Christians (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

E. We have all necessary instruction today in the New Testament that was recorded for our teaching and moral guidance (Gl 1:11,12; Ep 3:3-5; 2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:3). Therefore, we must not add to nor subtract from the Bible (Dt. 4:2; Gl 1:6-9; 2 Jn 9-11; Rv 22:18,19).

VI. GOD WORKS THROUGH THE BIBLE:

Since God is our creator, He seeks to direct us to Him. He intends that His word function in the following ways in the lives of those who seek a relationship with Him, and thus desire to submit to His direction. Through the Bible God seeks ...

A. ... **to produce faith in our hearts** (Jn 20:30,31; Rm 10:17).

B. ... **to sanctify our souls of sin** (Jn 17:17; Ep 5:26; 1 Tm 4:4,5).

C. ... **to cleanse our hearts and souls** (Jn 15:2,3; Ep 5:26; 1 Pt 1:22).

D. ... **to quicken our souls** (Ps 119:50,93; Ep 2:1,5).

E. ... **to enlighten our minds** (Ps 19:8).

F. ... **to give us understanding** (Ps 119:104,130; Ep 3:4).

G. ... **to lead our lives** (Ps 73:24; 119:105).

H. ... **to comfort our hearts** (Rm 15:4; 1 Th 3:2; 4:18).

I. ... **to produce in us spiritual growth** (At 20:32; Cl 1:10,11).

J. ... **to strengthen our hearts** (At 20:32; Rm 16:25; 2 Tm 2:1,2).

God revealed His word to us in order that we find our way to Him. Without His revelation to us, we could not know who He is or how to please Him. The Bible reveals that Jesus is the only way to God (Jn 14:6). As the Son of God, Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15). If you want to find your way to God, and to show your love for Jesus, the Son of God, then you must keep the commandments of Jesus. The only way to know the commandments of Jesus is by reading the Bible. You can know and keep Jesus' commandments by obedience to the gospel by baptism into Christ (See Jn 6:45; Mk 16:16; At 2:38; 22:16; Rm 6:3-6; 1 Pt 3:21). Through faith and obedience of the gospel, one becomes a member of Jesus' body, the church (1 Co 12:13; Cl 1:18).

Chapter 5

THE NEW TESTAMENT OF JESUS

The Bible contains two written laws that God has given to man throughout history. The first is the Old Testament law that was given specifically to Israel as the condition for keeping the covenant that God established with Israel on Mount Sinai. This law is also called the "law of Moses" (Ne 8:1), the "law of God" (Ne 8:8,14,18), the "law of the Lord" (Lk 2:22-24), or simply, "the law" (Jn 1:17; Rm 7:7). This law preserved Israel until the Messiah came.

The second written law, the New Testament law of Christ, was brought into force after Jesus, the Messiah, died on the cross about two thousand years ago. This law was established when the first official announcement of Jesus' reign in heaven was made in A.D. 30 on the Jewish feast of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The New Testament law and covenant are superior to the Old Testament law and covenant because the New has a better hope (Hb 7:19), a better covenant with God (Hb 7:22; 8:6), better promises (Hb 8:6), better sacrifices (Hb 9:23), a better possession (Hb 10:34), a better hope of resurrection (Hb 11:35), and a better blood offering (Hb 12:24). Those who are immersed into Christ have come into this new covenant agreement with Jesus (See Mt 26:26-29). They are now subjects to the "law of the Spirit of life" (Rm 8:2), which is the "perfect law of liberty" (Js 1:25). This is the "law of Christ," a law that brings freedom in Christ (Gl 5:1,2; 6:2). It is the perfect law that brings freedom to all who obey it.

I. ORIGIN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW:

The Old Testament law was given to the nation of Israel. It was a condition for Israel's keeping the covenant that God established with the nation about 1,440 years before Jesus.

A. The old law was given to Israel by God on Mount Sinai in the fifteenth century before the coming of Jesus (Ex 19:11,18-20; Dt 33:2; Ne 9:13).

B. The old law was given through angels (At 7:38,53) to Moses for Israel (Ne 8:14; 9:14; Jn 1:17; 7:19).

C. The old law was given only to the Jews, the chil-

dren of Israel (Dt 4:1,13; 5:1-5; Ex 19:4-6; Ne 8:1; Rm 3:1,2).

II. PURPOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW:

The Old Testament law was given only to Israel as a temporary law to prepare Israel for a greater law that would come in the future of the nation. By giving Israel the old law, God sought to preserve a segment of humanity until His Son, Jesus, came into the world for the salvation of all men.

A. The old law was a shadow of more glorious things to come (Hb 10:1; Cl 2:16,17; see Jr 31:31-34).

B. The old law was a tutor, or headmaster, to guide, instruct and preserve Israel until Jesus came (Gl 3:24,25; 4:4).

C. The old law was given to expose and correct sin (Rm 3:20; 7:7).

D. The old law preserved Abraham's heritage until God's promise (Gn 12:1-3) **could be fulfilled** (Gl 3:8,16-19).

III. WEAKNESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW:

The Old Testament law was flawless for the purpose for which it was given to Israel. It was God's law, and thus, it was holy, just and good (Rm 7:12). It was not given to Israel as a means for the Israelites to earn their salvation, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). Therefore, the weakness of the law was not in the law itself. It was weak in reference to salvation because of the following:

A. Animal sacrifices of the law could not in and of themselves take away sins (Hb 10:4; 9:15).

B. No man can ever be justified by meritorious works of the law (At 13:39; Rm 3:20,28; Gl 2:16; 3:10,11; Hb 10:1-4). Therefore, salvation under both the Old and New Testament laws is through an obedient faith that responds to the grace of God (See Hk 2:4; Rm 1:17; Gl 3:11,12; Hb 10:38; Js 2:14-26).

C. Righteousness before God cannot be achieved by meritorious works of law (Gl 2:21). By works of merit no one can receive life under law (Gl 3:21,22), for all people sin (Rm 3:10,23).

D. Because everyone sins against law, God never intended that law-keeping make one perfect before Him (Hb 7:18,19).

E. There was forgiveness under the Old Testament law only in view of the sacrificial blood of Christ (Rm 3:27; Hb 9:15).

IV. ABOLISHMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW:

The Old Testament law was never intended to be a permanent law of God for all men, for God promised a new covenant and law that came after it was given (Jr 31:31-34). God intended that the old law exist only until the time came for the establishment of the New Testament law of Christ.

A. The law was to be in force only until the time when the Seed (Christ) came into the world (Gl 3:19; 4:4).

B. Jesus came to fulfill the purpose of the old law, and thus, abolish it through the establishment of a new law (Mt 5:17,18).

C. When Jesus died on the cross, the old covenant was taken away, and thus, the law of the covenant was made void (Hb 10:9,10). It was abolished (Cl 2:14; Ep 2:14-16) in order that the New Testament covenant and law be established (Hb 9:16,17).

D. Christians are made dead to the old law (Rm 7:1-6).

E. There was a change of priesthood when Jesus ascended to heaven (Hb 7:11-25). Jesus became our high priest (Hb 2:17; 8:1; 9:11). Therefore, the change in priesthood meant that there also be a change from the Old Testament law to the New Testament law of Christ (Hb 7:11-14).

F. The old law has been nullified and all Christians are free from its bondage (Gl 4:21 – 5:1).

V. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT LAW:

When Jesus came, He came with a new covenant and law for all men. This is a law of grace and truth that has come to us through Jesus (Jn 1:17). Eternal moral principles of the old law continue in the law of Christ.

A. Jesus died in order to institute a new covenant be-

tween God and all men (Hb 9:15-18; 10:9).

B. The revelation of God's grace and His truth came through Jesus (Jn 1:17; Ti 2:11-14).

C. God speaks to us today through His only begotten Son, Jesus (Hb 1:1,2; see Mt 17:5; Jn 12:48).

D. Jesus is now the only way, truth and life (Jn 14:6; see At 4:12).

E. At the final judgment, Christians will be judged by the words of Jesus (Jn 12:48) which are spirit and life (Jn 6:63).

Christians use the Old Testament today as an inspired record for learning and admonition (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). However, the old law of the Old Testament is no longer binding on mankind as a religious law. We no longer have to offer animal sacrifices or keep the rituals of the Jewish priesthood. All men this side of the cross of Christ must submit to the law of Christ, for He died once and for all time for our sins (Gl 6:2; Hb 5:9). All must now obey the good news of Jesus' death for our sins and resurrection for our hope. We do this by immersion into Christ for the remission of our sins (At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6; 2 Th 1:7-9). Once we are born again, we are directed in life by the law of Christ. Christ-centered people follow Christ by being obedient to His word.

Chapter 6

GOD WORKED AND CONTINUES TO WORK

God is not confined to natural laws. Neither does He dwell in a realm that is controlled by natural laws. He is above nature. He is above the laws of this physical world. He is supernatural. And for this reason He can work in any way He desires at any time in history. It is the task of the Bible student to determine why He worked in a specific manner at any time in history. This is important because God does not work without a specific purpose.

Because of the great confusion in reference to the work of God today, we must discipline ourselves to allow the Bible to explain how God works. If we do not do this, then we are left to the wild imaginations of ignorant and misguided people to define the work of the god they have created after their own imagination. The idolater never understands correctly the work of God. He is always misguided by his own imagination. Therefore, it is imperative that we use the Bible as the dictionary concerning how God has worked throughout history.

I. BIBLE WORDS FOR GOD'S WORK:

Four different Greek words are used in the New Testament to explain how God has supernaturally manifested Himself in our physical world.

A. Wonders (*teras*):

This word is never used alone in reference to miracles. It is always used with other words that refer to God's supernatural activity (At 2:22,43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 15:12; Hb 2:4). This word explains the reaction of people to a miracle (Mt 9:26; Mk 2:12; 4:41; 6:51; 7:37; Lk 8:56; 13:17).

B. Signs (*semeion*):

This word is used when God wanted to signal to unbelievers His presence with those who preached His word (Mk 16:20; Jn 3:2; At 14:3; 2 Co 12:12; Hb 2:4).

C. Powers, or mighty works (*dunamis*):

Through powers, God wanted the witnesses to recognize a power that is greater than the natural laws that ordinarily work in our environment (Gn 18:14; Ex 5:2; Ps 33:4-9; 107:23-32; Is 40:12-27; At 2:22; 19:11). Miracles manifested the power of the Father (At 15:12), Jesus (Mt 10:1), and the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:28).

D. Works (*ergon*):

Though a miracle was a wonderful act to man, this word explains that a miracle was a manifestation of the environment in which God dwells (Jn 5:36; 7:21; 10:24,32,38; 14:11,12; 15:24). A miracle, therefore, clearly manifested the presence of God to all men.

II. PURPOSE OF CONFIRMING MIRACLES:

God does not work without a purpose. He did not work in a miraculous manner in order to satisfy the idle curiosity of man. He worked through miracles to accomplish specific purposes.

A. Miracles manifested the glory of God.

1. When God revealed the realm of the supernatural through miraculous work, His glory was manifested to people in a manner that could not be denied (Jn 1:14; 11:40-42; 17:6-8; At 4:14-16).
2. The miraculous glory of God is recorded in the Bible for us to read and give glory to God today (Is 40; Ps 19:1,2; Jb 38,39; Rm 1:20).

B. Miracles manifested the glory of Jesus.

1. Miracles proved that Jesus was sent directly from God into this world (Jn 3:2; 4:48; 5:36; 6:14; 10:24,37,38; 11:15; 14:11).
2. Miracles manifested God's approval of Jesus as His Son (At 2:22).
3. Miracles proved that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), and the incarnate Son of God (Mt 11:2-6; Lk 7:20-22; Jn 20:30,31).
4. Miracles glorified Jesus when He was on earth (Jn 2:11).
5. Miracles proved Jesus to be God on earth with the authority to forgive sins personally (Mt 9:6; Mk 2:9-12; Lk 5:26).
6. Miracles proved Jesus' supernatural power on earth over material substances (Jn 2:1-11), distance (Jn 4:46-54), time (Jn 5:1-9), creation (Jn 6:1-14), nature (Jn 6:16-21), misfortune (Jn 9:1-12), and death (Jn 11:1-46).

C. Miracles gave a divine witness to God's messengers.

1. Miracles proved that God was working with His people (Dt 13:1-4; Mt 12:24-27; At 2:1-4,6-8,43; 3:6-10; 4:14-16; 5:12-16; 8:6; 9:36-42; 14:8-11; Hb 2:3,4).
2. God allowed His messengers to work miracles in order to manifest to the world that His messengers were sent from Him. He gave miraculous witness to Elisha (2 Kg 2), Moses (Ex 7:8-13), Jesus (Jn 3:2), the apostles (At 2:43; 2 Co 12:12), and special first century disciples (Mk 16:17-20; Hb 2:3,4). This miraculous witness of God is recorded in the Bible. The Bible is thus a sufficient witness for us today to believe in Jesus as the Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31; 2 Tm 3:16,17).

D. Miracles confirmed that the word of God was from God.

1. Miracles proved that the inspired word of the Christ-sent apostles was from God and not from man (Mk 16:17-20; see Jn 14:26; 16:13,14).
2. Miracles proved that the Christ-sent apostles were God's messengers who had the authority to speak His word (Hb 2:3,4).
3. Since God's will was confirmed by miracles and recorded for our reading, the disciples of Jesus find confidence in the historical fact of the miracles that are recorded in the Bible (See 2 Th 2:10-12; 2 Tm 3:16,17).
4. Miracles were not given for personal benefit (See Ph 2:25-27; 2 Tm 4:20).

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFIRMING MIRACLES:

A. In order for a miracle to be valid, the occurrence of the miracle had to be perceived through one or more of the five senses of man (See Jn 3:2; At 26:26).

B. True miracles could not be explained by the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Those who experienced true miracles clearly understood that something out of the ordinary had happened (At 4:14-16; 26:26).

C. The presence of the supernatural work of God was clearly seen in a miracle (1 Kg 18:17-46; Jn 3:2; 11:43-45).

D. A miracle did not occur over a long period of time. A miracle was instantaneous so that it would not be confused with the ordinary occurrence of natural laws (Mt 8:3; 20:34; Mk 10:52; Jn 11:43,44).

E. Miracles in the Bible were not worked in a manner to be hidden from the beholders. Because they could be witnessed by everyone, true miracles could not be denied even by unbelievers (1 Kg 18:30-40; Jn 9:1-41; 11:45,46; At 4:14-16; 26:26).

F. Because miracles could be witnessed, their purpose of signaling God's presence to unbelievers could be accomplished (Mk 16:17-20; Jn 20:30,31; At 2:22).

IV. GOD PROVIDENTIALLY WORKS TODAY:

God continues to work today apart from the ordinary occurrence of natural laws, but in a way that is perceived through the faith of the believers. His work is believed by believers, but often denied by unbelievers. Nevertheless, He continues to work providentially in the lives of His people.

A. Since God has already miraculously worked to confirm Jesus as the Messiah and His Son, He now works through the preached word in order that people believe (Jn 20:30,31; At 2:22).

B. God works providentially to restore health to those believers who pray for healing (2 Kg 20:5; Js 5:13-16).

C. God works providentially to care for those believers who ask for the necessities of life (Mt 6:9-13).

D. God works providentially to open doors for evangelism (1 Co 16:9; 2 Co 2:12; 2 Th 3:1,2).

E. God works providentially to provide ways of escape from temptations and trials (Rm 8:28; 1 Co 10:13; Ph 1:19; 2 Pt 2:9).

F. God works providentially to deliver His people from evil doers (2 Co 1:9-11; 2 Tm 4:18; see Pv 2:6,8,12,16; 2 Th 3:2; 2 Tm 3:11; 4:17; Ph 22).

G. God works providentially to raise up evangelists (Mt 9:38).

H. God works providentially so that our faith not fail (Lk 22:31; see Ps 125:3; 1 Co 10:13; Cl 4:12).

I. God works providentially to aid the saints in times of need (Rm 15:30-32).

J. God works providentially to bring evangelists to the saints (Rm 1:9,10; 1 Th 3:10).

K. God works providentially to bring forth fruit to His glory (1 Co 3:5,6; 1 Th 1:2-8; 2 Th 1:11,12).

God expects people today to respond to His preached word in order to believe and obey the gospel (Rm 10:17; see Jn 20:30,31). The message of the gospel needs no more miraculous confirmation, for the confirmed word of God is sufficient to produce faith (Rm 10:17; 2 Tm 3:16,17; see 1 Co 15:1-4). Though God will allow many to believe in false miracles (2 Th 2:10-12), one must now believe the testimony of the miracles that are recorded in the Bible. One must respond to the preached word of God by baptism in obedience to the miraculously confirmed gospel of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6; see Gl 3:26,27).

Chapter 7

THE GRACE OF GOD

The word "grace" refers to what God gives and cannot be earned. Grace is God's loving desire and action to save us regardless of our inability to earn eternal life by our good works. In order to understand this grace, we must first understand our impossibilities in life in reference to our desire to live eternally with God.

I. UNDERSTANDING GRACE:

When one understands the nature of God's grace toward all men through Jesus, he is drawn to the cross where grace was manifested (Ti 2:11).

A. The impossibility of trading life for life:

What God has to offer costs more than what we can afford to pay (See Rm 8:18; 2 Co 4:17). Eternal life in heaven is without end. There is no possible way for us to earn heaven in a fair deal by exchanging a lifetime in good works as a Christian for the reward of eternal life. We could not live long enough doing good works on earth in order to earn what God offers in eternal dwelling in heaven.

B. The impossibility of trading our life for eternal life:

In reference to our ability to keep God's law, God says that *"there is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rm 3:10). The problem is that *" all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rm 3:23). We fall short because we cannot keep law perfectly in order to stand just (justified) before God. God says, *"By the deeds of law no flesh will be justified in His sight"* (Rm 3:20). One cannot be *"justified by the works of law"* (Gl 2:16). We cannot be justified before God by law simply because

no man can keep God's law perfectly in order to save himself.

When one sins, the law says that he is a lawbreaker (1 Jn 3:4). According to law, therefore, lawbreakers must be punished (Rm 6:23). The lawbreaker (sinner) must receive the wrath of the Judge (Rm 4:15). One might seek to keep the whole law, and yet commit one sin. That one sin makes him a lawbreaker, and thus, guilty before God's law (Js 2:10). We must, therefore, cry out for grace from the Judge. Recognizing his inability to live perfectly before God, Paul cried out, *"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* (Rm 7:24). **As breakers of God's law, all of us seek deliverance from judgment**.

Most people recognize that they break God's law. Most know that they are sinners. But because we think we can stand alone before God, we seek out or invent our own system of forgiveness of sins against God. We thus answer Paul's question in a wrong way. We answer with works to receive forgiveness that is based on our own efforts.

Our invented system of "salvation by good works" is the false belief that our good works will make up for or atone for our sins. We deceive ourselves into thinking that if we do enough good works, God will forgive our sins. Doing good works may make one feel good toward God, **but not one good work will obligate God to forgive one sin**. The Bible says that we are not saved by good works *"lest anyone should boast"* (Ep 2:9). If we were saved by good works, we would boast against one another. We would glorify ourselves before God as the religious leader in the Bible who boasted in prayer that he gave tithes and fasted twice a week (Lk 18:11,12). **Salvation cannot be earned by good works lest we put God in debt to pay us with heaven**. If one could earn his salvation by good works, then the reward would not be counted *"as grace but as debt"* (Rm 4:4).

II. REVELATION OF GOD'S GRACE:

Only God can give a solution for our sin problem that has destroyed our relationship with Him. He only can deliver us from our condemnation in sin. Paul praised God for his deliverance from sin by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rm 7:25).

The Bible says, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men"* (Ti 2:11). To this, we say hallelujah! Jesus has become a mediator before God on behalf of those who establish a covenant with God (1 Tm 2:5). He is the divine link between God and humanity. He has brought to us God's free gift of grace. The Bible says that *"the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many"* (Rm 5:15).

For God so loved us that He gave His Son (Jn 3:16). Though we were lawbreakers, God loved us. Even in our futile efforts to save ourselves, God reached from heaven and loved us through Jesus (Rm 5:8). Grace is God's gift to sinful man. It is a gift, and thus, it is not earned by our righteousness. Since it is a gift, we cannot demand it on the basis of good works (Ep 2:8,9).

III. RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE:

God has worked His part in His plan to bring us eternally into His existence in heaven. We must now learn of His work through Jesus and respond to His grace (Jn 6:45). Our knowledge of the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus must generate faith. Faith must move us into action. We must be moved to obey what God wants us to do (Rm 1:5; Gl 5:6; Js 2:14-26). The Bible says that *"the just will live by faith"* (Hk 2:4; Rm 1:17; Gl 3:11; Hb 10:38). The justified will live by trusting in God for their salvation (Rm 5:1,2), not in their ability to perform law perfectly or attempt to trade their good works to God for His grace.

God's grace does not give us freedom to sin as some have misunderstood (See Rm 6:1; Jd 4). It gives us freedom to obey (1 Pt 2:16). The one who has heard and learned of the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus is motivated to obey the Father (Gl 2:20). We establish God's law in our lives by responding to His grace (Rm 3:31).

The same response of thanksgiving that results from recognizing God's saving grace also applies to good works. We are *"created in Christ Jesus for good works"* (Ep 2:10). **We work because we are saved by God's grace, not in order to be saved**. Good works to others, therefore, are expressions of appreciation and thanksgiving to God for our salvation (1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15).

IV. GRACE AND FREEDOM:

There will always be those who seek to bind on the consciences of men those things God never intended to bind. Some Jewish teachers in the first century sought to bind circumcision and other Old Testament ceremonies on the consciences of the early Christians (At 15:1,2,10). These teachers came in "**to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage**" (Gl 2:4). But God's grace sets us free from the bondage of human religious traditions (Gl 5:1). One is fallen from grace if he seeks to justify himself through the performance of religious traditions and ceremonies (Gl 5:4).

In order to come into the realm of God's grace, you must respond to grace by obedience to the gospel which is the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (See Rm 6:3-6; 1 Co 15:1-4; 2 Th 1:7-9). Therefore, baptism for remission of sins is not a work. It is a response to the grace of God that was revealed on the cross. Those who respond to grace by baptism, show their appreciation to God for the grace that was revealed through Jesus. Those who give their lives in thanksgiving for the grace of God, work in appreciation of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus (2 Co 4:15).

Chapter 8

THE GOSPEL

God knows that we cannot live perfect lives. Because God knew we could not live without sinning, He planned before the creation of the world the offering of Jesus Christ for the sins of all men. He planned that Jesus would save us from eternal condemnation. When the time came for God to reveal His salvation for man, He sent Jesus into the world (Gl 4:4).

All of us know that we cannot save ourselves by perfect obedience to law or earning heaven through good works. Realizing that we cannot live perfect lives should motivate sincere people to search for the means by which God seeks to save people from their sin. God has given to us this means. It is called grace. His grace was revealed on the cross through Jesus (Ep 3:3-5). When we realize our inability to save ourselves, we seek grace.

God is the creator of all things (Gn 1:1,26,27). He created man in the beginning. Since God created man, this gives Him the right to give moral laws to man by which we must live. Since God is the creator, He also has the right to demand obedience from man.

Everyone has sinned against God's law (Rm 3:10,23). In fact, if one says he has not sinned, God says that he is a liar (1 Jn 1:8-10). Therefore, each one of us must recognize and repent of our sins (At 3:19; Js 4:1-9). Before we die, we must obey what God wants us to do to fulfill our obligations to establish a covenant of grace with Him.

I. SIN IS TRANSGRESSION AGAINST GOD'S LAW.

1 John 3:4 teaches that we sin against God by voluntarily breaking His law. We do so by **not doing** what God has told us to do in His word. We also sin by doing what God has told us not to do in His word (Rm 8:12-14; Ep 2:1-3). Everyone, therefore, has sinned.

II. SIN IS NEGLECTING TO DO THAT WHICH IS RIGHT.

James 4:17 teaches that we sin when we do not do those principles of good that are defined in the Bible (Gl 6:10). If our conscience is directed by God's word to do good, then we sin if we fail to do what we know is good (Mt 25:41-46).

III. SIN SEPARATES US FROM GOD.

Isaiah 59:1,2 teaches that sin spiritually separates us from God. Therefore, when we think of sin we must think about being **separated from God who can give us eternal life.** We must think about being forever separated from our Creator (Mt 7:21-23). Everyone, therefore, must be **reconciled** to God.

IV. THE RESULT OF SEPARATION FROM GOD IS DEATH.

Romans 6:23 teaches that the result of sin against God's will is **separation from God**. The result of separation from God, is **spiritual death**. One is spiritually dead because his sin has separated him from God who gives eternal life. The final payment for sin that is in our lives, therefore, will be our destruction in the **second death,** which is our final separation from God for eternity (Mt 10:28; Jn 5:28,29).

A. The result of sin is spiritual death.

Romans 5:12 teaches that when one walks in sin, he is separated from God, and thus, **spiritually dead.** As the representative of the human race, Adam was the first to introduce sin into the world. Everyone since Adam suffers from spiritual death because everyone has individually sinned against God. **Spiritual death, therefore, is man's first and greatest problem**. The gospel is the only solution to this problem.

B. Sin brought physical death into the world.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 teaches that when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he was separated from the Tree of Life. He thus had to **physically die** (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, all of us have to suffer the **consequences** of Adam's sin because we cannot now partake of the Tree of Life (Hb 9:27). **Physical death, therefore, is man's second greatest problem.**

V. JESUS REVEALED THE GOSPEL.

Mark 1:14,15 states that Jesus preached the gospel. The word "gospel" means **good news.** The good news is Jesus' coming to solve both our **spiritual death problem** and our **physical death problem**. However, Jesus asks us to first **learn** of Him (Jn 6:45), and then **believe** the good news (the gospel) (Mk 16:16; Jn 3:16; 8:24).

VI. JESUS IS COMING AGAIN.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 teaches that Jesus is coming again at the end of time! When He comes, He will punish with everlasting destruction those who do not **obey the gospel** (1 Pt 4:17). It is necessary, therefore, that everyone "obey the good news" (the gospel) in order to escape the coming destruction when Jesus comes. If one must obey the gospel, then there are two questions that must be asked and answered. **"What is the gospel (good news)?"** and **"How can one obey the gospel?"** Once these two questions are answered one is on his way to come into contact with the grace of God. The answer to the questions, therefore, is crucial for our salvation in Christ.

VII. THE GOSPEL IS AN EVENT IN HISTORY.

1 Corinthians 15:1,2 teaches that the gospel was **declared** and **preached** to men. It was **received** by receptive and repentant hearts. Obedient believers base their emotional and spiritual well being on the historical fact that the gospel event actually happened. We are **saved by the gospel** if we continue to believe the word of God that communicates to us the historical fact of the gospel event. Now what is the gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:3,4 gives a simple definition of the heart of the gospel. The gospel is the **historical event** of **Jesus' death for our sins** and **His resurrection for our hope of eternal life**. Jesus, therefore, died in order to bring us back to God (2 Co 5:18-21). He made it possible for us to draw near to God (Ep 2:11-13). It is for this reason that the gospel is good news!

VIII. ONE OBEYS THE HISTORICAL EVENT OF THE GOSPEL.

Romans 6:3-6 explains how to obey the gospel. In Romans 6:3 Paul declared that one comes "**into Christ**" by immersion (baptism). Verses 4 & 5 explain that we are buried **with Jesus** by immersion into water. We are then resurrected with Jesus out of the "tomb" of water. However, verse 6 explains that before one can obey the gospel by immersion into water, he must first be **crucified with Jesus**. In other words, one must repent of sins before he or she is baptized for remission of sins (At 2:38; 3:19). As an example, people in the first century ...

1. ... **heard** the good news (Mt 13:9; Jn 5:24,25; 6:45; 8:47).
2. ... **believed** the good news (Mk 1:14,15; Jn 3:16; 8:24; 20:30,31).
3. ... **repented** of sin (Lk 13:3; At 2:38; 3:19; 2 Pt 3:9).
4. ... **gave their lives** as a living confession (Mt 10:32,33; Rm 10:9,10).
5. ... **obeyed the gospel** by immersion (baptism) into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Mk 16:15,16; Jn 3:3-5; At 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pt 3:21).

Chapter 9

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL THROUGH BAPTISM

Baptism in obedience to the gospel is one's opportunity to obey Jesus. Baptism, therefore, is necessary in order to obey the gospel. If one is not baptized, then certainly he has not obeyed the historical event of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. In order to be born again, we must obey the death, burial and resurrectio of Jesus.

Since the words "baptism" and "baptize" are mentioned over one hundred times in the New Testament, we must assume that this is a very important subject in the Bible. Thousands of people were baptized in the first century. Thousands were baptized in order to come into a covenant agreement with God. Millions since the first century have also been baptized for the same rea-

son that the early believers were baptized. They were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Upon faith and repentance, anyone can be baptized for the same reasons people were baptized two thousand years ago.

The Greek word *baptizo* that is used in the New Testament was first transliterated in English Bibles with the new English word "baptize." In the transliteration of the word *baptizo*, the equivalent sounds of the Greek letters were brought over into the English language to produce the words "baptize" and "baptism."

However, the Greek definition of *baptizo* is "to dip," "plunge," "immerse," or "overwhelm." The most common definition is "immerse." Therefore, when the words "baptize" or "baptism" are used in the English Bible in reference to one's salvation, the meaning of immersion must be understood. When people were immersed in the first century, they were immersed in "much water" (Jn 3:23). The New Testament teaching is that men and women were immersed in water for remission of sins.

I. THE ONE BAPTISM:

Throughout the New Testament, six baptisms are mentioned.

1. John's immersion (baptism) unto repentance (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:14).
2. Immersion into the responsibility and burden of leadership (Mt 20:22,23).
3. Immersion with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; At 1:5).
4. Immersion with fire (Mt 3:11).
5. Israel's immersion in the cloud (1 Co 10:1,2).
6. Immersion in water for remission of sins (At 2:38).

When Paul wrote the Ephesian letter in A.D. 62, he proclaimed that **there was only one valid baptism at that time** (Ep 4:5). This is the baptism in water for forgiveness of sins that was first preached in Acts 2:38.

II. CANDIDATES FOR BAPTISM:

In order to be a candidate for immersion, the following must happen before one is immersed:

1. Only those who can be taught are to be immersed (Mt 28:19,20).
2. Only those who can understand the command to be immersed are to be immersed (At 2:38).
3. Only men and women are to be immersed (At 8:12).
4. Only those who can hear the teaching of the gospel are to be immersed (Mk 16:15,16).
5. Only those who can believe are to be immersed (Mk 16:16; Jn 8:24; 8:12).
6. Only those who can receive the word of God are to be immersed (At 2:41).
8. Only those who can repent are to be immersed (Lk 13:3; At 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 2 Pt 3:9). Therefore, baptism is only for adults who can make a free-moral choice to be immersed.

III. THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM:

The New Testament records the examples of thousands of people who believed in Jesus and were immersed (At 2:41; 6:7; 8:6,12). They were immersed in obedience to the gospel for the remission of their sins.

A. Immersion is obedience to the gospel.

The gospel is the historical event of the death of Jesus for our sins. It is the event of His burial and resurrection to give us hope of eternal life (1 Co 15:1-4). This historical event is communicated to us through the inspired word of God. Unless one obeys the gospel, he cannot be saved (2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17). When one is baptized, he is buried with Christ into His death in order to be raised from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:3-6). Therefore, the action of *baptizo* is immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in order to be saved. The believer obeys the gospel by immersion in water for the remission of his or her sins.

B. Immersion is for the remission of sins.

When one is immersed with Jesus in obedience to the gospel, he or she comes into contact with the blood of Jesus. He thus receives forgiveness of sins (At 2:38). One's sins are thus washed away (At 22:16; Ti 3:5). God subsequently adds the immersed believer to the church of His people who are in a covenant relationship with Him (At 2:47). Baptism, therefore, stands between being lost outside Christ and saved in Christ. It is necessary, therefore, that one be baptized into Christ.

IV. THE RESULT OF BAPTISM:

Baptism is a response to and obedience of the gospel. When one submits to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus by immersion, he or she receives great blessings from God. The following things happen in 7the spiritual realm of his or her spiritual regeneration:

1. One walks in newness of life (Rm 6:4).
2. One becomes a new creature (2 Co 5:17).
3. One appeals to God with a good conscience (1 Pt 3:21).
4. One puts on Christ (Gl 3:27).
5. One becomes an obedient subject of Christ (Jn 3:3-5).
6. One becomes a part "of Christ" (1 Co 1:12,13).
7. One comes into a relationship with Christ (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:26,27).
8. One comes into Christ where he or she receives the following:

   a. All spiritual blessings (Ep 1:3)
   b. Redemption by Jesus' blood (Ep 1:7; Cl 1:14)
   c. Forgiveness of sins (Ep 1:7)
   d. Sanctification from sin (1 Co 1:2; 1 Jn 1:7)
   e. No condemnation (Rm 8:1)
   f. A new creation in Christ (2 Co 5:17)
   g. Eternal life with Jesus (1 Jn 5:11)
   h. Salvation for eternal life (2 Tm 2:10; At 4:12; 1 Pt 3:21)

V. EXAMPLES OF BAPTISM:

There are many examples in the New Testament where believing men and women obeyed the gospel by immersion in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

1. The Jews on Pentecost (At 2:41-47)
2. The Samaritans (At 8:5-13)
3. The Ethiopian eunuch (At 8:26-40)
4. Saul of Tarsus (At 9:17,18; 22:16)
5. Cornelius and his household (At 10:34-48)
6. Lydia and her household (At 16:14,15)
7. The Philippian jailor and his household (At 16:30-34)
8. The Corinthians (At 18:8)

Faith, repentance and confession are **unto** salvation (Rm 10:9,10; 2 Co 7:10). However, immersion is **into** Christ where there is salvation (2 Tm 2:10; 1 Pt 3:21). Men are redeemed by the sacrificial blood of Jesus (At 20:28; Rv 5:9). However, this redemption by the blood is in Christ (Ep 1:7; Cl 1:14). One must be immersed into Christ (Gl 3:27). Jesus sanctified the church by His blood (Hb 13:12). He continues to sanctify the faithful (1 Jn 1:7). Only the sanctified, therefore, are in the body of Christ (1 Co 1:2; 6:11). In order to be sanctified by the blood of Jesus, one must be immersed into the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13). If one has been immersed for the wrong reasons, he should be immersed again for the right reasons (At 19:1-6).

Chapter 10

KING JESUS

No matter what happens in the world today, one thing is true. Jesus Christ now reigns over all things. He is in control even of the physical world. All people on earth are under His kingdom reign. Even Satan and demons are contained by His authority. Regardless of what may happen on earth, or things in the spiritual world, we can be assured that Jesus reigns as the supreme authority over all things in heaven and on earth.

Now here are some exciting facts about this reign. Among the approximately three hundred Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus, the Messiah (Gr. "Christ"), the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 refer specifically to Jesus' kingdom reign and the establishment of Jesus' reign.

In Daniel 2 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was given a vision by God. The vision was of an image that had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly of brass and feet and legs part of iron and part of clay (Dn 2:31-35). Daniel interpreted this vision. This amazing vision was a prophecy of four world kingdoms (Dn 2:36-45). The head of gold was the Babylonian Kingdom; the breast and arms of silver was the Medo-Persian Kingdom; the belly of brass was the Greek Kingdom; the feet and legs of part iron and part clay was the Roman Kingdom. It was in the days of the Roman Kingdom that Daniel said God would establish a new kingdom (Dn 2:44). This prophecy has been fulfilled!

Daniel 7 is a parallel prophecy of the same four world kingdoms of Daniel 2. In the Daniel 7 vision, Daniel foresaw the ascension of the Son of Man (the Christ) to the Ancient of Days (God) (Dn 7:13). When the Son of Man ascended to His throne, kingdom reign and dominion were given to Him (Dn 7:14; see also the prophecies of 2 Sm 7:12,13; Ps 16:8-11; 110:1; Zc 6:12,13; Jl 2:28-32; Is 2:1-5; Mc 4:1-3).

The prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7, with many other

prophecies, speak of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father. These prophecies foretold that Jesus would be King over all things on the throne of God. On the throne He would function as both a priest and king. God's house would be the spiritual dwelling into which people from all nations would flow as they were drawn by God's word.

I. JESUS AND JOHN SPOKE OF THE KINGDOM:

As the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist was the one crying in the wilderness of Palestine to prepare the way for the Messiah. In preparation for the King's coming, he proclaimed, *"Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight"* (Mt 3:3; see Is 40:3; Ml 3:1). Jesus followed John's preparation. Jesus proclaimed, *"My kingdom is not of this world ..."* (Jn 18:36). Jesus told Pilate that He was born for the purpose of being a king (Jn 18:37).

A. John announced Jesus' kingdom reign.

John preached, *"Repent, **for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**"* (Mt 3:1,2). The word "kingdom" refers to **reign** and **rule**. The phrases "of heaven," or "of God" define **the origin** of the reign and rule. Jesus' reign proceeds from God and out of heaven. The phrase "at hand" referred John's audience to the nearness or immediate establishment of the kingdom reign from heaven. In reference to John's ministry, Jesus' kingdom reign was soon to be established. It was not a kingdom that would be established over two thousand years in the future after the time John first preached this message. It was a kingdom that was to be established in the first century.

B. Jesus announced His kingdom.

After John, Jesus prophesied, *"**The time is fulfilled**, and the kingdom of God is at hand"* (Mk 1:14,15). In order to emphasize the immediate nature of the establishment of His kingdom reign, Jesus said that some of His immediate disciples would not die before He established His kingdom (Mk 9:1; see Lk 9:27).

C. Jesus announced His church.

During His ministry, Jesus asked His disciples, *"Who do you say that I am?"* (Mt 16:15). Peter answered, *"You are **the Christ*** [Messiah], *the **Son of the living God**"* (Mt 16:16). In fact, Jesus was the prophesied **Messiah** (Christ) because He fulfilled all Old Testament prophecies concerning His coming and work (Lk 24:44). He was the **Son of God** because the Father worked mighty miracles through Him (Jn 20:30,31; see 3:2). The Messiahship and Sonship of Jesus are the rock upon which the church is founded (Mt 16:18).

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus spoke of His kingdom. He said to Peter, *"And I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven ...."* "Keys" refers to the privilege to reveal heavenly authority. Peter had the initial authority (privilege) of unlocking the kingdom reign (authority) of Jesus on earth. He was **the first man to officially and publicly announce the kingdom reign of Jesus**. This He did in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

II. FULFILLMENT OF KINGDOM PROPHECIES:

The disciples of Jesus were in Jerusalem on Pentecost when God poured out the Holy Spirit upon all the apostles (At 2:1-4). This outpouring fulfilled the prophecy of Joel that God had made centuries before (Jl 2:28-32; At 2:16-24). It was God's signal that Jesus' reign had begun and the church was to begin by the addition to the disciples the first peole to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins.

A. Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 2.

In the days of the Roman kings the events of Acts 2 fulfilled all kingdom prophecies (Dn 2:44; Lk 2:1-3). Jesus had already ascended to the right hand of the Father and was reigning as King by the time the Acts 2 events took place (Dn 7:13,14; At 1:9-11).

1. Peter stood up on Pentecost and made the first official announcement of the reign of the resurrected and ascended Jesus to the throne of God in heaven (At 2:29-33; see 2 Sm 7:13,14).
2. Peter preached that Jesus was at the right hand of God with all His enemies as His footstool (Ps 16:8-11; 110:l; At 2:25-28,34,35).

B. The church began when people responded to the first announcement of Jesus' kingdom reign.

Peter preached the lordship of Jesus (At 2:36). People believed and responded by repentance and baptism (At 2:37,38). When submissive men and women obey Peter's instructions today, they are added to the

church by God (At 2:41,47). **The church began in the first century when submissive people first responded to the first official announcement of the kingship of Jesus as He exercises all authority from heaven**. Today, every time people submit to the kingdom reign of Jesus, the will of the Father is done on earth in the hearts of men as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:9,10). The kingdom comes into the hearts of those who have submitted to Jesus (Lk 17:20,21). The submitted recognize the power and authority that King Jesus now has.

1. All authority has now been given to Jesus (Jn 13:3; 17:2; Mt 28:18).
2. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).
3. He is now far above all principality, power, might and dominion (Ep 1:20,21).
4. All things are now put under His feet (Ep 1:22).
5. He is now exalted above every name (Ph 2:9,10).
6. All angels and authorities have been made subject to Him (1 Pt 3:22).
7. The created world is now under His control (Hb 1:3).

Jesus is now King of His kingdom and head of His church! He now has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). All those who submit to His kingdom reign will become a part of His body, the church. The church, therefore, is the manifestation of the kingdom reign of Jesus on earth. He reigns from heaven in the hearts of men (Lk 17:20,21). He will reign as king with all authority until He comes again. At this final coming, He will return the authority of kingdom reign to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1 Co 15:26-28).

Chapter 11

THE CHURCH

The word "church" is used in the New Testament to refer to the people of God who have obeyed the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The Greek word *ekklesia* that is translated with the English word "church," comes from two different Greek words, one meaning "out" and the other meaning "to call." The word was originally used in Greek culture to refer to a general participatory assembly of citizens and leaders of a community who were "called out" for a special meeting where discussions were conducted by the entire community. In the New Testament the word "church" (*ekklesia*) is used primarily to refer to God's people who have been called out of the world in order to be a part of an interactive fellowship of believers. The church is God's special holy nation of redeemed people whose citizenship is in heaven (At 20:28; Ph 3:20,21; Ti 2:14; 1 Pt 1:18,19; 2:9). The church is the manifestation on earth of Jesus' kingship in heaven.

The church is made up of those on earth who have submitted to the reign of Jesus from heaven. The church is composed of those in whose hearts Jesus now reigns (Lk 17:20,21). Wherever the will of God is done on earth in the hearts of men as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:10), then the church exists. All the church is under the reign of Jesus, but not all the kingdom of Jesus is the church, for angels, spiritual principalities and earthly governments are all under the kingship of Jesus, though they are not a part of the church (Ep 1:20-22; 1 Pt 3:22).

I. PROPHECY OF THE KINGDOM AND CHURCH:

The church of Christ was established in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem on Pentecost in Acts 2 when people first submitted to the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus.

A. Jesus ascended to heaven prior to Acts 2 (Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; see At 1:9-11).

B. The Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts 2 (Jl 2:28-32; see At 2:1-4,16-24).

C. The events of Pentecost in Acts 2 took place in the last days of national Israel (Jl 2:28; Is 2:1-5; see At 2:16,17; Hb 1:1,2).

D. People of all nations were added to the church and the gospel went from Jerusalem (Is 2:1-5; Mc 4:1-3; see Lk 24:47; At 2:41,47).

E. The new covenant was established when people were baptized into a covenant relationshp with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Jr 31:31-34; see Hb 8:6-18; Mt 28:19,20).

II. BIBLE DESCRIPTION OF OBEDIENT BELIEVERS:

It is important to understand that the New Testament does not emphasize titles that distinguish disciples from one another. The names that are used in reference to God's people describe who they are.

A. New Testament references to Jesus' disciples:

The following are descriptive adjectives that explain who the people of God are in their relationship with God and one another.

1. Disciples (At 11:26)
2. Brethren (Ph 4:21; 1 Pt 2:17)
3. Christians (At 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16)
4. Members (1 Co 12:27)
5. Saints (Rm 1:7; Ep 1:1; Ph 1:1)
6. Servants (Rm 16:1,2)
7. Children of God (Gl 3:26; 1 Jn 3:1,2)
8. Priests (1 Pt 2:5,9; Rv 1:6)

III. BIBLE DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE:

The fact that there are several references to the people of God in the New Testament indicates that there is no one specific name of the church. Those phrases that are used in the New Testament in reference to the ekklesia of God are used to define the nature of the people of God.

A. New Testament references to God's people as the church:

The people of God are focused on God. Since God's people are Christ centered in their lives, then every reference to them in the New Testament would exemplify their identity. They are thus not called after men, but after God and Christ, the Son of God.

1. Church of God (1 Co 1:2)
2. Bride of Christ (Rv 21:9)
3. Body of Christ (Ep 1:22,23)
4. Church of the Lord (At 20:28)
5. Church of Christ (Rm 16:16)
6. Flock of God (1 Pt 5:2,3)
7. House of God (1 Tm 3:15)
8. Temple of God (2 Co 6:16)

IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S COVENANT WITH GOD:

Those who have submitted to the lordship of Jesus have come into a saving covenant relationship with God (Hb 10:15-18).

A. They are in fellowship with God (1 Co 1:9; Jn 15:4; 1 Jn 1:3).

B. They have been purchased and purified by the blood of Jesus (At 20:28; Ep 1:7,14; Ti 2:14; Hb 1:3; 9:14; 1 Jn 1:7).

C. They are a royal priesthood of God (1 Pt 2:5; Rv 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

D. They are a holy nation of God (1 Pt 2:9).

E. They have a heavenly citizenship (Ep 2:6,19; Ph 3:20,21).

F. They are reconciled to God (2 Co 5:18-21; Cl 1:20-22).

G. They are built on the Son of God (Mt 16:15-19; 1 Co 3:10,11).

V. ORGANIC LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE:

Jesus is the only head of the church (Ep 4:4-6). He rules from heaven by the authority of His word (Jn 12:48). Members of the church are Christ centered. They manifest Christ on earth because they recognize who He is (See Mt 16:13-19).

A. Jesus is Head, King and Priest:

As our **Head**, Jesus seeks to direct our lives through His word (Mt 11:28,29; Jn 12:48; Rv 3:20). As our **King**, we voluntarily submit to His lordship in our hearts (Lk 17:20,21). As our **Priest**, we trust in Jesus to have taken care of our problem of sin (1 Jn 1:7).

1. Head: From heaven, Jesus is the only controlling head of His body on earth which is His church (Ep 5:23; Cl 1:18).
2. King: Jesus is King of all things (Jn 18:36,37; 1 Tm 6:15; Rv 3:21). He reigns over all with all authority (Mt 28:18; 1 Pt 3:22). God has subjected all things that exist to His reign (Is 9:6,7; Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:9,10; Hb 1:3).
3. Priest: Jesus is our High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Hb

4:14-16; 8:1,6). He makes intercession for all who have obeyed the gospel (Hb 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn 2:1).

B. Shepherds serve by their godly examples:

1. A plurality of qualified servant elders (1 Tm 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9) are designated among the disciples in order to give spiritual service, guidance and counseling to the flock of God (At 14:23; 20:17; Ph 1:1; Ti 1:5).
2. Elders of the church are also referred to in the New Testament as "presbyters" ("those who are older in age" – At 11:30; 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22; 1 Tm 5:17), "overseers," (or, "bishops" in some translations - At 20:28; 1 Tm 3:1), and "pastors," or "shepherds" ("those who care for the needs of the flock" – Ep 4:11; 1 Pt 5:2). All these terms refer to the elders in order to explain their ministry to the saints.
3. Elders work to spiritually lead (1 Tm 5:17), care for (1 Pt 5:1-3; Js 5:14,15), guard (At 20:28-32; Ti 1:9) and admonish the church of God (1 Th 5:12,13).

C. Deacons, or servants, serve in special needs:

1. Deacons are designated to serve the church (At 6:1-6; Ph 1:1).
2. Deacons have qualifications of work and behavior before they are designated as special servants of the church (1 Tm 3:8-10,12,13).

D. Evangelists preach the word of God to the lost:

It is the work of an evangelist to ...

1. ... proclaim the good news (the gospel) to the lost (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15; Rm 1:15; 10:14,15; 1 Co 9:16; 1 Pt 1:25).
2. ... proclaim the truth (1 Tm 1:3-10; 4:1-3;6,11-16; 2 Tm 2:2; Ti 3:8).
3. ... reprove, rebuke and exhort the church with longsuffering (2 Tm 4;1,2).

All references to special ministries in the New Testament emphasize the service that members of the church offer to one another. They are not references that exalt members above one another.

VI. THE SERVICE OF THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS:

As a body filled with the Spirit of God (1 Co 6:19), the church is a vibrant community in this world to accomplish the work of God to bring people into eternity through obedience to the gospel.

A. Evangelism:

Disciples of Jesus preach and teach the gospel to the world (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16; Lk 24:46,47; At 5:42; 6:7; 8:4; Cl 1:23).

B. Benevolence:

Disciples of Jesus care for the needy and do good works to all men (Mt 6:1-4; 7:11,12; 25:31-46; Lk 4:18; 6:30,31; 10:25-37; 14:12-14; At 2:44,45; 4:32-37; Gl 2:10; 6:10; 1 Tm 5:3-16; Js 1:27; 2:14-26; 1 Jn 3:17,18).

C. Edification:

Disciples of Jesus must edify themselves (1 Co 14:3-5,12,16) in order that they be equipped to minister in all good things (At 14:22,23; Ep 4:11-16; 5:19; 6:10-18; Hb 10:24,25).

VII: THE WORSHIP OF THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS:

Though every day is a day of service and worship for Christians (Rm 12:1,2), Sunday is a special day of worship together as an assembly of God's people. They come together to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus over a love feast (1 Co 11:17-33; 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). During or after the feast they partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus (Mt 26:26-29; At 20:7; 1 Co 11:23-29). Every day disciples sing praises to God and admonish one another (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16), preach and teach the word of God (2 Tm 4:2), pray (1 Th 5:17), discuss and implement good works (At 20:7; Hb 10:24,25), and give to help those who are in need, especially widows and orphans, and in order to send forth evangelists to preach the gospel (Rm 10:14,15; 1 Co 16:1-3).

Jesus is coming again to save His body, the church of Christ. In order to be delivered from this world when Jesus comes, one must be a part of the one body for which Jesus died (At 20:28). Therefore, one must be baptized into the body of Christ in order to be saved when Jesus comes again (Rm 6:3-6; 1 Co 12:13; Gl 3:26,27). Jesus is coming for His people. It is imperative, therefore, that each person on earth has the opportunity to become a member of His body. Christians preach the gospel to the world in order to give everyone an opportunity for heaven.

Chapter 12

CHRISTIANS ONLY

Over two thousand years ago the disciples of Jesus were called Christians (At 11:26). It was not easy being a Christian in the first century in the midst of so many confused religious beliefs Today, there are also thousands of religious groups throughout the world. However, in the midst of so many religious beliefs, millions are becoming Christians only. They are becoming Christians because of the overwhelming truth that Jesus of Nazareth was more than a prophet. He was the Son of God just as He claimed.

We want to be Christians only. That's all. In a world of conflicting and confusing religious beliefs and practices, you too can be just a Christian. You can be a disciple of Christ without being a part of any religious institution of men. You can be just a Christian without placing your membership with a religious organization of man that seeks to claim you as its member. Your membership will be in heaven alone.

The word "Christian" means that one is "of Christ." As a Christian you belong to Christ. You are a follower of the person of Jesus and His teachings. One who follows the person of Jesus Christ and is obedient to His teachings, is just a Christian. Millions of people throughout the world have become Christians only. They are validated as Christians simply because they have obeyed the gospel by being immersed into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and now, they are living a Christ-centered life.

I. WHY BE A CHRISTIAN:

We are Christians because Jesus fulfilled over **300 prophecies** written about Him hundreds of years before He lived. He must be believed. Here are only a few examples of these fulfilled prophecies.

A. He was a descendant of Abraham (Gn 12:1-3; see Gl 3:16).

B. He was born in Bethlehem (Mc 5:2; see Mt 2:1,3).

C. He was a sojourner in Egypt (Hs 11:1; see Mt 2:15).

D. He was a teacher of the Gentiles (Is 42:1-4; see Mt 12:18-21).

E. He was a worker of miracles (Is 35:5,6; see Lk 7:18-23).

F. He was betrayed (Zc 13:7; see Mt 26:55,56).

G. He died and rose from the dead (Ps 16:10; see Jn 2:19-22).

II. UNITY OF CHRISTIANS:

God expects His people to be united throughout the world. Though there were individual assemblies of Christians in the first century as in Corinth (1 Co 1:2) or Ephesus (At 20:17), all local assemblies were part of the one universal church (Rm 16:16). **There is only one church throughout the world that is made up of all those who are just Christians**. God expects Christians to be united together as one universal church (1 Co 1:10). They are not to divide themselves from one another. As obedient disciples of Jesus who have given themselves in service to God, they are to stand fast in the faith and strive together with one heart and soul against the works of Satan (Ph 1:27; Cl 1:2-16). Through the power of God and their unity, Christians are a worldwide force against evil.

II. PRAYER OF CHRISTIANS:

Jesus prayed that those who follow Him should be united as one (Jn 17:20,21). He did not pray that we be satisfied with dividing ourselves into different denominations. All of us throughout the world who believe in Jesus and His word are seeking to answer Jesus' prayer to be one. We are striving to be united in order to call all non-Christians of the world into a covenant relationship with God through obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-6).

III. BEING FREE AS A CHRISTIAN:

You can be free as a Christian. Believers in Jesus can be Christians without being a part of any man-made religion. Believers in Jesus can be free from being divided into different religious groups. One can be free as a Christian only by allowing the Bible to be his or her **only authority in religious matters**. Since we will be judged only by the word of Jesus (Jn 12:48), **then we are free in religious matters to be responsible only to the word of Jesus**. Since the Bible is the Spirit-inspired word of God (2 Tm 3:16,17), **then we are free to allow the Bible alone to direct us in godly living**. Since the

word of Jesus is our source of faith (Rm 10:17), **then we are free to allow it to be the only foundation of our faith**. It is not wrong to have religious traditions. However, religious traditions must never be bound on believers in a manner by which the traditions cause division among Christians (Gl 5:1; see Mk 7:1-9). In order that the truth make us truly free, we must agree to allow the Bible to be our final authority (Jn 8:32). We must speak where the Bible speaks. But where the Bible is silent, we must allow freedom of opinion in loving discussion.

IV. FIRST PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIANS:

Being just a Christian in the community means believing and doing great things. Being a Christian means being a disciple who works for Jesus. In order for you to get started in living as a Christian, the following are essential or fundamental beliefs that all Christians must maintain in their lives:

A. Believe in the one true and living God (Is 44:8; Ep 4:4-6).

B. Believe in Jesus as the one Lord (Jn 20:30,31; Ep 4:4-6).

C. Believe in the one universal body, the church (Cl 1:18).

D. Believe in the one Holy Spirit and His fruit (Gl 5:22,23).

E. Believe in the one baptism (immersion) (At 2:38; Ep 4:4-6).

F. Believe in the one faith (Ep 4:4-6; Jd 3).

G. Believe in holy and moral living (Cl 3:12-17; 1 Pt 1:15).

H. Believe in Jesus' behavioral principle of love (Jn 13:34,35; 14:15).

V. EXPECTATIONS OF CHRISTIANS:

As a result of their commitment to Jesus, Christians expect to live the abundant life of spiritual and emotional peace in this world (Jn 10:10; Ph 4:6,7). Christians know and expect all things to work together for good (Rm 8:28). They expect not to be tempted above what they are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). However, because of their commitment to be working disciples for their Lord Jesus, they expect persecution from those whom Satan is using to destroy the work of God (2 Tm 3:12). They remember that the word of God tells them not to be ashamed, but to glorify God by living as a Christian (1 Pt 4:16; see At 11:26; Mt 5:10). Since the disciples of Jesus are more than Christians in name only, they understand that obedient service of the Lord Jesus Christ will stir up persecution. But they also remember that the reward for faithful discipleship is eternal life in heaven.

IV. YOU CAN BE JUST A CHRISTIAN:

In order to be a disciple of Jesus, one must first believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). We must then be immersed into Christ in order to put on Christ (Gl 3:26,27). Jesus calls out to all people through the gospel of His death for your sins and resurrection for your hope (2 Th 2:14). If we accept His call, we can be just a Christian. Great things will then happen in the life of the obedient (At 2:38,47).

Book 41

Obedience To The Gospel

A preacher once stood up before a hundred church leaders, held up a copy of the Bible and shouted, "Is this the gospel?" In unison they all responded, "Yes!" The preacher then said, "Wrong! The Bible is not the gospel!" Was the preacher a heretic, or a knowledgeable "gospel preacher"?

It is the natural quest of people of faith to seek out God. In their search they thirst for acceptance and peace of mind with their Creator. If their faith is true, they will not turn from their search until they have satisfied their souls that they are right in the eyes of God. Nothing is more crucial to this search and acceptance than knowing with certainty that one has fulfilled the will of the Father, especially in establishing his or her initial relationship with Jesus.

People of faith who call themselves after Christ are driven to live Christ-centered lives. They seek to walk with Christ. They seek to follow Him through the trials of life, being assured that they are in Him and with Him in this earthly walk. Ask any Christian and he can tell you when his Christ-centered life began. It began at a cross and tomb. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of confusion in the religious world as to when the Christ-centered life begins. Conflict and confusion seem to reign concerning what should be a simple biblical answer concerning the beginning of the Christ-centered walk with King Jesus.

The assurance of our faith is based on our objective knowledge that we are Christ-centered in our walk with God. Our knowledge must be based on the Christ-like life that is objectively learned from the word of God. It is as plain as John stated, *"And by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments"* (1 Jn 2:3). We can know that we are living the Christ-centered life only by our knowledge of and obedience to what Christ commanded. From the beginning of our walk with our Lord Jesus Christ, to the time of our death, we must be assured that we are walking in the commandments of Jesus. This certainly sets aside our own religious inventions or traditions as to how we would begin and end our life with Jesus. The agonies that are in store for those who do not seek and follow the commandments of Christ are a terrifying deterrent to following after our own religious inventions.

It is for the preceding reasons that God knew that we needed a specific time or event in our lives when we could confidently affirm that our walk with Jesus began by His forgiveness of all our past sins. He knew that we would have little faith in a subjective experience that emotionally originated from within ourselves. He knew that we would have doubt if His answer to our desires was abstract rather than concrete. Therefore, God commanded a specific event in our lives to which we could continually refer the rest of our lives concerning when our walk with Jesus began. It would be time when our past sins were washed away and we could confidently affirm that we were in a right relationship with God.

It would be inconceivable to claim that we walked with Christ, while at the same time, we based our walk on our own religious inventions. Knowing that religious traditions continually plague our religiosity, we would never take the chance of beginning our relationship with Christ on the foundation of the traditions of our fathers. As the Jews of Jesus' day, our fathers may have walked away from the commandments of God (See Mk 7:1-9). In order to reassure ourselves of our relationship with Jesus, all of us must dig through our religious traditions and subjective experiences in order to make sure that we have not sought to establish a relationship with God that is based on

something of human origin. Any relationship with God must be based on His conditions. And the only way we can determine and discover His conditions, is in His word. With this challenge, therefore, we would assemble around an open Bible in order to define, reassure, or simply discover the great news that God has for all people in reference to beginning a lifetime relationship with His Son that will end in eternal life.

Chapter 1

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

Paul's reference to "**obedience of the gospel**" in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 is crucial to our understanding that the gospel, and our obedience thereof, are the beginning of our relationship with Jesus. His statements in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 are in the context of the final coming of Jesus. Since Jesus is the coming King before whom we must make peace (see Lk 14:31-33), then it is imperative that we understand how to make peace with Him.

> *For it is a just thing with God to repay tribulation to those who trouble you, and to give you who are afflicted rest with us when 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. These will be* ***punished*** *with* ***everlasting destruction*** *away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power ....*"

Frightening? We must never forget that it is the LORD Jesus Christ who will be our final judge. This is not baby Jesus in the manger. It is not the Jesus with the disciples along the Galilean road. This is King Jesus who is coming as the just judge of all humanity.

The coming King Jesus is the One into whose hands God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have given all rights to be our judge (At 17:30,31). *"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).

Now here is a very important question every reader of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 must ask and answer: **Is Paul saying that if one does not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that he cannot be saved**? If you answered "No", then you need to read the passage again. Jesus is coming to condemn to eternal destruction those who have not obeyed the gospel. The statement is right there in your Bible.

Is preaching and obeying the gospel important? The importance of understanding and preaching the gospel is based on Jesus' mandate to *"go into all the world and* ***preach the gospel to every creature****"* (Mk 16:15). And this is exactly what happened in the first century. Throughout the book of Acts the gospel is proclaimed in every recorded address of the disciples to the people. The gospel was the first thing that Paul preached when he went to every city of his missionary journeys (1 Co 15:3,4). From Jesus' mandate to the example of the evangelistic outreach of the early disciples, the gospel was made the "first page" on which any Christ-centered life must begin and be sustained. If one bypasses the gospel, he has bypassed Jesus. He is not living a Christ-centered life.

Paul emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel first because of what he states in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. He is definitely talking about Jesus' final coming. Jesus is coming with His angels in flaming fire. He is coming to take vengeance. He is taking vengeance on those who refused to have God in their knowledge, and thus, seek to find the one true and living God (See Rm 1:20). And those who have found God, but refuse to respond to the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, these He will punish with everlasting destruction. The punishment will be destruction forever away from the eternal life-giving God. The passage is talking about damnation forever.

If you do not believe that there will be an eternal punishment for those who do not respond to God, then it will be useless to continue reading this plea. In fact, it will be useless to continue reading the Bible, for throughout the word of God there is a clear message that all men will be held accountable for their behavior. The New Testament is saturated with commands and examples that enjoin upon all men the necessity of obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter stated this as a question. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us,* ***what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God****?"* Peter knew that the Christians to whom he was writing knew the answer to the question. And the answer is 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

It takes no interpretation of the Bible to understand

clearly the consequences of not obeying the gospel. Those fundamentals that are necessary for our salvation are not written in obscure language or figurative statements. Bible texts that speak of those things that are essential for our salvation are written in passages that "mean what they say, and say what they mean." And in the two texts that we have just read, **the Bible states that every person must obey the gospel in order to escape the coming vengeance and eternal judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Since one must obey the gospel in order to escape a destiny of eternal hell, then there are two very important questions that must be asked and answered.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?
HOW CAN ONE
OBEY THE GOSPEL?

Our eternal salvation depends on a correct answer to these questions. And in answering these questions we must be cautious that we do not slip in our own religious traditional theologies of the past or any emotional experiences we have used to validate our relationship with God. We must not be influenced by some charismatic evangelist, or the preacher down the street who has also been confused. Our answers to the questions must be based on an objective reading of the Bible.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Remember the audience of one hundred people who said that the Bible was the gospel? Yes, they were all wrong. At the conclusion of this one chapter of study you too will agree that they were wrong.

David needed to kill a giant. In order to do so, he took with him five smooth stones to meet Goliath. However, he only needed one to do the job. And so it is with clarifying our understanding of the gospel. We need only one passage of scripture that goes right to the heart of the gospel message. God began His plan of redemption from the first sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. He continued working His plan throughout the history of national Israel, until eventually coming to the fullness of time in the event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus two thousand years ago (See Gl 4:4). Paul explains the consummation of the plan of redemption in **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**.

A. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

Since there is a great deal of misunderstanding concerning the gospel, it is imperative that we work through Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 in order to be very specific and definitive. We begin with verses 1 & 2.

> *Moreover, brethren, I **declare** to you the **gospel** which I **preached** to you, which also you **received** and in which you **stand**, by which also you are **saved**, **if** you hold fast to that **word** which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.*

These words are in the Bible because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16,17). However, **these words are not the gospel**. They are only words that talk **about** the gospel. The following are important points that Paul explains in verses 1 & 2 concerning the propagation of the gospel to the world:

1. ***Declare:*** The gospel is a message that can be declared. The Greek word in the text means "to make known." Unless Christians assume their duty to be evangelistic, the gospel cannot be made known to the world.

2. ***Preached:*** The medium through which the gospel is made known is through the words of preaching. The words are not the gospel. Words are only used to communicate the event of the gospel.

3. ***Received:*** The gospel is received as true when those who read their Bibles believe that the gospel event really happened. Unless one believes what is communicated through the words of the Bible, he will not respond to the event of the gospel. Need we say that receiving the gospel is something that babies cannot do. Receiving involves making an adult choice, and babies cannot make choices. Individuals must make the choice of accepting as true the event of the gospel.

4. ***Stand:*** The word "stand" is used as a metaphor in reference to believing the gospel event. As we have emotional assurance because the foundation upon which we physically stand, the gospel brings emotional stability to all those who receive it as true. When one responds to the gospel, it brings him peace of mind (See Ph 4:6,7).

5. ***Saved:*** This is the reward when one responds to the event of the gospel. One is saved from his inability to justify himself before God, and thus be rewarded with eternal life. If one would seek to live forever, there-

fore, the gospel event stands between him and eternity.

6. ***If:*** This is subjunctive, and thus, conditional. One is saved by the gospel only if he continues to believe the event of the gospel. If one stops believing any event of the gospel, as some in Corinth did, then he will lose his salvation. The remainder of 1 Corinthians 15 is discussing the event of the resurrection of Jesus. If one stops believing that Jesus was raised from the dead, then the gospel will profit him nothing in reference to his salvation.

7. ***Word:*** In order to continue believing, and thus inherit the salvation of eternal life, we must continue to believe our Bibles that report the event of the gospel. The gospel is communicated to us through the written word of God, though the Corinthians originally heard it through the spoken words of Paul. The gospel event happened before the New Testament was written. But if we do not study and continue to believe the recorded news of the gospel in the New Testament, we will lose our salvation.

The first four verses of 1 Corinthians 15 are as a newspaper. A newspaper is the record of events that happened in history. When a particular event happens in history, a reporter may go to where the event took place. He interviews those who experienced the event. He talks to witnesses. He returns to his office and writes a report of the event. The newspaper, therefore, becomes **a report of events** that took place in history. The newspaper is not the event. It is only the report of the event. **The Bible is not the gospel. It is only the Holy Spirit inspired report of the event of the gospel**.

Verses 1 & 2 of 1 Corinthians 15 are only a report concerning the gospel in relation to Paul's original delivery of the good news to the Corinthians. He used words to communicate facts about the gospel. However, the words he used were not the gospel. He only reported about the gospel. In verses 3 & 4 he explains the central events of the gospel that the Corinthians received as true, and by which they were saved.

> *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.*

Now this is the great news! This is the event of the gospel! The gospel was an historical event that took place outside Jerusalem many years ago. Christ historically died for our sins. He was buried. He was historically raised from the dead to give us hope of being raised to a new life in this life, and eternal life to come. **The gospel is the historical event of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ**. We read about this historical event in the inspired word of God. The Bible, therefore, is not the gospel. It is the inspired report of the gospel event.

And herein are many people confused. Unknowledgeable preachers have for years held up their Bibles and proclaimed, "This is the gospel." They were wrong. They also taught, "Obey the gospel" when referring to the countless commands of the Bible. But they were teaching an impossibility that brought guilt, and not assurance and hope. If the Bible were the gospel, and we had to obey every command perfectly in order to be saved, then no one could be saved, for no one can obey the law of God perfectly. No one could thus be saved because *"there is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rm 3:10), *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rm 3:23).

No one can perfectly obey all that is written in the Bible. And because no one can obey everything that is written in the Bible, then no one can be saved. If the Bible were the gospel, then the proclamation of the preacher is a message of doom, not salvation and hope. The truth is that the gospel event happened in order to deliver us from our inability to keep God's law perfectly. The gospel event brings confidence and assurance. We have hope because we are delivered from sin because of the cross. The Bible is God's means by which the saving event of this good news is communicated to us. If we respond to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, then we will be saved as the Corinthians who received (believed) and obeyed the report of the gospel that was preached by Paul.

B. Our two great problems:

We need salvation by the gospel because of two great problems that we have in our lives, problems for which we need good news.

1. ***Our problem of spiritual death:*** There is no person alive who has not sinned, for no one can live the perfect life (Rm 3:23). The problem with sin is that it separates us from the One against whom we sin. *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear"* (Is 59:2). It is for this reason that the wages of sin is death (Rm 6:23). If God will not hear our pleas for mercy, then we will suffer the consequence of eternal separation from Him when Jesus comes again (2 Th 1:9). We are thus without hope and condemned to hell if we do not find good news for our prob-

lem of spiritual death. No man can be saved without responding to God's solution for our problem of sin. It is God who must determine the conditions for our spiritual death problem, not man.

2. *Our problem of physical death:* When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, he spiritually died in being separated from God because of his sin. However, his disobedience also had consequences that affected all mankind. After Adam's sin, God said, *"Behold, the man has become as one of Us, to know good and evil.* ***And now he must not be allowed to put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever"*** (Gn 3:22). So God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever. The problem was, not only was Adam driven from the tree of life, he also took with him all humanity. Therefore, because of the consequences of the sin of Adam, all men must physically die (1 Co 15:20-22). In a few years we will all be physically dead. Do we have a problem? Certainly!

The gospel is goods news for our spiritual and physical death problems. Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and rose again the third day in order to give us hope. It is as Paul wrote, *"But now Christ has been raised from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who are asleep* [dead]. *For since by man* [Adam] *came death, by man* [Christ] *came also the resurrection of the dead.* ***For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive"*** (1 Co 15:20-22). Do you want to live forever? Then keep reading.

Chapter 3

HOW CAN ONE OBEY THE GOSPEL?

Remember 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 and the two questions that were proposed by what Paul said? The first question was, What is the gospel? This question was answered in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4. The gospel is the good news of the historical event of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope.

Paul clearly stated in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 that when Jesus comes again, He will punish with eternal destruction those who do not obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Since this is true, then we must answer the second question that is proposed by 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9: How can one obey the gospel? How can one obey the historical event of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus?

Romans 6 is the answer to how one must obey the gospel. Verses 1-6 answer the question. In verses 1-3 Paul asked three very important questions.

> *What then will we say?* [1] *Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Certainly not!* [2] *How will we who died to sin live any longer therein?* [3] *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*

Baptism was a turning point in the lives of those to whom Paul wrote in Rome. They had "died to sin" at the time they were crucified with Christ. In their subsequent burial with Christ in His death, they were "baptized into His (Christ's) death." In verse 4 Paul began his answer to the three questions he asked in verses 1-3.

> *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.*

One is baptized into the death of Christ in the tomb by being buried with Him through baptism into a tomb of water. Paul could not have made this more simple. The Greek word *baptizo* means "to dip," "to plunge," or "to immerse." Two thousand years ago Jesus died, was buried in a tomb, and then resurrected. One today can join with Him in His death, burial and resurrection by going down into a tomb of water. Baptism, therefore, is not simply a reenactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is a response to the good news of the gospel. It is establishing a union with Christ by death on a cross, immersion in a tomb of water and resurrection.

Paul assumed that the Romans did not fully understand the total purpose of their obedience to the gospel. He expands on his explanation in verse 5 with different words.

> *For if we have been* ***united together in the likeness of His death****, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.*

Before we are buried with Christ, we must *"have been united together in the likeness of His death."* In verse 4 he simply explained that we were "buried with

Him" in baptism. But in verse 5 Paul takes a step backwards. Before one is "buried with Him through baptism," he must first be "united together in the likeness of His death." In other words, **one must die before he is buried**. Paul explains this in verse 6.

> *. . . knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him** so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be bondservants to sin.*

Those who want to be buried with Jesus, must first die with Him on a cross. If we would be baptized into His death, then we must first die. Before burial, we must be crucified in the "likeness of His death." Jesus was nailed to the cross for our sins (1 Co 15:3). We must be nailed to our cross of repentance for our sins. It is not that we must come to the foot of the cross, as we hear so many saying. If the sinner stays at the foot of the cross, he will accomplish nothing in reference to his salvation. The Greek word for "crucified" is passive, that is, the subject is acted upon. The gospel message takes people to the cross, not just to the foot of the cross. As nails were driven into the hands of Jesus, so nails of repentance must be driven into the old man of sin. The old man must die on the cross as Jesus died on the cross. If there is no death through repentance on a cross, then there can be no burial. If we do not crucify the old man of sin, we cannot bury him. Have you ever tried to bury a living person?

Here is how Paul referred to his own crucifixion with Christ.

> *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).

Unless one is "crucified with Christ" Christ cannot live in him. When Ananias said to Paul after the Damascus road encounter with Jesus, *"Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins,"* he was talking to a dead man who had crucified himself with Christ (At 22:16). Paul needed to be baptized in order to bury the old man and wash away all his past sins.

The old man of sin must die on the cross, not in the water. Only the dead are buried. We do not drown living sinners by trying to bury them until they stop bubbling. **Before burial there must be death**! There must be a cry that one receive all that Jesus is into his heart. There must be remorse over sin and rebellion. There is no salvational magic in a "sinner's prayer," which thing is never mentioned in the Bible. Too many people have been duped into thinking that all is well once they have cried out for salvation and repented of their sins. What they have done is repent of their wayward life. They have been crucified with Jesus. So now they are dead. What many of the religious world have done is convince thousands of dead men that they are alive without being buried with Jesus in order be raised to walk in newness of life. But there is no life until there is a burial.

The best way to determine if one has truly been crucified with Christ is if he or she is sniffing out a tomb in which to be buried. There is no life in death. If one has died with Christ on the cross of repentance, he is a dead man walking until he finds a tomb of water from which to be resurrected in order to walk in newness of life. This is how the Ethiopian eunuch responded. *"See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized"* (At 8:36). It is a sad situation to think that you are alive when actually you are a dead man walking.

In order to complete one's obedience to the gospel in order to escape the coming judgment of Jesus, he must be buried with Jesus and raised with Jesus. The gospel is the good news of Jesus' death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection to give us hope. Our obedience to the gospel is our death on a cross of repentance, burial and resurrection with Jesus. Now we understand why there are so many recorded cases of people being baptized in the first century. They were responding to the cross of Jesus, His death, and resurrection (See At 2:31-47; 8:5-13,26-40; 9:10-19, 24-43; 16:13-14, 25-34; 18:8; 19:1-5).

As we said before, these are not things that concern innocent babies. Crucifixion with Christ involves making life-changing decisions. It involves response and commitment, things which infants can never do. We would never degrade the importance of what God calls on us to do with ourselves by making choices in the lives of those who do not have the power to make such choices for themselves. There is no harm in dedicating one's infant to the Lord, but we would not dare plagiarize or minimize obedience to the gospel by baptism in order to assume that some infant is in sin.

Too many people have degraded baptism to be a legal work of law in order to justify oneself before God. But baptism can never be a legal work of law. It is a response, a response to what Jesus did for us. The legal understanding of some is often expressed in how they seek to move one to be baptized. They say, "Isn't it time you 'get baptized'." If we "get baptized" in response to law, then our response is not in reference to the good news of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is not the end of a legal action of hearing, believing, repenting and confessing. Baptism is a response to Jesus

and the grace of the cross (Ti 2:11). It is for this reason that Paul reminded the Corinthians, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel . . ."* (1 Co 1:17). When we preach the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, people will respond as the Ethiopian eunuch. They will respond as the thousands on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 (See At 2:37,38). They will respond by following Jesus to the cross, to the grave, and then, in resurrection to a Christ-centered life.

So is baptism important and necessary to establish a relationship with God? 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 answers this question. But consider also the fact that many people want to be **with Jesus** in eternity, but not with Him on the cross and in the grave. Paul expressed his desire to die and be with Christ. *"For I am torn between the two, having a desire to depart and to be **with Christ**, which is much better"* (Ph 1:23). Our question is, When does the "with" begin? If one wants to be with Jesus in eternity, he must begin his journey with Jesus by first being "crucified **with** Christ" (Rm 6:6). If one is crucified with Christ, then he must be buried **with** Him (Rm 6:4). And once one comes out of a tomb of water in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, he must walk with Jesus throughout life. If we seek to be with Jesus in eternity, therefore, we must start the "with" on a cross of repentance, and continue it through a burial in water in order to be raised to walk with Him in this life. There can be no being with Jesus in eternity if there is no obedience of the gospel.

Living with Christ is discipleship. In order to determine if one is a disciple of Christ, He must follow the teachings of Christ. Jesus explains this in Matthew 28:19,20. *"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**."* Discipling people to Jesus means teaching them to the point that they crucify themselves with Christ, and then, they are buried and raised with Christ. But discipleship does not stop at baptism. One must continue to learn the word of Christ. Baptism is only the beginning of the Christ-entered life. If one is baptized, and then terminates his study of the word of Christ, then he is no longer Christ-centered. He is not remaining "with Christ" because he has forsaken the direction of the word of Christ. Jesus said, *"**If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples**"* (Jn 8:31; see 14:15,23).

It is easy to discover a disciple of Jesus. It is the person who continually studies the word of Christ. If one does not continue to study the word of Christ, then he ceases to be with Christ in this life. Therefore, **we cannot disconnect the gospel from the word of Christ**. If one is sincere in being crucified, buried and raised with Christ, then he is sincere about giving his life to a study of the word of Christ (2 Tm 2:15). Crucifying oneself with Christ, therefore, is more than being remorseful over past sins. It is making a change from refusing to listen to the word of Christ to a lifetime commitment of studying of the word of Christ in order to know Him. As Peter said, *"But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18). When one obeys the gospel and comes into a relationship with God, it is only natural for that person to seek instruction from the Father.

Chapter 4

BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

The Christ-centered life begins when one joins with Jesus on the cross. It continues into a grave of water, and then in the new life with Christ in life. And *"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). Walking in the light with Jesus after baptism brings all those blessings that will eventually result in hearing the words, *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 25:34).

In Romans 6:3 Paul spoke of being baptized **into Christ**. These are the same words he used when he wrote to the Galatians. *"For as many of you as were baptized **into Christ** have put on Christ"* (Gl 3:27). The phrase "in Christ" is unique with Paul in that it explains a relationship that one establishes with Christ at the time of his obedience to the gospel in baptism. This relationship with the Son of God comes with a great deal of spiritual blessings. In fact, all spiritual blessings that will result in our final salvation are found in this relationship in Christ. *"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). The following are these spiritual blessings:

- **Redemption and forgiveness:** *"**In Him** we have **redemption** through His blood, the **forgiveness** of sins according to the riches of His grace"* (Ep 1:7; see Rm 3:24).

- **Sanctification:** *". . . 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; 6:9-11).
- **No condemnation:** *"There is now, therefore, **no condemnation** to those who are **in Christ Jesus** . . ."* (Rm 8:1).
- **New creation:** *"Therefore, if any man is **in Christ**, he is a new creature"* (2 Co 5:17).
- **Eternal life:** *"And this is the testimony, that God has given us **eternal life** and this life is **in His Son**"* (1 Jn 5:11).

The result of all the spiritual blessing that one has as a result of being baptized into Christ is salvation. *"Therefore, I endure all things for the elects' sake,"* wrote Paul, *"that they may also obtain the **salvation that is in Christ Jesus** with eternal glory"* (2 Tm 2:10). If redemption and forgiveness of sins are in Christ, then there is no redemption and forgiveness of sins outside Christ. If sanctification by the Holy Spirit is in Christ, then there is no sanctification outside Christ. If one is not under condemnation in Christ because he has the continual cleansing of the blood of Christ, then one is under condemnation outside Christ. If one is a new creature in Christ, then he remains an old creature outside Christ. And if eternal life is in Christ, then only eternal death is outside Christ. Must we still answer the question as to why one must obey the gospel by immersion into Christ in order to be saved?

That which is most important for one to do in order to be saved is where Satan will do his best work in deceiving men. And in reference to obedience to the gospel he has done a very good job in the religious world. He has held people back from the grave of baptism by convincing them that a simple "sinner's prayer" will get them to heaven. He has convinced some that if they have some esctatic experience of speaking in "tongues," (gibberish), the Holy Spirit has saved them directly, and thus, they can circumvent the cross, grave and resurrection. He has convinced people that they can marginalize the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus by some emotional experience with the Holy Spirit by which they have been supposedly saved directly apart from obedience to the gospel. Satan has kept thousand off the cross of crucifixion with Jesus by making them believe that they can emotionally feel themselves into Christ without baptism for remission of sins. This is the greatest tragedy of Christendom in the world today.

After the event of His death, burial and resurrection (the gospel), Jesus commissioned His disciples, *"Go into all the world and preach the **gospel** to every creature"* (Mk 16:15). The disciples were to go and preach that He had died on the cross for the sins of humanity. They were to preach that He was buried, but that He was also resurrected in order to give men hope of resurrection to eternal life. Therefore, Jesus stated a truth to the disciples, *"**He who believes and is baptized will be saved**. But he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mk 16:16).

True believers will obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. But if one does not believe that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected, then there is no need to talk about baptism. But for those who believe as Noah, whose family was saved from death by the waters of the flood, *"the like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us"* (1 Pt 3:21). One is saved at the point of baptism because all past sins are washed away (At 2:38). The statement that should now be made to every honest believer is, *"**Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins**, calling on the name of the Lord"* (At 22:16).

Those who seek to begin a Christ-centered life must seek out a cross, and then find a tomb of water in which to be buried with Jesus. If there is no burial, there will never be a resurrection to life. If one is not nailed to a cross in repentance, and buried with the Son of God in order to be raised with Him, then he is on his own with the merit of his own religiosity. Just keep the following words of Jesus in mind: *"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).

No miracles were worked in the first century through those who had not obeyed the will of the Father by obedience to the gospel of His Son. The Father would never minimize the cross and resurrection by confirming that the disobedient were saved through some miraculous manifestation of the Spirit. It is not the will of the Father to circumvent the cross of His Son through some supposed work of the Spirit in the lives of unbelievers. To claim such is almost blasphemous in saying that the cross and resurrection of the Son of God can be bypassed in order to be saved. You cannot circumvent the cross and the tomb for the crown.

Book 42

The Music Of The Church

When the members of the body of Christ come together in assembly, that which manifests their organic function for than anything they can do in assembly, is their teaching and admonishing one another in song. Great singing is the sign of a healthy and functioning fellowship of members. In singing, every attending member joins in the function to teach fellow members spiritual truths through the medium of song. The members join in a participatory admonition of one another in song. The Lord's Supper is individual between a member and His God. Preaching and teaching during the assembly is usually carried out by a few members. Giving is also individual. But singing is participatory. This is what God meant it to be.

It is the nature of the ekklesia (church) of Christ to be bonded together because of a common salvation (Jd 3). Passages that use the phrase "one another" saturate every New Testament book that was directed to the early ekklesia. The phrase is used so much that we are overwhelmed with the Spirit's affirmation that we as members of the ekklesia should make every effort to be known by our love for one another because of our common salvation by the grace of God (Jn 13:34,35). Christianity is a "one another" faith that is focused on Jesus.

In the context of such emphasis on the participatory oneness of the body of Christ, **we would expect that the Holy Spirit would mandate discipleship behavior that was focused on doing that which brings us together and keeps us together**. For example, consider these exhortations: *"consider one another to stir up love and good works"* (Hb 10:24), *"bear one another's burdens"* (Gl 6:2), *"bear the weaknesses of the weak"* (Rm 15:1), *"let every one of us please his neighbor for his good"* (Rm 15:2), and *"for this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that you should love one another"* (1 Jn 3:11). We get the point.

In reference to the unified nature of the body, we would expect that God also mandate what should be manifested when all members of the body come together in assembly. **What His people would do in assembly should reflect the participatory oneness of the body**. For example, in the Lord's Supper/love feast we are to consider one another and *"wait for one another"* (1 Co 11:33). In our assembly as disciples we are to exhort and edify one another with our gifts that find their expression in edifying the whole body (Read 1 Co 12). In fact, every meeting of the saints should be an opportunity for mutual edification through the mutual participation of the whole body. Unfortunately, the Corinthians manifested pride and divisiveness in their assemblies. The result was that the Holy Spirit directed the hand of Paul to write a lengthy portion of Scripture specifically directed to correcting their divisive attitudes and behavior (See 1 Co 11-14). **When Christians come together in assembly, it should always be for edification and the promotion of the oneness of the body**. Our assemblies should always reflect our unity and participation in one another's lives.

In the midst of his exhortations to the Corinthians, Paul made the statement, *"I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with the mind* [understanding] *also"* (1 Co 14:15). Certain individuals in the Corinthians' assemblies were taking pride in speaking in languages (tongues) in prayers or songs that no one understood in the assembly. Paul said that such prayer and singing in a foreign language was unfruitful because no one understood the language (1 Co 14:14). His mandate was that if a person spoke in a language a prayer or song that could not be understood by the assembly, then that person should remain silent (1 Co 14:28). He should remain silent because his speaking in a language that no one understood did not edify the entire assembly (1 Co 14:26). **He was violating the purpose of the assembly of the disciples by doing something that was for his own pleasure or according to his own abilities or gifts**. He was thus ministering selfishly, and not according to the "one another" purpose of the assembly of the body.

In the "one another" context of the assembly of the body, Christians have the opportunity to sing with their voices in order to encourage one another. Through song, individuals have the opportunity as a collective group to bring participatory exhortation into the assembly of the saints in order to promote unity.

When we discuss the music of the church, therefore,

we must determine the type of music that meets the needs of the participatory function of the body. Music is defined as "the art and science of combining vocal or instrumental sounds or tones in varying melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre ..." (*Webster's Dictionary*). Music is arranging the notes of different sounds in a manner that produces a melody. There are thus two ways by which music can be produced: **vocally** or **instrumentally**. God recognizes the existence of these two types of music as separate, for He is the Creator of all music (See 2 Ch 29:25-29). Vocal music is referred to as **acappella** music, that is, singing without instruments. When we speak of the music of the church, therefore, we seek to determine which music God wanted His people to use in order to accomplish the participatory function of the disciples to exhort one another.

The word "acappella" is an Italian word that means "according to (the style of the) chapel," or "in the church style." The word originally referred to the sacred choral music that was sung in the assembly of the church or in the chapel. In other words, when reference to music in the assembly of the church was made years ago, it was vocal singing. This was the music of the church. Only in modern times have churches adopted both vocal and instrumental music in the assemblies of the church. But this was not the case from the first century until about four hundred years ago in the religious world outside the Roman Catholic Church. All music of the churches was vocal, or acappella, and thus, "the music of the church" was singing without instruments.

Chapter 1

MUSIC IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

When considering the acappella music of the New Testament, it is often good to consider the acappella music with which Israel lived for several years after they came out of Egyptian captivity. The timbrel, or tambourine, was used to accompany the singing of Miriam (Ex 15:20), but it is doubtful that the timbrel would be considered a musical instrument. It makes noise, but cannot play a melody of notes, and thus does not fall under the definition of musical instruments as is indicated in 1 Samuel 18:6.

When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, Moses and the children of Israel sang, *"I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously.... The Lord is my strength and song ..."* (Ex 15:1,2). *"Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously"* (Ex 15:21). The Israelites celebrated the Lord's victory that was given to them over Pharaoh and his army. Their songs were composed of words that expressed their thanksgiving and joy.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, after receiving the law of God, he heard *"the sound of singing"* in the camp of Israel (Ex 32:18). However, on this occasion, it was not the singing of praise to the Lord, but the singing of rebellion. Nevertheless, it was singing by the people, even though it was in reference to the golden calf they had made for themselves. The focus of their singing changed from praising God to their material idolatry that came with them out of Egypt.

The next time we witness singing in the Old Testament was when Deborah and Barak sang to the Lord for their victory over the enemies of Israel (Jg 5:3). They sang praise to the Lord of Israel for empowering them to conquer their enemies.

When we come to the days of Saul, we have the first mention of *"singing and dancing ... with tambourines, with joy and with instruments of music"* (1 Sm 18:6). We must keep in mind, however, that this event took place over four hundred years after Israel came out of Egyptian captivity.

In the Old Testament law that God gave to Israel, He did not include any instructions concerning the music of Israel. It was only assumed that when the people sang, they would verbally express their thanksgiving to the Lord and praise of His name. We must also keep in mind that there is silence in reference to instrumental music in the Old Testament until the preceding reference to those who sang with instruments when Saul returned from battle. However, the purpose of the singing of Israel in this situation did not have the same purpose as singing among the people of God today. Singing today is for the purpose of the members' edification of one another in a spirit of unity as they sing praises to God. **"Assembled singing" for participatory edification was not a part of the Old Testament law**.

David loved his harp while alone as a boy with his sheep in the peaceful meadows of Palestine. It was a part of his life. When he became king of Israel after Saul, the harp was still a part of his life. It had a soothing, tranquil sound that accompanied this sweet singer of Israel. We must not forget that God remembered David as the "sweet psalmist (singer) of Israel," not the sweet "player" (2 Sm 23:1). David was a composer and singer of songs.

The harp that David used did not produce a sound that would disturb the sheep in the quietness of the meadows of Palestine. When David introduced the music of the harp into the sacrificial services of the priests at Jerusalem, he wanted to introduce a tranquil sound during the commotion and baying of thousands of animals that were being slaughtered during the sacrificial feasts of Israel.

David's introduction of instrumental music was thus a concession of God, as was the building of the temple. Neither were in the original law that God had given at Mount Sinai, which law was intended for a rural, agricultural culture in which Israel lived for over four hundred years before David. Many years after the introduction of the instruments of music, when Israel was in her final apostasy from God, Amos rebuked the apostates who sang *"idly to the sound of the stringed instruments, and invent for themselves instruments of music like David"* (Am 6:5). David was the "inventer" in that he introduced the instrument into the environment of the sacrifices (1 Ch 23:5). Instrumental music was not in the original law of God, and thus, God gave the concession to David to bring his instruments into the environment of the sacrificial services. In the Psalms that David wrote we would thus expect David to emphasize the praise of God with instruments (See Ps 149:3; 150). However, during special events in Israel where the instruments were used, the Holy Spirit wanted us to remember that the instrument was the invention of David, and not a part of the original law that was given by God on Mount Sinai. (See 1 Ch 15:16; 25:1; 2 Ch 7:6; Ez 3:10; Ne 12:31-37).

Before we leave the subject of singing and instruments in the Old Testament, we must correct some misinterpretations that have often been made of Amos 5:23. In their state of apostasy, God condemned Israel for their loss of heart in Him. In the Amos 5 passage, God judged, *"Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments."* This is not a condemnation specifically of "stringed instruments," because the instruments were a concession of God that were introduced by David. In the same context of Amos 5 God told the apostate Israel that He would not accept those things that He had specifically commanded in the law, such as burnt offerings, grain offerings and peace offerings. He also said that they "take away" the noise of their singing. The point is that they had syncretized (mixed together), the laws of God with the practices of their idolatrous religions. Their commanded laws of God were invalidated by their submission to false gods and idols. They were ceremonially making offerings that were commanded, but when they were doing so, they had other gods on their minds.

In all our discussions concerning David's introduction of instrumental music in the Old Testament era of Israelite history, we must not allow ourselves to be confused in our discussions concerning the acappella music of the early church. Israel was not a nation to be bonded together through assemblies. There was the yearly Passover assembly of a rural nation. Though this event reminded them of being a nation of many tribal groups, the infrequency of the event did not serve as an occasion for unity that God intended should happen during the weekly assembly of Christians. Throughout the year, Israel functioned as a farming community of people whose focus was on the worship of individual families on the farm. There was no such thing as the assembled worship of several families as was characteristic of the weekly assemblies of the early church (At 20:7; 1 Co 16:1,2). Through the assemblies of the early church, God sought to encourage the bonding of individuals. However, in the Old Testament situation, the families were already bonded by blood from the fathers, and in their common covenant relationship as a nation, which covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai.

Chapter 2

ACAPPELLA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We must continually remind ourselves of the nature of the ekklesia, and thus remember the mutual "one another" participatory assemblies that bring the members of the body together as one. It is not surprising, therefore, that when we study the nature of the New Testament body of Christ, we find an assembly identity in which members are bound together by a participatory ministry of gifts. One means by which Christians are bound together is in their singing to one another. As will be discussed throughout the remainder of this book, acappella music accomplishes God's purpose of binding Christians together in their mutual expression of love and praise from their hearts. We must make every effort, therefore, to build ourselves up in the area of singing in order to accomplish the purpose of promoting unity through participatory singing.

There are two primary statements in the New Testament in reference to the music of the church. Both state-

ments are made by Paul. They are made in the context of the Christian's life in general, not only in reference to the assembled singing context of the church. They are not passages that refer exclusively to the assembly of the saints, but would include the assembly. **The passages define the nature of the Christian's life every day of the week**. We must understand this very clearly in order to understand what Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:18-21** and **Colossians 3:16**.

> *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God"* (Ep 5:18-21).

> *"Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"* (Cl 3:16).

A. Definitions:

Consider closely what Paul says in Ephesians 5:18-21. It must be noted that the participles in the passage are imperatives. "Speaking" (*lalountes*), "singing" (*adontes*) "making melody" (*psallontes*), "giving thanks" (*eucharistountes*), and "submitting" (*hupotassomenoi*) are participle imperatives that emphasize the fact that these things must typify the nature of every disciple. "Singing" and "making melody" are essential characteristics of one's life as a Christian. In order to fulfill the mandates of what Paul is stating as an imperative, therefore, every Christian must "sing" and "make melody" in his heart. He must do so in a manner that typifies the nature of his life of praise. Unfortunately, what some have done is confine what Paul described in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to the assemblies of the saints. But in the context of the instructions, Paul is discussing our life behavior, not just our assemblies with one another.

1. *"Singing" and "making melody"*: Some have assumed that since these two actions are separate in Ephesians 5:19, one must refer to vocal music and the other to instrumental music. But if this were true, every member of the body would have to play an instrument since the mandate of Paul **is to every member of the body**. The fact is that "making melody" (*psallontes*) cannot be separated from "in your heart." The grammar is the same as Jesus' statement in Mark 12:30, *"You will love the Lord your God **with all your heart** ...."* "With all your heart" is the means by which one loves God. The action of love cannot be separated from the heart, as the "making melody" cannot be separated from one's heart. The heart is the instrument by which one loves God and makes melody. If our singing does not come from our hearts, then we fall under the same condemnation that was revealed in the Amos 5:22,23 passage. Heartless singing is worthless in expressing true worship. Our singing becomes only a "noise" if there is no melody in our hearts.

2. *"Making melody"* (*psallontes*): The Greek word from which "making melody" is translated is *psallo*. The *Abbott-Smith Greek Lexicon* defines this word, ". . . in the New Testament, to sing a hymn, sing praise." The *Moulton and Milligan Greek Lexicon* define the word, "to sing a hymn." The *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* defines the word, ". . . in the New Testament to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song." And finally, W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines *psallo* to mean, ". . . in the New Testament, to sing a hymn, sing praise."

The above meaning of the word *psallo* was carried out in the behavior of the early church. In explaining the singing of the early church, M. R. Vincent, in his *Word Studies in the New Testament* (p. 915), wrote the following:

> A psalm was originally a song accompanied by a stringed instrument .... **The idea of accompaniment passed away in usage**, and the psalm in New Testament phraseology, is an Old Testament psalm, or a composition having that character" [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

The *Shaff-Hergog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Vol. III, p. 1961) concurs with this thought in the following statement:

> It is questionable whether, as used in the New Testament, "psallo" means more than to sing .... **The absence of instrumental music from the church for some centuries after the apostles** and the sentiment regarding it which pervades the writings of the fathers are unaccountable, if in the apostle's church such music was used" [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

The word *psallo* can be found in the Greek language with meanings as "to pluck the hair," "to twang the bowstring" or "to touch the cords of a musical instrument." However, according to historians and Greek lexicons,

this meaning did not find its way into the New Testament in reference to the singing of Christians. That which was "plucked" or "touched" was the vocal cords of the heart. It is for this reason that translators correctly translated the word *psallo* to simply mean "sing."

The above meaning is what the translators of hundreds of translations wanted us to understand in their use of the English word "sing" to translate the Greek word *psallo* in the following verses: *"For this cause I will confess to You among the Gentiles and* ***sing*** [psallo] *to Your name"* (Rm 15:9), *"I will* ***sing*** *with the Spirit and I will* ***sing*** [psallo] *with the mind also"* (1 Co 14:15), *"Is anyone cheerful? Let him* ***sing*** [psallo] *psalms"* (Js 5:13). Every credible translation uses the word "sing" to translate *psallo*. Since the Holy Spirit used the word *psallo* in reference to what Christians should do with hymns, psalms and spiritual songs, then we would conclude that the Spirit wants every Christian to approach God with his heart through vocal music. God desires that our praise of Him through song originate, not externally, but internally from our hearts. The music must come from the melody of our hearts.

B. A note from church historians:

We would not do justice to this subject by using our present day environment of the typical assembly of the typical church as the guide by which we would either determine or judge the music of the body of Christ. In fact, if Jesus would step into the assembly of some churches today, He would probably think that what was going on would be quite strange.

Since we are driven by the authority of the word of God, then it is always our purpose to first investigate the Holy Scriptures in any matter that pertains to our behavior and worship. Any mandate of God must take priority over our present day practices. Once we understand the instructions of God in His word, then we can proceed to study through church history. It is thus interesting to survey through the statements of church historians in order to capture their understanding of the behavior of the early church. This is particularly interesting in reference to the historians' research in reference to the singing of the early church. Without exception, every commentator and church historian agrees that the early church fulfilled her obligation to sing praises to God with acappella music.

As a matter of historical perspective, the use of instruments in conjunction with vocal music in Christendom came many centuries after the establishment of the early church. Around A.D. 139, Justin Martyr, wrote, "**The use of singing with instrumental music was not received in the Christian churches**, as it was among the Jews in their infant state, but only the use of plain song [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.]." McClintock and Strong made the following statement in reference to the development and use of instrumental music in Christendom:

> The Greek word *psallo* is applied among the Greeks of modern times exclusively to sacred music, which in the Eastern Church has never been any other than vocal, instrumental music being unknown in that church, **as it was in the primitive church**. Sir John Hawkins, following the Romish writers in his erudite [scholarly] work on the *History of Music*, makes Pope Vitalian, **in A.D. 660, the first who introduced organs into churches. But students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date**; for Thomas Aquinas, A.D. 1250, has these remarkable words: "Our Church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize." From this passage we are surely warranted in concluding that there was no ecclesiastical use of organs in the time of Aquinas. It is alleged that Marinus Sanutus, who lived about A.D. 1290, was the first that brought the use of wind organs into churches, and hence he received the name of Torcellus. In the East, the organ was in use in the emperor's courts, probably from the time of Julian, but never has either the organ or any other instrument been employed in public worship in Eastern churches; nor is mention of instrumental music found in all their liturgies, ancient or modern (Vol. VIII, p. 739) [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

In contrast to the assemblies in pagan temples wherein instruments were used in worship, the early church refrained from such. Early Christians understood that they should refrain from the use of instrumental music in their assemblies, understanding that vocal music was instructed to be used by the early New Testament prophets of God, and later recorded in writing as in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. In the Roman Catholic Church, the custom of vocal music evidently changed when Pope Vitalian introduced in Catholic Church assemblies instrumental music in the seventh century. However, during the period of the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the leading reformers sought to restore vocal music to the assemblies of the reformed churches.

Most churches of Christendom today use instrumental music in their assemblies. Though most have little knowledge of the historical controversy that has sur-

rounded this subject, they have often been unaware of the benefits of acappella music and why the great leaders of the Reformation Movement stood against the introduction of instrumental music into the assemblies of the Reformation churches. Instrumental music has become so common in the assemblies of churches today that adherents to these churches often do not realize the marvelous bonding effect that acappella music has in bringing the hearts of the people together in an assembly context.

It is not our purpose in this book to investigate the use of instrumental music in the assembly of the church, but to exalt what God intended should be accomplished with acappella music. For some reason God instructed the early church to sing only with their voices in order to exhort one another and praise Him. This tradition continued for several centuries after the establishment of the ekklesia. For this reason, it is necessary that we rehearse again what God intended should be accomplished by the medium of participatory singing among the disciples of Jesus.

Chapter 3

THE BEAUTY OF ACAPPELLA MUSIC

Singing among Christians is mentioned several times throughout the New Testament. Singing manifested both the spirit of joy and praise in the heart of Christians, as well as their desire to exhort and encourage one another. The focus of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is that our singing be both vertical in praise of God and horizontal in exhortation of one another. When both purposes for singing are accomplished, then the members of the church are greatly encouraged to be united as one.

There were no special places where the early Christians sang to one another. Singing was simply a part of their lives. They sang anywhere and at anytime. The following are some of the purposes, or advantages, of acappella singing, as well as the nature of the spirit of singing that Christians must manifest in praising God and edifying one another:

A. Singing is the outpouring of a joyful heart.

James wrote, *"Is anyone cheerful?* ***Let him sing psalms****"* (Js 5:13). Singing is an emotional outlet. It is an outlet of one who feels joy in his or her heart. Those who are experiencing the true joy of their salvation naturally express their joy through song. James does not state that one's singing should be limited to the presence of others. Joyful hearts sing anytime and anywhere. This fact was manifested in the lives of Paul and Silas when they were in prison in Philippi. The magistrates of the city commanded that both evangelists be beaten with rods (At 16:22). *"Now when they had laid many stripes on them, they cast them into prison"* (At 16:23). The jailor *"put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks"* (At 16:24). You get the picture. Paul and Silas were sore from beating and sitting in stocks in the darkest part of the prison. And yet, *"about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and* ***singing hymns of praise to God****"* (At 16:25). It is the nature of joyful Christians to sing, even under the most dire of circumstances.

Because of the singing of Paul and Silas, the other prisoners were listening to them. We must conclude from this occasion of acappella music that the singing of Paul and Silas opened the door to the hearts of their fellow prisoners. At least this was the case with the jailor. An earthquake opened the prison doors, but the songs had already opened his heart (See At 16:26-34).

We encourage our preachers to stand in markets and on street corners in order to preach the gospel to the public through spoken lessons. Likewise, we need to encourage our gifted singers to stand in markets and on street corners in order to preach the gospel through song. We have experienced that more people will often listen to the singers than to the preachers.

B. Singing is a means of communicating to one another.

In the context of their daily relationships with one another, Paul stated that Christians must be zealous in *"****speaking to one another*** *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"* (Ep 5:19). Singing encourages Christians to communicate with one another in a way that brings joy to their hearts. "One another" means that there are at least two who must speak through songs that are spiritual in nature. Christians have an obligation to communicate with one another in song because they are obligated to encourage and exhort one another.

What is important to remember concerning the context of Ephesians 5:19 is that "speaking to one another" in song is not limited to a specific place or time. The entire context of Ephesians 5 focuses on the daily be-

havior of the Christian. On every occasion, and at every opportunity, Christians should fulfill their obligation to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ by communicating with one another through song. Unfortunately, many have limited their singing communication to a specific time and place. Outside this special time and place they often fail to keep the channels of communication open through song.

C. Singing is a means of teaching the word of Christ.

Paul exhorted that we should *"let the word of Christ dwell"* in us richly (Cl 3:16). When the word of Christ dwells in us richly, it is only natural that the word of Christ be expressed through our singing. Paul thus commanded, *"... **teaching and admonishing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ..."* (Cl 3:16). Singing is a means of teaching one another the word of Christ. In order for one to be taught, he must clearly hear and understand that which is being taught through song. This assumes that the teaching through song must not be cluttered with noise that drowns out one's speaking through song. The teaching in song must be clearly heard. The ministry of teaching through song thus assumes that Christians are to be in a quiet place where the words of the songs can be clearly understood. **If the noise of the environment is so loud that the words of the teaching cannot be heard, then the mandate of teaching one another through song is useless**.

Teaching through song also demands that the word of Christ is being taught in the songs. One is not teaching the word of Christ through songs that have no reference to the word of Christ. One is not teaching the word of Christ when singing those words that are contrary to the truth of the Bible. In other words, in order for individuals to be teaching the word of Christ through song, **they must know the word of Christ**. When Christians are filled with the knowledge of Christ, they are able to admonish one another with the word (Rm 15:14). If they do not know the word of Christ, then they could be singing error, and thus, not accomplishing the purpose for singing which God instructed.

Teaching through song assumes that not everyone must sing at the same time. The act of teaching assumes that someone is speaking and others are listening. If an individual has a truth of the word of Christ that he or she would like to teach others, then there must be those who are willing to listen, as well as the opportunity for the teaching to take place. If a group of Christians have truth they want to express through the means of song, then there must be an audience that respectfully listens to their teaching through song. (It is interesting to note that the first translations of the Bible into English were portions of the Bible that were translated into English by preachers who composed their translations into songs that they sang before the people.)

"Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" **does not assume that everyone is teaching at the same time**. It assumes that some are teaching and others are listening. This seems to be the context of 1 Corinthians 14:26,27. When the Corinthians came together in assembly, there were those who had a psalm. Some had a teaching, others a language, some a revelation, and then there were those who had an interpretation. All the singing of psalms, teaching, speaking in a language, etc. were to be done for the edification of the whole assembly. In other words, not everyone came with a psalm. However, the whole came with all the ministries that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26,27. They were ministries that were, in an orderly manner, to be used for the edification of the whole body. Not everyone had a revelation or a language. Some came with a psalm. They would in the assembly, therefore, be given the opportunity to teach with their psalm while others listened. Not everyone had to sing when one was teaching through song. Someone may have written a song and the whole assembly needed to listen to the teaching of the song. When the newly revealed teaching in song was learned by the whole assembly, then the whole assembly could join together in the song.

The nature of the assembly was defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:31. *"For you can all prophesy **one by one** so that all may learn and all may be exhorted."* Paul instructed that those who had written or received a psalm by inspiration should take the opportunity of the assembly to teach the word of Christ through song. If different people came with different songs, then "one by one" they could teach their songs to the assembly. This is possibly the commentary on what the Hebrew writer wrote in Hebrews 2:12. *"I will declare Your name to My brothers, **in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You**."* Notice the first person pronoun "I." This was an individual singing praise to God in the assembly while others were listening.

D. Singing encourages the ministry of singing.

Everyone can sing. However, there are those who are gifted with voices that excel. The preceding point C should be understood in the sense that the body as a whole has gifted singers and gifted speakers. We should give an opportunity to our gifted speakers and singers to use their gift to edify the body as a whole. If one feels that the gifted are entertaining the body through their

gift of singing, he have missed the point. When our gifted speakers deliver a good lesson to the assembly that is eloquently spoken, we often compliment them. We should also compliment our gifted singers among us who can stir our spirits through spiritual songs. Gifted speakers and singers have special abilities to lift up our hearts in praise to God. Acappella music is an opportunity for the body to clearly hear Bible lessons of spiritual songs by our gifted singers.

The advantage of acappella singing is that the gifted singers can minister to the body. The teaching of their songs communicates exhortation because our minds are focused on the words of their singing. It is for this reason that our gifted singers must not be interrupted by any surrounding noise of the environment. If we cannot hear the words of the singers, then they cannot minister to us teaching with their gift. The louder the surrounding noise, the less the singers are able to teach by means of their gift. In many cases we have witnessed that those who have trained themselves to play instruments, for which they have no mandate to exercise in the assembly of the saints, actually drown out those who have a divine mandate to teach through singing.

E. Singing stimulates the organic life of the body.

The ekklesia is an organic body in motion for the purpose of serving others. Along the path of service, the members of the body have obligations to one another. They are to *"**consider one another** to stir up love and good works"* (Hb 10:24). One of the means by which the body organically functions is that the members stir up one another through the ministry of singing. The members of the body speak to one another in song (Ep 5:19). They teach and admonish one another through spiritual singing in order to encourage love and good works.

God knew what singing would do as a dynamic bonding experience for the ekklesia. He knew that when the members of the body speak to one another for the purpose of edification, they would grow together as the ekklesia of Christ. Their responsibility to sing to one another would bond them together as a functioning body that would reach out in service to others.

Two people will have a hard time holding a grudge against one another if they are singing to one another in song. If they do have a matter of contention between themselves, it will soon pass as they exhort one another through song. When brothers and sisters are bonded together in song, the dynamics of participatory singing stimulates the organic function of the body to work as one.

F. Singing focuses on ministering to others.

Though individuals sing to themselves in praise of God, the Scriptures add the responsibility that in song Christians must teach and admonish **one another**. Singing, therefore, is an outward, not inward ministry. It is an expression of joy from the heart of one disciple to the heart of another disciple. In our singing to one another, we are encouraged by hearing others sing to us. Acappella music, in teaching and admonition, focuses on reaching out to others. In assembled singing, each Christian should focus on his or her output in song from the heart in order to teach and admonish the others. Acappella music is a mutual ministry of the church as a whole. The serendipity ("unexpected surprise") of our individual participation in singing is that we are personally exhorted when we join in song with the whole assembly.

G. Singing includes everyone.

The "one another" statement of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is an **inclusive** statement. Everyone must sing. And when everyone sings, **everyone is included in the body life**. This is the advantage of singing over playing mechanical instruments. Not everyone can play an instrument. But everyone can sing. God knew that when everyone joined in with his or her offering in song, then the natural feeling would be that everyone would feel that he or she is a part of the organic life of the body. Everyone would have a sense of belonging.

There is a time for individual singing to one's self, or when two or three are gathered together. But when individual singers come together in the assembly of the people of God, something dynamic happens. To be a part of assembled acappella singing is an experience that few people today in Christendom understand simply because they have not allowed themselves the opportunity. Some assemblies have become so dominated by and dependent on instrumental music that they have forgotten to sing as an assembled body. The instrumentalists have hijacked the assembly at the expense of those who want to sing with their voices alone. Our encouragement to these churches is that they must learn to sing acappella again. Once they do, they will understand the beauty and dynamic that God intended should be experienced in assembled acappella singing.

H. Singing is a mutual offering of praise to God.

The members of the body speak to one another in song, but also as the body they make melody in their hearts in unison to the Lord (Ep 5:19). They sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord (Cl 3:16). Christians

can individually sing at all times in their daily walk of life. However, when the individual members of the body bring their melodious hearts together in song as an assembled body, they are bonded together through the harmony of their vocal singing. The beauty of acappella music is in the harmony that is produced when singers come together as a group. There is a natural spirit of unity among those who seek to harmonize their voices with one another. God knew this, and thus, He instructed Paul to write that Christians speak to one another in song. This seems to be the meaning of the Hebrew writer's statement in Hebrews 13:15. *"Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is,* ***the fruit of our lips****, giving thanks to His name."*

The "fruit of our lips" can mean nothing other than vocal singing in praise of God. This is not something that can be produced mechanically. "Making melody in our hearts" in praise to God is the "fruit of our lips." When Christians assemble together to join in songs of praise to God, something magical happens. The beauty of acappella music is truly discovered when devoted disciples of Jesus unite together in offering praise to God with the fruit of their lips.

I. Singing is spiritually without limits.

There is an interesting phenomenon that takes place when individuals pour out their hearts in song. We often sing until we become hoarse, where we can sing no more. But after so much singing, we feel exhilarated. We have a sense of peace, knowing that we have poured out our hearts in praise to God and edification of one another. It is a feeling of tremendous elation. We feel so elated with the experience that we cannot wait until we have the same experience again. There seems to be no end to the emotional joy that one experiences when he or she vocally sings with others as united hearts pour out their feelings to the Lord.

But with mechanical noise it is different. After about thirty minutes of amplified mechanical music from giant speakers, the listeners are physically tired and exhausted. One of the first lessons that is taught to airplane pilots in their training is that noise emotionally and physically wears the individual down. In flying airplanes over great distances for great periods of time, the individual becomes physically and emotionally tired because of the noise of the airplane. The same is true when assembled people are bombarded with the high decibel noise that is mechanically produced and projected through amplifiers and speakers.

Those who have experienced the loud noise of amplified mechanical music have often never experienced the difference between an hour of mechanical music and an hour of vocal music. And since mechanical music has captivated and dominated the majority of religious groups today, it is doubtful whether they will take the opportunity to experience the difference. But everyone who has poured out his or her heart in vocal music with fellow worshipers knows the difference. After an hour of amplified instrument music, one is exhausted. After an hour of vocal music, one is spiritually exhilarated and emotionally uplifted, not worn down. Please keep in mind that there is a difference between being emotionally exhausted and emotionally exhorted. Emotional exhaustion **is not** spiritual exhortation.

But what about the harps? There is a difference between a full instrumental band that takes a dominant role before an audience as a concert and the background sound of a harp. David knew this, though he never experienced the reverberating noise of amplified mechanical music that is so typical of religious groups today. If he had the opportunity to amplify the noise of a full band across the peaceful meadows of Palestine, surely his sheep would have been scattered from Dan to Beersheba.

In the book of Revelation, John used symbols to signify the nature of eternal dwelling (Rv 1:1). He used harps as a symbol, or metaphor to portray the appeal of the heavenly dwelling. The harps were not literal, as the incense and other figures of speech were not literal (See Rv 5:8). These figures only referred to concepts and teachings that were above their literal use in this world. However, we would wonder why the Holy Spirit used harps to refer to the appeal of heaven? This is easy. The sound of the harp is appealing, as heaven should be. David knew this when he introduced the sound of harps as the background music during the offering of the animals as sacrifices in the tabernacle service. But every instrumentalist knows that there is a vast difference between the amplified instrument music of today through monstrous speakers and the quiet background music of a harp.

Acappella music was the music of the early church. For the preceding reasons God wanted to accomplish through vocal music that which would bring the members of the church together to both exhort one another and offer up praise to Him. In the midst of a religious world that seems to be obsessing over the performance of high profile bands and orchestras, we would plead for a restoration of the simplicity of acappella music. Our plea is based on the aforementioned reasons. God simply knew what He was doing when He instructed the holy writers to teach the church to offer up the fruit of their lips in vocal music. We would thus plead with our

instrumental friends that they give acappella music a chance. Silence the instruments for a month. Allow the assembly to learn how to sing again and you will be surprised. Learn "four-part harmony," and the church will come alive. (If you do not know what four-part harmony is, then you have a long way to go in understanding the beauty of what our Creator made possible with the human voice.)

Chapter 4

WORSHIP IN SONG

In worship we pour out our hearts to the Lord. Worship is an inward response to our awareness of the presence of God in our lives. For the Christian, it is the result of his continual realization of what God has done for him through Jesus Christ. Worship, therefore, originates from within the heart of man. It is not something that can be imposed on man with either a pleasing environment or sound from outside man. True worship needs no crutches, either to be initiated or continued. If environmental circumstances are needed for the individual to bow down before God in worship, then the worship is artificial, if not simply ceremonial.

Singing is naturally worshipful. Singing is the expression of a joyful heart. It is the evidence of cheer within an individual. We can understand why Paul would instruct Christians to make melody in their hearts to the Lord (Ep 5:19), and to sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord (Cl 3:16). Through the singing of secular songs, the individual is expressing inner feelings. How much more natural would it be for one who realizes the presence of God in his or her life to pour out one's heart in spiritual songs?

There is a difference between being **mesmerized** and true worship. According to dictionaries, the word "mesmerize" means "the state of being under mesmeric influence ... to hypnotize." One is mesmerized by something outside himself. When we fall under the influence of a mesmeric influence, we are emotionally controlled by that influence. It is important to understand that being mesmerized and worshiping God **are not the same**.

We have found that people have great difficulty in determining the difference between mesmerization and worship. Mesmerization is an influence from **outside**, whereas worship originates from **within**. David mesmerized himself with his playing on the harp, but his worship originated from **within his heart**. An individual can mesmerize himself by playing on an instrument, but at the same time never worship God. A multitude can be mesmerized at a rock concert, but never experience worship. Consider also that one can be so mesmerized with his gift of playing an instrument, and the sound thereof, that he can forget God. Simply because an individual is swooned by the art of his fingers does not mean that he is making melody in his heart to the Lord.

In this context it might be good for some to remember the dictionary definition of an idol. Webster's Dictionary gives one definition of an idol as the following: ". . . **any object of ardent or excessive devotion or admiration**." Idolatry is also defined as "excessive attachment or veneration for some person **or thing**; admiration which borders on adoration." Christians should be very careful about giving themselves over to anything that is of this world. In our worship, Christians must give themselves over to the One who is above this world by offering the melody that is in their hearts. They do not give themselves over to an object that is in their hands to which they give "ardent or excessive devotion."

We must keep in mind that God is the creator of all music, both vocal and mechanical. He knew that the mechanical would originate from outside the individual, but **the vocal would originate from within the heart**. Vocal music would thus accomplish the purpose for which He commanded it among the saints. This helps us understand why God instructed vocal music among Christians. They must focus on their hearts, not their abilities, lest they become so enthralled with their abilities to play an instrument that they forget the One they are to worship. In their worship, therefore, the Christians' vocal music keeps them away from focusing on their abilities to play. It keeps them from idolizing something that is of this world. Acappella music keeps them focused on generating melody in their hearts.

If Christians focused on their abilities to play mechanical instruments, then they would be tempted to suppress vocal music in order to give way to the dominance of either the instrument or the individual or individuals who were mesmerized by what they can generate with machinery. The audience would be tempted to become spectators to the skills of those who would perform before them with an instrumental band or orchestra. God never intended that the music of the assembly should be a "save our children" effort to encourage instrumental concerts. The music of the church belongs to the church, not a select few. Some people need to

remember that the assembly of the saints is not about them and their performances, but about Jesus.

We would suggest that those who play instruments should take another look at the dominant role their playing of instruments has taken in the assemblies of churches. We have been in some assemblies where the instrumentalists have actually hijacked the assembly as an opportunity to perform before an audience. We cannot see this taking place in the assemblies of the New Testament church in the first century. As some Corinthians took advantage of the assembly to boast in exercising their gift of tongues, no one person or group of people should be given the opportunity to do the same in the assemblies of the body of Christ. If they do, then they are as Paul stated when he rebuked the Corinthians with the words, "You are puffed up" (See 1 Co 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 8:1; 13:4; 2 Co 5:12; 10:17; compare Cl 2:18).

The origin of the music that God wants has always been the result of what James stated. *"Is anyone cheerful?* ***Let him sing psalms"*** (Js 5:13). Nothing has changed since these words were written. Today, we ask for a restoration of acappella singing because of the joy that comes forth from the hearts of the worshipers. Is there anyone cheerful today? If there is, then we ask that they do simply as James instructed. When an assembly of cheerful people happens, the result is that everyone sings with their voices.

Book 43

Exercising Sobriety And Self-Control

God's people are known for bringing into control both their minds and bodies. It is a signal to to the unbelieving world that Christians are not out of control. While religions of men cater to the emotional chaos of people who follow after their own outburst, God's people are identified by self-control. It is through such self-control that Christians maintain their relationship with one another, as well as unbelievers. Throughout the New Testament, we are not surprised to discover that every member of the universal body of Christ must be identified by his or her behavior. And this behavior is manifested as a behavior of sobriety and self control.

In 1 Kings 18 there is an interesting event that took place in the life of Elijah. It was an event that helps us identify the behavior of religionists who have created religion after their own extravagant emotional outburst. The occasion was Elijah's contest with 450 Baal prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Kg 18:19). When the prophets and people were gathered, Elijah challenged them, *"**How long will you hesitate between two opinions**? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him."* The people did not answer.

Elijah stood alone on this particular occasion. He affirmed to the misguided religionists and self-proclaimed prophets, *"I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord"* (1 Kg 18:22). To prove his affirmation, he challenged the people to collect two bulls and put each on an altar. He then challenged the preachers to cry out to their god, "Lord, Lord." He would simply call on the God of heaven. Whichever god answered with fire, then that would be the true God (1 Kg 18:23,24). That would be the God who had not been invented after the misguided imagination of religionists.

You know the story. From morning to noon, the Baal preachers cried out to the god they had created after their own imagination, *"O Baal, hear us,"* they pleaded (1 Kg 18:26). Throughout their cries, notice their foolish behavior. *"And they leaped on the altar that was made"* (1 Kg 18:26). They exerted great physical performances, jumping up and down and carrying on like mad men in frenzied emotionalism. People who have created a religion after their own human emotionality behave in such a manner. The more they exert their emotions the more they think they validate their faith.

Elijah mocked the false preachers for their beliefs that led to their senseless behavior. *"Cry aloud,"* he chided them, *"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). Now notice the incredible behavior of religionists who had created a religiosity after their own imagination and according to their own fanatical emotionalism. *"So they **cried with a loud voice** and **cut themselves according to their custom** with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them"* (1 Kg 18:28). These preachers continued to frenzy until the evening sacrifice. But still, there was no answer from the god they had created after their own image and a religion that was based on the misguided emotions of man. Their senseless behavior manifested the religious delusions of their own invention (See 2 Th 2:10-12). And according to the context, they acted "according to their custom." This was not a onetime outburst on their part, but a behavioral custom that identified their religiosity.

And so it is today with countless churches that have created a religiosity that produces bazaar behavior as the Baal preachers. Adherents carry on with hysterical and uncontrollable behavior while they cry out, "Lord, Lord." In their ignorance of the word of God, they have fabricated a religiosity that is extreme in behavior because it lacks the substance of the controlling power of God's word and the sobriety of a Spirit-guided life. Religionists who lack Bible knowledge will always seek to validate their religiosity "according to their customs" of colorful assemblies and uncontrolled behavior. "According to their custom" they will seek to prove their faith by their spiritual "cutting of themselves" until their own emotional "blood gushes out on them." The more emotionally extreme they behave, the more they assume that there is a god out there who will hear them. But they are wrong. Their god does not answer, for their god is not "out there," but only in their own minds. The only god who hears is the one that they have created in their own thinking. They are thus crying out to themselves in a

futile effort for their god to send "fire from heaven."

In the context of this emotional extremism, many religionists today have hijacked the name "Christian" in order to justify their amalgamation of some Bible with a lot of Baal. As the Baal preachers, they often lose control, forsake the sobriety by which Christians are to be known, and allow themselves to be carried away, as the Baal preachers, on a downhill spiral of emotional chaos and exhaustion. They have forgotten some very important characteristics of the Christian's behavior that are identified in the word of God. For this reason, we call for a restoration of the behavioral principles that are set forth in the word of God by the Holy Spirit. These are principles by which the Holy Spirit seeks to lead us lest we be brought into the subjection of our own misguided thinking and ignorance of His direction through the word of God. Through the Holy Spirit, God gave us the Scriptures *"for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* so that we might be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tm 3:16,17). For some emotional extremist, therefore, it is time for reproof, correction and instruction in the word of God. Their misguided emotionalism and behavior must be brought under the control of the word of God.

Our source for reproof, correction and instruction can only be the Scriptures. If we do not allow the Scriptures to guide us in these matters, then we are hopeless, carried about by every wind of teaching that comes forth from the mouths of false prophets who claim to be leading people closer to God. In the midst of emotional extremism in a chaotic religious world, there are many who care little for what the Bible says on these matters. Paul warned Timothy of such people. *"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****"* (2 Tm 4:3,4). It is time to call "itching-ear churches" out of their emotional delusions back to a life of self-control and sobriety that is led by the Spirit.

Chapter 1

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

There are some key words that the Holy Spirit used in order to define the demeanor of the character of Christians. In His use of these words in different contexts, the Spirit wanted to define the character and behavior that would identify the people of God. In our efforts to be Christ-like in our behavior, therefore, it is our task to pattern ourselves after the demeanor of character that is directed by the Spirit through the word of God.

A. Sobriety:

Sobriety, or soberness, is from the Greek word *sophrosune*, meaning "soundness of mind" (See At 26:25; 1 Tm 2:9,15). Sobriety refers to an inner self-control that brings into subjection one's passions, emotions and desires. Sober-minded people have established in their lives an inner strength that consciously subjects all aspects of their demeanor of their will. The sober-minded person will never allow his mind to be driven uncontrollably by extreme emotions.

Sober is from the Greek word *sophron*. This word denotes one of a sound mind, and thus, one who continually lives the self-controlled life (See 1 Tm 3:2; Ti 1:8). The sober-minded person guards himself from emotional hysteria and extremism. Though the sober-minded person will experience great excitement that leads to rejoicing, he or she will never allow his thinking and behavior to become senseless and beyond control. The mandate that comes from the Holy Spirit's use of the words "sobriety" and "sober" means that Christians should under no circumstances voluntarily allow themselves to lose control of their senses and behavior.

B. Temperance (self-control):

"Temperance" is the older English word that is used to translate the Greek word *enkrateia* (See At 24:25; Gl 5:23; 2 Pt 1:6). Most modern translations render the Greek word "self-control." Use of the word in various contexts refers to the will of man being brought under the subjection of the will of God. In "righteous" self-control, righteousness is defined by the direction of God through His word (At 24:25). Self-control in righteousness, therefore, is determined by the word of God. "Knowledge" in reference to self-control, as in 2 Peter 1:6, assumes that the knowledge that should lead us originates from God. The knowledge that one learns from the word of God must be implemented in the life of the

student as he directs his behavior by God's instructions. We would correctly assume, therefore, **that the one who is ignorant of the word of God will be carried about by every wind of teaching, being deluded by his own thinking** (See 2 Th 2:10-12). Those who have little knowledge of the Bible have no end to the delusions they will produce in their minds. It is very difficult for one who is experientially subject to the religion of delusions to prioritize the word of God as the source for reproof, correction and instruction. Misguided emotionalists will always follow their emotions over following the word of God. Just ask Elijah who confronted such religionists on Mount Carmel.

C. Discipline:

The English word "discipline" is used to translate the Greek word *sophronismos*. The Greek word was used when one was admonished or called upon to be of a sound mind. When one disciplined himself, he exercised control over his mental facilities in order to adhere to a designated goal or "discipline" (See 1 Co 9:27). The disciplined person was one of a sound mind as opposed to one who gave his senses over to intoxication or hysterical senselessness.

The general definition of all forms of the preceding words emphasize the fact that the Christian must exercise self-restraint of his passions and desires. He must always be of a sound mind. Through the cultivation of sound judgment and prudent behavior, Christians are to be known as a people who are in control of their being. Throughout the New Testament there is no occasion wherein Christians emotionally lost control of themselves. In fact, the opposite is seen in the lives of Jesus and the early Christians. In a chaotic world, Christians were those who maintained control of themselves because they knew that God was in control of all things.

In the religious world today of Christendom, if occasions are found wherein people lose control of themselves as the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel, then from a Scriptural perspective we would judge that the adherents of such a group are lacking in the sobriety that is to be characteristic of the Christian life. The Corinthians had fallen victim to a lack of control in their assemblies. Not only did Paul say they were behaving carnally, but he also added that they were behaving childishly. Notice carefully his exhortation of 1 Corinthians 13:11: *"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****."*

The demeanor of the Christian life is to exercise self-restraint over one's spiritual excitement, in which area of behavior, spiritual people often have a problem. How does one become and remain spiritually excited, and yet in behavior remain mature in one's emotional expressions? Webster's Dictionary gives an appropriate definition of the word "temperance" by defining that the temperate person is "not extreme or extravagant." Add to this Webster's expanded definition of temperance, that a temperate person is one who is "characterized by reason, sanity, or self-control; showing mental and emotional balance." By this demeanor of life, the Christian must be known. This must be the nature of the behavior of the leaders of God's people, and such nature must be characteristic of those who follow. This is evidenced by the examples of the early Christians that are recorded in the word of God.

Chapter 2

THINKING SOBERLY

Christians are not those who walk in darkness. They walk in the light (1 Th 5:4,5). They are *"the children of light and the children of the day"* (1 Th 5:5). And because they have been enlightened with the truth, they are sober-minded to watch for our Lord. *"Therefore, let us not sleep as others do,* ***but let us watch and be sober****"* (1 Th 5:6). People who allow themselves to lose their senses, are not sober minded. They are as drunken people who have lost control of their senses, for they have put themselves in an emotional state wherein they cannot seriously consider the work of the Lord. We can identify Christians by their sobriety, as Paul wrote, *"But let us who are of the day* ***be sober*** *..."* (1 Th 5:8). The church is led by those overseers who are sober-minded, for leaders understand the serious spiritual warfare in which we are involved against the evil influences of Satan (1 Tm 3:2).

Paul's exhortations to Christian women in reference to sobriety is pointed. *"Let a woman learn in silence with all subjection"* (1 Tm 2:11). Subjection is a demeanor of life wherein a Christian woman does not seek to be dominant over man. In her spirit of subjection, even the woman's dress must manifest sobriety (1 Tm 2:9).

Some women have allowed themselves to dominate in the assemblies by allowing themselves to emotionally go out of control, and thus they sacrifice their spirit of subjection for a moment of hysterical madness. By doing such, they seek to dominate by their lack of self-control, and thus, their lack of sobriety when in the company of the saints. But such behavior would certainly not manifest the nature of what Paul exhorted women to be. *"But I do not allow a woman to teach or to be dominant over a man,* ***but to be in silence****"* (1 Tm 2:12).

There is no assembly context of the church wherein members are to be allowed to emotionally be out of control. Assemblies of the saints are for the purpose of exhortation, not opportunities for emotionally showcasing oneself before others.

Being sober-minded and maintaining self-control are two virtues that should characterize the thinking of every disciple of Jesus. Sobriety is not an option. Peter commanded, *"****Be sober****"* (1 Pt 1:13). *"Therefore,* ***be sober*** *and watch unto prayer"* (1 Pt 4:7). And why such an exhortation? Peter explains. *"****Be sober****, be vigilant.* ***Your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour****"* (1 Pt 5:8). Those who lose their sobriety, lose their self-control, and subsequently are opportunities for Satan to use an individual to cause chaos among the disciples.

A lack of self-control is evidence that one has little sobriety. Those who pretend to worship God, while at the same time lose their senses in uncontrollable hysteria, have deceived themselves. **God is not worshiped by senseless people**. Neither would the Holy Spirit instruct through the Scriptures that we must exercise self-control in all things, but at the same time, move people to behave senselessly in worship of God. People who are senselessly out of control cannot be worshiping God with their soul, mind and spirit.

Many should listen to the words of Paul that he wrote to some Christians in Corinth. Some were behaving senselessly when they came together in assembly with the other saints. *"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). It is easy to understand from this that if a leader, as Paul, allowed himself to uncontrollably behave before others, he would be disqualified. Many who claim to be disciples have so disqualified themselves by their senseless behavior in a supposed worship of God. We must "discipline our bodies" at all times, both in our daily walk of life, as well as in times when we are in the presence of others in the assembly of the saints.

Chapter 3

THE DEMEANOR OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

One might define sobriety as maturity. When one grows up from childhood, he puts away his lack of self-control as he brings into control the demeanor of his behavior. He grows up in order to be mature. We correct the frivolous behavior of our children by admonishing them to "grow up." When an adult acts frivolously and silly, we likewise exhort such a one to "be mature." Maturity is identified by one's control over his or her behavior. Immaturity is simply identified in the lives of those who exercise no self-control. Through His word, God guides us to "grow up" in Christ in order that His people be an example to the world of the mature obedient life (Compare Hb 5:14; 1 Pt 2:2; 2 Pt 3:18). Paul exhorted, *"Brethren, do not be children in thinking. ... but in thinking be mature"* (1 Co 14:20). The behavior of Christians should reflect the spirit of Jesus of whom we claim to be a disciple. Unruly behavior is evidence that we are still children in our efforts to grow up, or the fact that we seek to behave carnally as some in Corinth. If we seek to grow up in Christ, then it is imperative that our lives manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Maturity involves implementing in one's life the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit about which Paul speaks in Galatians 5:22,23 is not divided into parts that can be exercised individually. In the context of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul does not say "fruits." "Fruit" is singular. **The "fruit of the Spirit" is a singular identity of the disciple of Jesus**. **The individual characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit come as a whole**. We cannot pick and choose any one of the characteristics, and then separate that characteristic from the whole. It is all or none when we speak of the fruit of the Spirit.

Here is how it works: We are to **love** our neighbor as ourselves (Gl 5:14). The product (fruit) of the Spirit is founded upon love. The totality of the fruit of the Spirit is a manifestation of love. When we love our neighbor as ourself, then **joy** comes into our lives. Therefore, in order to preserve our joy, we seek to maintain **peace** with our neighbor. And in order to maintain peace, we must be **patient** when there is a disagreement with our neighbor. Lest our patience turns into impatience with the faults of our neighbor, we work on our **kind-**

ness. And in being kind to our neighbor, we cannot help but **do good** to our neighbor. The cure for impatience is doing good, for in doing good to others, we preserve our joy (See Jn 13:17). In our goodness, we are showing **faithfulness** to our neighbor. We stand by him in his time of trial and need. In all things, therefore, we are **gentle** in our relationships with others lest we sacrifice our joy in a time when we lose control. In all things the Christian must exercise **self-control** in order to maintain the fruit of the Spirit. There is no situation in which the Christian is to lose his self-control, for when he does, he loses his joy. If we forsake one characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit, we lose the whole. We may be weak in one area of behavior, but we must continue to focus on growing in the whole in order to grow up in the Spirit.

In this context of discussion we must consider Paul's specific instructions to women. They must *"continue in faith and love and holiness **with self-control**"* (1 Tm 2:15). They are to continue in faith, love and holiness. However, it is "with self-control" that they are to continue in these virtues. Self-control is the foundation virtue upon which the others rest. If there is no self-control in their lives, then their faith, love and holiness are unfruitful. Self-control is the impetus, or driving virtue, by which the others grow. Paul is writing these instructions to Timothy, the young leader. As a leader, Timothy must encourage the self-control of the women by exercising the same self-control in his life. A leader who allows women to go out of control is not a good leader. When the disciples come together in any assembly, therefore, it is imperative that the leaders of the assembly manifest a spirit of self-control in their own lives in order to maintain control in the assembly. In his final admonition to the Corinthians in reference to their assemblies, Paul wrote, *"Let all things be done properly and in order"* (1 Co 14:40).

Chapter 4

SOBRIETY IN ACTION

In Acts 24 Paul stood before government officials, which officials had the power to condemn him to death. In this case, they sent him on to be tried before Caesar in Rome, where there was usually harsh judgment. But in his defense before Felix in Caesarea, it is interesting to note that Paul spoke of self-control in his defense. *"Now as he* [Paul] *reasoned about righteousness, **self-control** and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened ..."* (At 24:25). The subject of self-control is mentioned by Paul in the context of other serious subjects as right living before God and the final judgment. We would conclude that self-control, therefore, is also a serious subject to be considered when discussing the behavior of anyone who would stand before God in judgment. When discussing the conduct of the Christian, and the Christian's understanding that he will give account of his behavior in the final judgment (2 Co 5:10), self-control is a major character virtue of those who would behave according to the will of God.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to the self-control of athletes when they competed in games. *"And every man who strives **exercises self-control in all things**. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we an imperishable"* (1 Co 9:25). With the same amount of self-control that athletes exercise in training to compete in athletic games, so Christians should exercise the same in the demeanor of their lives in order to receive the crown of life when they finish the race of life. It is the nature of the Christian life to exercise personal discipline in all aspects of one's life. Under no circumstances or on any occasions should a Christian relinquish his responsibility to maintain self-control. As athletes exercised self-control in **all things**, so in **all things** must the Christian do the same.

We would certainly assume that the "all things" about which Paul speaks includes occasions when Christians come together in assembly. In fact, the Corinthians were not exercising self-control when they came together in their assemblies. Paul said that their behavior in their assemblies would be judged by the unbeliever as an assembly of mad people (1 Co 14:23). **The assemblies of Christians should be a manifestation of the self-control that is typical of the demeanor of Christian behavior**. If our assemblies as Christians are out of order (1 Co 14:40), then the unbeliever would judge us to be people of chaos and madness.

It is for this reason that the demeanor of our assemblies should be determined by those who attend. It is not that the assembly of Christians is to be an entertainment session that excites attendees. Our assemblies should reflect our respect and appreciation for the love of God that was revealed through Jesus.

Chapter 5

SIGNS OF MORAL DEGRADATION

Paul writes his final words to Timothy in 2 Timothy. In this letter he spoke of perilous times "in the last days" (2 Tm 3:1). We could debate what times to which he refers as the "last days." But one thing is clear in the context of the "perilous times." Unrighteousness would define the times. *"For men will be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers,* ***without self-control****, brutal, haters of good . . ."* (2 Tm 3:1-5). We need not go on. Among the characteristics that define a wicked and depraved society are those societies in which the inhabitants exercise little or no self-control. It is for this reason that Christians must make every effort to be sober-minded and in control of their demeanor. They must set an example of self-control in societies that are out of control. In all things of life, Christians must manifest a spirit of control. Since those of the world are known by their lack of self-control, Christians are known by their self-control. A Christian, therefore, should not put himself in a situation where he might lose control over the demeanor of his conduct.

This is especially true of older men and women who should give an example of self-control and sobriety. Older women are admonished to *"be sensible, grave,* ***self-controlled****, sound in faith, in love, in patience . . . reverent in behavior"* (Ti 2:1-3). Those who would lead the church must be examples of sobriety. They must teach self-control by the behavior of their lives. They must *"****think soberly****, according as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith"* (Rm 12:3). If a woman is out of control in an assembly, then she is setting a worldly example for others. She is manifesting the "perilous times" in which people exercise little or no control over their behavior.

It is our goal to know Jesus. We seek to have a Christ-like life that manifests to the world that we are disciples of Jesus. For this reason, the disciples of Jesus give all diligence to add to their knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience (See 2 Pt 1:5-8). Peter exhorted, *"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).

Those who lack self-control, **do not know Jesus**. Jesus would not swirl senselessly in the presence of others, faint from dizziness, and then collapse to the ground. Such foolishness would never characterize one who truly knows Jesus. If we would be disciples of Jesus, then we must understand His behavior as it is explained in the Spirit-inspired records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As disciples of Jesus, we do not simply believe His teachings. We seek in our lives to become Christ-like in His behavior. Under no circumstances did Jesus ever lose control of His senses. We should do likewise.

Chapter 6

CONTROL IN ALL MATTERS OF LIFE

Christian husbands and wives have the opportunity to give themselves to fasting and prayer. In their time of fasting and prayer, they can fast from sexual relationships with one another (1 Co 7:5). For Christian couples, therefore, abstention from sexual intercourse during times of fasting and prayer is an opportunity to increase their self-control over the lusts of the flesh. In Paul's instructions concerning fasting from sexual intercourse among married couples, he urged the couples to fast from such for a specific period of time, *"so that Satan not tempt you because of your lack of self-control"* (1 Co 7:5). We fast to build our self-control. Whether as married couples abstaining from sexual intercourse to give ourselves to fasting, or Christians in general fasting from food, our goal is to build our self-control.

Paul also gives instructions to single Christians in reference to their urges for sexual relationships. In reference to the trying times of distress during which Paul wrote, he advised that people remain single (1 Co 7:26). However, if single Christians at that time had a difficult time exercising self-control in reference to sexual intercourse, he advised that they marry, *"for it is better to marry than to burn with passion"* (1 Co 7:9).

Paul's point in reference to self-control is that even in the sexual relationship between a husband and wife, self-control must be exercised. Sobriety and self-control must identify the relationships that Christians have with one another on every occasion. Through fasting

and prayer one builds his or her self-control in all areas of life. No occasion wherein Christians come together should be made a platform for any one Christian to lose control of either his or her senses or behavior. No occasion should be a justified environment in which a disciple of Jesus should be allowed to lose control.

In any discussion on self-control and sobriety, we should conclude with James' truth that we can never completely control the tongue. *"For every kind of beast and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.* ***But no one can tame the tongue***. ***It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison****"* (Js 3:7,8). And so true this is. In our efforts to lead the self-controlled and sober life, we always stumble over our tongues. *"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity"* (Js 3:6). James' admonition in reference to the tongue reveals the truth that if we can control our speech, then we are on our way to controlling the totality of our lives. Herein we do find comfort, since God knows that we cannot completely control our speech. All that we can do is to do as James admonishes, *"... let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak ..."* (Js 1:19).

Book 44

Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith

One of the identifying characteristics of Christian behavior was explained by Paul in his letter to Timothy. It is the characteristic that we *"lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty"* (1 Tm 2:2). It was to promote this behavior that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"Let all things be done properly and in order"* (1 Co 14:40). Whether in assembly, or in their daily relationships with others, a Christian should be identified by a life that is orderly godliness that is expressed in a life of integrity. Anything else is simply immature behavior that is based on the carnal desires of man. Word-based faith always produces a spiritually controlled behavior.

Throughout history there have always been those who have created religion after their own desires. It is our spirit of idolatry to do our own thing in either our rejection of the word of God, or simply an absence of the Bible in our culture. We are religious beings, and thus, we are incurably creative in our efforts to express our religiosity according to our own desires. And because we are this way, in the absence of the word of God we will create a religion after our own inventions, which religion is always subject to our thinking.

In reaction to the formalism of those who have created and ceremonialized religion, others have moved to the extreme by discarding either traditionalism or ceremonialism in order to follow emotional-based religions. They have gone on this journey in order to have a greater sense of spiritual fulfillment, or a sense of victorious living of their faith. In their quest for this objective, they have rejected the mundane for a deeper experience of religiosity that is driven by human experience rather than divine guidance by the revelation of God. These religionists would be classified as experientialists.

In the world of Christendom today, we have religious faiths that are generally based on at least one of three foundations: (1) the traditions of the fathers, (2) the emotional experiences of man, or (3) the word of God. Our immediate concern are those religious groups that have based their faith on human emotional experiences as opposed to the word of God. We will refer to these groups as **experiential religions**.

Experiential religiosity is not something that is unique with our present century. Such religiosity occurred at different times throughout recorded history, beginning with Montanus, a "converted" priest from pagan religion in the second century. Unfortunately, Montanus brought his spiritualistic baggage with him into Christianity upon his "conversion." In A.D. 157, he claimed to be some prophet, considering himself to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. He assumed that he had a special relationship with the Holy Spirit beyond the ordinary believer. Montanus claimed that he was a prophet of the last period of revelation from God, and the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He was purported to have prophesied that in his lifetime the "new Jerusalem" would come down out of heaven somewhere in Phrygia. As a result of his influence throughout Asia Minor, he affected a great many people who converted to his leadership. The result was that he became a leader of one of the first apostasies to experiential religion.

Because Montanus was zealous in his ministry, his movement spread throughout the Roman Empire, reaching into western Europe. The movement became known as Montanism, of which the great religious leader, Tertullian, became a convert. The Apostolic Father, Eusebius, led in countering the apostasy of Montanus. Of his spiritual exploits, Eusebius wrote,

> "So that he was carried away in spirit, and was wrought up into a certain kind of frenzy and irregular ecstasy, raving, and speaking, and uttering strange things and proclaiming what was contrary to the institutions that had prevailed in the church . . ." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 16).

With contemporary church leaders, Montanus was considered to be an apostate from true Christianity. Even those who were associated with him affirmed that he did not follow any authority of the word of God in his theology. His system of faith was experiential, and thus, the word of God had little relevance to the foundation of his faith.

We have few records of experiential religiosity throughout the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic

Church dominated Christendom. The only documentation of experiential movements from the time of the early apostolic age to the Protestant Reformation Movement was of the early Montanists. However, throughout the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century, and in reaction to the cold ceremonialism of Roman Catholicism, the Reformers dealt with what Martin Luther called "the enthusiasts." Church historians have called such groups "evangelical radicals," "holy rollers," and "holy jumpers." These would be groups as the Munzerites, radical Anabaptists and others. Later came the Quakers who, as the early Gnostics, focused on discovering some "inner light." Then came the Shakers of 1776. There were the Pietists, and then, the Irvingites that were started by a Scottish Presbyterian preacher. In the nineteenth century came the great "holiness" movement that swept across early America. This experiential movement included Mary Campbell, who in 1830, began a group that claimed to speak in tongues.

Campbell's teachings began what was called the Catholic Apostolic Church. This group taught the restoration of all the miraculous gifts of the early church, affirming that the gift of prophecy was the greatest gift. However, because many of their teachings clearly contradicted the word of God, and because many of Campbell's "prophecies" were not fulfilled, this group waned. It was dealt a heavy blow when one of the prominent leaders of the group, Robert Baxter, renounced the group and subsequently proclaimed that the "gifts" the movement promoted were only the work of evil spirits. Campbell herself later confessed that she was not correct by claiming that some of her utterances were the voice of God. When it was reported that immorality was rife within the group, and that many who had claimed to be healed, actually died soon after, the movement died.

In the past century experiential religion manifested itself in what church historians refer to as the modern Pentecostal Movement. This movement began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 at the Bethel College. It began as a result of the work of a young man named Charles Parham. One of the students of Parham was a young woman named Agnes Osman, who yearned for a deeper spiritual life that was guided by her passion for the Lord. She longed for a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit that was based on a greater emotional experience. After an extended session of prayer, Parham laid hands on her and she received that for which she had yearned, to have an ecstatic experience, supposing that the experience was from the Holy Spirit.

After Osman had her ecstatic experience, the experiential movement grew and spread throughout the Midwest of America, extending into the state of Texas. By 1906 the movement reached as far west as southern California to the Azusa Street Mission. From the Azusa Street Mission there began what is known as the modern Pentecostal Movement. The movement has since extended throughout the world. It is a movement that is identified by tremendous spiritual fervor, ecstatic speech, shouting and dancing, with claims of prophecy and healings. Adherents of the movement have become known more by their experiential emotionalism, than their study and teaching of the word of God.

The growth of experiential religion has become so expansive throughout the world today that some have referred to it as the third religious force in Christendom since the first century. The first was the Roman Catholic Church moment, then came the Protestant movement, and now the Pentecostal movement. But the fact that all three movements have come too late after the original establishment of Christianity should be the first signal that these are only counterfeits of the original and movements that have been generated by man. Since they are religious movements of man, they are suspect. Christianity was not a movement of man. It was the divinely revealed redemption of the cross to which men responded by faith.

As those who seek a restoration of the faith of the first century, we do not seek to reinvent either a Catholic or Protestant movement by the invention of another. We seek to restore a faith that is based on the word of God and a faith in the work of God through the cross. We do not seek to validate our faith by our feelings, but solely by the directives of our Lord Jesus after whom we call ourselves Christians. We seek to call people again to the testimony of the word of God in order to renew our faith in God's work for us through the cross.

Chapter 1

KNOWING WHO WE ARE

Our term "experiential religion" covers a great deal of religious faiths that fall under the definition of the term. In fact, many non-Christian religions would be considered experiential in that they base their faith upon human emotionalism and spiritual experiences. Under the umbrella of Christendom, however, the Pentecostal/

charismatic movement would be classified as experiential religiosity.

Many church historians have viewed Pentecostalism simply as a remake of similar experiential religions that have existed throughout the history of mankind. As an experiential religion, the Pentecostal movement in the past century is only a redressing of older movements in that the foundation of the faith of the adherents is experiential.

It is important to understand what Pentecostalism is not. A lack of understanding concerning the theology of the movement—if indeed it has a theology—has led to a great deal of misunderstanding. We feel that too much nonsense has been propagated by those who have little information, or lack of understanding concerning Pentecostalism. It is certainly not fair, if not dishonest, to accuse any religious group of error on the basis of one's own lack of information or understanding of those he opposes. This is often the case in reference to the opposition that less informed people have made against what is commonly referred to as Pentecostalism.

Let us be clear that Pentecostalism is not defined by whether one raises his hands in praise of God, taps his foot or claps his hands. These outward bodily expressions of individuals in the excitement of their praise of God are not inherently wrong, neither do they define Pentecostalism. To condemn such practices because they supposedly reflect Pentecostalism only manifests one's lack of understanding of Pentecostal thinking, if not one's own efforts to bind on others his own cultural identity or worship behavior. To engage in debate over such bodily movements is beneath the dignity of honest theological discussion.

We are of a culture that is somewhat subdued in the expression of praise and worship. But this gives us no right to impose on others our subdued Western culture, and thus judge others wrong who have more expressive responses to the glory of God through the clapping or raising of hands. To do so would manifest efforts to impose a legal system of behavior on others that is outside any discussions in the Bible.

If we seek to subdue those who are more expressive in their praise and worship, then we are no better than the legalistic Judaizing teachers who also sought to impose their culture on the Gentile believers in the first century. The Judaizers sought to command the Gentiles to be circumcised in order to be saved (See At 15:1,2). The anti-expressionists do the same by seeking to impose a legal command of something they believe should not be done in their eyes in order for one to be right before God. What is the difference? Therefore, only the uninformed would define Pentecostalism by expressions of bodily movements, not an investigation into theology or philosophy of religion. In fact, the origin of experiential religiosity finds its very roots in the cold, expressionless formalism of certain groups of Christendom who bound their sedate cultural and emotionless worship on those who sought freedom from rigid ceremonialism.

Experiential religion, or what is commonly referred to as modern Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement, has historically been a reaction to the cold formalism of traditional religion. The experientialist is in a religion of intense, personal pleasure that is often ecstatic in its manifestation. He focuses on a powerful and individual experience that is in opposition to emotionally indifferent ceremonialism. This leads experientialists to focus more on personal religious experiences than the word of God. The validation of faith, therefore, is experience, not the revelation of God.

We would not define Pentecostalism as a unique denomination, or body of theology. It is an experience as a way of life that is both personal and spiritual. The general belief of the experientialist is that experience supersedes revelation as the foundation of one's faith. The experience is often defined as the "baptism of the Spirit." The "baptism" is said to manifest itself in ecstatic speech, or speaking in an "unknown tongue." This experience is often accompanied by the gifts as prophecy, interpretation of tongues, and miraculous healing. As will be discussed in the following chapters, it will be found that modern experientialists have developed their own definition of "speaking in tongues," "baptism of the Holy Spirit," and "miraculous healings," which practices contradict the truth of the biblical definition of these first century phenomena.

A. A movement of experiences:

Pentecostalism in its purest form is a movement of those who elevate a human experiential response to God over the foundation of God's revelation. However, in its connectivity among different assemblies in the world of Christendom, Pentecostalism is a universalistic movement that seeks to bring together all those who have had some supposed spiritual experience of the Spirit, an angel, or some vision or dream. The movement is not defined by a unique catechism of doctrine. It is defined by the personal experiences of individuals. For this reason, the first validation the experiential adherent uses to define his salvation is some experience he or she has had, or some encounter with an angel, or the Holy Spirit. Dreams and visions also play a significant role to reaffirm one's faith. All those who have had such experi-

ences, therefore, would affirm to be Pentecostal, believing that their experiences are a restoration of the Pentecost events of Acts 2.

Pentecostals are brought into fellowship with one another on the basis of their common experiences. The word of God often has a minor role to play in this fellowship. For this reason, there are few Pentecostal theologians. The Catholic nature of the movement is their common salvation that they base on personal experiences, not on one's common obedience to the gospel (See Jd 3).

Because experiential religion is an ecumenical movement that is based on common experiences, differences in doctrinal belief are considered insignificant in reference to creating unity. It is not a Catholic movement that is based on a unifying belief in fundamental teaching, but a union of faiths that use experiential validation as the common identity of union. In fact, in some cases Bible knowledge and authority are minimized in order to maintain unity among all those who have had some experiential encounter. The principle that Jesus stated in reference to those Jews who based their faith on the traditions of men would apply here (Mk 7:9). Instead of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep one's traditions, the experiential religionist would reject the commandment of God in order to keep the experiential validation of his faith. In both religious scenarios the commandments of God take second place to either traditions or experiences. Whether a traditionalist or an experientialist, the commandments of God end up being rejected.

In the historical development of the holiness movements in the last two centuries, experientialists have often formed their own assembly groups that huddle together under the influence of dynamic speakers and a common acceptance of their experiences. But closely connected with these Pentecostal groups is the charismatic movement which is more ecumenical. This movement takes its identity from the Greek word *charisma*, meaning "gift." Charismatics focus on the continuation of all the miraculous, or spiritual gifts of the first century. Charismatics have taken the experiential manifestation of faith to all religious groups. As a charismatic, one can be a member of any religious group. The charismatic sees no denominational barriers.

Pentecostals, however, often identify themselves as a "Pentecostal church," and thus, meet as specific denominations that are based on the common experiences of the membership. Charismatics, on the other hand, are more catholic in that they have permeated all religious groups. Charismatics have a strong ecumenical spirit, and thus, seek to accept all experientialists regardless of their religious affiliation or doctrinal beliefs. As long as one claims to have had some spiritual experience in a dream, vision, speaking in tongues, healing, etc. he can be accepted by all charismatics.

Pentecostals are often charismatic in the sense that they believe in the continuation of the miraculous gifts of the first century. It is for this reason that the philosophy of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement works as a catholic movement simply because charismatics do not seek unity that is based on doctrine, but on experience. They cannot disclaim the experiences of another person, and thus, they must accept one another. They cannot participate in any biblical discussions concerning their experiences for the validation of their faith is based on their experiences, not on the word of God. Their goal is to produce a union of experientialists, not unity that is based on the tangible truth of the word of God.

Those religious groups that believe they are the restoration of the Holy Spirit in these times can never have unity that is based on the word of God. Paul wrote that we should be *"eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ep 4:3). Since experiential groups marginalize the authority of the Scriptures, they can never "keep the unity of the Spirit" who has spoken to us through the inspired word of God (2 Tm 3:16,17). They can never produce unity because they marginalize the very foundation upon which the Bible teaches that we must establish unity.

The Bible nowhere teaches that unity is produced upon the foundation of the members' experiences with the Holy Spirit. The experientialists, therefore, may create unions wherein adherents agree to accept one another's experiences, but there can never be any real unity that is based on a variety of human spiritual experiences. True unity originates from the Holy Spirit speaking a united message in Scripture that honest believers objectively learn and to which they humbly submit. This is the central meaning of Jude 3. *"Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write to you about* ***our common salvation****, I felt it necessary to write to you, exhorting that you earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."*

We cannot submit to one another's experiences, and thus produce unity. We can be united only when we both agree to submit to the faith that was once and for all time delivered to the saints (Jd 3). **Union is accepting one another's experiences**. **Unity is our common submission to the faith that was revealed two thousand years ago**.

The very fact that the Pentecostal/charismatic churches are not directly controlled by the Holy Spirit is revealed by the disunity which prevails among many Pentecostal groups. If the Spirit directly spoke to and

directed such groups, there would be no disunity since the Spirit cannot be divided against Himself. And since these groups claim to be directly controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit, then they are accusing the Holy Spirit of sending contradictory messages to different groups or individuals. Their disunity is an accusation against the oneness of the Spirit of God because they are often teaching contradictory doctrines.

We must keep this point in mind in reference to Paul's argument against those in Corinth who produced disunity by their prideful use of the spiritual gifts. Paul argued that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, and thus, they do not work against one another in any function of the body (1 Co 12:4-11). In the case of the Corinthian chaos, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit did not work against one another. The division that prevailed in the church, therefore, did not originate from the Godhead. Paul's beginning argument to correct the Corinthian division was to remind the church that the unity of the Spirit is manifested in those who submit to the direction of the Spirit's leading through the word of God (See 1 Co 1:10). **Unity is not obtained upon the foundation of personal experiences, but upon the foundation of the unchanging word of God**.

B. Neither Catholic nor Protestant:

Compromises, or revisions, can be made in reference to the particular doctrines that define Catholicism or one of the many denominations of Protestantism. These minor changes can be made, and yet, one can remain either a Catholic or a member of one of the Protestant denominations. However, one cannot compromise within the two religious world views concerning the fundamental doctrines that identify one as either Catholic or one of the protestant denominations. One must remain either Catholic or Protestant in reference to fundamental teaching that identifies Catholicism or a particular denomination. In general, one either has a Catholic theology and relationship with God or he has a Protestant theology and relationship with God. But the theological world views of the two bodies of faith cannot be mixed.

Pentecostalism, however, does not belong in the camp of true Protestantism, for in Protestantism each unique network of the denominations is defined by a unique body of doctrine. Pentecostalism is generally not defined by a body of theology.

As an experiential faith, Pentecostalism belongs to a religion of subjectivism with little attention being given to doctrine. It is a faith wherein one is obsessed with his personal experiences, rather than being enthusiastic about what the Bible teaches. It is not an objective faith that is focused on a faith that is guided by the outside influence of the word of God. One's faith is validated by his subjection to inner experiences as opposed to the outward influence of the word of God. The true experientialist cannot quote and truly believe the statement, ***"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ"*** (Rm 10:17). If a supposed Pentecostal quotes and believes the concept of this statement, **then he is not a true Pentecostal**. If the foundation of his faith is the word of Christ, then he has allowed the word of Christ to have priority in his life over his experiences. He has thus left the experientialism that defines one to be a Pentecostal.

The true Pentecostal is so obsessed with his subjective experiences that his experiences become the focus of his religiosity and the validation of his faith. The true Pentecostal, therefore, is overwhelmingly subjective to his experiences. He is so overwhelmed by his experiences that such experiences become the focus of his faith. Spiritual experiences become so strong in reference to his faith that he feels little need for any knowledge of the word of Christ.

We must clearly understand this point because there are many religious folks who have their roots in Pentecostalism, but they have grown beyond an experientially based faith. They have moved past themselves in order to discover what God requires of them in His word. They are not, therefore, true Pentecostals. Though they may not realize this, they must understand that they have moved past the definition of true subjective Pentecostalism to a faith that is based on revelation.

The true Pentecostal assembly is not an opportunity to come together to listen to the teaching of the word of God. The purpose of the true Pentecostal assembly is an opportunity to renew an emotional experience. Since true Pentecostalism is experientially based, then the assemblies of the adherents are for the purpose of renewing weekly the experiential flavor of the religion. It is for this reason that dynamic speakers who have the ability to cheerlead audiences into creating an atmosphere of ecstasy are usually the public leaders for Pentecostal assemblies. Such preachers are not known for their knowledge of the word of God, but for their ability to bring an assembly to the heights of emotional ecstasy. However, many Pentecostals have grown weary of such experiential oriented assemblies. It is as one member of a Pentecostal church once said, "We need more teachers and less preachers." We all knew what he was saying.

C. Carnal religiosity:

Since experiential religiously is centered on the ex-

periences and emotions of the individual, it naturally focuses on man himself. This is humanistic religiosity. It is fleshly in that the validation of one's faith is based on personal subjective experiences, not on what one objectively discovers through his study of the word of God. It is interesting to note in history that when Mary Campbell promoted experiential religiosity in the early part of the nineteen century, she was an ardent advocate of the supposed "pre-tribulation" event of the premillennial theology. She was one of the first people to promote the teaching. Her experiential thinking led her to interpret the Scriptures from a humanistic point of view. She was thus obsessed with those things that pleased the flesh.

Premillennialism focuses on the carnal desires of men who seek to rule over their fellow man during the so-called 1000 year reign of Jesus on earth. Subjective experientialists are intense about this fleshly teaching since the very foundation of their faith is focused on man. Those who would emphasize sensual feelings and experiences in order to validate their faith would naturally have a hope in an earthly, material kingdom of this world wherein they can reign as kings over others.

Jesus, however, taught servanthood in reference to the needs of man (See Jn 13:1-17). The Bible teaches that our purpose is to subject ourselves to God, and to manifest such through our subjection to the needs of all men (Gl 6:10). The Bible teaches us to look out for the needs of others, and to bear the burdens of others (Gl 1:2). The true experience of Christianity is to lose oneself in service to others. Christianity is not a faith of self-glorification or an opportunity or occasion for one to exalt himself over others. It is a faith that follows the example of its Founder who *"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant ..."* (Ph 2:7). **Service for others, therefore, is the true experience of the disciple of Christ**. It is as Jesus said, *"If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"* (Jn 13:14).

Chapter 2

AN EXPERIENTIAL PHILOSOHY OF RELIGION

From the most unlearned to the most educated, and from the inhabitant of the hut to the penthouse dweller of New York City, everyone makes decisions on the basis of their philosophy of life. This is true because every man is concerned about what is morally right or wrong, good and evil, true or false. We are concerned about how to determine what is true, and what is real in life and valuable. We are all philosophers in reference to life. This is the way God made us.

In our philosophical approach to life, however, we must keep in mind our efforts to know and please God. **We do not come to an understanding of His will through philosophical means**. God speaks through His word and we obey (See Jr 10:23; 2 Tm 3:16,17). Through reasoning and common sense we objectively interpret His word. We do not come to an understanding of what is fundamentally binding for salvation through a philosophical approach to Bible study. Our faith is built on what God clearly states in command, not on our philosophical deductions (See Rm 10:17). He speaks and we obey.

In order that we arrive at a knowledge of the truth, the Bible warns that we should be careful to identify what is false philosophy, for believing false philosophy will lead us astray. Paul warned Timothy, *"O Timothy, guard what is committed to your trust,* ***avoiding profane and vain babblings and opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge"*** (1 Tm 6:20).

In order to avoid establishing our faith on a false philosophy of life, we must be objective students of the revealed word of God. Once one submits to his objective understanding of what God would require of him, he relies on revealed truth in order to determine his philosophy of life. The truth of God, therefore, guides his philosophical deductions and conclusions. But if we subtract the word of God from our philosophical thinking, we will most certainly go astray, for it is not in man who walks to guide his own paths (Jr 10:23).

When applying our philosophical approach to life to our religious thinking, there are (1) empirical religionists, (2) idealistic religionists, (3) experiential religionists, and (4) the divinely mandated faith. Every person has a philosophy of life according to at least one of or more of these general world views of thinking.

The **empirical religionist** believes that there is no truth except that which he perceives through his five senses. In other words, "seeing is believing" in reference to what he holds as true. This is the person, though he may be religious, who questions the miraculous foundation upon which Christianity was validated in the first century. If he is a religious person, then he has a faith that is void of the miraculous, and especially the work of God in the life of the Christian today.

The **idealistic religionist** assumes that he can determine truth by what he can intellectually conclude. He believes that all truth is subject to human reasoning. The idealist relies on man's ability to reason in order to discover truth. Though he may be a person who deducts truth from the Bible, he assumes that all truth is the product of the reasoning of man, and thus, must be the result of and subject to man's reasoning. That which is revealed in the Bible must be put through the scrutiny of man's reasoning before it can be accepted as truth that is applicable to man's moral behavior. The idealist would discard Bible truth if he judges that it is not applicable to the human culture or behavior of his time.

The **experiential religionist** has a philosophy of faith that subjects reality to the emotional whims of men. He assumes that the heart of man should have priority over the mind of man. He would reject the view that truth can be objectively discovered. He would do so because he believes that truth is determined by the feelings of the individual. In other words, the experientialist does not believe in a constant state or existence of truth because the emotions of the individual, or his circumstances, constantly change. That which is true or moral, therefore, can be changed according to the subjective feelings of man. The individual, not truth, is the absolute, and thus, truth or morality can change according to the emotional state or needs of the individual.

To the experientialist, what feels right is right. And thus, to him there is no absolute truth or morality to which we must conform. Truth must conform to the needs of man. Our relationship with God is thus based on our conditions and needs, not on the unchanging mandates of God's commandments. In this way, experiential religiosity is subjective to the whims of men. (More later.)

The experiential religionist is his own authority in matters of faith, and thus, the consequences of his religion are devastating to true faith. His philosophy of faith is devastating to true faith for several reasons:

- He denies the authority of the Bible in the lives of those who would serve God.
- He exalts man's feelings over any unchanging truth from God to man.
- He denies that there is any standard of morality by which men should relate to one another.
- He negates the necessity of studying the Bible, for it is believed that truth is determined by the changing emotions, feelings and experiences of men.

The conclusion to the religious philosophy of the experientialist is that there is no such thing as an unchanging body of teaching that identifies the nature of the church of God. Since the experientialist substitutes the authority of his experiences for the authority of the Bible in matters of faith, then he has established his own feelings and experiences as the final authority in matters of faith. It is this philosophy of religion that governs the thinking of the true Pentecostal. One may claim to be a Pentecostal because of his heritage from Pentecostalism, but if he resorts to the word of God in matters of faith, he is not philosophically a Pentecostal. He has moved from Pentecostalism into the fourth philosophy of religious belief. He has moved from experientialism to the word of God. He thus walks by a faith that is based on the word of God.

We would technically not call the fourth religious philosopher a "divinely mandated religionist." True faith is not a religion. It is the same as saying there is no false "Christianity." There is only true Christianity. Everything else is a religion of man, and thus false.

The fact is that Jesus would have all men be simple Christians. And Christians base their faith totally on the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him, ***"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"*** (Jn 8:31). To His disciples He said, ***"If you love Me you will keep My commandments"*** (Jn 14:15). Jesus' word, His commandments, are not discovered or determined by the rational deductions and logic of man. They are mandated from heaven through His written word. His commandments are absolute. Their discovery and application are not determined by the experiences or emotional whims of people. They are discovered through diligent Bible study (At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15). And since we will be judged by the word of Christ, then His word is absolute, that is, it cannot be changed (See Jn 12:48).

The philosophy of the true Christian is that the word of God is his final authority in matters of faith (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21). It is the foundation upon which his philosophy of life stands. He believes that all men must obey the gospel in order to be saved (Rm 6:3-6; 2 Th 1:6-9). He believes that there is only one church (Ep 4:4-6). These and many other mandated truths are certainly contrary to the philosophy that our experiences and emotions should have priority over the revelation of God.

Experiential religionists believe and live contrary to the philosophy of life of the Christian. The experientialist places his feelings above the Bible. The Christian places the word of Christ over his feelings. The experientialist changes his faith when he experiences new visions or has another dream concerning what he must do. The Christian believes in and lives by the un-

changing word of God. The experientialist often questions the validity of his visions and dreams. The Christian has total and absolute faith in the truth of God's word. Experiential religionists often have conflicting experiences, dreams and visions. But the Christian follows the unchanging word of God that is without contradiction, and thus, is specific concerning what mandates are necessary to obey in order to be pleasing to God.

Chapter 3

THE RISE OF RELIGION

We must understand that God created man a religious being. He created man with intelligence in order to deduct the existence of God (Rm 1:20). Because man is inherently religious, and subsequently, seeks a divine being beyond his own existence, in the absence of revelation from the one true and living God, he will create a god after his own imagination. He will then create a system of religious belief and behavior that he feels pleases the god he has created in his mind. The culture of the religious believer, therefore, plays a very significant role in his religious beliefs and behavior in reference to his creation of his god and religion.

Every new generation of human beings is ignorant of the truth of God. It is thus the responsibility of every generation of fathers and mothers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Pv 22:6), if indeed they themselves have access to the word of God. In many places of the developing world, there is the total absence of the Bible, and thus, by word of mouth people have propagated teachings concerning Christianity. However, these teachings have often been greatly amalgamated with local cultural beliefs, and thus a "christianity" has been developed that has been influenced more by local religious beliefs than the truth of the Bible. Throughout Africa there are thousands of religious groups that claim to be Christian, but have little knowledge of the word of God.

There are also those places where the parents have failed in their duties to impart to their children Bible teaching. The result has been that the succeeding generation of believers is not true to the word of God. They are apostate believers who carry on in their own ignorance of what God would have them believe and do.

There are also those situations where the fathers have allowed their religiosity to digress into a traditional system of ceremonies that is void of Bible teaching. More specific, there are those religious environments wherein "Christianity" has simply been relegated to ceremonial assemblies that are cold and formal. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find in the religious world a vast assortment of religious groups that vaguely have any connection or identity with what would be called a "christian" church. The Christendom of today would probably best be described by Paul's words in Romans 3:10: *"There is none righteous, no, not one.* ***There is no one who understands. There is no one who is seeking God.****"* Because we seek to fabricate a religiosity after our own desires, we have subsequently created a god whom we believe sanctions our fabricated religiosity.

When God said of Israel, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Hs 4:6), in the historical context Israel was destroyed from the land because the people had allowed themselves to be destroyed as the representatives of God on earth. They had rejected being led by their objective response to the word of God, and thus following after subjection to their own religious imaginations, they were destroyed as the people of God. Nothing less happens today when religious people reject the word of God, either by ignorance, tradition, or willful neglect of studying their Bibles. In their ignorance of the word of God, they are willingly led about by teachers who will tickle their ears.

"Ear tickling" preachers are such because they have little knowledge of the word of God. They depend on their speaking abilities to woo into subjection an innocent following (See 2 Tm 4:3,4). Such people are often sincere in their beliefs. But we must keep in mind that in the Scriptures sincerity is never considered the final condition for salvation. One can be sincerely faithful to his erroneous beliefs, but certainly lost. The suicide bomber is sincere, but sincerely lost.

Because there is so little Bible knowledge among many groups that claim some connection with Christianity, it is easy to understand why the adherents of such groups would assume that religious experiences should validate one's faith. Since they cannot quote a scripture from the Bible to prove that they are truly Christian, then they have only one other source of validation. Spiritual experiences under the guise of being touched by the Holy Spirit have become the common foundation upon which many individuals believe that they are right with God. For this reason, doctrinal beliefs play an insignifi-

cant part in their theology, if they indeed have a theology.

Bible discussions with experiential religionists are often fruitless simply because the experiential religionist places more emphasis on his experiences than what the Bible teaches. It is true that the experientialist has had some type of ecstatic experience, an experience that he uses as evidence for his faith. But when approached with Bible teaching on such subjects as the purpose of miracles, the purpose of tongues (languages), or the authority of the Bible, the experientialist will almost always resort to his experiences in order to invalidate any Bible teaching that may contradict his experiences.

It is not that this person has had an experience, but whether the experience was from the Holy Spirit, or just the excitement of his own spirit. When someone says he saw the Lord, or God spoke to him in a vision or dream, it is not important what the person claims. What is important is to determine what the person claims the Lord said to him. If what the Lord supposedly said to someone in a dream or vision contradicts what is taught in the Bible, then the origin of the supposed experience of the dream or vision was from the individual's own spirit, not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would never tell someone something that contradicted what He has already stated in the Bible.

Chapter 4

GOD'S WORK FOR US

There is a vast difference between experiential religiosity and the faith that is revealed in and based on the New Testament. The emphasis of the New Testament is the revelation of the gospel to which God desires that all men respond through repentance (2 Pt 3:9). The gospel is Christ, and thus, all focus in the New Testament is on Christ. In order to complete God's plan to save man, He worked in two ways in reference to Christ:

1. **His redemptive work through Jesus**.
2. **His redemptive work in and through the believer by the Holy Spirit**.

In order to bring men into eternal dwelling, these two works of God in the lives of people are necessary and related. But they must be clearly distinguished from one another in reference to our justification.

A. God's redemptive work through Jesus:

God's redemptive work through Jesus is based on the historical event of the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). The gospel event is a statement to all men of **what God has done for man through Jesus**. It is not a proclamation of what God is presently doing or will do. **The event of the gospel has already occurred**. It happened two thousand years ago outside the city of Jerusalem. What God has done for us through the gospel is past tense, as Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 5:18. *"And all things are of God who **has reconciled us** to Himself through Christ ...."* Paul reminded the Ephesians, *"In Him* [Christ] *we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace ..."* (Ep 1:7).

In order to accomplish this redemptive work, Jesus *"humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:8). God's work of redemption through **the work of Jesus resulted from Jesus' obedience on our behalf**. His work was based on the principle of what Paul explained in Romans 5:8. *"But God demonstrates His love toward us, **in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**."* Because all have sinned (Rm 3:23); because there is none who are righteous (Rm 3:10); and because there is no one who can earn his salvation through meritorious works or perfect keeping of law (Gl 2:16), Jesus was obedient to the redemptive plan of God in order that all have the opportunity of His cleansing blood. Jesus did what we could not do for ourselves.

God's redemptive work has been accomplished for us. Jesus left heaven for us (Ph 2:5-11). He suffered on the cross for us. He bore our sins on the cross, died there, and was buried. He rose again on the third day for us in order to give us hope of eternal dwelling. He is now reigning as King of kings for us (1 Tm 6:15). And He is coming again for us (1 Th 4:13-18). God did all this for us, **not in us**.

The gospel event took place in history before us and for us. We can connect with the redemptive work of God through the gospel by obedience to the gospel in baptism (Rm 6:3-6). But we must keep in mind that regardless of our sinfulness, the gospel was revealed. Regardless of men's willingness to accept Jesus (Jn 1:11),

Jesus came into the world for the salvation of all men. **This salvation is not discovered experientially, but objectively as one reads about it in the Bible**. If the Bible did not exist, no man could be saved by his own experiential inventions. Salvation results from one's obedient faith response to what is revealed in the Bible, not one's experiences that he would offer to God for his own justification.

B. God's redemptive work in us through the Holy Spirit:

The second work of God on our behalf takes place as a result of our obedience to the work of God through the gospel. It is a blessing of grace because we are saved by our obedient response to God's redemptive work through the gospel. Peter indicated this work upon the first pronouncement of what men would receive when they obeyed the gospel by baptism for remission of sins. To the thousands on Pentecost in A.D. 30 who had asked, "What shall we do," he responded, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. **And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**"* (At 2:38).

When one obeys the gospel by baptism, God begins His work for the obedient through the Holy Spirit. **Sanctification by the Spirit is a lifetime work of the Spirit on behalf of the obedient**. Throughout our lives we are regenerated by the Spirit in order to be transformed into the image of Jesus. Now consider this work of the Spirit in the obedient believer in reference to God's work for us through the gospel event. These two works must never be confused. They must never be made the same. Since the second is dependent on the believer's response to the first, then the Spirit can do nothing if one does not respond through baptism to the gospel of the cross and resurrection.

God's work outside and before us through the cross was accomplished on our behalf. We had nothing to do with the event of the cross, for Christ died for us while we were dead in our sins (Rm 5:8). For this reason, we must keep in mind the following points in order to maintain a clear understanding of the two different redemptive works of God on our behalf:

1. *The grace of God appeared to all men regardless of the state of all men.* Paul wrote in the past tense, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation **has appeared to all men**"* (Ti 2:11). Apart from our sinful actions, God took action in reference to our redemption. God extended grace in spite of our unrighteousness. The grace of God that was revealed on the cross is thus different from His grace in giving the Spirit to those who obey the gospel. The redemptive work for sin took place before the giving of the Spirit to the obedient for sanctification. His grace that was revealed through the cross was not dependent on the obedience of man, for *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rm 5:8). But the work of God in us through the Spirit is dependent on the submission of the obedient believer to the leading of the Spirit. In other words, God's grace in giving the Spirit does not happen until one responds to the grace that was revealed on the cross.

2. *The gospel event happened before and outside us.* We had no part in the work of God through the gospel. The gospel happened regardless of our sinfulness. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them"* (2 Co 5:19). Reconciliation took place outside us and regardless of us. We did not earn the event of the gospel. Because of our sins, we were spiritually not worthy of God's grace that was revealed on the cross. Nevertheless, because God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16).

3. *Our acceptance by God upon our obedience to the gospel does not depend on the work of the Spirit after we have obeyed the gospel.* Our acceptance by God is based on our obedience to the gospel through baptism. We are added to His family by Him when we obey the gospel (At 2:38,47). **Our acceptance by God, therefore, is not based on what the Holy Spirit does for us, but because of our response to what God has done for us through the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus**.

If God through the Holy Spirit had to regenerate a response in us in order that we obey the gospel, then He would be a respecter of persons, and thus an unjust God in view of the fact that most people will not respond to the gospel. But we must remember that God is not willing that any person perish (2 Pt 3:9). For this reason, the gospel goes out to everyone in order to give everyone an opportunity to respond. The fact that we have the opportunity to respond to the work of God through the gospel means that we must take ownership of our response to the gospel. It is not the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to generate a response in our hearts to the message of the gospel.

4. *God's work for us through the gospel is complete, perfect and sufficient.* The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was complete and sufficient. *"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**"* (Hb 10:10). On the other hand, God's work in us through the Holy Spirit is incomplete because we are sinners. The Holy Spirit is working with malfunctioning units. We cannot live the

perfect life. We confess that we sin. John reminds us, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 Jn 1:8). The Spirit works in our lives in a sanctifying and transforming manner, but His work is with imperfect subjects who struggle to live according to the will of God. Christians are the sanctified in that they have been cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 Co 1:2). However, they continue to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit in separating themselves from the world. *"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work"* (2 Tm 2:21). *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one ..."* (Hb 2:11; see Ep 4:17-32). We are being sanctified by the truth of God on a daily basis (Jn 17:17). Our response to the Spirit-inspired word of God continues to set us apart from the world. Through His blood, Jesus cleaned up our past sins when we obeyed the gospel (At 2:38; 22:16). But the Holy Spirit works to lead us through the word of Jesus in order to mold us for eternal dwelling.

In view of the preceding points, we must understand that what God did for us through the gospel was complete and perfect. However, His work that He does in us through the Spirit is incomplete because of our own inability to live the perfect life. While Jesus was with His disciples He wanted to make this point very clear to them. It was clarified when He sent out many of the disciples in order to heal the sick and cast out demons (See Lk 10). When the disciples returned, they were quite jubilant about their accomplishments. *"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name"* (Lk 10:17). But notice Jesus' response to their ability to command the obedience of the demons in His name. *"Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you.* ***But rejoice because your names are written in heaven****"* (Lk 10:20). Jesus knew that His disciples would be excited about what God would do in their lives. But they must keep in mind that this was the work of God outside them, not in them. **They should not rejoice in that over which they had no power, but over that which God had done for them, that their names were written in heaven** (Lk 10:20).

We praise God for what He has done for us through the gospel. Through the regular observance of the Lord's Supper we remember Jesus and the cross (Mt 26:26-29). In reference to the Supper, Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of Me." We must continually be reminded of what Jesus did for us in order to keep our minds off rejoicing over what the Spirit is doing in us, lest we become arrogant. Being Christ-centered means focusing on the gospel event, not on the Spirit's work in our lives. We have discovered that the more people focus on the work of the Spirit in their lives, the less they focus on doing that which Jesus did for them. They become less Christ-centered and more "me-centered." And because of this, those churches that obsess over the work of the Spirit in the lives of the adherents usually have little concern for remembering Jesus through the regular observance of the Lord's Supper. **Christ-centered churches regularly observe the Lord's Supper because they want to remain Christ-centered** (See At 20:7).

As long as we keep focusing on God and what He did for us through Christ, the Spirit will continue to do His work of sanctifying our lives. But when we take our eyes off Christ, and start focusing on what the Spirit is doing in our lives, we start minimizing what Christ did for us. We become obsessed with our own "spirituality" and our own experiences. We must always keep in mind what Jesus said in reference to the observance of the Supper, "This do in remembrance **of Me**." Did Jesus make this statement because He knew that men would eventually take their eyes off Him, and start focusing on themselves? Certainly!

If our focus is primarily on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is obvious that we will take every opportunity to remember His incarnational revelation, atoning death and glorious resurrection. We will continually remind ourselves that He is not in some forgotten tomb in Palestine, but ascended to the right hand of God where He now reigns over all things. The center of reference for the disciple of Christ is the good news of appearing of the Son of God in order to bring us back into fellowship with the Father. Every time disciples come together, it is in response to the gospel of Jesus. If we forget this, then we forget who we are.

Chapter 5

COMPELLED BY LOVE

The experience of love (Gr. *agape*) in the context of the experientialist is viewed differently than it is set forth in the Bible in reference to God's love for us. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul wrote, *"**For the love of Christ compels us**, because we judge that if one died for all, then all died."* And if all died in their sins (Rm 3:9,10), then all

need the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel. We are thus driven by the love that God extended toward us through Jesus. We are driven to extend the same love toward the lost. It is a love that is manifested through duty.

There are two different views of the nature of the *agape* (love) about which the New Testament speaks. (1) The experientialist will do good works because of the love in his heart to do such things. To him love is a rapturous feeling that compels him to do good. When love is in the believer's heart, then the believer will act. (2) The Bible presents love as a principle of unselfishness. Because one has submitted to Christ whom God gave because He so loved us, he in turn submits to the needs of others as God served our spiritual needs. *"**We love because He first loved us**"* (1 Jn 4:19). And God loved us even when we were unloving and did not deserve His love.

Biblical love cannot be separated from obedience, for it is manifested in obedience. *"For this is the love of God, **that we keep His commandments**"* (1 Jn 5:3). See if this is not what John meant in 1 John 3:16. *"**By this we know love**, because He laid down His life for us. **And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**."* Jesus laid down His life because of His duty to save the unloving. We, therefore, will respond to our enemies with the same love, and especially with our brothers. It is as John wrote, *"... let us not love in word or in tongue, **but in deed** ..."* (1 Jn 3:18). It was Jesus' duty to go to the cross. It was the Father's will, not His will, for He wished that the cup could pass from Him (Mt 6:10; 26:39,42; Hb 10:7-9). It is the same in our response to the needs of others. We may not like the cross we bear, but we must bear it for Jesus. It is as Jesus said, *"And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, **cannot be My disciple**"* (Lk 14:27).

The experientialist will do something because he feels like doing it out of the love in his heart. But the biblical concept of love is based on obedience and duty. It is based on bearing a cross. **One does good whether he feels like it or not**. **His feelings do not determine whether or not he will carry his cross in caring for his brother**. When it comes to doing that which is his duty to do, he will do his duty regardless of his feelings. In fact, his true obedience (love) is exemplified when he does that which calls for great sacrifice and duty. His first desire is to glorify God, not himself. His first desire is toward others, not himself. Crosses are not a pleasure to bear.

Observers see the actions of the experientialist and glorify him because of the love that he must have in his heart. Observers see the actions of the obedient who act regardless of their convenience or feelings, **and give glory to God for the works of the obedient**. The one who loves God with all his heart, mind, strength and soul will bear his cross in order to bring glory to God (Lk 14:27). He keeps the law of God at the expense of his own personal convenience or even his own life itself. He will love his enemies. He believes what Paul wrote. *"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). The cross-bearer sometimes becomes weary in doing good, but he continues. He believes, *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially those who are of the household of the faith"* (Gl 6:10). The cross-bearing disciple continues when the feeling-motivated experientialist has long since exhausted himself.

Biblical love is not a sensual love experience. It is an objective obedience to the will of our Father that brings personal fulfillment (See Jn 13:17). God's final definition of those who are His was revealed to John. *"Here is the patience of the saints. Here are **those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus**"* (Rv 14:12). We are of those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus regardless of our feelings and experiences. Regardless of our insufficient love, we have kept His commandments and remained faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our confidence, therefore, is not in ourselves, particularly our imperfect behavior. Our confidence is not in our experiences and our insufficient feelings. It is in our loving obedience to the commandments of God. It is not that we are perfectly obedient, but that we are struggling to walk in the light as He is in the light. In our obedience, we never forget 1 John 1:7. *"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**."*

The experientialist must remember Jesus' words, *"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**."* To the experientialists, Jesus says, *"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 7:21-23). Why is it that those religionists who claim to be prophets, claim to cast out demons, and claim to do many miraculous works, have never read this passage? Or maybe they have, and then ignored these words of Jesus to be meaningless because of the experiences they have exalted over the *"will of My Father who is in heaven."* (More on this later.)

Chapter 6

JUSTIFICATION

A brief overview of the digression into apostate thinking after the first century illustrates where men will go when they take their eyes off the redemptive work of God through the cross and focus on their own performance of law and meritorious works. This overview especially helps in the African context where there are many who are so obsessed with spooks and spirits that they have a difficult time focusing on God's word, *"that our names are written in heaven."* We become so obsessed with demons we have created in our imaginations that we remain continually in fear of being possessed by some evil spirit. Our minds are our own worst enemy. Our creative and misguided imaginations destroy our confidence in Christ whom we often marginalize by our imaginations.

Some Christians are too often as the disciples of Jesus when they returned from the mission trip of Luke 10. They rejoiced over the casting out of the demons while they should have been rejoicing over their names being written in heaven. If the focus of our faith is on what we can do, even though "in the name of Jesus," then we forget what God has done for us through Jesus.

This is exactly what happened in the digression away from the truth that eventually led to the birth of the Roman Catholic Church. After the close of the first century, Gnosticism and Montanism in the second century began to refocus the thinking of many Christians. Focus turned from the cross to the supposed direct function of the Spirit in the individual. This change of focus led people to create a subjective view of the individual's relationship with God. The Gnostic taught that one must be enlightened by being aware of what was called the inner divine light. The Montanist focused on a direct experience of the Holy Spirit in one's personal life. The focus of the believer, therefore, was turned from the work of God through the cross, to the subjective work of what men could do through their own "spiritual performances." It was the spirit of idolatry without the carving of a wooden idol. Men began to idolize their own spiritual experiences.

The obsession of one's focus on his own work instead of God's work, eventually led to the fundamental theology of the Roman Catholic Church. This theology is that one's acceptance in the eyes of God is dependent on one's personal experience of the grace of God within the individual believer. The Catholic doctrine of an "infused righteousness" was the belief that justification takes place on the basis of the experience of the believer, not on the basis of what God has done through the cross. Justification was subject to what one could generate within himself, and thus, the grace of God that was revealed on the cross needed the supplement of the believer's works.

One of the primary tasks of the leaders of the Reformation Movement was to restore the New Testament teaching of justification. They sought to restore the teaching that God's grace on the cross was sufficient for our justification and not dependent on the performance of the believer. There was much discussion among the Reformers concerning justification by faith because they were teaching themselves out of the meritorious concept of justification that was taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The discussion centered around justification by our faith in what God has done, not in what we can do in our performance of law and meritorious deeds. If justification were based on our performance of either law-keeping or meritorious deeds, the Reformers argued, then our focus is on ourselves, not on the justification that freely came through the work of God on the cross. The Roman church taught that justification was earned. But if it is earned, then it is no longer a free gift. It is no longer by grace, but through merit. *"But if it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise grace is no longer grace"* (Rm 11:6).

A. Justified by the faith of Christ Jesus.

Our justification is not only based on our faith in what God worked on our behalf, but in Jesus who worked on our behalf through the cross. What must be the center of reference to our thinking on justification is what Paul taught in Galatians 2:16. *"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****"* (*International King James Version*). Notice that our justification came "by **the** faith of Christ Jesus," not by the experience of our own faith. Our faith is in what Jesus did on the cross when He *"became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:8). Our salvation was made possible by **the faith of Christ** that took Him to the cross. Our faith is in His obedience of accomplishing our salvation outside our inability to live perfectly according to law. We thus thank Jesus for His faith in

going to the cross, for we have faith in the cross for our justification.

But some recent translations have obscured the point of Galatians 2:16 by incorrectly translating the passage, and again placing the responsibility for justification on the performance of men, as did the Roman Catholics. Notice the *New International Version's* translation of Galatians 2:16. *"... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but* ***by faith in Jesus Christ****. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified* ***by faith in Christ*** *and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."* In the Greek text, the article "the" precedes the word "faith" in both phrases in reference to faith. But in the *New International Version* the focus is placed on the faith of man, **whereas the correct translation would place the emphasis on the faith of Jesus whereby He took Himself to the cross** (Jn 10:17,18). Galatians 2:16 is not talking about our faith in Christ in order to be justified. **Paul is talking about the faith of Christ to accomplish justification for us**. God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. We did not reconcile ourselves to Him (2 Co 5:18). Justification was made possible by the faith of Christ. We have access to it by our own faith in Christ.

When Jesus said prior to His crucifixion, "*Not My will, but Yours be done*," He was placing His faith in the Father to complete the plan of redemption through the cross. The work of God through the redemption of the cross occurred regardless of our faith. In fact, we were hopeless when the grace of God was revealed on the cross (Rm 5:8). Justification was the work of God outside ourselves and regardless of either our obedience or faith. **If it were not for the faith of Christ who worked through the cross on our behalf, we would have no reason for any faith in Christ**. His faith has generated our faith. We must never forget that it was His faith that made it possible for us to have faith in His work for us.

B. Justified by the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

It was Christ's experience for us on the cross, not our own experience, that is the foundation for "our names being written in heaven." This is the exact prophecy of Isaiah 53:11,12. "*By His knowledge* [of His redemptive work of the cross] *My righteous servant* [Jesus] ***will justify many****, for He will bear their iniquities."*

The life of the Christian is in Christ. Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*" (Jn 10:10). Contrary to the thinking of many materialists, Jesus' focus in this statement was not on prosperity, but on what He brought to all men through the cross. He is the life, and now the source of this life is in heaven. Our faith, therefore, must be focused on Jesus in heaven, not on ourselves on this earth. Jesus died for our sins. He rose for our hope. He reigns for our protection. He is coming again for our eternal salvation. Our faith, therefore, is in Him to accomplish that which we can never accomplish on our own. We praise and thank Jesus, therefore, for His faith in the Father that led Him to fulfill the gospel event, which event has led to our justification.

We must compare our religiosity, and especially the focus of our life, with the New Testament teaching concerning the justification that was revealed through Jesus. **The believer must ask himself if the focus of his life is on his own experiences to be made right before God, or on the experience of Jesus on the cross**. If one's focus is on the experiences of his own life, then he has missed the point. He has forgotten that one is not justified by the merit of experiences (Gl 2:16). One may cry out "Lord, Lord," but in all actuality, his faith is based on the performances of his own experiences, and not on the experience of Christ on the cross.

We must never forget that Jesus merited our justification on the cross, and then, He handed it to us as a free gift. This is true grace. And since it is a free gift, it can never be merited or earned by works of experience. By responsive faith we access that which is free. Our confidence in our justification, therefore, is not in our ability to perform, but in Jesus' "performance" on the cross.

C. No justification by personal performances of law.

Experiential religiosity is defined by the focus of the adherents on their personal experiences as the validation of their salvation and acceptance by God. But if one's faith is based on the redemptive work of God, regardless of his sinfulness, then he is not an experientialist. We have discovered that many people who have come out of a Pentecostal background have actually grown out of the true definition of what a Pentecostal is. They have grown from trusting in their own experiences to trusting (faith) in Christ as the surety of their salvation. These people have grown away from a religiosity that was based on experience in order to have a faith that is based on what the word of God states concerning the work of Christ on the cross. Their faith, therefore, has become word based and not experience based as they climb out of the quagmire of experiential religiosity. In the true definition of Pentecostalism, therefore, they are no longer Pentecostals.

It has been one of the evangelistic methods of some to boast of how God has worked in their lives. The testimony of their experiences, therefore, has often become

the message of their "gospel." But this is contrary to what Paul preached. Notice his statement of 2 Corinthians 4:5. *"**For we do not preach ourselves**, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake."*

We have met those who preach themselves. They are eager to boast about some experience they had with an angel or the Spirit working in their lives. They will carry on endlessly about how they had some vivid dream or vision when they were "slain in the Spirit." **They preach themselves**. Paul said, *"But we preach Christ crucified ..."* (1 Co 1:23).

Luke recorded the emphasis of the apostles' preaching. *"And with great power **the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"*** (At 4:33). There is a vast difference between preaching one's own experiences and preaching the crucified and resurrected Jesus. The subject of the preaching of one identifies him as the representative of a false religion, whereas the subject of the other identifies him as a messenger of the gospel.

When the apostle Paul spoke of his experiences, the subject was hardships and tragedies that befell him during his preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified (See 2 Co 11). But in all his trials of preaching the cross, he wrote to the Corinthians, *"**For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**"* (1 Co 2:2).

We can identify those who are preachers of the gospel. They do not preach their own personal experiences. They determine to know only the experience of Christ on the cross and His resurrection for our hope. True preachers do not preach themselves. They are not obsessed with telling others of their personal experiences. On the contrary, they are overwhelmed with the work that God did throughout history in bringing the plan of redemption to finality on the cross. They are in awe of the empty tomb. They tremble at the feet of the King of kings and Lord of lords. They work tirelessly in anticipation of the coming King who will finalize the purpose for which this world was created. They are looking for and pleading that the new heavens and earth be revealed (2 Pt 3:11-13). They can look forward to the coming of Jesus with anticipation because they do not trust in themselves for their justification. They fully trust in the work of Jesus Christ through the cross.

Chapter 7

EXPERIENCES versus TRUTH

One of the reasons for the rise of experiential religiosity is that religion throughout the centuries often becomes so emotionally sterile, traditionally stagnant, and ceremonially performed that the emotional needs of people have been either suppressed or ignored. In reaction to such rigid religiosity the swing of the intellectual and emotional pendulum goes from the one extreme of cold orthodoxy to the uncontrolled and ecstatic emotionalism of experiential religion. People often run through Jerusalem in forsaking all forms of ceremony and personal self-control. They have rejected formally cold religiosity in order to emotionally base their faith on claimed divine experiences they assume are divine interventions in their lives. They have gone so far as to base their faith entirely on their experiences rather than the Bible. Many have digressed to the point that their emotional experiences have blinded them to the fact that they have actually forsaken the Bible as the foundation of their faith. They are philosophically and theologically ecumenical in reference to anyone who has had an emotional experience, regardless of what one believes concerning the word of God.

As Bible students we must keep in mind that a religious emotional experience proves that we have a spirit. We are emotional beings. We *"rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"* (Rm 12:15). If we refuse to bring our emotionality into our faith, then we live in an emotional vacuum. We will also be a spiritually crippled being who has a difficult time in expressing our brotherhood and fellowship with others. We will never fully understand the nature of the God of love. But because we crave brotherhood, we seek to express our emotions with our faith in God. However, our emotions must be guided and controlled by the revelation of God.

This is the principle behind John's caution in 1 John 4:1. *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."* Because we live in a world of religious spirits that have gone astray, John lays on Christians the responsibility of testing the spirits. And there is only one standard by which spirits can be tested. This standard is the word of God.

We are not, therefore, to believe every religious experience of everyone who believes in Jesus. We are to believe only those experiences that are tested by the word

of God. In other words, only those experiences that conform to the teachings of the Bible must be accepted. The thinking of the experientialist is to be considered only if he allows himself to be tested by the word of God (1 Jn 4:1). Those whose teachings contradict the word of God are to be rejected.

It is imperative that we test the spiritual experiences of men with the word of God in order to guard ourselves from being intimidated, and subsequently, led astray by the experiential "spirituality" of those who arrogantly put forward their experiences as divinely generated. Paul reminded the Corinthians of their former experiences in pagan idolatry. *"You know that when you were Gentiles* ***you were led astray to dumb idols*** *..."* (1 Co 12:2). In their former life, the emotional ecstasy of their idolatrous religious experiences led them away from God. The same happens today when people subject themselves to experientialism that is void of the word of God. **Without the standard of the word of God, religious experiences lead one away from God**. There is fertile soil for apostasy today in the religious world of experiential religion simply because there is a dearth of knowledge of the Bible.

Experiential religionists often make the fatal mistake of behaving as some of the apostate Corinthians who had not yet forsaken their former behavior in pagan religions. Paul warned us concerning the behavior of these experientialists, *"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). Experiential religionists often compare their emotional experiences with one another. They often try to out perform one another in recounting who had the greatest religious experience, healing, dream or vision. Upon first contact with one another, they begin to validate and exalt themselves with one another by focusing on who "spoke in tongues," had a dream or experienced a vision. They are not wise in doing this.

We would think that if one's personal encounters with the Holy Spirit should be our message to others, then certainly the apostles of Jesus would have preached themselves and their experiences. They could have magnified themselves, as some preachers do today, by explaining in detail their encounters with the Holy Spirit and angels. But Paul explained, *"For* ***we*** [the apostles] ***do not preach ourselves****, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake"* (2 Co 4:5).

Too many preachers preach themselves and their experiences, and at the same time preach little of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. They exalt themselves by emphasizing sensational experiences with spirits and angels when they should be preaching Jesus Christ and His crucifixion for our sins. What has happened is that the message of the gospel has been subjected to the personal experiences of sensational preachers. And since they claim that their experiences originated from the working of the Holy Spirit, they have reversed the ministry of the apostles of Jesus. They have done so by exalting the work of the Spirit over the work of Christ in redemption. Instead of glorifying Christ, they bring glory to themselves and the Holy Spirit. Such preachers are counterfeits of the true messengers of the gospel. They are counterfeits simply because Jesus said the Holy Spirit would never work in a way that would bring glory to Himself (See Jn 16:13).

One cannot validate his faith by comparing his emotional experiences with the experiences of others. This is circular reasoning, and in the mind of Paul, not wise. When Jesus said, *"Your word is truth,"* He meant that the word of God must be the standard by which we test one another (Jn 17:17). When Paul said, *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves,"* he meant that the standard by which we test one another and test the spirits, is the word of God (2 Co 13:5). One can know that he is "in the faith" only by God's declaration through His word that he is in the faith.

We would not know if we have gone astray if we had no divine standard from which we can go astray. Humanistic religion places man as the standard of judgment. The Christian places the Bible as the standard by which we can determine if one has gone astray from the faith. If we compare one another's emotional experiences, then we can never determine who has gone astray. This is especially true in reference to our salvation. Some validate their salvation by some emotional experience. But if their salvation is not dependent on what God says concerning our salvation, then our emotional experience are invalidated as just experiences that any unbeliever would have.

What should transpire when one is saved is that he has an emotional experience when he knows he has followed the instructions of God concerning what is necessary for salvation. But if one has not obeyed the gospel according to the instructions of God, then his emotional experiences are in vain. True emotional experiences happen when we know we have been obedient to God.

If our emotional experiences become the standard by which we judge the validity of either our salvation or faith, **then we have become a law unto ourselves**. And when we become a law unto ourselves, everyone becomes his own standard by which he judges himself right in the eyes of God. We become as the apostate Israelites, *"Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes"*

(Jg 17:6). If we judge ourselves as either saved or spiritual upon the basis of our emotional experiences, **then we have claimed to be inspired by the validation of our own experiences since we claim that the experiences come directly from the Holy Spirit**. Regardless of what the word of God states concerning our salvation, we will thus exalt our emotional experiences over the teachings of the Bible. This is the curse of the experiential religionist. He is a law unto himself because he has based his faith on himself. He makes the Spirit contradict Himself. Instead of the supposed Spirit-inspired experiences leading him closer to the Spirit-inspired word of God, he is led away from the word.

The true Christian who guards himself from being deceived by the experiences of others, is as the one described by Isaiah concerning the wisdom of the prophesied Branch. *"**And He will not judge after the sight of His eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of His ears**"* (Is 11:3). The true believer will question great signs and wonders lest he be deceived (Mt 24:24). He knows that there are many false signs and wonders in the world that give the appearance of being miraculous (2 Th 2:9). If we trust in our senses, we will surely be deceived. If we trust in our experiences and use them to validate our faith, we will surely fall under the judgment of Proverbs 28:26. *"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool ...."*

Our faith is both intellectual and emotional. *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth"* (Jn 4:24). Cold ceremonial and traditional religiosity does not fulfill the basic spiritual and emotional needs of the human being. God created us to be both emotional (in spirit) and intellectual (in truth). If we focus entirely on the emotional part of man as the validation of our faith, then we will lead ourselves astray from the truth. Emotion must have truth in order to stay on the right path. If we focus entirely on truth without emotion, then we will also go astray. **All truth with no emotion leads us into a religiosity that has no personal relationships and a superficial brotherhood**. But if we abandon truth for emotional experiences as the foundation for our faith, then there is no end to which our idolatrous spirit will take us. If we have teachers who use their emotional experiences to validate themselves as teachers, then we need to test the spirit of these teachers with the word of God. It may be that we need to change teachers.

The point is that we do not need to validate our faith on the foundation of an emotional experience if we have followed the instructions of God in His word. Paul instructed, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ..."* (Cl 3:16). When we are filled with the word of Christ, then we are filled with the Spirit (Ep 5:18). But no one who is ignorant of the word of God can be filled with the Spirit. Therefore, if we claim to have been filled with the Spirit through an emotional experience, but are ignorant of the word of God, then we should seriously question which spirit filled us. More accurately, the one who is ignorant of the word of God, but claims to have been filled with the Holy Spirit, has been filled with the spirit of deception. He has deceived himself into believing something the Holy Spirit has not done.

Chapter 8

OBJECTIVISM versus SUBJECTIVISM

If someone wants to be religious, or express his religiosity, he must make a very important choice concerning the validation of his religiosity, or the expression of his faith. He must choose whether (1) to base his religiosity, and the expression thereof, on objective truth, that is, the Bible, or (2) he must decide whether to base his faith on himself. The overwhelming majority of people of faith throughout history have chosen the second option.

Since we focus on ourselves, and our desire to be free, it is quite difficult for us to allow authority outside ourselves to be the foundation upon which we base our faith. Israel went astray because she chose the second option. In order to bring them back to the authority of God, Jeremiah reminded them, *"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; see Pv 16:1; 20:24). Nevertheless, men seek to subject themselves to themselves in order to create a religion after their own desires. For this reason, almost all religions today are subjective to the catechism of traditions or emotional experiences.

A. Subjectivism:

Experiential religiosity is based on subjectivism. Subjectivism is the teaching that one comes to God on the basis of his own conditions. He subjects himself to himself. Whatever seems right to himself is the standard by which he submits to God. Subjective religiosity is the teaching that one's salvation, and continued validation of faith, is based upon what one feels, regardless

of Bible teaching concerning salvation and faith. The subjective person would say, "I know what I believe because of what I feel." "I know that God is leading me because of what I experience in my life." "If it feels right, then it must be right."

Subjectivism can be better understood by comparing it with objectivism. **Objective faith means that one's faith is based on the foundation of revelation and law**. The objective person of faith affirms that his faith is based on what God has revealed through His word. The faith of the objectivist is based on something outside himself. This is the principle of Romans 10:17. *"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."* The faith of the objectivist is based on what he objectively reads in the Bible (See Jn 20:30,31).

The subjectivist would say that he believes because of what he feels or experiences in his life. The objectivist would say that he believes because of what God has revealed. The subjectivist is directed by his experiences. The objectivist is directed by what is communicated in the word of God. The subjectivist is his own authority, whereas the objectivist stands on the authority of the word of God. The subjectivist is led by the word of God only when it conforms to his emotional experiences. His experiential religiosity, therefore, is based on himself as the final authority in matters of faith. The objectivist, however, behaves on the basis of what God says. The problem with the subjectivist is that his salvation is based on his own experiences. In fact, the experiential subjectivist will often reject the conditions for salvation that are revealed in the Bible in order to cling to his own established creed of experiences. On the other hand, the objectivist will have confidence in his salvation because he can put his finger on the commands of God that he has obeyed in order to have his sins washed away (See At 2:38; 22:16).

As previously stated, subjectivism was the problem with the nation of Israel during the days of the judges (See Jg 17:6). The Israelites had become subject to their own desires, and thus, they did that which was right in their own eyes. Their subjective religiosity led them away from God. It will do the same today.

Subjectivism is a religious behavior wherein everyone does that which is right in his own eyes. The period of the judges was a time when the people had forgotten the law of God. And when religious people forget the law of God, they will become a standard of law unto themselves. This is subjectivism. Subjective religiosity is only a spiral down to idolatry wherein men create religious behavior after their own desires. Subjective religiosity is spiritual anarchy against the law of God. The religious subjectivist always moves away from the God of the Bible because he has rejected the God who only is revealed through the Bible.

B. Religious subjectivism:

Some of the Corinthians were caught up in subjective religiosity. Subsequently, they were a divided church. Paul sought to correct their subjective religiosity in order to produce the unity for which the church is to be known. He exhorts that they *"all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions"* among them (1 Co 1:10). Unity could not be based on the members' comparing their experiences with one another, even though their experiences were in their exercising of the spiritual gifts (See 2 Co 10:12). Unity could be established only on an objective response to and obedience of the revelation of God. Paul challenged the subjective experientialist, *"If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that* ***the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord****"* (1 Co 14:37). The experientialists in Corinth needed to submit to the commandments of the Lord that were given through Paul. Peter stated the principle as such, *"****If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God****"* (1 Pt 4:11). Experientialists need to be cautious about sharing their experiences. They need to be more concerned about sharing the oracles of God. Instead of speaking of their experiences they should speak the oracles of God.

Subjectivism will destroy the unity of any church. When we forsake the "oracles of God" as the standard for unity, there is no standard for fellowship other than the feelings and experiences of each member. Members may accept one another's experiences, but when disagreements occur over personalities and methods, doctrinal agreement over fundamentals is not strong enough to keep a church from division.

The miraculous gifts that the Corinthians prized so highly as they experienced them in their lives, would soon pass away. Their experiences with the gifts of prophecy and tongues, in which they competed with one another, were not considered the greater gifts, for their exercising of the gifts with an unloving spirit resulted in their being divided. In the midst of a discussion concerning prophecy and tongues, Paul wrote, *"But earnestly desire* ***the greater gifts****. And yet I show to you a more excellent way"* (1 Co 12:31). The more excellent way would be the foundation upon which the disciples of Jesus are blessed.

The "greater gifts" did not include their experience with prophecy and tongues. As Paul continued in 1 Corinthians 13, love is the foundation upon which the greater gifts are based and unity maintained. When the

miraculous gifts passed away, the "more excellent way" would continue. Paul continued, *"But when that which is complete has come,* ***then that which is in part will be done away****"* (1 Co 13:10). The miraculous gifts were only "in part." But that which was "complete" (or, perfect) was greater. He concluded chapter 13 by stating, *"****And now*** *abide faith, hope, love, these three. But the greatest of these is love"* (1 Co 13:13). Notice that the phrase "and now" emphasizes that that which is "complete" had come. Reference to the "complete" cannot be heaven. Heaven is yet to come. Reference is to **the complete revelation of the truth through the apostles** (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). This was the foundation upon which they could be united.

All truth had been revealed through the apostles by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (Jd 6; 1 Pt 1:3). This truth was verbally preached by the apostles, but would eventually be written. It was this truth upon which the unity of the body could be maintained, not on the experience of the miraculous gifts.

In order to correct the subjective religiosity of some in the church in Corinth, Paul enjoined upon them several mandates that would bring order to their chaotic disunity. He reminded them that it was the Spirit's choice as to who would function with the gifts, and not the individuals who exercised the gifts (1 Co 12:11). He condemned them for minimizing one another's gifts, for the body is one, though it is made up of many members (1 Co 12:15-26). He condemned them for being jealous of one another's gifts (1 Co 12:28-31). He condemned them for speaking in a language in the assembly that no one understood (1 Co 14:6-9). He exhorted them to pray and sing in a language that could be understood (1 Co 14:15). He exhorted them to be mature and not think and behave as children (1 Co 14:20). He chided them for behaving in their assemblies as madmen (1 Co 14:23). He condemned them for causing confusion by speaking at the same time in their assemblies (1 Co 14:23,24). He reminded them that all things must be done for edification of everyone, not just one or two individuals (1 Co 14:26). He instructed them that all teaching must be conducted in an orderly manner (1 Co 14:27-31). He taught that no prophet is subject to the influence of the Holy Spirit against his will, but that they must manifest self-control (1 Co 14:32). God does not work in an assembly that is out of control (1 Co 14:33). The wives of the prophets must keep silent in the assembly in order that they not embarrass their husbands when they are teaching (1 Co 14:34,35). And just in case someone might think that Paul's instructions originated from himself, he reminded them that what he taught was *"the commandments of the Lord"* (1 Co 14:37). **Everything that Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 12–14 in reference to the assemblies of the saints is totally contrary to the out-of-control assemblies of a group of subjectivists**.

Those who have fallen victim to subjective religiosity often forget one very important teaching of Paul in the context of his instructions of 1 Corinthians 14. Verse 32 states, *"****Now the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets****."* The "spirit" (or attitude, character and demeanor) of the mature teacher is under control. If a teacher loses control of himself, he must blame himself, not the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit never moved an individual to lose control of his personal demeanor**. If a prophet lost control of himself so as to behave senselessly, then he can never blame the Holy Spirit for such foolish behavior.

C. Objective response to the gospel:

It is not coincidental that Paul immediately begins the subject of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 after concluding his instructions an assembly in 1 Corinthians 12–14. In speaking of the gospel, he reminded the Corinthians that they received and stood on the foundation of the truth of the gospel (1 Co 15:1,2). Their faith rested upon the fact of the gospel event that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected for our hope (1 Co 15:3,4). **They did not stand justified through their experiences of the gifts, but in the truth of the gospel event**. Their stand upon the historical event of the gospel was objective, not subjective. **They believed and obeyed what Paul had preached** (1 Co 15:1,2). Their faith, therefore, was based on the gospel, not on the function and experience of the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts would pass away, but the historical event of the gospel would stand for eternity. Their misunderstanding was in basing their faith on the experiences of the spiritual gifts that would pass away and not on the eternal gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul also reminded the Corinthians, *"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 those who believe****."* The world through its wisdom could not discover God. In the context of 1 Corinthians 1, the world could not save itself through its own religious inventions. God had to invade the world with the historical event of the gospel in order to reconcile men to Himself (See Ti 2:11). Therefore, only those who objectively learn of and obey the gospel can be saved (See Jn 6:45).

Personal encounters or spiritual experiences cannot be a means of salvation. There is no means of salvation revealed in the Bible apart from knowing and obeying

the gospel. This is so biblically evident that Peter asked a question that he knew every Christian could correctly answer. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us,* ***what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"*** (1 Pt 4:17). We know the answer (See 2 Th 1:6-9). It is because there is salvation by no other means than an objective knowledge of and obedience to the historical event of the gospel, that Paul, and the other first century evangelists, preached Jesus and His crucifixion. This is the basis for what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2. *"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (See At 4:12).

What the Corinthians seem to have done is that they took so much pride in the experience of the function of the spiritual gifts that they focused primarily on the gifts that were only the means to an end, the end being Christ. They had reversed the order of importance in coming to Jesus Christ. They believed that coming to Christ was the means by which to experience the spiritual gifts. They took pride in the gifts but marginalized their "names being written in heaven" because of their obedience to the gospel of Christ. They needed to remember that their obedience to the gospel of Christ should reflect one's focus on Christ. The work of the Spirit through the gifts should have continued their focus on Christ until that which was complete, or perfect, had come. And since their faith was based on revelation, the perfect word of God would keep their minds focused on Jesus, not on the miraculous gifts which would soon pass away (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). Their experiences with the gifts, therefore, should never have taken their focus off Christ.

When people minimize the word of God for the Spirit, they are taking their focus off Christ in order to exalt the means (the Spirit) to Christ. The Spirit works to glorify Jesus, not Himself. Experientialists need to remember John 16:14. *"**He*** **[the Holy Spirit]** ***will glorify Me**, for He will take of Mine and will declare it to you."* Jesus is the discovered pearl of great price (Mt 13:45,46). He is the hidden treasure that is found (Mt 13:44), the fullness of the Godhead (Cl 2:9). He is the Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). We do not minimize Jesus Christ by obsessing over the work of the Holy Spirit. Our primary focus is on Jesus. The focus of the Holy Spirit is on Jesus. The Spirit would take that which was of Jesus in order to focus the minds of men on Jesus by means of the inspired Scriptures (Jn 16:13,14). If Jesus is not foremost in the minds of those who claim to be Christians, then they are not Christian. Christ, not the Holy Spirit, is the center of our attention.

D. Humanistic theology:

When one forsakes a knowledge of the Spirit-inspired word of God, he has no alternative for religious validation than his own religious feelings and performances. He thus becomes subjective to his own imagination and guided by his emotions. His feelings, therefore, determine his behavior. He determines whether something is either right or wrong based on how he feels about a particular situation. What happens is that one subjects himself to himself. Feelings become the criteria for rejecting the commandments of God. He forgets that the law of love and the love of law are not exclusive of one another. They are mutually inclusive. This is brought out in Jesus' statement, *"If you love Me you will keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15). John restated the same principle. *"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.* ***For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments"*** (1 Jn 5:2,3).

God's love does not do away with His law for us. Because He loved the world, He gave law in order that men not lead themselves astray by doing that which was right in their own eyes. In turn, it is not possible for us to return the love of God by ignoring His law. The one who truly loves God, therefore, is an ardent Bible student. He is a student of the law of God in order to please the One who extended great love for him. For this reason, **it is impossible for one to love God outside the realm of God's law**.

Religious people who are ignorant of the law of God have established a foundation of love that is based on their own standards and their own experiences. Their undoing in their relationship with God is that they have sought to do that which was right in their own eyes, not that which is right in the eyes of God. Subjective religiosity, therefore, is the religion of one coming to God upon the foundation of his own apart from the law of God. His relationship with God is humanly defined, not defined by the word of God.

It is relevant in this context to notice some of the final words of Paul to the evangelist Timothy. *"Take heed to yourself* ***and to the teaching****. Continue in these things, for in doing this you will* ***both save yourself and those who hear you"*** (1 Tm 4:16). Notice that Timothy was to take heed to "the teaching," not to any personal experiences. Timothy was to base his faith on "the teaching." In doing such he would save both himself and those who obeyed the teaching. This is objective faith, not subjective emotionalism. Timothy was not exhorted to take heed to some spiritual experience, nor to recount some experiences that Paul may have related to him in

his own personal ministry. No man's religious experiences are to be the foundation upon which our faith is based.

E. Supplementing grace:

One of the very first attacks against the work of God through the cross and salvation by grace was the legalistic teaching of the Judaizing teachers of the first century. These teachers went among many of the newly established churches and preached that unless those who had obeyed the gospel were also circumcised, they could not be saved (At 15:1,2). The premise upon which their teaching was based was that with works of law one supplements the grace of God. The Holy Spirit argued clearly through Paul in the book of Galatians against this theology. It was a theology that placed emphasis on the performance of the individual in order to make oneself right before God. The Spirit countered the legalists by stating that *"**man is not justified by works of law**, but by the faith of Christ Jesus"* (Gl 2:16).

By the end of the first century, another similar theology was making itself into the fold of the flock of God. It was the theology of Gnosticism. The Gnostic taught that through the knowledge of one's inner light he would be enlightened, and thus, saved through his self-awareness. As with the doctrine of the Judaizing teachers that focused on the performance of law, so the Gnostic focused on the spiritual performance of the individual in order to be justified. Both theologies were similar in that they focused on man, not what God had done for man through the cross. They were supplemental theologies in the sense that both centered on the works of man in order for man to be justified before God. Both taught that the grace of God needed to be supplemented by some work (circumcision) or spiritual enlightenment (experientialism) in order to make the grace of God effective in one's life in reference to salvation.

The Pentecostal/charismatic movement of these modern times falls into the same category of seeking to supplement the grace of God. It is assumed that some "spiritual" performance on the part of man is necessary in order to be pleasing before God. These performances often manifest themselves as to whether one has been "baptized in the Spirit," "spoken in tongues," or had some experiential encounter through visions or dreams. The essence of the theology is the same as the legalistic Judaizing teachers and the spiritual arrogance of the Gnostics. In all three theologies (Judaism, Gnosticism and experientialism) the grace of God is supplemented, or at least marginalized by the performance or experiences of man.

When considering this point of theology, we would question the water baptism of some religious groups. If the baptism of the adherents of these groups was a work of law in order to supplement the grace of God, then the baptism became a simple work and performance on the part of man. Such an attitude toward baptism would thus be contrary to the biblical teaching that baptism is a response to the grace of God.

The Judaizing teachers made circumcision a work of law in order to be saved. The Gnostic made one's experience of discovering his inner light a requirement for salvation. The experientialist makes his spiritual encounters with the Holy Spirit works of law in order to be pleasing before God. Theologically, there is no difference between the three groups. All three are man centered religions that focus on the performances of man in order to supplement the grace of God.

In our discussion of these matters we must never forget that religion is a system of self-sanctification. The religionist realizes that he sins. Therefore, in order to feel good about himself, he must perform some meritorious system of reconciliation. If one has laid aside his Bible, then he must invent for himself some system by which he will feel justified before God. The world is filled with religions, as was the world into which Jesus came. The Jews were the masters of religion for they had created their religion that had some sprinkles of the Sinai law, but primarily, their own religious traditions. Their focus was on keeping their traditions.

Chapter 9

"SPIRITUAL" PHENOMENA

In the first century God confirmed the message of His messengers as Jesus had promised. *"And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word by the signs that followed**"* (Mk 16:20). We must investigate the claimed "supernatural" experiences of present-day religionists in the context of the early church experience of God *"confirming the word by the signs that followed*." Experiential churches today seek to validate their existence by supposed supernatural manifestations as the baptism

of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophecies of the future, supernatural voices, visions, casting out demons (exorcism), and divine healings. Most emphasis is usually placed on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and divine healings.

We do not deny the occurrence of experiences today that are equated with the works and experiences that are found in the New Testament. The experiences that some have today do happen, though we would question that these experiences are the same as the supernatural phenomena of the first century that God used to confirm the early message and messengers of the gospel.

We must keep in mind that when men trust in their own senses, they can be easily deceived. Jesus said that even many Christians would be deceived because of the overwhelming appearance of some phenomenon that seem to be supernatural (Mt 24:24). But if Jesus said that such is deception, then deception cannot be the evidence of truth. If the unexplained phenomenon were true, then one would not be deceived by believing in something that is actually supernatural.

For those who affirm that God continues to work today through confirming miracles, then we must ask them how do we identify a false miracle? If there is such a thing as false signs as Paul stated in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, then how are we to identify such false signs in order not to be deceived? **We have found that those who are adamant about confirming miracles today say very little about the New Testament teaching not to be deceived by false miracles**.

When discussing this subject, there are obviously some questions that arise. Are the experiences of "speaking in tongues" today the same as the phenomenon of speaking in languages that was experienced by the early Christians? Were there divine healings and the exorcism of demons in the first century? What we would need to determine is if the supernatural phenomena of the first century were meant to continue throughout the history of the church.

In our investigation we must also be careful not to read our experiences into the Bible. We have found that this is often the case in reference to the subject under discussion. People will have an ecstatic experience of speaking in gibberish, and then associate this experience with the speaking of languages in the New Testament. As a result, their understanding of the purpose of the ministry of the gift of languages is twisted and confused. They are as those who sprinkle people for baptism. Since sprinkling is a common practice for "baptism" today among many religious groups, the practice of sprinkling is read into the cases of baptism in the New Testament. It is thus difficult to reason with this method of Bible interpretation because people are so adamant about keeping their tradition of sprinkling. It is the same with those who have had the ecstatic experience of speaking in gibberish. They know that they have had the experience, and thus, they seek to validate their experience as being from God by seeking out some promise in the Bible that their experience is a promise of God.

Another question that must be answered and consider is this: Is the phenomena of supposed "speaking in tongues," "casting out demons," "healings" and "prophecy" that are assumed among many religious groups today, even among non-Christian religions, actually occurring today? If these phenomena are actually the work of God, then these religions, including the non-Christian religions, must be validated as true, if indeed such phenomena are from God. Of course God would not confirm as true those religious faiths that are non-Christian and do not believe in Christ or the Bible. Neither would God through miraculous manifestations condone those who deny and refuse to obey fundamental truths of the Bible.

We must take a very serious look at the spiritual phenomenon that occurs today and is equated with what is recorded in the Bible. Since Jesus claimed to be the only way into eternal life (Jn 14:6; see At 4:12), then those religions that use personal experiences and supposed supernatural occurrences to confirm their faith must with us be very cautious about confirming our faith by our personal experiences.

We must be cautioned about using Bible names to define spiritual phenomena that are totally the result of human experiences. We have found that people are too quick to use a Bible name as "demon possession," "speaking in tongues," or "baptism of the Holy Spirit" to identify some spiritual phenomenon that happened in their life. Using a Bible name does not ratify an experience as biblical. A human experience that is labelled with a Bible name only manifests the lack of knowledge of some who have little understanding of the biblical definition of demon possession, speaking in tongues, or baptism of the Holy Spirit.

A. "Tongue speaking" among pagans:

Keep in mind that the purpose of the miraculous manifestation of signs and wonders in the first century was to confirm the message of the messengers as they went out to preach the gospel to the world. *"And they went forth and preached everywhere,* ***the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed****"* (Mk 16:20; see Hb 2:2-4).

A phenomenon that has often been used today to

confirm one's faith is the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" that is supposedly manifested by the "speaking in tongues." If these manifestations are true, then we must believe that wherever there is the "speaking in tongues," God has confirmed the messenger, as well as His message. So we now have a problem. The problem is that the "speaking in tongues," as well as other ecstatic experiences, have been manifested throughout the world, **and in many different religious groups**. The phenomenon has been so prevalent among all religious groups that Pentecostal/charismatic groups have had to assume a Catholic Church world view in reference to all religions that claim to have had such experiences. In other words, if the phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" occurs in all religions, then we must assume that God is confirming all religions. Of course this is totally contrary to the teaching of the word of God. Nevertheless, when one takes the position that the experiential phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" is actually the same as the tongues in the New Testament, then he has to take the position that God is working among all religious groups who claim to have experienced the phenomenon, regardless of their teachings.

Glossolalia is a Greek word that refers to the gibberish speech of one who is experiencing a semiconscious state of emotional hysteria. It is a natural phenomenon of speech, but should not be confused with the speaking in languages that is mentioned in the New Testament. (More on this later.)

Nevertheless, speaking in gibberish is often confused with the speaking in languages in the New Testament. But if this were true, then we have some problems in reference to the "speaking in tongues" among apostate cults as the Thracian Dionysus, as well as the Delphic of Phrygia, the Bacides and the Sybils of early Greek culture. They also experienced the phenomenon of glossolalia (See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans Pub. Co.). P. Feine wrote of these groups,

> The Greek oracles were mediated through priests or priestesses who uttered what the divinity suggest to them while their consciousness was in complete abeyance [state of suspended consciousness]. Another characteristic of the giving of oracles is the obscurity or unintelligibility of the oracles, which ever needs explication ("Speaking in tongues," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*).

In 1921, T. K. Oesterreich wrote the book, *Possession: Demoniacal and others among Primitive Races, in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times*. Though Oesterreich was not a person of faith, his purpose for writing was to investigate the phenomenon of ecstatic speech among people throughout the world. Though he did not write as a believer in the supernatural, he did give witness to the fact that the phenomenon of glossolalia was something that was experienced by many different religious groups. In his work, he dealt with what was claimed to be "demon possession" He did not refer to such beliefs as religious fiction. He simply understood that such psychological phenomenon in man had a psychosomatic origin, that is, such phenomena originated in the psyche of man, not the result of an alien force possessing man.

In his studies, Oesterreich also reported that people of pagan religious faiths spoke in ecstatic utterances, practiced the casting out of demons, pronouncing of curses, and making prophecies of the future. The conclusion to these studies was that "speaking in tongues" was not unique with any particular religious group, but was practiced among all the religions he studied, regardless of their doctrine.

In his book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, George B. Cutten investigated cases of "speaking in tongues" by those who were simply ingenious in their psychic behavior. He investigated and recorded the case of a Helene Smith (a pseudonym) who was born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1864. Smith was the daughter of a linguistic father who spoke at least six languages. Her mother was a spiritualistic medium who claimed to have visions. At the age of 28, Smith too became involved with spiritualists, and eventually, she became a medium of a group of her own followers. In her suspended state of consciousness she claimed to be under the control of a spirit named Leopold. Would we affirm that her experiences were a confirmation by the Holy Spirit that what she taught should be believed and followed? Keep in mind that in February 1896 she claimed to have journeyed to the planet Mars, then returned and spoke words of a supposed Martian language, which she also translated for her cult.

Outside the context of the faith of Christendom, there is also the case of Albert LeBaron (also a pseudonym). In his past association with mystics and spiritists, he claimed to have had experiences of visions and speaking in tongues. After he had become a follower of spiritualism, he proclaimed and asked others to believe in his incarnation. He too spoke in tongues, claiming that his speaking in another language was proof of a language that he had spoken in another existence of life. After he had escaped such cultic practices, LeBaron later confessed,

> They are . . . but a ludicrous and silly mistake of the man's imagination allied to some species of humorous hallucination and are not to be considered seriously, or they are a perjury, or a ghastly jest, or a very profound mental trick, or the loose jargon of a maniac (quoted in *Speaking With Tongues, Historically and Psychologically Considered*, Yale University Press).

A host of authors have accomplished a great deal of research and reported countless cases of tongue speaking, healings, exorcism and visions among non-Christian religions throughout the world. Healings have supposedly occurred among certain groups in the Tonga Islands. In Ceylon, it was claimed that people were healed by visiting the temple of a demon called Vakuka Dandara Devijo. In the book, *A Doctor In Search Of a Miracle*, the author reported that in the Philippines surgery was performed without the use of anesthetics. In India, healings are reported to have occurred during pagan ceremonies in the temple of Hur-Hureshvurku. It is claimed that the blind received their sight, and others have claimed to have been healed by the mother of Buddha. Demons are supposed to have been exorcised by pagan "doctors" of Siam. The list goes on. If such cases of healings and speaking in tongues are true, then those who practice such among "Christian" groups must also affirm that God is working among these unbelievers through pagan "doctors" or religious practitioners. If they do not believe that such phenomena are miraculous among unbelievers, **then they are burdened with the task of proving such acclaimed miracles to be false**. If they say the miracles of non-Christian faiths are false, then they must challenge themselves concerning the validity of their own miracles.

B. "Tongue speaking" among religious people:

In his book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, E. R. Dodds documented the phenomenon of ecstatic utterances (gibberish) that was practiced among the Hittites as early as 1,400 B.C. He also documented the same practice among the Phoenicians as early as 1,100 B.C. In Greek religions the practice extends back to the time of Apollo at Delphi, when it was affirmed that a "god" entered and controlled the vocal cords of certain individuals. We must keep in mind that these documented cases are of ecstatic experiences of "tongue speaking" **before Christ**, before the revelation of the gift among the early Christians.

In the early existence of the church, there were apostate groups that followed after the religious inventions of some dynamic leaders. Montanus (around A.D. 156) was said to have experienced speaking in tongues when he was in a rapturous state of semiconsciousness. He had two female companions whom he referred to as prophetesses, whom also he claimed to have had the same experience. Around A.D. 150 it is claimed that Marcion had the same experience of glossolalia when in a state of ecstatic frenzy. In the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* it is also recorded that Apelles, who was one of Marcion's disciples, "seems to have engaged in magical practices and paid great attention to visions, to the utterances of oracles, and to . . . prophetical revelations."

Throughout the centuries there have been numerous cases of the phenomenon of glossolalia. The psychological phenomenon permeated many religious groups. It has been practiced by unbelievers and heretics alike. Since one can learn to "speak in tongues," some Protestant groups have had classes on how to speak in tongues. It is thus of human origin that can be induced by hypnotic suggestion, or simply by bringing oneself into a state of semiconscious emotionality. For this reason it is a purely human phenomenon that people confuse with the actual speaking in languages in the New Testament. There is nothing inherently wrong with the phenomenon of glossolalia. But to equate such with the speaking in languages of the first century is erroneous. It is erroneous for the following three reasons:

1. *False "speaking in tongues" today minimizes the purpose for the gift of speaking in languages in the first century.* As previously discussed, the purpose of the gift of languages in the first century was first to identify God's people in fulfillment of prophecy. Second, it was practical in allowing evangelists as Paul to easily communicate with those foreign peoples to whom he went to preach the gospel (See 1 Co 14:18).

In the setting of principle trade cities as Corinth, the ministry of speaking in languages not only proved to visiting Jews that the Christians in the city were the people of God, it also allowed those brothers in Corinth the opportunity to teach the word of God to the visitors. For this reason, the speaking in languages was both a **signal** and a **ministry**. It was a signal to the visitors that they were among the people of God. It was a ministry in that the visitors could be ministered the word of God by those who had the gift of languages.

If the gift that was used as a signal and ministry was simply speaking in gibberish, then the purposes for the gift of languages was useless. The visitors would know of other non-Christian religious groups who "spoke in tongues" (gibberish). Thus God's validation of the Christians as His people in Corinth would be invalidated. And,

no teaching could be ministered to the visitor with gibberish. If the gibberish was from the Holy Spirit, then why would not the Spirit simply inspire the teacher to speak in the language of the visitor instead of forcing the "tongue speaker" to work through an interpreter?

2. *False "speaking in tongues" today denies the sufficiency of the Scriptures:* *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,* ***so that the man of God may be complete****, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tm 3:16,17). This statement by Paul should eliminate all need for a validation of faith outside the Scriptures. We seek the Scriptures in order to be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. Paul's affirmation in this statement reveals the authority and validation of the Scriptures in the life of the believer. The believer, therefore, should not seek for another foundation for his faith than the word of Christ (See Rm 10:17).

Those who seek and practice "speaking in tongues," are actually seeking to supplant the word of God with a personal experience. The "speaking in tongues" becomes the confirmation of their salvation other than the word of God. The problem with the emotional outburst of a "speaking-in-tongues" experience is that the Scriptures take second place as the foundation for one's faith. In fact, the "tongue speaker" will minimize his desire for the authority of the word of God in his life, trusting that his emotional experience cannot be denied. When asked if he is a Christian, the "tongue speaker" will invariably resort to his "tongue-speaking" experience as proof of his sonship.

Some have even taught that people are not spiritually complete without the experience of "speaking in tongues." The non-tongue speakers feel that their faith is marginalized by those who have "spoken in tongues." Some even consider the faith of the non-tongue speakers to be weak because they have failed to "speak in tongues." Such thinking is not only carnal, but it also marginalizes the sufficiency of the word of God in the life of the believer. Those who study their Bibles and trust in the will of God are viewed as weak until they have spoken in tongues. Such thinking denies the sufficiency of the word of Christ that dwells in the heart of the student of the Bible (See Cl 3:16).

3. *False "speaking in tongues" today leads to the spiritual destruction of the individual.* When Paul left the elders of Ephesus, he made a very important statement of truth. *"And now, brethren, I commend you to God and* ***to the word of His grace that is able to build you up*** *..."* (At 20:32). He also reminded Timothy, *"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).

When one validates his faith by his personal experience of "speaking in tongues," he minimizes the power of the word of God to build him up in the faith. If faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, then his faith will come to destruction because he no longer focuses on the word of God as the source and builder of faith. His obsession over his experience of tongue speaking marginalizes his desire to study the word of God. The only consequence to such thinking is the destruction of one's faith. Faith cannot be "built up" through ignorance of the Scriptures. When one is not nourished by the word of God, his faith will suffer

The above explains why those who have experienced "tongue speaking" are so adamant about their experience as a validation of their faith. When the psychological experience dies away, they are left in doubt concerning their faith, for they do not have a biblical foundation upon which to stand. A faith that is based on a moment of psychological frenzy will become weak if the psychological experience cannot be continually repeated.

One interesting note to make in reference to true speaking in tongues was that the Corinthians were able to speak in tongues on a regular basis as those who had the gift could so choose. The gift was subject to the speaker (1 Co 14:32). The one who possessed the gift did not have to work himself into a psychological frenzy in order to use the gift. He was totally in control of his mental facilities when he spoke in tongues. This is far different from the mental state of those who practice "tongue speaking" today.

If the phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" is proved by the Scriptures to have been simply a psychological phenomenon of an individual losing control of his senses, then the whole world of faith of the supposed "tongue speaker" comes crumbling down. The individual must understand that he had a true experience. He did experience the psychological phenomenon of glossolalia. But to equate this experience with the speaking in languages of the New Testament is to lead one's self to believing something that is simply not true. But if one does come to an understanding that they were self-deceived, and thus were only experiencing a state of emotional senselessness, then they must begin anew the building of their faith on the word of God. There is no substitute for the Bible as the foundation upon which we build our faith.

Chapter 10

SPEAKING IN LANGUAGES

When discussing any subject in the New Testament, it is necessary to consider every teaching in the context in which it is found. If a teaching is taken out of its context, then it can easily be twisted to conform to the bias of the student. This is especially true in reference to a study of experiential religion, specifically to a study of the gift of speaking in languages. Each context in which the gift is mentioned must be scrutinized in order to determine all the facts relevant to the function and purpose of the gift. If there are still questions concerning our understanding of the teaching in a particular context, then the whole context of the Bible must be the final dictionary to aid us in our study of the subject. To fail to observe this principle of interpretation will lead to our reading into a particular context or teaching our theological prejudices and experiences. Failure to observe this simple principle of Bible study has led to a great deal of confusion in reference to understanding the gift of "speaking in tongues."

The gift of languages (tongues) is mentioned in only three books of the New Testament. In these two books, Mark, Acts and 1 Corinthians, the writers record four cases where individuals spoke in languages (See At 2:1-13; 10:1 – 11:18; At 18:24 – 19:7; 1 Co 12–14). The reference to the "new language" in Mark 16 is prophetic (Mk 16:17). References to tongues in the book of Acts refer to the **historical event** of the gift. The reference to tongues in 1 Corinthians is in reference to corrections concerning the misuse of the gift. Therefore, the 1 Corinthian discussion of tongues is more **expository**, whereas the accounts in the book of Acts are historical.

In 1 Corinthians Paul sought to correct the use of the gift in reference to the purpose for which the gift was given. What is important to remember concerning all four cases of the mention of tongues is that no other New Testament book speaks of the gift. We would assume from this, therefore, that the gift of tongues was not something about which the early disciples obsessed, as is characteristic of some religious groups today. The cases recorded in Acts are given as evidence of the God-ordained faith that the early Christians maintained and preached throughout the Roman Empire. If there had been no problem with arrogance and pride among the Corinthians, then there would have been no mention of corrective measures concerning the use of the gift when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. We assume, however, that the gift was manifested in other churches, but there was no misuse of the gift. These thoughts lay the foundation upon which the gift was given, and thus, must be remembered as we study those New Testament books that were written to particular churches.

In the New Testament there are also lists given of the special gifts that were given to establish and build the early church in the absence of the written truth of the New Testament. It is interesting to note the lists of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10,28-30. Other lists of the special gifts do not list the gift of tongues. In the list of 1 Corinthians 12, tongues and the interpretation of tongues are placed last. If there is a priority of function of the gifts as is indicated in verses 28-30, then it would seem that the gifts of tongues and interpretations were the least important.

In the expository discussion of Paul over the misuse of the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, he clearly stated that the gift of prophecy was greater than the gift of tongues. This would confirm the less important function of the gift of tongues in comparison to prophecy in the edification of the church. The gift, therefore, was to be kept in its proper place of function, while the one who possessed the gift should pray that he prophesy, that is, teach by inspiration.

A. Definition of the gift of tongues:

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-13, Jews and proselytes to Judaism from every nation of the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem (vss 9-11). The apostles were in an upper room in Jerusalem on this day when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They were empowered by the Holy Spirit and began to *"speak with other **languages*** [*glossais*], *as the Spirit gave them the ability"* (vs 4). Verse 6 states that *"everyone heard them speak in his own **language*** [*dialekto*]*."* Those who were present asked concerning what was happening, *"And how is it that each one hears them in our own **native dialects*** [*dialekto*] *where we were born?"* (vs 8). They also stated, *"We hear them speaking in our own **languages*** [*glossais*] ***the wonderful works of God"*** (vs 11).

If one would simply read these verses without reading into them any modern-day ecstatic utterances, he would clearly understand that Luke is describing a miraculous endowment of speaking in languages that had been received by the apostles.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit inspired the

apostles to speak in the languages of the people who were present. The people heard them speak in their own dialects the wonderful works of God. The people understood what was being said by the apostles because they said they did. Luke records that they heard the apostles speaking the wonderful works of God. Therefore, the apostles were not speaking gibberish because of some emotional hysteria. They were not speaking some language that was unknown to man. They were, through the languages of men, speaking the wonderful works of God. There is nothing difficult in understanding that the apostles miraculously received the ability from the Holy Spirit to speak the gospel in "new languages" (Mk 16:17) to those who were present. (As we will see later, the reason they spoke in languages had more to do with the event than simply communicating the gospel to the multilingual audience.)

In the context of Acts 2, there are two different Greek words that are used in reference to the languages that were spoken. The Greek word *glossa* is used in the plural (*glossais*) in verses 3,4,11 and 26. This word refers to a **known foreign language**. It is used in this manner in the context of these passages. The apostles were not speaking a language that was unknown to man. They were speaking known foreign languages that were new to them, for they had never before studied these languages.

In verse 4 the apostles *"began to speak with other languages* [*glossais*], *as the Spirit gave them the ability."* The "tongues" here are defined in verse 11 where the word *glossais* is used again. *"We hear them speaking in our own languages* [*glossais*] *the wonderful works of God."* The meaning is that the apostles were speaking in the languages of the people who were present from every nation. They were speaking languages that could be understood.

The Greek word *dialektos* is used in verses 6 and 8. This term can refer to either a **dialect** or **language.** It is used in this manner in the context of Acts 2. Those from every nation who heard and saw the apostles preaching, stated, *"And how is it that we hear, each in our own native dialects* [*dialekto*] *where we were born?"* Not only were the apostles speaking in the languages of the people who were present, they were also speaking in the dialects of the Jewish audience.

A mother language may have several dialects that are unique to different regions where a mother language is spoken. What seems to be indicated here is that the apostles not only spoke the mother languages, but also the regional dialects of the mother languages. This fact may be what truly stimulated the curiosity of those who heard. They could not understand how these Galileans could fluently speak in their native dialects.

From the use of the above two Greek words in the same context, it is evident that in some way Luke uses *glossa* and *dialektos* interchangeably. *Dialektos* is used in verses 6 and 8. *Glossa* is used in verses 4 and 11. Both of these words are actually used **by the people** in the context that is recorded by Luke. In other words, the audience used these two words interchangeably in the context when they responded to the apostles. Therefore, we would understand that these were synonymous words in the culture when used in reference to spoken languages. At least we must conclude that the people not only heard their languages spoken (*glossa*), they heard the derivatives of their languages (*dialektos*) spoken. The miracle of the apostles' speaking in languages was magnified in the sense that the Spirit not only inspired languages to be spoken, He also inspired all the dialects of the mother languages to be spoken.

The Jews in Acts 2 came from areas where hysterical (or, ecstatic) gibberish was undoubtedly practiced in pagan religions. However, when they came to Jerusalem and experienced the events of Acts 2, they recognized that the apostles spoke the languages of their homelands. The apostles were not speaking hysterical nonsense. They were speaking the actual languages of the people who were present. The proclamation of those who heard on the day of Pentecost proves that the tongues which the apostles spoke were languages.

In Acts 2:13 Luke recorded, *"Others mocking, said, 'They are full of new wine.'"* This statement has been used by some to affirm that the apostles were actually speaking in gibberish that sounded like men who were drunk. But this is not the case. Keep in mind that the apostles were speaking in different languages. Those from Parthia would not understand the language that was spoken by those from Libya. Those from Galilee, who knew that the apostles were from Galilee, would not understand the language of those from Parthia or Egypt. To the audience, the apostles' speaking in any other language than what they understood would only sound like men who were drunk. Therefore, the irreverent mockers dismissed as drunken the apostles who were speaking in something they did not understand.

This event of the apostles' speaking in "tongues" on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 becomes the dictionary to define the rest of the cases where "tongues" are discussed in the New Testament. This is a consistent manner by which we must allow the Bible to interpret itself. Therefore, when we come to the other records of miraculous speaking in languages, we must understand these biblical contexts from what is learned in the Acts 2 context.

B. The gift was a sign.

Since the gift of languages was such a uniquely and divinely given grace, it is important to fully understand its purpose in the context of the establishment of the church in the first century. This is crucial in order to understand the function and purpose of the gift among the early disciples, as well as to understand why the gift ceased by the close of the first century.

1. *Tongues were a sign.* Paul stated, *"Therefore, languages are for a **sign**, not to those who believe, **but for unbelievers**"* (1 Co 14:22). The word "sign" comes from the Greek word *semeion*. The miraculous endowment of languages was a signal, or a token that indicated something greater than the gift itself. Jesus was signalled to be the Son of God because of the supernatural manifestation that God worked through His miracles (See Jn 20:30,31). Jesus worked miracles in order to signal to everyone that He was from God. In a similar manner, the gift of tongues was a signal of something greater that the gift itself.

2. *Tongues signalled the saints.* Jesus had promised that His disciples would speak with "new languages" (Mk 16:17). They would do so for a special reason. In reference to Paul's preceding statement of 1 Corinthians 14:22, we understand that the sign was for "unbelievers." Now we must determine who these "unbelievers" were in order to understand the purpose of the gift of languages, specifically in reference to Jesus' promise that His disciples would speak with new languages.

3. *Tongues fulfilled prophecy.* Paul's quotation of Isaiah 28:11,12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 is very crucial in understanding the purpose of the gift of tongues. God had promised Israel through Isaiah, *"With men of **other languages** and other lips I will speak to **this people**, and yet for all that they will not hear Me."* "This people" in the context of the ministry of the prophet Isaiah was **the Jewish people**. Paul makes this application to the Jews in 1 Corinthians 14:22 when he introduced the statement of the verse with the Greek word that means "therefore." So when he made the application, *"languages are for a sign ... for unbelievers,"* he stated the purpose of the languages, **that they were a sign to the unbelieving Jews**. This is based on the fact that the original prophecy was made to the Jewish nation.

In the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14:22 the article is present with the word "languages." This fact must not be overlooked because the article identifies "the languages" to be given for a specific purpose, that purpose being that **through the gift of languages God signalled His people to the unbelieving Jews**. This makes the gift special, and thus, given for a different purpose than the other spiritual gifts in the sense of being a unique work of God to signal to the world those who were His people.

God had promised through Isaiah that He would identify His people with the "other languages" by which He would speak to them. Jesus had promised that His disciples would speak with "new languages." **The clear understanding of the prophecy and fulfillment is that God signalled to the world the identity of His people by the gift of languages**, through which He spoke to **His** people.

Whenever the gift of languages was manifested, as recorded in the book of Acts, there were Jews who were present. When Peter was in the house of the Gentile Cornelius, he had taken Jews with him in order to witness what he was doing (At 10:23). Now while Peter was speaking to the household of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit fell on them and they spoke in languages (At 10:44,46). Notice what Luke records in reference to the reaction of Peter's Jewish companions. *"And those of the circumcision who believed **were astonished** ..."* (At 10:45). They were astonished because they knew the prophecy of Isaiah 28. Since Isaiah's prophecy was in the context of "this people" (the Jews), they must have assumed that only Jewish people would speak with the new languages, and thus be confirmed to be God's true Israel. But in this historical context, the Holy Spirit came upon Gentiles and endowed them with the gift of tongues. They too were confirmed to be God's people. They too were to be accepted into the spiritual Israel, the church. The speaking in tongues by the Gentiles was God's visual signal to the Jews that the Gentiles were to be grafted into the people of God (See Rm 11).

When Peter and his companions returned to Jerusalem from the household of Cornelius, the Jewish believers contended with him about going into the house of a Gentile (At 11:2). But when Peter rehearsed everything that had happened, he explained that *"the Holy Spirit fell on them **just as** on us* [Jews] *at the beginning"* (At 11:15). And because the Spirit fell on them as He did on the apostles in Acts 2, they too received the "like gift," the gift to speak in tongues, just as Isaiah had prophesied (At 11:17). Now read carefully the response of these Jewish brethren in Jerusalem who fully understood the prophecy of Isaiah 28. *"When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying '**Then God has also granted repentance to life to the Gentiles**'"* (At 11:18). Their statement meant that they accepted the Gentiles into the new house of Israel, the church.

This same purpose for the giving of the gift of

tongues is seen in Acts 19 when Paul encountered some disciples who had heard only of John and his baptism. Paul subsequently spoke to them the message and man Jesus Christ, on whom they believed. The Holy Spirit authenticated the message of Paul by endowing twelve men with the gift of speaking in tongues (At 19:6). It may have been that these disciples were Gentiles. Their speaking in languages was thus a signal to the Jewish believers in Ephesus that they too had been *"granted repentance to life,"* even though they were Gentiles. The Holy Spirit thus endowed these disciples for the same reason He endowed the household of Cornelius. The Gentiles were to be grafted into the new spiritual Israel, the church (See Rm 9–11).

We must take Paul's explanation for the gift of tongues to the context of Acts 2 when the gift was first manifested to the Jewish nation. We can only wonder how astonished the Jewish theologians were in Jerusalem when Galileans who had previously been with the crucified Jesus stood up on that memorable day of Pentecost and spoke new languages in fulfillment of Isaiah 28. Those whom they had contended with throughout the ministry of Jesus were now signalled by God to be the initial beginnings of the new covenant that He had established with His people (See Jr 31:31-34). Those who were subsequently baptized on that day were added to this new Israel of God (At 2:47). The astonishment of the Jewish audience was not simply in the apostles' speaking in the languages and dialects. It was in the fact that they knew the Isaiah 28 prophecy. On that day they were experiencing its fulfillment before their eyes. Now we can understand why the antagonistic priests and Pharisees tried to pass off the speaking of the apostles as men who were merely full of new wine.

In the context of the Corinthian problem concerning personal pride in speaking in tongues, Paul corrected them by referring to the fact that a misuse of the gift would be childish (See 1 Co 13:11). If they did not understand the purpose for the gift, then they had missed the point, and thus, would be behaving childishly in their contention with one another as to which gift was greater.

The Greek word *teleioi* is used in 1 Corinthians 14:20. The word means to be mature in behavior and thinking. So Paul was rebuking them in the statement, *"Brethren, do not be children in thinking. However, in malice be babes, but in thinking* ***be mature*** [*teleioi*]." They must be mature in understanding the purpose of God signalling His people through the gift of languages. We wonder if those today who are so adamant about "speaking in tongues" have carefully considered this point. Are they simply being childish in their pride that they have "spoken in tongues"? Or have they matured to realize that they are only behaving as children in becoming emotionally excited to the point of losing control of their speech, and thus, speaking gibberish? And in their state of senseless behavior, have they passed off such gibberish on the Holy Spirit that He is moving them to "speak in tongues"?

C. Tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

It has been asserted that the speaking in tongues is a signal of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion to this thinking is that if one does not speak in tongues, then he has not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. But this thinking would certainly be strange to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul stated that *"God has designated some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and varieties of languages."* Paul certainly did not assume that everyone was designated an apostle, or that everyone had the gift of healing. **Neither did everyone have the gift of tongues**. It seems that some today have conveniently overlooked this point. All of the Corinthians had been baptized in water in obedience to the gospel (1 Co 12:13), but not all the Corinthians spoke in tongues.

Some have unfortunately misunderstood the "baptism" of 1 Corinthians 12:13. Paul said, *"For by one Spirit* ***we were all baptized into one body****, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondservants or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."* Notice that Paul said they were **all** baptized into one body, which is the church (Cl 1:18). Some have asserted that reference here is to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But this cannot be true. In 1 Corinthians 12:30 Paul asked, *"Do all speak with languages?"* The answer is definitely "No."

Now here is a problem for those who say that speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Not all the Corinthians spoke in tongues according to the question of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:30. If the "baptism" of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then not all the Corinthians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. But Paul said that they had all been baptized. If speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then why did not all the Corinthians speak in tongues if they were all supposedly baptized in the Holy Spirit? Were those who did not speak in tongues thus outside the body because they were evidently not baptized in the Holy Spirit? And if one is not baptized in the Holy Spirit, is he or she outside the body? Some Bible interpreters need to take another look at the "baptism" of 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Some might wonder why the gift of languages was so prevalent among the Corinthians? The answer may be in the fact of where Corinth was located and what part it played in the economic trade of the first century. The Jews were a people of commerce. In their commercial affairs they settled in the economic centers of the Roman Empire. One of those centers was Corinth. It seems that one of the commercial ventures of the Jews was to go to this city or that city in order to trade (See Js 4:13). Because Corinth was such a strategic city in reference to national trade in the Roman Empire, we would suppose that there were many Jews in the city where people were coming and going in their marketing. These Jews would have been coming from many different areas of the Roman Empire, and thus speaking many different languages. When they arrived in Corinth, the sign of the gift of tongues would authenticate that the Christians in the city were indeed the people through whom God spoke "new languages" to His people. The gift of languages was evangelistic in the sense of signalling to visiting Jews that those who possessed the gift were the people of God. And because they were in the presence of the saints, they could be edified in their home language.

The use of the gift of tongues in the assemblies of the saints, therefore, was to be carried out in an orderly manner in order that the visitor not believe that he had come into an assembly of confused madmen. Paul gave some simple instructions on how to use the gift to the greatest advantage of edification for the assembly, and for the benefit of the unbelievers who were present. (1) At any time, only two or three people were to speak in a language, and no more than that number (1 Co 14:27). (2) When one was teaching in a language, an interpreter must be present in order to interpret the message for those who did not understand the spoken language (1 Co 14:28). (3) No women were to exercise the gift in the assembly (1 Co 14:34). The women were to remain silent. By following these simple rules of conduct, order could be brought to the Corinthian church assemblies for the purpose of edification.

Chapter 11

PASSING OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES

In view of the purpose of the gift of tongues in the first century, and its fulfillment of purpose from Old Testament prophecy, we would certainly question why there would be those today who would seek to validate the people of God by a supposed "speaking in tongues." Is God still trying to validate His people to the Jewish unbelievers? In view of the fulfillment of Isaiah 28, God confirmed that the church was His people of the first century. This validation is recorded in the New Testament, and thus, continues as a recorded validation of the church throughout history.

In view of the prophecy of Jesus in Luke 21 and Matthew 24 in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, God gave the Jews every opportunity to believe that Jesus was the Messiah (Jn 20:30,31). By His bestowing of the gift of tongues on the Gentiles, He manifested to the Jews that they were to be grafted into the body of His people. When the times of the Gentiles' grafting in had been completed, it was time to consummate the physical nation of Israel by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It was as Paul quoted Hosea, *"I will call them My people who were not My people* [the Gentiles], *and her beloved who was not beloved. And it will come to pass that in the place* [Jerusalem] *where it was said to them 'You* [Gentiles] *are not My people,' there they will be called the children of the living God"* (Rm 9:25,26; see Hs 1:10; 2:23).

When the Gentiles had been grafted in, then the sign of languages was no longer needed. If one today wants to know if the Gentiles have been accepted into the family of God, they simply need to read their Bibles. Modern-day proponents of speaking in tongues unfortunately fail to see the prophetic purpose and fulfillment of the gift. If they could understand that the purpose for the giving of the gift has been fulfilled, then they would understand that there was no need for the gift to continue after A.D. 70 when God gave a crushing blow to national Israel in order to terminate the nation.

It is certain that 1 Corinthians 13:8 teaches that the gift of languages would cease. *"Where there are languages,"* Paul wrote, *"**they will cease**."* We have already concluded that when that which is perfect (or complete), has come, the imperfect miraculous gifts would no longer be needed to establish and confirm the early church. The "perfect" of 1 Corinthians 13:10 is neuter in gender, and thus cannot refer to the coming of Christ in His final coming. If reference were to Christ, then the gender would be masculine in reference to Christ. Reference cannot be to our eternal dwelling, for that

which was complete was abiding at the time Paul wrote (1 Co 13:13). But to allow the interpretation that reference is to heaven, does not mean that the miraculous gifts as a ministry among the disciples would of necessity continue until our final dwelling is revealed. God is in the heavenly realm, but there will be a realm of dwelling for the redeemed that is not as the heavenly dwelling of God, for we will be embodied for the special heavenly dwelling that is for the saints (See 2 Co 5:1-10).

We have also found that those who seek to read their esctatic experience of speaking in gibberish into the actual gift of speaking in tongues in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 – 14, fail to see that all miraculous gifts must also continue until heaven is revealed if the gift of languages continues. If one gift continues, then all gifts must continue. Since many assume that all miraculous gifts continue, the major part the word of God is to play in directing our lives is greatly minimized. The concept of 2 Timothy 3:16,17 is often foreign to those of this persuasion.

The best interpretation of "that which is complete" in 1 Corinthians 13 is the complete oral truth that was revealed by the Holy Spirit by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13, which truth would eventually be written for our instruction. The written truth of God would maintain the faith and direction of the church until the coming of Jesus. When the complete recording of all truth happened, then there would no longer be a need for the confirming miraculous gifts, including the gift of languages. The revelation of all truth through the apostles had been completed by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. The recording of all truth would be completed by the close of the first century.

What is interesting to study is the history of the church between A.D. 100 and 400. In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers during this period, no emphasis is placed on the gift of tongues. One would think that if the gift were so important in confirming one's faith, it would have been mentioned extensively by the post apostolic church leaders. If the gift were to continue indefinitely, then we would also assume that there would be much discussion in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers between A.D. 100 and A.D. 400. The historical fact is that the gift is nowhere alluded to or even hinted at as being exercised among the faithful of this era. This is an amazing historical fact if the function of the gift was to continue outside the written historical record of Scripture as a confirming evidence of God that Christians were His people. Here are some interesting points in reference to the cessation of tongues in the post apostolic period:

A. Writings of the Apostolic Fathers:

Some Apostolic Fathers wrote to churches where tongues had previously existed. Clement of Rome, for example, wrote to the church of Corinth where the gift had been in existence during the lifetime of the apostle Paul (See Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, I,II). Now if there existed a church where the gift of tongues would have continued, certainly Clement would have mentioned something in his letter to the Corinthians concerning the gift in the first part of the second century.

In his book, *To the Corinthians*, Clement spoke of problems that faced the church in Corinth. Though one of the major problems during the lifetime of Paul was competition among those who possessed the miraculous gifts of prophecy and tongues, Clement says nothing of the gift of tongues in dealing with the problems in the Corinthian church of his time. Even when Clement speaks of their spiritual heritage as a church, nothing is mentioned concerning speaking in tongues (Ibid., XLII-XLIV). By the time of the writing of Clement to the Corinthian church in the second century, therefore, the gift of languages had long passed away.

In a similar manner, Ignatius wrote to the church in Ephesus. Though in the establishment of this church in Acts 19, some spoke in languages, Ignatius says nothing of the gift when he wrote to this church in the second century. We would also assume, therefore, that the gift had long passed from use by the saints in Ephesus.

B. Absence of the gift of tongues in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers:

There is no reference to the gift of tongues among the post apostolic churches regardless of the extensive travels of the early Apostolic Fathers. Polycarp was a shepherd in the city of Smyrna. While there, he wrote to the church in Philippi. As previously mentioned, Clement of Rome wrote to the saints in Corinth. Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the saints who were in the cities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Smyrna and Philadelphia. Though we do not know its authorship, the *Epistle of Barnabas* was possibly written from the city of Alexandria in Egypt. *The Epistle to Diognetus* was also possibly written from Alexandria. *The Shepherd of Hermas* was possibly written from Rome. The *Didache* may have been written from either Egypt, Syria or Palestine. **In none of these writings do we find any evidence of the existence of the gift of languages in the church at the time when these documents were written**.

The writings of these individuals cover an extensive geographical area of the early first century. If the gift of tongues played any significant part in the early church, we would certainly think that the gift would have been emphasized in these post apostolic writings. We would think that there would have at least been an allusion to the gift as a part of the assembly of the church. But the lack of any mention of the gift is an overwhelming argument that the gift of tongues, as well as the other miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, had ceased by the time the Apostolic Fathers addressed the second and third century church.

The absence of the gift of tongues in the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers argues against the continuation of the gift after the first century. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers were not textbooks on theology for the church. The Apostolic Fathers were men of renown who sought to correct doctrinal errors in the church. In their writings they discussed almost every major teaching of the New Testament, and yet, there is no mention of the gift of tongues. We would wonder that since the gift of tongues was a fulfillment of Isaiah 28 in reference to God confirming the church as His people, there would at least be some mention of the gift, if indeed the gift continued after the first century. This would be true if God sought to continue His confirmation of the church with the gift throughout history. But there is "silence of the Apostolic Fathers" on this subject. By the end of the first century, no reference is made to the gift of tongues as being a part of the ministry of the faithful.

1. *The Epistle of Diognetus*: An example of the cessation of the gift of tongues would be the Epistle of Diognetus. This letter was written in order to answer questions that had been posed by Diognetus concerning the church. In the letter, the writer defended the faith of Christians by discussing the foolishness of idolatry, the insufficiency of Judaism, and the superiority of Christ and Christianity over pagan religions. Since the gift of tongues was originally meant to be an evidence that God had placed His "stamp of approval" on the church as His people, we would think that in the letter to Diognetus there would at least be some mention of the gift if it had continued past the first century. If the gift of tongues was some experiential evidence of the individual Christian and his salvation, then certainly there would be some mention of the gift in the letter. But there is only silence (See Earl Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*).

2. *Against Heresies:* An interesting statement is made in Irenaeus' reference to Polycarp's letter to the Philippians. He said in the letter that those who "choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 3,4). In the context of this statement, if the gift of tongues validated one's salvation, we would certainly have expected Irenaeus to make reference to the gift if the gift was still in existence. But he is silent on the matter.

3. *Dialogue With Trypho* and *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*: Another example of the absence of discussion on the gift of tongues in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is that of Justin Martyr who was born around A.D. 100. (The name "Martyr" is not his real name. It is only a reference to the fact that he was martyred somewhere between A.D. 163 and 167.)

Justin was born in Samaria, converted in Ephesus, and traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire. In his work, *Dialogue With Trypho,* he made a very significant statement:

> "For the prophetical gifts remain with us [Christians], even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation [the Jewish nation] have been transferred to us" (*Dialogue With Trypho*, LXXXII).

Some have assumed that in Justin's reference to the "prophetical gifts" he included the miraculous gifts, including the gift of tongues. But this is not the case. The "prophetical gifts" about which Justin was speaking **were formerly among the Jewish nation**. However, the gift of tongues was not among the nation of Israel, for its mention in the Bible is only in reference to the church.

Also in Justin's writings he mentions only seven gifts. He leaves out the gift of tongues (Ibid., XXXIX). The fact that Justin traveled extensively throughout the post apostolic church emphasizes the fact that he evidently had no experience or contact with the function of the gift of tongues. Since he never encountered this phenomenon in the church of his time, then obviously his silence on the matter confirms the fact that the gift did not exist in the post apostolic church.

Since Justin was a teacher of doctrine, it is significant that he did not mention the gift of tongues as a part of "Christian doctrine." Either the gift did not exist during his time of teaching, or he considered it insignificant in reference to the life of the Christian. Both points would be true in reference to the gift. According to Paul, the gift was not as important as prophecy. The exercising of the gift did not make one more spiritual. The case of the Corinthian church proves this point. They behaved carnally in their use of the gifts (1 Co 3:1-3).

The gift of tongues simply did not exist in the church of the second century. When Justin wrote his *Dialogue*

With Trypho he defended the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. He defended the fact that the church was now the people of God. National Israel had passed away. Since the gift of tongues was in the prophecy of Isaiah 28 as a signal of God by which He would identify His people, certainly Justin would have used this argument to defend the church that existed in his day. If the gift of tongues was still in existence during the time of Justin, then he would have made an easy argument that God was at that time continuing to signal to the unbelieving world that the church was now His people, and not national Israel.

In his writing, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks,* Justin set out to prove that Christianity was the true religion in contrast to Judaism and pagan religions. This would have been the ideal opportunity for him to use an existing function of the gift of tongues to prove his point. But he is silent on the gift simply because the gift did not exist in the church at the time of his writing.

4. Irenaeus: Around A.D. 177, Irenaeus left Asia Minor and went to Lyons in Gaul. It was there that he became a presbyter. While in Lyons he heard of the erroneous influences of Montanus that were taking place in Asia Minor and Syria. Montanus was an apostate who supposed that he had a personal and ecstatic experience directly from the Holy Spirit. Since there was a close connection between the churches of Asia Minor and Lyons, Irenaeus had to deal with the influence of the Montanists.

Montanism was one of the doctrinal elements in the church of Lyons with which Iranaeus and others dealt. It was in the context of this controversy that Iranaeus made the statement, "we hear many brethren in the church ... who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages" (*Against Heresies*, V, 6.1). Iranaeus had heard of the experiential excesses of the Montanists, and thus, he wrote against such false religiosity in *Against Heresies*. But we must understand the context in which Iranaeus made the preceding statement.

In the development of the theology of Iranaeus, we must keep in mind that he had been greatly influenced by Polycarp, a bishop of Smyrna. As a boy growing up in Smyrna, Iranaeus had heard much from Polycarp. Because of the influence of Polycarp in his life, he was subsequently greatly influenced by the teachings of the aged bishop. The gift of tongues did not exist during the teaching ministry of Polycarp, and thus, Iranaeus likewise did not consider the gift in existence in the church of his day. It seems that if the gift of tongues played some major role in the function of the church of their day, both Polycarp and Iranaeus would have focused on its use in their writings. But the lack of mention of the gift as a function of the church is evidence that the gift was not a part of the church in the second century. If Christians spoke in tongues during the lifetime of Polycarp and Iranaeus, we would assume that they would have written much on the phenomenon. But neither Iranaeus nor his associates experienced the gift, for he said in the preceding quoted statement that "we" have heard that some brethren speak in all kinds of languages. Because of Iranaeus' vague statement, it is apparent that he had heard hearsay concerning the activities of the Montanist in Asia Minor. His statement must also be considered in the context that only Montanus himself claimed to have had a spiritual encounter with the Holy Spirit, as well as his two female prophetesses. In his arguments against the excesses of Montanus, Iranaeus only affirmed what he had heard of the apostate's practices.

5. Tertullian: Tertullian of North Africa did come under the influence of Montanus. In his writings he makes reference to the spiritual gifts in a broad context, but does not specifically mention the gift of tongues as prevalent where he resided. He only mentions a woman who was a Montanist who claimed to have spoken with angels and had other ecstatic experiences (*A Treatise on the Soul,* 9). But his mention of this case falls far short of being a testimony to any widespread exercising of the gift of tongues in North Africa.

In his writing, *Against Marcion,* Tertullian mentioned the gift of tongues, but does so only in reference to Paul's writing on the subject in 1 Corinthians 12 – 14. In his discussions on the subject, he does not claim to have knowledge of anyone who exercised the gift.

6. Origen: Origen was known as one of the greatest theologians and lecturers of the post apostolic era. He traveled extensively, giving many lectures on theology. As a scholar who was well known throughout many regions of the Roman Empire, we would think that in his lectures he would have spoken on the subject of the gift of tongues. If the gift was in existence in Christendom, even in his writings we would think that he would have made some reference to the gift. The fact is that he does not speak of the gift of tongues as a phenomenon in the Christendom of his day. His lack of discussion on the gift clearly indicates that the gift did not exist as a function of the church of his time.

One of Origen's references to "strange" words was in answer to Celsus. Celsus had claimed that the Old Testament prophets were in a state of ecstatic emotion when they made their prophecies. In the following statement, Origen discussed the teaching of Celsus in reference to the prophets:

> To these promises are added strange, fanatical, and quite unintelligible words, of which no rational person can find the meaning: for so dark are they, as to have no meaning at all; but they give occasion to every fool or impostor to apply them to suit his own purposes (See Origen, *Against Celsus*, VIII, 8-11).

In his answer to the preceding beliefs of Celsus, Origen stated that though there were miraculous demonstrations of the Holy Spirit during the ministry of Jesus and the early stages of the church's existence, these demonstrations eventually ceased (*Against Celsus*, VIII, 9). Origen affirmed that in his time–the post apostolic era after the close of the first century–the miraculous gifts no longer existed.

7. Chrysostom: After his ministry in Antioch, Chrysostom became the patriarch of Constantinople. In this position of influence, he had contact with church leaders throughout the Roman Empire. He delivered many expository lessons on the New Testament in the fourth century, one of which is recorded. In his teaching on 1 Corinthians he stated in reference to spiritual gifts that the "whole place is very obscure." He went on to say, "... but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and **by their cessation**, being such as then used to occur, **but now no longer take place**" (*Homilies on First Corinthians*, XXIX, 1). This is a very important testimony concerning the cessation of the miraculous gifts, and in particular, the cessation of the gift of tongues. If the gift of tongues were as widely practiced as some today claim they should be, then certainly Chrysostom would have spoken of such as prevalent throughout the church of his day. But he testifies to the fact that they had ceased, and such they had.

The conclusion of the preceding testimonies is that the silence of the Apostolic Fathers on the gift of tongues in the post apostolic period is overwhelming evidence that the gift of tongues never made it past the close of the first century. If the gift of tongues were as prevalent throughout the church of the post apostolic era, then certainly the Apostolic Fathers would have mentioned its commonality. "Speaking strange things" was mentioned by the Apostolic Fathers who were arguing against the heresy of Montanus. His erroneous view of the Holy Spirit led him in a movement against the established views of the early Apostolic Fathers. But his presumption to equate his ecstatic experiences with the work of the Holy Spirit in the first century was considered heresy by the post apostolic writers.

We must keep in mind when studying the writings of the Apostolic Fathers in reference to the miraculous gifts that national Israel had already been terminated by the time these men wrote. For the believers, Israelite nationality ceased in Christ (Gl 3:26,27). Beginning in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost, those who were baptized into Christ became the spiritual Israel of God. In the fulfillment of Isaiah 28, the baptized were confirmed to be the Israel of God. To the unbelievers, particularly the Jewish unbelievers, national Israel was terminated in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of over 1,100,000 Jews. When the Apostolic Fathers wrote, national Israel had been terminated and the church had been confirmed to be the true people of God. The miraculous gifts ceased for the church had been confirmed and established as the new Israel. During the early history of the church after the first century, the Apostolic Fathers wrote to defend the church as we would do so today. **They resorted to quoting the word of God**. They did not seek to prove their arguments against heresy on the foundation of their personal experiences, dreams or visions. They defended their faith on the foundation of the word of God that revealed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The final argument against the speaking in tongues today is if the particular religious group that practices such is preaching the gospel. If the individual who supposedly speaks in tongues has neither obeyed or preaches the gospel, then certainly he or she has involved himself or herself in some cultic practices that are man generated.

Chapter 12

"MIRACLE" BASED RELIGIOSITY

One of the primary obsessions of experiential religionists is "miracles." When we use the word "miracle" in religious discussions, the definitions of the word are so endless in today's religious culture that the word is essentially meaningless in differentiating between the confirming miracles of the Bible and the "miracles" that believers experience today. The word has become a generic term to refer to all of God's work outside the ordinary occurrence of natural law. And admittedly, there is really no word that is provided by the Bible that we can

use to explain the work of God today that is unexplainable, awesome, and assuredly, outside the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Some have used the word "providence," but this is not a biblical word, and thus, it needs definition itself by those who use it.

If a nonbiblical word needs definition, then the use of the word is subject to the theology of the one who uses it. But if the word is used in reference to a Bible event, then the definition must come from the Bible, not our experiences. This is particularly necessary when discussing the miraculous work of God in the affairs of man.

When we say that the Bible must be our final authority in matters of faith, we mean also that it must be our final dictionary in defining matters that took place in the time when the Bible was written. Because many people have a limited knowledge of the Bible's definition of such things as demon possession and miracles assumes, we will have endless confusion in our discussions of these matters. But regardless of the confusion, we will remain with the Bible as our center of reference for defining Bible things, not our experiences, traditions or religious culture. We will do this because we know that we can be easily deceived by our experiences.

When God works today in the affairs of man, it is certainly "providential," but in the extended use of the word "miracle," it is also miraculous. It is miraculous in the sense that something happens outside the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. God works in the life of the Christian outside the bounds of the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Some use the word "miracle" to define this work simply because there is no other Bible word to use. Some use the word "providence," but they have extracted a word from a secular dictionary in order to explain something that is beyond the definitions of our dictionaries. So we are left with a dilemma. Whenever we use the word "miracle" we are certain to be misunderstood. We are misunderstood because there is no Bible word that can be used to explain God's work beyond the "confirming" miracles of the Bible, but is still outside the realm of the ordinary occurrence of natural laws.

We could thus speak endlessly about definitions of "providence" and "miracle," but frustrate ourselves with arguments over our definitions. One thing is true, however, is that everyone who is involved in the discussions, or debates, believes that God is working today in the life of the Christian. No baptized believer doubts this, though we will struggle with our definitions.

So we would begin the discussion of this chapter by clarifying our understanding of what substantiates our faith. Miracles–whatever definition we use–do not stand alone in confirming faith. **We would say that the definition of the church is not a body of confirmed miracles**. The church does not rest upon a catechism of miracles. Miracles draw attention to the message and messenger, and subsequently point one to the faith of the messenger. Nevertheless, the miracles do not define the faith of the messenger. **It is revelation that defines the church**.

God confirmed the word with signs in the beginning of the early church (Mk 16:20). The word that was first spoken by Jesus was then confirmed by the early believers *"both with signs and wonders and with various powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit ..."* (Hb 2:3,4). It was the **word** that was confirmed. Miracles do not confirm miracles. Miracles were a signal that the word spoken by the early messengers of God was from God.

Miracles may confirm a faith, **but the faith must be examined on the basis of what is taught by those who hold the faith**. It is the word of God that determines and defines our faith. We believe the occurrence of the miracles, **but it is the word of God that explains to us what to believe and how we should behave as children of God. It is thus the word of God that builds us up** (At 20:32). Any religion, therefore, that professes to be a true religion must stand upon the word of God. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, not by standing on a catechism of miracles. And in the context of our discussion, our faith is not based on our experiences of what we would claim to be miracles. Our faith is based on the word of Christ. It must be this way because there are so many false signs and wonders out there that people are easily led astray (See 2 Th 2:10-12). But it is difficult to be led astray when one objectively deals with the written word of God. We can question one another's experiences, but we cannot question the infallible word of God.

God worked through signs and wonders in order to confirm the word that was spoken by the early evangelists. However, the early evangelists did not stand alone in the miraculous work of God. Miracles served only partially in reference to their faith in Jesus (See Jn 20:30,31). Miracles validated that which was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, which prophecy was recorded. Notice that Paul did not resort to the proof of miracles when preaching Jesus to the Jews in Rome. He persuaded *"them concerning Jesus,* ***both out of the Law of Moses and the Prophets****, from morning until evening"* (At 28:23). Throughout the book of Matthew, which was directed to the Jews to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, the statement is continually made, *"that it might be fulfilled"* (Mt 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 4:14; 8:17). The book of Matthew is a confirmation that Jesus fulfilled Old

Testament prophecy. The Jews to whom Jesus came had their copies of the Old Testament in order to search the prophecies that were made about Him.

The first "miracle" to validate the foundation upon which our faith is built is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus as the Messiah. As the Jews, we need to study our Bibles in order to establish this foundation for our faith (See Jn 5:39). But what if one has little knowledge of the Bible? This is the reason many resort to "miracles" today as the validation of their faith. They have so little knowledge of the Bible that they seek elsewhere for validation of their faith. This is the foundation upon which experiential religion is based. In the absence of the word of God, people have flocked to miracle-based religions. This is the reason so many people obsess over the miraculous. **If their miracles are proved to be only false (2 Th 2:10-12), then they have no foundation for their faith**.

Psychosomatic refers to the power of the mind. It is a word that refers to the power of the mind over the physical body. It is true that a positive mental attitude lends one to being more healthy. The power of hypnosis proves that one person can have a great influence over the mind of another. The power of suggestion (hypnotism) is real in reference to bringing one's thinking into the subjection of another person. Through hypnosis one can be convinced that he has no pain, and subsequently, the person who has been hypnotized will feel no pain. There is nothing supernatural about hypnosis. It is simply a psychological tool used by some psychologist to bring mental healing to others.

Some religionists who plagiarize the word "miracle" from the Bible are fraudulently claiming miracles when they bring others into a state of subconsciousness, and then through the power of suggestion (hypnosis), tell the person that they are healed. Religious frauds have been doing this for centuries.

When we were in high school in our younger days a hypnotist would come by our school and demonstrate the power of suggestion (hypnotism). On one occasion he hypnotized an entire group of students into doing different things we thought were quite hilarious. There was no magic about what he was doing. There were no miracles. But if one were ignorant of the power of suggestion, he would think that the hypnotist was casting some spell over others. Now think about all the nonsense and confusion fake healers are causing in the religious world by using the power of suggestion to deceive people into thinking that they are healed.

One of the most interesting books we have read throughout the years was written by William A. Nolen who wrote the book, *A Doctor in Search of A Miracle* (Random House Pub). Dr. Nolen took a leave of absence as a writer for *McCall's Magazine* and went on a search throughout the world for a true miracle of healing. After an extensive investigation of supposed healings in the context of many different religions, he published the book. The book is a comprehensive investigation of so-called healings in all religious contexts.

Nolen was not a person of any faith, but just wanted to honestly investigate the claims of those who claimed miraculous healings. He made a very intensive study of the "miraculous healings" of Kathryn Kuhlman who was an acclaimed healer of America. At the end of his investigation, he came to three conclusions: (1) He found no evidence of a miraculous cure for any physical deformity or disease. (2) People as Kathryn Kuhlman, though very sincere in their profession to heal people, had no understanding of the difference between psychogenic and organic diseases. (3) It is doubtful that the good that was psychologically done for people by those as Kathryn Kuhlman outweighed the harm they were actually doing to the people they claimed to have healed. They were giving so much false hope that when the psychosomatic effect of the "healing" wore off depression would often set in when the person realized that he or she was not actually healed.

Though we do not fully understand the power of the mind over the body, we do understand enough not to play religious "healing games" with people in order to generate a following. We simply submit to what James stated, *"Is anyone sick among you? Let him* ***call for the elders*** *of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will restore the sick"* (Js 5:14,15). This certainly does not sound like a healing ceremony. What is important in the statement is that James said "call for the elders." This is a plurality of men who would offer the prayer, not a single performer who would draw attention to himself by orchestrating a healing ceremony.

Chapter 13

JESUS SAW IT COMING

It is not our purpose here to go into a biblical definition of how to identify a true confirming miracle. We affirm that God's work through confirming miracles in the first century and His work today are different.

Though He no longer needs to work in a manner by which to confirm His written word, He certainly works today in the life of the obedient. What word we use to define His work in the life of the Christian today may be subject to our own understanding. But according to the Bible definition there is a difference between a "confirming miracle" and a wondrous work of God today that we as believers perceive through faith.

Confirming miracles were not perceived through faith. They were so empirically witnessed and experienced through the senses of men that even unbelievers could not deny their occurrence (See At 4:16). Such miracles were so evident that they were meant by God to be confirming miracles of His word and His messengers who were sent forth to preach the gospel to the world (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:2-4).

In this context, we must take another look at one of Jesus' statements that seems to focus directly on the problem He knew the disciples would encounter in their ministry. He knew that He was sending them out into a world wherein they could be deceived. It was a world described by Paul, for he lived in that world. *"The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan* ***with all deceiving power and signs and wonders****, 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****"* (2 Th 2:9,10). Therefore, Jesus forewarned His disciples, *"For there will arise false christs and false prophets.* ***And they will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect****"* (Mt 24:24).

The "great signs and wonders" the disciples would encounter would cause many to be deceived. If the "great signs and wonders" were real, one would not be deceived if he believed them. One is not deceived when he believes that which is real. So the "great signs and wonders" about which Jesus spoke, and to which Paul referred, were false miracles. Though they were claimed to be supernatural signs and wonders by many, they were still false. We too live in a world of many fraudulent "miracle workers" who seek to deceive, if possible, even the elect of God. If we do not question these "great signs and wonders," then we too will be deceived. It is never wrong to question the spirits to see if they are from God.

Knowing that there would be a host of religionists in the world who would succumb to the fraud of deceptive "great signs and wonders," Jesus gave the warnings of Matthew 7:15-23. No context of Scripture seems to be more relevant to the deception of experiential religionists than this warning of Jesus. Jesus knew that His disciples would be walking into a world of experiential religions as we have in the world today. Therefore, please study this message of Jesus carefully.

A. False prophets (vs 15):

> *Beware of* ***false prophets*** *who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are* ***ravenous wolves****.*

The context of verses 21-23 begins with this statement in verse 15. **The false prophets would give the presentation of being harmless religionists**. They would be teachers, and thus religious leaders whose goal would be something other than the preservation of the sheep. The metaphor "wolves" indicates that **their intention would be to satisfy their own appetites**. They would be as those spoken of by Paul. *"****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).

We must understand the context of verses 15-23 in view of the devouring desires of the wolves. They would use the claims of verse 22 to gain and maintain their position as religious leaders. Once the innocent had committed themselves to be followers, the wolves were set to devour. **The problem with the innocent is that they do not know that they have been devoured**. The innocently believe many lies simply because they have little knowledge of the truth.

B. Their fruits (vss 16-20):

> ***You will know them by their fruits****. Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit, but* ***a bad tree brings forth bad fruit****. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore,* ***by their fruits you will know them****.*

Jesus instructed the sheep as to how they can identify the true nature of the wolves. "Fruit" is the product of something inward that is manifested outwardly. By their behavior, they will be identified. They will not be able to say as Peter said to the lame beggar at the gate called Beautiful, *"Silver and gold I do not have ..."* (At 3:6). The wolves are loaded with the possessions they have devoured off the innocent.

One of the quickest means by which to identify the motives of the false teacher is that **he seeks to fleece the sheep for his own gain**. He is a Balaamite in that he uses the occasion of the flock for his own gain (2 Pt 2:15). **One who is greedy for gain cannot produce good fruit**. The fruit he always produces is corrupted.

The adherents of the churches of greedy preachers, therefore, give allegiance to the Balaamite because they too believe that they will become rich if they cry out "Lord, Lord." The Balaamite preacher fills the church house with promises that the adherents will also become prosperous.

The false teacher makes empty promises to his adherents by promising that "God will bless you, too." The adherents keep coming to the assemblies because they are looking for gold, not God. The Balaamite preacher thus produces "bad fruit churches." The adherents become as he is. They are not a church of Christ because they are drawn to God because of selfish motives. They are convinced that they must give in order to receive gain. Their motives for giving, therefore, are selfish. They do not give out of love for what Jesus has done for them. They give out of selfishness in order to be blessed as the Balaamite preacher. In the context of Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus teaches the faithful that ravenous false preachers and their group of followers can be identified by their ungodly thinking which is manifested in their behavior. They are flocks of selfishness who chime at the puff of the smooth and fair speeches of Balaamite preachers.

C. "Lord, Lord" religionists (vss 21-23):

> ***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. 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**."*

It is almost ironic that experiential religionists claim **the very religious practices that Jesus here states are the claims by which the faithful are able to identify the false prophets**. It seems that if one is a religious leader, he would be very apprehensive about making the claims of this context since Jesus stated that the ravenous wolves would be identified by making these claims.

The false prophets will claim to prophesy, cast out demons, and work miraculous wonders. But Jesus said that those who make these claims are false teachers. They are liars and frauds. And those who believe these claims have been duped, and thus, they too are a part of a "bad fruit church." They have allowed themselves to be swooned away by the theatrical claims of very charismatic preachers. They are carried away with such religious charlatans simply because in their ignorance of the word of God, they have no desire to investigate either the claims of the wolf or the word of God. They may be initially innocent victims, but they will be held accountable for their ignorance of the word of God if they do not investigate the claims of the Balaamite preachers with the word of God. *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 Jn 4:1).

Verse 21 is Jesus' transition in the text to define those "Lord, Lord" people who do not do the will of the Father. He introduces the subject by saying, *"Not every one ...."* This means that there are those who **will** enter into the kingdom of heaven. These are those who cry out, "Lord, Lord," **but they also do the will of the Father**. While others simply seek an experiential identity of their relationship with the Father, these understand that any relationship with the Father depends on keeping His commandments (1 Jn 5:2). While some seek out books of authors who have validated their religion by their personal experiences, others seek out books that explain the word of God. Some "Lord, Lord" religionists thrive on reading about the personal experiences of others. But those who seek out the will of the Father thrive on the word of God. While some seek to discover in the Bible what God can do for them in the present, others discover what God has already done for them at the cross. While some obsess over any promises of what God can give to them in experiences, others obsess over what teaching they can learn in order to teach others (2 Tm 2:2). Some seek promises of experiences, while others seek teaching for correct moral behavior and teaching to keep their minds focussed on the will of God.

It is not without purpose, therefore, that in verses 21-23 Jesus referred to the three claims that false teachers will often use to prove that they are from the Lord. Our question, however, is why Jesus wants us to understand that false teachers can be identified by these three claims.

1. "Prophesied in Your name": The false prophets would present themselves as representatives of Jesus. The word "prophesy" was used in both the Old and New Testaments to refer to a teacher teaching the word of God. In the Old Testament some of the recorded statements of the prophets (teachers) were prophecies of future events. But the ordinary work of the prophet was to teach the people. The false prophet in the context of Jesus' statement evidently did not know his Bible. He did not do the will of God, or he knew the will of God and refused to obey. It is not surprising, therefore, that those who would "prophesy in Your name" would pre-

sume to tell the future of individuals simply because they have little Bible knowledge to teach. And such we have found throughout the preachers of experiential religions. They know little Bible, and thus, they have to resort to their "prophecies," "casting out demons," and "healings" in order to gain and maintain a following.

The deceptive trick of the modern-day prophet is that he claims to prophesy the future when actually he is only **predicting** the future. There is a difference between prediction and true prophecy. Prediction is based on known present facts that indicate that something will happen in the future. In true prophecy, however, there are no known facts in the present to indicate what will come in the future. It is interesting that no so-called prophets of modern times prophesied the fall of the Berlin Wall. No so-called prophets prophesied the 911 attack on the World Trade Center. No so-called prophet prophesied the economic worldwide downturn that began in 2008. And where were the prophets who would have prophesied the Arab Spring? These major events that affected the entire world were not prophesied by any modern-day, self-proclaimed prophets. What we have found is that fraudulent false teachers prey on the innocent by "prophesying" the coming events in individuals who are gullible and seeking for a "quick fix" in their religiosity that is void of any investigation into the word of God.

2. "Cast out demons": Jesus said that the false teachers can also be specifically identified by supposedly "casting out demons." We would think, therefore, that all those today who claim to cast out demons would fear in reference to this statement simply because Jesus alerted the faithful that they can identify false prophets if they make this claim. Because false teachers do not fear to claim to cast out demons reveals the brash arrogance of such experiential religionists. Their fraudulent character can be identified by their making such claims.

But why did Jesus refer to the real casting out of demons during His ministry as a signal of false teachers who would come after Him and make the same claim? The answer is simple. **People who have never experienced real demon possession would not know how to identify real demon possession**. Because they would not have a real life experience with demon possession, they would easily associate present psychological phenomenon or dysfunctional mental conditions with what the Bible defines as true demon possession.

The biblically challenged will always refer to any psychological disorder as a demon, and thus seek to "cast out the demon." And because of their thirst to have power over Satan in a visible manner, they will resort to performances of exorcism in order to demonstrate to others that they have power over Satan. Such false teachers would confuse epilepsy, mental illness, or just the spirit of fear in individuals who have little faith in themselves or God, with true demon possession. They would assert that mentally challenged people are demon possessed. The imagination of such religionists runs wild in conjuring up demons in all sorts of situations. Their basic fear of the unexplained causes them to label any unexplained phenomenon to be a demon. The more uneducated the people, the more demons that seem to exist in the minds of the people.

As the idolater creates a god after his own imagination, so people are quick to create a demon after their own lack of understanding of the word of God. They forget 1 John 4:4. *"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them because greater is He who is **in you** than he who is **in the world**."* The Spirit of God is **in** the Christian. But the Christian must continue to remember that Satan is "**in the world**," not in people. Right?

3. "Wonderful works in Your name": God, the Father, and the Holy Spirit did many wonderful works through Jesus in order to prove that He was the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). God worked many wonderful works through the hands of the apostles when they went forth to preach the gospel to the world (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:2-4). These were true miraculous wonders that even the unbelievers could not deny (At 4:16). It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that false teachers would also want to validate themselves and their messages by performing many "wonderful works." **It is only natural that a religious person who has little knowledge of the Bible, and no willingness to study the Bible, would turn to something other than the Bible to validate his "Christianity."**

If the "wonderful works" of the false teachers were true, **then certainly Jesus would not have stated that the false teachers were false**. If God used "wonderful works" to prove that Jesus and the apostles were from Him, then the same works, if true, would prove that the false teachers were true and not false. **But the fact that Jesus in this context states that the teachers are false, means that their "wonderful works" are also false**. They are fraudulent, deceptive and a lie. However, they are such persuasive "wonderful works" that even some Christians would believe them (See Mt 24:24). But they are **deceiving** "wonderful works" (2 Th 2:10). Those whose faith is experientially based are always quick to find "wonderful works" upon which to base their faith. Instead of basing their faith on the word of God, they seek out "wonderful works." Their search for "wonder-

ful works" identifies them as experiential religionists. Again, we would think that since Jesus used the "wonderful works" as a means by which to identify false teachers today, then we should be cautious about believing frivolous claims of miracles here and there.

One thing is true. If one is mesmerized by the "wonderful works" of a particular teacher, he does not need to be confused as to whether the "wonderful works" are miraculous. If the teacher is not a Christian, then his works cannot be miraculous. He may claim to be a Christian, but if he has not obeyed the gospel by baptism for remission of sins, **then he is not a Christian** (See 2 Th 2:9-11 in reference to Rm 6:3-6; At 2:38; 1 Pt 4:17). **God would not do miracles through a teacher who is not a Christian**. For this reason, all the "wonderful works" ("healings") of the non-Christian are false. We would suggest that the next time you encounter someone doing "many wonderful works," you ask the so-called healer if he has obeyed the gospel. We would venture to say that he does not know that the gospel was the historical event of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (See 1 Co 15:1-4). And for sure, he probably does not understand that one must go down into a grave of water with Jesus and be raised in order to walk in newness of life with Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). If he has not obeyed the gospel, his "wonderful works" are false.

Chapter 14

"LORD, LORD" CHURCHES

We must be clear in reference to what Jesus said in the context of Matthew 7:15-23. He was speaking of "Lord, Lord" religionists who had deceived themselves into thinking that their relationship with God was correct. The deception of the group is that they professed allegiance to the Lord, but believed and practiced that which was not the will of God. It was a religiosity based on deception. Because they were not doing the will of God, then their supposed casting out demons and doing many mighty works would lead us to conclude that they were deceiving people into thinking that they were casting out demons and doing mighty works. The fact that they were not doing the will of God means that they were deceiving people.

On the outside a group of such religionists are perceived to have an active relationship with God because they cry out "Lord, Lord." But their fruits tell another story. Bad leaders produce bad fruit. And bad fruit is the indication of ravenous wolves who are very religious, but very wrong. The following is the bad fruit that is produced by these false teachers and their followers:

A. Twisted concept of salvation:

Bad fruit churches teach a twisted concept of salvation. They always have a corrupted and twisted view of how one is to be reconciled to God. **We must understand that that which is most important for man to do in order to be saved eternally would be the greatest focus of Satan in his work to deceive man**. And in the area of what is necessary for salvation, Satan has done some of his greatest work among "Lord, Lord" religionists.

We hear fraudulent claims for salvation as "Just believe on Jesus," "Call on the name of Jesus," "Receive Jesus into your life," etc. People are led to believe that if they make such simple statements that they will be saved immediately. Though these are statements that are similar to statements found in the New Testament, they are statements that are used today to emphasize only a part of the whole of what is necessary for salvation. For example, Jesus said, *"But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Lk 13:3; see 2 Pt 3:9). Calling on or receiving Jesus without repentance is fruitless. The people cry out, "Lord, Lord," but this plea alone will not save. If we call on the Lord, we must be willing to accept the entirety of what the Lord requires in reference to our salvation. The entirety includes faith, repentance and immersion for remission of sins (See Mk 16:16; At 2:38). "Lord, Lord" believers are only dead men walking because they have called on the name of the Lord, but they may not have repented and crucified themselves with Jesus. If they have repented, they may have not gone down into the grave with Jesus and been resurrected with Him (See Rm 6:3-6).

Bad fruit churches will always teach that one does not have to obey the gospel of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection through immersion in order to walk in newness of life (See 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17). False prophets preach false teachings that are believed by entire groups of people, and thus, the people reflect in their lives erroneous teaching. God will not through any miracle validate people who have not obeyed the gospel. One's faith may take him to the point of crying out "Lord, Lord,"

but if it does not take him to obedience of the gospel, then his faith will fail him when Jesus comes (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

B. Warped understanding of obedience:

Bad fruit churches have a warped understanding of what one must do in reference to obeying God. The experiential religionist confuses his experiences with true obedience to the word of God. He feels that his experiences are obedience. He assumes that his calling on the name of the Lord is obedience. But Jesus said that "Lord, Lord" only will not save. Obedience refers to objectively studying the will of God, and then, doing what God commands. But the "Lord, Lord" churches, according to Jesus, are not doing the will of the Lord by casting out demons and doing many mighty works.

The experientialist claims that his participation in healings and exorcism are obedience to the will of the Lord. But he has deceived himself. He has substituted such practices for doing *"the will of My Father"* (Mt 7:21). He is thus *"practicing lawlessness"* because he has substituted prophesying, exorcism of demons, and doing wonderful works for his own obedience to the law of God.

When the thousands on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 cried out to Peter as to what they should do, Peter responded with commands they had to obey. Specifically, they had to repent, and then be baptized in the name of Jesus (At 2:38). Their cry as to what one must do in order to be saved was answered with instructions on what to obey. And what they had to do was obey the gospel by repenting and being baptized for remission of sins.

C. Twisted understanding of miracles:

Bad fruit churches have a twisted understanding of true miracles. Since those who were claiming to do "wonderful works" were actually practicing lawlessness (Mt 7:23), then their "wonderful works" were not true. They were only lying wonders (2 Th 2:9,10). In their deception, they trusted in their lawless activity of practicing that which was not true. They believed in their practices, not in the true miracles and prophecies that are defined in the Bible. Since "Lord, Lord" churches are not doing the will of the Lord, then their wonderful works cannot be miraculous. God does not supernaturally confirm those who refuse to do His will. He does not work through lawless people.

D. Belief in the erroneous:

Bad fruit churches reveal their character by their belief in that which is erroneous. People will believe almost anything. And in the world of confused religiosity, if one has little knowledge of the word of God, he will allow his misunderstandings to take him into extreme fantasy. Gullible people will believe all the stories about people being raised from the dead, and all the fantasies false preachers tell about some "wonderful work" here or there. Gullible people are identified by their willingness to believe all the stories of men that are told as "wonderful works." Bible-believing men of faith, however, are not gullible because they trust in the Holy Spirit inspired testimony of the wonderful works **that are recorded in the Bible**. In order to believe, they believe that the signs of Jesus were written that we *"might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"* (Jn 20:30,31). They consult their Bibles in order to confirm their faith, and then, they use their Bibles to test the spirits of those who perform many wonderful works.

Some people walk by believing in fanciful stories of "wonderful works." People of Bible faith walk by believing in the wonderful works that are recorded in the Bible. Their faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17), not by hearing and believing the fictitious stories that are propagated by false preachers who are seeking to mesmerize great audiences for their own gain. When a group of gullible people organize a church, they revel in their fanciful stories of unexplained phenomenon. They have a warped understanding of the miracles of the Bible, and thus, they find it very difficult to distinguish between the confirming miracles by which God stood behind His Son and the apostles, and the "wonderful works" that Jesus states in Matthew 7:15-23 are false.

E. Lack of love for the truth:

Bad fruit churches pay little attention to the word of God. Though one may not understand all the phenomena that occur in his life, he can trust in one solid source of truth. This source of truth is the word of God. Because we live in a world of unexplained phenomena, God knew that we could easily be deceived (Mt 24:24). He thus directed our attention to the solid foundation of His word (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). And for this reason, Paul commended the Ephesian elders to God and to His word (At 20:32).

Instead of trusting exclusively in what a teacher is doing, **the hearer should pay more attention to what he is teaching**. If one is not teaching that one must obey the gospel in order to be saved (2 Th 1:6-9), **then what-**

ever he claims to be miraculous is false. **God would not work miracles through a false teacher who is teaching that one should not obey the gospel in order to be saved**. Though one might be confused by the so-called "wonderful works" of a ravenous wolf, **he can determine if the ravenous wolf is a false teacher simply by asking him if one must obey the gospel in order to be saved**. If the wolf says that one is saved apart from obedience to the gospel (At 2:38), then you know that all his "wonderful works" fall into the practicing of lawlessness about which Jesus warned us in Matthew 7:15-23. It is as simple as that.

Our obedience to the gospel, not our experiences, is the final determining factor as to whether we are pleasing in the eyes of God. If one has been baptized for remission of sins, God has added that person to His fold (At 2:47). Therefore, one should never feel that his faith is marginalized by those who have allowed themselves to be overcome with emotional experiences that seem to be spiritual and from the Holy Spirit. Our confidence in our salvation is in our obedience to what God requires of us to be saved, which requirements are clearly stated in the word of God. Our faith, therefore, is based on the word of God in that we have done what God has said to do in order to be saved. Our faith is not in our experiences, but in the commandments of God.

Chapter 15

JEREMIAH 23

A book as this would not be complete without an expository lesson from Jeremiah 23. The religious environment in which Jeremiah lived is so close to the religious environment today that it is almost prophetic. Jeremiah lived in the same world of misguided religiosity wherein men, who had rejected the word of God, believed that they were right in their own thinking and behavior. The religious leaders of Jeremiah's day had rejected and/or forgotten the word of God. In their religiosity, therefore, they created a god after their own image and religions after their own desires. The cause of the religious environment was explained by Hosea.

> *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, 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).

In the historical environment of Jeremiah and Hosea's day, the people had forgotten the law of God. The religious environment today is somewhat different in that **religious people have not yet learned the law of God**. Religious people today have simply carried on with that which is right in their own eyes, and thus, they continue on a path of destruction, thinking that their religious man-made traditions and ceremonies are pleasing to God. Nevertheless, the religious environments are the same in that religious people have no knowledge of the law of God. It is in this context that Jeremiah's religious environment is comparable to ours today. The comparison in Jeremiah 23 between then and now is striking.

A. Wayward shepherds:

Bad religious leadership is identified by those *"who destroy and scatter the sheep"* through misguided leadership (vs 1). It is not that the sheep are led to be nonreligious. They are led by shepherds who have no knowledge of the law of God. Leaders who lead God's people into ignorance will be attended to by God (vs 2). Jeremiah stated that because their doings were evil God would bring judgment down upon them.

In contrast to the shepherds who led the people into ignorance and disobedience of God's law, God promised that He would gather His sheep again out of the nations to which He drove them into captivity. However, He would gather them unto shepherds who would feed them with the word of God (vs 4). As a result, the sheep would no longer fear either Him or invading nations. They would not be dismayed, or lack anything (vs 4). Good shepherds bring the sheep to the word of God wherein they find peace of mind (Ph 4:7).

In this context of God's exhortation to Jeremiah's generation, God made a promise of the Messiah who would come. The "Branch of righteousness" would be the Christ who would *"execute judgment and righteousness in the earth"* (vs 5). In a historical context of despair in captivity, God gave hope of deliverance from those shepherds who led the people astray through their ignorance of the will of God. The shepherds who were ignorant of the word of God would be replaced with the Branch of righteousness who would lead them to God through His word (See Jn 12:48).

B. Bad preachers lead to bad results:

In verse 9 Jeremiah turned to the prophets (preachers) who were guilty of leading the people astray into destruction. He wrote, *"**My heart within me is broken because of the prophets**."* His lamentation over the spiritual state of the people rested on the backs of the religious leaders. *"For both prophet and priest are profane"* (vs 11). God had *"found their wickedness"* (vs 11). As a result of their behavior, God promised that He would *"bring disaster on them"* (12).

God had *"seen folly in the prophets"* (vs 13). Their folly was that they *"prophesied by Baal and caused My people Israel to err"* (vs 13). Because the prophets had rejected the standard of God's word, their behavior reflected their moral rebellion. *"I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing"* (vs 14). The horrible thing was that they *"commit adultery and walk in lies"* (vs 14). In this context the "adultery" probably refers to their "theological" adultery with the false teaching of Baal prophets. As Israelites, they were married to God in a covenant relationship, but slept in the bed of Baal idolatry. They were thus full of lies. Their corrupted moral leadership set an example for the flock to follow. Therefore, *"they strengthen also the hands of evildoers so that no one turns back from his wickedness"* (vs 14).

God's judgment of adulterous preachers who compromise the word of God with the false teachings of men is not pleasant. God would feed them with the bitterness of wormwood. They would be made to drink bitter gall for the profaneness they had preached throughout the land (vs 15).

Jeremiah's exhortation to the people was that they should change preachers. *"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you"* (vs 16). The reason the people needed to stop listening to the preachers who were ignorant of the word of God was that **the people were made worthless** (vs 16). They were worthless as a witness to the nations that there was only one God. They were worthless in setting a moral example before the nations. They were worthless in leading people to faith in the one true and living God.

Lying prophets can always be identified because they often preach their visions instead of the Bible (vs 16). Because they have rejected the word of God, they trust in their visions in order to validate their positions before the people. They seek to entice the people to listen to them because they have supposedly seen some vision or had some dream. They thus preach their visions and dreams and not that which comes from *"the mouth of the Lord"* (vs 16).

The audience of the bad prophets listens because the people are of the same nature. The prophets, therefore, have an audience for they speak to those who walk *"according to the imagination of his own heart"* (vs 17). These are the "itching ear audiences" about which Paul warned Timothy (2 Tm 4:3).

God's proclamation to the people in reference to the prophets is, *"**I have not sent these prophets** ... **I have not spoken to them**"* (vs 21). If these preachers had preached the word of God to the people, then the people would have turned from their evil way (vs 21). But the fact that the people also followed the false preachers was evidence that the preachers were false.

Jeremiah then identified those who had forsaken the word of God in order to preach their own lies. We can identify them by what they say. In order to validate their religious positions, and thus command a hearing from the people, the false preachers will usually say, *"I have dreamed. I have dreamed"* (vs 25). They preach their dreams, and thus, they preach *"**the deceit of their own heart**"* (vs 26). In preaching their own dreams they *"try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal"* (vs 27). They speak more of their dreams to their neighbors than the word of God because they have allowed their dreams to have a greater impact on their lives than the word of God.

God challenged the prophet who subjected himself to his own dreams, *"The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream"* (vs 28). He then challenged the objective prophet who was faithful to the word of God, *"And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully"* (vs 28). The dreams of the dreamers would fail. But the word of those who preached the word of God would break into pieces the lies of the false prophets (vs 29).

God says that He is against those preachers who preach lies (vs 30). He is against those who seek to validate their own existence as preachers by saying, "*He* [God] *says!"* (vs 31). When the preacher says, "God says," but does not quote the word of God, then he is proclaiming something that is based on his own feelings or intuition. What he says, however, may be true or false. But we can identify the false preacher when he says "God said to me," for such preachers are seeking to command the attention of the audience by something they feel in their hearts or have experienced in their lives.

Our faith is not in those who claim that "God has spoken to them," but in what is written (Rm 10:17). God is against *"**those who prophesy false dreams**"* (vs 32). He is against them because in preaching their false dreams, they *"cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness"* (vs 32). The people need to understand that God did not send those who preach their dreams (vs 32).

God's conclusion in reference to the one who preaches his dreams, and falsely claims that "God says," is that He will punish that man and his house (vs 34).

God told Jeremiah that He would cease giving "oracles" in his ministry. There would be no more revelation of messages whereby one could claim that an oracle came directly from God. Therefore, **if anyone from that time on claimed that God had given him an oracle, then everyone would know that that person was lying**. They were lying because God was giving no more oracles (vss 34-40). The same principle is applicable today. God has granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pt 1:3). We are not to add to or subtract from His word (Rv 22:18,19). The faith has forever been granted unto the saints (Jd 3). All Scripture, therefore, is complete and able to furnish the man of God unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16,17). If some preacher says, "God told me," (that is, "the oracle of God"), then that preacher speaks a lie. In His word God has told us all that we need. He has left nothing out to be privately spoken to individuals who seek personal validation from God through their own experiences and feelings. The early inspired writers received the word of God through inspiration. We can know the will of God today only through hours of perspiration in study. *"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).

It is not our goal in the Christian life to be good meritorious "religiousarians," but to walk faithfully and obediently according to the will of our Father who is in heaven.

Book 45

Grace Response vs Tithing By Law

Returning to God that over which we have control begins by realizing that what we give to God was never ours in the first place. We are only stewards of all that which we possess. Some have sought to encourage giving by binding on Christians the Old Testament law concerning tithing. But no such encouragement for giving is found in the New Testament. The teaching of Jesus and the inspired letters on this subject focuses on first giving oneself to the Lord. Once one has given himself unto the Lord, theN he begins to discover the secret for sacrificial giving. The secret is in discovering that Jesus gave all for us, and thus, we seek to give all to him. There is no percentage restrictions. If one who follow Jesus, therefore, he should be moved to give as Jesus gave to him.

The spirit of discipleship is summed up in 2 Corinthians 4:15. *"For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reacahing many people* ***may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God****."*

The church of our Lord is a community of grateful people. It is a community of people who respond with thankful service to the grace of God that was poured out through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. In their freedom from sin and the necessity of being justified by perfect keeping of law, Christians are moved by the grace that set them free. They are characterized by "paying forward" because their sins were paid for in the past. In Christ they live, and thus, are living a life of thanksgiving, not burden with a meritorious quests for reward through works.

When digging through the Holy Scriptures in order to discover the awesome privilege of expressing our gratitude for the sacrificial offering of Jesus, the profound meaning of sacrificial giving springs from the pages of the Holy Writ. When we discover the emotional wonder of giving out of love instead of law, we experience the spirit of Jesus that was poured out as a gift for us. His giving has inspired "thank you" in our hearts. When we understand how much God so loved us through the cross, our response is to so love by giving to others as we have been given to (See Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19). This is the true spirit of Christianity. Our offerings, therefore, are out of love, not compulsion or law.

The "willing spirit" of responding to God's giving was first mentioned by Paul in reference to his preaching of the gospel. *"For if I* ***willingly*** *do this* [that is, preach the gospel], *I have a reward"* (1 Co 9:17). This is the spirit of giving. Notice how this willing spirit is brought by Paul into the context of giving. *"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 8:12). What a wonderful concept, a wonderful deliverance from the bondage of law. A willing mind is the foundation of a cheerful giver. When we fully understand the cross, we are frustrated if we do not express our thanksgiving through giving as our salvation was freely given to us.

With the nation of Israel, however, it was somewhat different. Israel lived under the bondage of law that legally tutored the nation to the cross of grace (Gl 3:19-25). In reference to offerings, therefore, the Israelites gave according to the requirements of the law. In contrast to law, however, the Christian gives because of his gratitude for the grace of God. God, through the Sinai law, defined for the Israelites the specific amount of their offerings. But under the grace of Christ, Christians themselves define the amount of the offering. The Jews gave because of commandment. The Christian gives because of thanksgiving. Therefore, **those Christians who seek to live under the tithing restrictions of the Sinai law have cheated themselves of the joy that comes in bringing free-will offerings before the Lord out of a willing spirit and a heart of thanksgiving**. They have actually robbed themselves of a "willing spirit." And without a willing spirit there is no joy when we make our offerings. We view our offerings as a burden and not an expression of joy.

In our giving, we must always have a sense of knowing that we have given our time through our offering in order to advance the work of God. We must appreciate that our contributions indicate our labor for the Lord to continue His mission to preach the gospel to the world and care for the unfortunate (Js 1:27; 3 Jn 5-8).

It is for this reason that we must take another look at the practice of tithing that has been so corrupted in the frenzy of religious priests and pastors who would stir up guilt, rather than free-will, in order to move their adherents into submitting to their obsession for money. There are too many M & M religionists among us, that is, "Miracles" and "Money" religionists who seek to gain wealth at the expense of sincere hearts who simply want to be pleasing to God. They are religious predators who, as the sons of Eli, take advantage of the spiritual obligations of the sincere in order to profit themselves (See 1 Sm 2:12-17). They do so to the point that the people *"abhorred the offering of the Lord"* (1 Sm 2:17). The people come to abhor that which they are obligated to do, that is to bring an offering before the Lord. When the people start to view the preacher as a profiteer, then they begin to "abhor the offering to the Lord."

We were once living in the West Indies when an "M & M" predator came through the island of Antigua where we were living in the early 80s. Upon arrival, he and his cohorts first went to the hardware store and purchased several large buckets for the meeting. To begin the meeting in the early hours of the evening, the "M & M" preacher stood up and cried out, "God wants a miracle tonight!" The people responded and shouted, "Amen!", not realizing that the preacher was using "miracles" as a bait to get the money of the people.

After about an hour of raving, the preacher and his cohorts pass out the buckets to collect the money. The buckets were then returned to the preacher. He looked in the buckets, and then cried out, "There is not enough money for a miracle to happen tonight!" So he raved on that the people must give in order that they be blessed with a miracle. He shouted that God would bring a miracle if they had enough faith, and their faith must be expressed through their giving.

The bucket team again passed out the buckets. The buckets came back, and again, the preacher was not satisfied. "There can still be no miracle tonight," the preacher cried out, "for there is little 'appreciation' in the buckets." He continued to bait the hook by promising miracles, and then, passing out the buckets hour after hour.

The sadness of the story is that the people were so emotionally caught up in the frenzy that they cried out, "Amen, Amen!" The had been baited with promises of miracles, and thus, were fully hooked. At about midnight, the preacher was emotionally wasted. Finally, some unfortunate and beguiled person came forward to be "healed." He too who had been worn down by the endless ranting and verbal abuse of the preacher.

The next morning the preacher and his bucket team boarded an airplane and went on to the next island to carry on again to extract money from the innocent for the purpose of gain. The people in Antigua were left with empty buckets and a feeling of guilt because they were convinced that they did not have enough faith to be healed. They were victims of a religious predator.

The unfortunate truth about what we might consider a unique event of a Balaamite preacher in Antigua happens almost every Sunday morning in thousands of religious meetings throughout the world (2 Pt 2:15). People have been burdened with so much guilt by the Balaamite preachers who preach for gain that they simply throw money in the bucket in order to find some relief from being harangued about giving. In their unwilling contributions they find a token of relief until next Sunday morning when the whole rampage of imposed guilt and profiteering continues. While the Balaamite drives to the meeting in a fine vehicle, saying to the people, "God will bless you too if you will give," the people continue to be burdened with the guilt of a false hope that they also will some day be "blessed" to have a fine vehicle. The unbelieving world turns away in disgust from these religious charlatans. It is time, therefore, that we take another look at the concept of "tithing" that was initiated in ancient times when thankful people expressed their gratitude to God for all that He had done in their lives.

Chapter 1

THE TITHE

Tithing (a tenth part) of one's produce, livestock and spoils of war originated before the giving of the Sinai law to Israel on Mount Sinai. Over four hundred years before the giving of the written law of tithing on Mount Sinai, Abraham tithed part of the spoils of war to Melchizedek, who was a king and priest of God (See Gn 14:17-20; Hb 7:4). Because Abraham tithed, it seems that the principle of tithing was given by God to those who walked according to an unwritten revelation law that God gave to His people before the giving of the written Sinai law to Israel (See Hb 1:1). However, it is not known exactly where tithing a tenth part to rulers

and religious leaders originated. The practice existed in ancient Babylon, as well as in Persia and Egypt. Even in ancient China there is evidence that tithing existed in the religious culture. Therefore, our first conclusion would be that the concept of "tithing" was not a unique practice among the Israelites. Also, we would conclude that tithing was not always in a religious context, but a practice of paying taxes to the state, as in the tithe that Abraham paid to Melchizedek who was the king of Salem.

In the law that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai, tithing was enjoined on Israel that they give of the produce of their land which included tithing from both crops and livestock. In the early years of the existence of Israel as an agricultural state, there was no use of money for exchange purposes. Tithing, therefore, was of their crops or livestock which manifested the giving of their labors. The purpose for their tithing was to support their religious leadership, the Levites and priests, which Levites functioned as the "governors" of the state to carry out the law of God among people. The Levites were in turn to support the priests who administered to the religious affairs of the people.

In reference to the produce of the land, the Israelites were to tithe the fruit of their trees, oil and wine, and of their herds and flocks (Lv 27:30-33; see Dt 14:22,23; 2 Ch 31:5,6). At the time of tithing, when their livestock went out to pasture, every tenth animal that passed under the rod was tithed as holy to the Lord (Compare Jr 33:13; Ez 20:37). In the process of determining the animal to be tithed, the owner did not have the right to choose which animal was to be given to the Lord. He could not exchange any tenth animal that was tithed. Neither was the owner allowed to buy back any animal that was tithed. However, tithes of the seeds of the crops and the fruit could be bought back. If they were bought back, however, twenty percent of the value of the tithe was to be added to the cost of buying back the tithe. We would assume that the reason for their being allowed to buy back the seeds of the crops was for the purpose of maintaining the people's survival during times of famine.

The Israelites were instructed to tithe in order to support the Levites since the Levites did not receive an inheritance of land in the land of promise (See Nm 18:21-32; see also Hb 7:5). The tithe the Levites received from the people was for their service to the people in teaching the law and service at the tabernacle (Nm 18:21,23). They were to receive tithes from the grain of the threshingfloor and wine from the wine press (Nm 18:27). From the tithe that was given to the Levites, a tithe of this offering was to be given by the Levites to the priests who served in the ministry of making sacrifices for the people. This was a tithe of the tithe (Ne 10:38,39). The Levites who received tithes were also to tithe of that which they received.

The tithe was to be brought to the tabernacle, wherever the tabernacle was alternately set up in the territories of Israel each year throughout their history (Dt 12:5,6,11,18; see Am 4:4). When this tithe was brought to the tabernacle, it was to be eaten as a sacred meal. It was to be eaten by the one who brought the tithe, his household, and the Levites. If the journey was long to the location of the tabernacle in a particular year, then one could sell his tithe of crops or livestock where he lived. He could then bring the proceeds he received from the sell to the tabernacle and buy oxen, sheep and wine in order to eat the offered tithe with his household and the Levites (Dt 14:22-29). Unfortunately, by the time of Jesus this practice was greatly abused (See Mt 21:12,13; Mk 11:15-17).

There was also the third-year tithe. This tithe was for the Levites, the foreigners, orphans and widows (Dt 26:12-15). This was often referred to as the "poor tithe." According to some Bible students, the "first tithe" was to be given to the Levites, from which tithe the Levites were to tithe to the priests. The "second tithe" was to be taken from the remaining nine-tenths of the owner's livestock and crops. This tithe was to be taken to the tabernacle meeting and eaten with one's household in fellowship with the Levites. In the third year, that which composed the "second tithe" was to be given to the Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows, as the "poor tithe." But according to Josephus, who wrote the latter part of the first century, the "poor tithe" was actually an additional "third tithe" that the priests and Levites were also required to give to the foreigners, orphans and widows (See *Antiquities*, IV, v; 3; VIII:8;22).

Though tithing took place before the giving of the Sinai law, it was legislated under the law for the preservation of the Levites and priests who ministered to the spiritual well-being of national Israel. Tithing was also legislated for benevolent causes, specifically for orphans and widows. Since the proselyte (the foreigner, a convert to Israel's faith) had no land inheritance, then it seems that in some ways he was to be supported with the "poor tithe" until he was financially established so that he could support himself and his household in the land of Palestine. This was never a tithe that was to continue indefinitely. The foreigner was simply sustained until he could support himself and his family.

Tithing was thus a legal system of support to sustain different social structures of the Israelite society, specifically the religious leaders who had the responsi-

bility of spiritually leading the people and administering the law of God in a theocratic system of government. The tithe for Israel, therefore, was based on the Sinai law that was given to Israel alone. The law specifically defined the tithe, or tax, that was to be paid in order for the nation of Israel to function as a nation in the land of Palestine.

The tithes that were to be consumed by the one who offered the tithe were meant to maintain the social interaction between the people, and the spiritual leaders, the Levities and priests. The sacred meal that was provided by the tithing Israelite was to keep himself and his family in fellowship with those who had the responsibility of spiritually leading the nation. Other tithes were given in order to sustain the families of the priests in their service at the tabernacle. God established the tithing as a law in the Old Testament. He did this in order to guarantee that the Israelites be spiritually led by those who had the responsibility of teaching the people the law of God. He also wanted to make sure that the unfortunate of the land be cared for until they could sustain themselves.

When we transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament in reference to tithing, most people make a fatal mistake of interpretation. Most people seek to live under law, and thus, they bind law in reference to tithing on themselves as believers in Christ. This is particularly true of those predator preachers who obsess over money in order to extract contributions from the free for the sake of gain. Balaamite preachers who seek gain will take the free back into the bondage of law in order to generate "tithes," particularly in reference to their personal support. But we see something different in the New Testament for the free that was made possible by the sacrificial cross of Jesus.

Unfortunately, too many people have confused the concept of the "tithe." They have taken a word that was used in the Old Testament in order to define a concept of the New Testament. It is true that the practice of giving the tenth part (the tithe) to the Lord existed before its first recorded mention in the Old Testament. The "tithing" practice existed before the giving of the Sinai law to Israel. The practice was brought into the Sinai law as a recorded statute with the giving of the law to Israel on Mount Sinai. However, when we come to the new Testament, we must understand that the principle of giving to the Lord continued, but giving in reference to the restrictions of the tenth part of the tithe did not continue.

This point is very confusing to many people. It is confusing because most do not understand that there is a difference between the Sinai law that was given specifically to national Israel and the New Testament law of freedom under which Christians now live.

Bringing offerings to the Lord while the people were under any law of God has always existed. There is no argument about this, especially as we survey some key passages in the New Testament that relate to this matter. However, there is a difference between the legal "tithe" of the Sinai law and the free-will offering of the New Testament. Therefore, if one says that we must "tithe" today because of what the Sinai law commands, then he has missed the point of why Christians are to bring their free-will offerings before the Lord. However, to say that Christians must "tithe" in making an offering, we would be correct. If we understand that the word "tithe" is used in a generic sense to simply refer to contribution, then we could do such, though using this specifically defined word of the Old Testament to explain the Christian's response to grace can be somewhat misleading. Christians give in response to grace, not in response to law. "Tithe" is a specific word that is used in reference to law. Christians have been set free from the bondage of law, though they have not been set free from their responsibility to support the work of the Lord. We must keep this clearly in mind as we move our studies from the pages of law in the Bible (the Old Testament) to the pages of grace (the New Testament).

Chapter 2

THE FREE-WILL OFFERING

Tithing under the Sinai law was a legal requirement of the law. It was thus a work of law that manifested one's obedience to the law, which law was given exclusively to the nation of Israel. The Israelites' legal obedience to the Sinai law, therefore, was a signal that they sought to maintain the covenant that God had established with them at Mount Sinai (See Dt 5:1-5; Ex 19:4-6; Ne 8:1; Rm 3:1,2).

Christians are no longer under the Sinai law (Rm 7:4). They have been freed from the limitation of law in order that they be able to work more abundantly in response to the grace of God (See Cl 2:14). And for this reason, **Christians are moved to give more than the required tithe of the Sinai law**. They have been freed

from the ten percent tithe of law in order to give according to their appreciation of grace.

Those who think that we are bound to the Sinai law continue to live in confusion in reference to our responsibilities to serve God, especially in matters concerning tithing. Christians are under grace, not law. Paul wrote, *"And if by grace, then it 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). Now consider this thought in reference to some among the Galatian Christians who were reverting back to certain ordinances of the Sinai law, specifically circumcision, in order to be justified before God. ***"You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace"*** (Gl 5:4). If anyone would seek to use any law of God as a legal means by which to be justified before God, then he has fallen from grace. The reason for this is simple. Paul wrote, *"For I testify again to every man who is circumcised,* ***that he is a debtor to keep the whole law****"* (Gl 5:3). In other words, if one would seek to use circumcision, or even tithing, as a legal means to justify himself before God, **then he must keep the whole Sinai law perfectly in order to be justified before God**. The problem with this theology is that **no one can keep any law of God perfectly**, and thus, every man stands as a sinner before God (Rm 3:9,10). We all sin and fall short (Rm 3:23).

Paul reminded the Galatians, *"... a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ...* ***for by works of law no flesh will be justified"*** (Gl 2:16). *"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). Therefore, if any Christian goes back to the Sinai law in order to tithe legally according to the restrictions of the law, **he is fallen from grace**. He is seeking to be justified legally before God by legally trying to keep law. If such a one seeks to be justified by the law, **then he is a debtor to keep the whole law**. In other words, he must keep the whole Sinai law perfectly in order to be justified by the law. Those who would use the Sinai law to bind tithing on the disciples of Jesus, are also debtors to keep the whole law, including the law of circumcision, animal sacrifices, the Passover, and the countless other laws of the Old Testament. "M & M" preachers need to keep this in mind as they take sincere people down the road of guilt in order to extract money from their pockets on the basis of law.

Christians are dead to the Sinai law by the body of Christ in order that they be married to Christ (Rm 7:4). So when considering contributions to God for the continuation of His work under the law of Christ, our sacrifices of thanksgiving are based on the principle of 2 Corinthians 4:15. Grace causes thanksgiving. God's grace causes thanksgiving in our hearts, which thanksgiving is manifested through offerings. **Christians give out of gratitude because of the grace of God that was poured out in their lives through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross**. The Israelites tithed in legal obedience to the Sinai law. Christians give in response to the grace that God has poured out in their lives. Christians give because they are debtors to the grace of God (Rm 1:14). They thus contribute liberally (2 Co 9:6-15), even out of their poverty (See 2 Co 8:1-4). Because they understand all that God freely gave to them through Jesus, they freely give in return out of a heart of gratitude. Here is the principle: *"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). If one gives because of the compulsion of the preacher, then he is not giving cheerfully. He is not giving as one whom God would love. The next time you give because of the compulsion of law or the guilt trip of an "M & M" preacher, then think in your mind that God loves the one who gives cheerfully out of appreciation, not because he is bound by law to give. Keep in mind that **the free always give more than those who are in the bondage of law**. In order to inspire giving, therefore, we preach freedom in Christ in order to set people free to give as we were freely given to by Jesus.

Christians are not restricted to tithe ten percent, but by their ability to give according to their means, or ability to give (1 Co 16:1,2). Their love of others and appreciation for the grace of God in their lives, therefore, moves them to sacrificially give in abundance because they understand that it is more blessed to give than to receive (At 20:35). They thus give to the poor (At 20:35; Js 1:27), to evangelists who preach the gospel (3 Jn 7,8), to those who are teachers of the word of God among them (Gl 6:6), to other Christians who are in need (At 2:44,45; 4:32-37), and even to unbelievers who are in need (Gl 6:10). Christians, therefore, **are not restricted in their giving by the ten percent of the Sinai law tithe**. Because of the abundance of the grace that was poured out upon them, **they give abundantly**.

Consider as an example of sacrificial giving the case of the initial few disciples in Philippi. When Paul, Luke, Timothy and Titus walked into Philippi, they encountered and led to Christ a traveling single business woman and her household (At 16:15). A humble government worker, the jailer, and his household also gave themselves to the Lord (At 16:33). Paul, Timothy and Titus stayed only a few days in Philippi before they went on to Thessalonica (At 16:12; 17:1). Now notice what

Paul said of these few disciples many years later, among whom there were initially only two wage earners, the jailer and Lydia. *"Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel 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). What makes newly baptized disciples do this? They had been Christians for only a few days, any yet, when the evangelists went on to Thessalonica they supported them. Was their support of the evangelists something that Paul taught them? Or, **was it inherent in the nature of the message they received**? We believe the latter was the reason. They received a message of loving sacrifice and the only way they could express the same in their lives was to sacrifice for the continued preaching of the message of grace.

Even in hard times the Philippians were willing do give to the needs of others. Philippi was in the province of Macedonia. Now notice what Paul wrote of the Philippian church in reference to their giving to the famine victims of Judea.

> *Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace* [favor] *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).

What makes people do this? This is a concept of true Christianity that the "M & M" preacher will never understand if he persists in his "money making" sermons to bring guilt upon the people. We believe that the message of the gospel of Christ in the incarnation and cross is so great and powerful that it compels people to give (See Ph 2:5-8). Christians who clearly understand this message do not have to be taught to give. They only need to be directed to where to take their offerings. They would never dare come before the Lord empty handed, for the Father in heaven came to them with a crucified Son in His hand. And because that crucified Son set them free, they freely give. If we would seek to increase our giving, then we must continually teach the message of freedom in the crucified Christ. Taking people back into the bondage of law restricts their willingness to give. Bringing people to a greater understanding of the willingness of Jesus to set us free through cross inspires free-will sacrifice on the part of those who have been set free by the cross.

Under law, it is the will of the law that tithing was to be made. But under grace, it is our own will that we give in response to what God has given to us through the cross. Free-will offering can thus never be the result of law. It must be willingly made from the heart of the free. We are free from law in Christ, and thus, fully willing to give all that we can. We thus present our entire lives as a sacrificial offering before the Lord. Our offerings, therefore, are not a sacrifice, but a statement of who we are, the sacrificial flock of God. The Holy Spirit said it thus,

> *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).

And again,

> *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).

Book 46

The Religious Sectarian

There is no greater sin that destroys the organic function of the universal body of Christ than the sin of groups of disciples separating themselves from one another. The spirit of sectarian behavior is simply contrary to the nature of the one body of Christ. Though there will always be differences of opinion, and traditional ways of carrying out the commands of Christ, there must never be any question in the minds of the members of the body of Christ that they are all one man in Christ. No group of disciples has the right to separate themselves from the universal body. To do so is to behave contrary to the nature of the one organic body. For this reason, therefore, all members of the body must make a concerted effort to remain one in order that the world might believe.

"Devoted to or prejudiced in favor of some sect." So says *Webster's Dictionary* of the word, "sectarian." Or, more definitive, Webster further defines "sectarianize": "To imbue with sectarian principles, feelings, or ideas; to make sectarian in spirit."

In a religious context, the word "sectarian" originally applied to those who were identified as a divisive group within a traditional religion. A religious sect was identified as such because of some unique teaching that was contrary to the accepted teaching of the traditional religion. Such was the derogatory use of the word in reference to Christians in the first century. The general public erroneously assumed that Christianity was a sect within the context of Judaism. This accusation was made of Paul by Tertullus when Paul stood before Felix. *"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). And Paul admitted to Felix, *"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers ..."* (At 24:14; compare At 26:5). The accusers called the Way a sect, but not Paul. To Tertullus, and those Jews he represented, Christianity was a sect of Judaism.

Paul, and all those of the Way, were not a sect of Judaism. They were of Christ who separated all believers from all religions that did not accept Jesus as the resurrected Son of God. According to those who rejected Christ in the first century, the word "sect" was not used in a favorable context in reference to Christians. Reference was to those who had separated themselves from those who rejected the truth of God's work among men through Jesus.

Today, however, the use of the word "sect" refers to any group of people who have set themselves against God's work to bring all men together as one man in Christ. A religious sect is a denominated group that has rejected the blessing of God's unity that He gave to those who are working to preach the gospel to the world. A sectarian is one who separates himself from others within the community of Christendom. If he leads a group of people, then they as a group are defined as a sect that is identified by unique beliefs or behavior.

Dictionary definitions of sectarianism seem to fall short of defining the result of sectarianism that is so prevalent in the religious world today. This is especially true in reference to any sectarian spirit that would affect the people of God. When we realize that a sectarian spirit naturally leads to the denominating (dividing) of believers from one another, then we must understand that the true nature of a sectarian spirit works against the unity of the believers for which Jesus prayed and died. For this reason, therefore, every Christian must struggle against the attack of sectarianism and its resulting fruit of denominationalism.

Everyone understands that among believers today the spirit of sectarianism is contrary to all teaching concerning the one church of the New Testament. Few people who are sectarian in spirit and behavior, however, realize that they are of such a spirit. They do not because they confuse their loyalty to a particular sect with true loyalty to Jesus. Sectarians often confuse loyalty to Jesus and His word with their loyalty to some dynamic personality or a specific group of people. Those who harbor a sectarian spirit often disguise their behavior as "contending for the faith," when actually they harbor a spirit that works contrary to the very spirit of unity that is to be characteristic of God's people.

It is essential as a Christian, therefore, to understand the nature of sectarianism. If we discover that we

are somewhat sectarian in spirit, then we can caution ourselves lest we allow our sectarian attitude to be carried out in our behavior. In doing such, we will find ourselves working against the work of God to keep all believers together in Christ. We thus call for a great deal of self-examination when studying this subject. Because we are human, almost every one of us has some sectarian feelings. However, if these feelings are manifested through our behavior, then it is time for repentance. The sectarian is known by his fruits. And if the fruit of division originates from a sectarian attitude, then one is working against the unity of the Spirit.

As we examine ourselves in reference to this subject, most will confess that they harbor some sectarian feelings, if not, behavior. If this study reveals some sectarian beliefs and behavior, then we have accomplished our purpose in challenging ourselves to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Satan would have us divided, and thus, we must continually exhort ourselves to be united. We must always remember that the fruit of a sectarian spirit that denominates God's people from one another is the work of Satan.

One of the most difficult challenges is to convince individuals who have a sectarian spirit that they are actually working against the blessing of unity that God has given to all believers in Christ. This is especially true of independent churches that are often led by a single charismatic leader who started his "own" church. The very fact that such leaders have separated a group unto themselves is evidence that they are sectarian in spirit and practice. Once such a sectarian leader has marshaled his followers into a "local" church, he then instills in the adherents loyalty to his particular party. Loyalty to the group thus becomes more important than loyalty to Jesus, His word, and all other disciples of Jesus. The result is that a new sect is established with a leader who believes that he is doing the work of God. But the leader of such groups, with their loyal adherents, have forgotten that sectarianism is contrary to the work of God among men. It is a spirit that is contrary to the oneness of the universal ekklesia of Christ. The preachers of denominated groups are sectarian, and the loyal adherents are practicing sectarianism. With such loyalty, a sect exists and is perpetuated as an independent church. All this is completely contrary to the nature of the universal church of God's people that we read about in the New Testament.

Chapter 1

THE ORGANIC UNITY OF THE BODY

In order to reveal the nature of sectarianism, it is always best to begin with a clear understanding of the nature of the unified and universal body of Christ as it is explained in the New Testament. The better we understand what God intended concerning the organic relationship of unity between His children, the better we can understand the confusion that sectarianism brings when it is manifested among the saints. Sectarianism works completely opposite to what God intended and created through the cross of Jesus. Therefore, we must focus on the principles of our unity with one another as members of the body of Christ, keeping in mind that our unity is a blessing from God.

A. Giving heed to Jesus' prayer for unity:

No passage of Scripture is more pertinent to discussions on sectarianism than Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:20,21. Jesus knew that division would continually threaten the oneness of His body. He knew that our individualism would often surface, and subsequently, it would work against our love for one another. He knew that His disciples would separate themselves from one another because of their individualistic pride and arrogance. For this reason, Jesus prayed that all His followers be one as He and the Father were one in purpose and being. It must always be the desire of the disciples of Jesus, therefore, to give heed to Jesus' prayer for oneness. True disciples of Jesus are known for their efforts to maintain unity among the saints of God. When there is division, it is the nature of the disciples of Jesus to seek reconciliation.

Maintaining the unity of believers about which Jesus prayed means that Christians should avoid arguments over senseless issues. In fact, in order to maintain the unity about which Jesus prayed, Christians are to avoid argumentative discussions over issues that are not biblical in nature, or are simply opinions concerning matters of interpretation (See 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9-11). In order to preserve unity, Christians should avoid any debates over issues that are not fundamental to our faith. Debates over nonbiblical issues and matters of opinion will only encourage argumentative behavior that is contrary to the fundamental teaching that we are to be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ep 4:3).

B. Being one universal body:

Sectarians fail to understand the universal nature of the body of Christ. No Bible teaching strikes at the heart of the erroneous nature of sectarianism than the fundamental principle of the one universal body of Christ. While residing in prison in Rome, Paul wrote to the Ephesian disciples, who were hundreds of kilometers away, that there is "**one** body, **one** Spirit, **one** hope, **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, and **one** God" (Ep 4:4-6). Paul in Rome was a member of the same one body that the Ephesians were members of in Ephesus. He continued that the one God is *"Father of **all**, who is above **all** and through **all** and in **all**"* (Ep 4:6). **Paul was referring to the global body of Christ**, not just a single group of Christians in Ephesus. He then said, *"But to **each one of us** grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift"* (Ep 4:7). Grace was given to each member of the global body.

Notice the context of Ephesians 4 from the viewpoint of Jesus initiating the building of "His church" upon the rock of His sonship and fulfillment of all prophecy as the Messiah (See Mt 16:18,19). Ephesians 4 is speaking of the universal body of Christ. In order to build His body after His ascension, He "gave some to be apostles" for the initial announcement of the gospel in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost (At 2), and the revelation of all truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). He gave "some to be prophets" in order to speak the word of God by inspiration to the church until the coming of the written word (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). He gave "some to be evangelists" who would go forth to preach the good news to the world. And He gave "some to be shepherd/teachers" who would continue to nurture the early converts at the beginning of the establishment of the universal body of Christ. Through the ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers, Jesus ministered His word to the world in order to establish His universal body.

When Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 concerning the "keeping of the unity of the Spirit," he was not talking exclusively about the disciples in Ephesus (Ep 4:3). He was talking about the body of Christ throughout the world. When he spoke of Christ setting some in the body with ministries of word and service, he was speaking of the one body that existed wherever there was a member of the body.

1 Corinthians 12 is a prime context that teaches the preceding concept of the universal body. At the same time, it is a context that teaches against any efforts to divide the body into local independent groups. The context of 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that because there is one Father, one Christ and one Spirit, the members of the one universal body of Christ function as a unit (1 Co 12:4-11). Paul's illustration of using the on Spirit of the Godhead was not simply to correct the divisive relationship the Corinthians had with one another in dividing up into different parties. His argument was that because the body is universally one, so likewise should the members relate with one another at any location in the world. The members are united as one because the body is universally one.

In order to emphasize this point, allow us to insert the word "universal" in 1 Corinthians 12:12 in order not to miss the point of Paul's argument. *"For as the* [universal] *body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one* [universal] *body, though they are many, are one* [universal] *body, so also is Christ"* (1 Co 12:12). We must take our "local congregation" thinking out of our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

It is not that we have oneness among individual autonomous local churches. The oneness is in reference to the oneness of the **many members**. Remember what Paul said: *"For as the* [universal] *body is one, and **has many members** ..."* (1 Co 12:12). How can some insert, "has many autonomous groups" into this text? The context is speaking of individual members, not groups of members.

We are the one universal body because every branch (individual member throughout the world) is connected individually to the One Vine, Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, in this universal relationship that the branches have with one another, there has been the attack of sectarianism among the members. Subsequently, sectarian interpreters have slipped into the context of 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 a word that is found nowhere in the New Testament in reference to the disciples of Christ. It is the word "local." And thus we have used in Christian writings, the phrase, "local church." This is just another way of sectarianizing the one universal body of Christ, the very thing Paul argued against in the contexts of 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

C. Being one with one another:

Paul urged the Corinthian disciples to *"**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). This mandate was not that they be cloned as a cult into using the same words and phrases in their speech, or behaving as regimented soldiers who were denied their individualism. Christianity is not a cult. The nature of Paul's instructions is opposite to what the sectarian would be

and do. Paul's statement introduces the Corinthians' division over personalities, even though the personalities, Cephas, Apollos and Paul, spoke the same thing. Cephas, Apollos and Paul were not cloned as robots without the right to have opinions. When it came to speaking the same fundamental teachings of God, however, they spoke as the oracles of God (1 Pt 4:11). They were totally one man in Christ in reference to fundamental teachings, but individual in how they carried out the fundamentals in their own lives.

D. Stand fast in one spirit:

Paul exhorted the Philippians that they *"stand fast in **one spirit**, with **one mind striving together** for the faith of the gospel"* (Ph 1:27). This thinking and behavior is completely opposite the nature of the sectarian spirit. Christians are to strive together for the faith, not against one another. The more Christians strive with one another, the less they strive for the faith of the gospel (See 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9-11). The spirit of unity struggles against the spirit of sectarianism. These two spirits of men are always in conflict with one another.

E. Be eager to keep unity:

The entire context of Ephesians 4 teaches against the denominating behavior that is the product of a sectarian spirit. Paul exhorted the Ephesians to *"walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called"* (Ep 4:1). And in order to walk this walk, one must be *"**eager** to keep the **unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace"* (Ep 4:3).

It is the nature of love to be eager to keep unity. It is the disciples' love for one another that moves them to keep the unity that they have in Christ. It is not that they are eager to establish unity. They already have the blessing of unity because they are all one man in Christ as a result of their baptism into Christ (Gl 3:26-29). They must earnestly keep that which they already have because of their common obedience to the gospel (See Rm 6:3-6; Jd 3). Being a disciple of Jesus demands that Christians understand that there is always an attack against their blessing of unity. Satan knows that there is awesome power in a united community. If he can keep the community of God divided, then he has greatly diminished God's work among men.

The sectarian does not realize that his spirit works against the Spirit of unity that Christians have in Christ. He does not realize that unity is a fundamental teaching that defines the nature of true Christianity. To take advantage of the sheep of God in order to promote one's unbiblical doctrine is working against the fundamental principle of unity in Christ. Every effort, therefore, must be made by every Christian to preserve the blessing of our oneness in Christ.

F. Guarding our freedom for unity:

We preserve the unity of the Spirit by guarding one another's freedom in Christ. Wherever the spirit of sectarianism seeks to divide the people of God, then we can be assured that our freedom in Christ is under attack. Paul expressed the fundamental principle of freedom 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**."* This statement was a reflection of what Jesus promised all His disciples. *"Therefore, if the Son will make you free, **you will be free indeed**"* (Jn 8:36).

Galatians 5:1 is in the context of some Jewish brethren who were seeking to bind circumcision as a condition for salvation (See At 15:1). They were certainly wrong in their doctrinal position, for they were binding where God had not bound. Throughout the book of Galatians, Paul adequately argued that there is nothing in circumcision (Gl 5:2-4), nor salvation that is supposed upon the foundation of perfect keeping of law (Gl 2:16). But the position of the Jewish legalists was more than keeping the rite of circumcision as a legal requirement for salvation. To them as Jews, if they were not circumcised, they lost their Jewish heritage. And in this context, it seems that they were trying to proselyte the Gentiles into their heritage of Judaism through circumcision. But such would destroy the freedom in Christ that the Gentiles gained when they obeyed the gospel.

Obedience to the gospel brings freedom from the bondage of perfect keeping of law in order to be justified. We must protect this freedom, lest someone with strong views on a particular matter of opinion would seek to divide the disciples from one another by binding a "circumcision issue." **We have the freedom to advance our opinions, but we do not have the freedom to bring anyone into the bondage of our opinions**. One with a sectarian spirit is often willing to sacrifice freedom for the sake of binding his "circumcision issues." Keep in mind also that those who have a strong sectarian spirit will not allow anyone to express their opinions if they are contrary to their opinions.

When discussing the subject of unity, we have always found that those who focus so much on unity often have some distorted view of unity. They often seem to be concerned about things of which God has no concern

in reference to the unity of His children. Some superficial appearances of unity about which some obsess would be such things as everyone assembling together at the same place. Or, it may be assuming that when everyone is assembled, then there is unity among the brethren. Or, some have erroneously assumed that unity consists of every disciple in a city assembling in the same manner, that is, in a church building, in a school, or in a house. Forced unity is supposing that everyone uses the same words and phrases to express themselves concerning matters of the disciples' work. Some impose unity by demanding a certain dress code on the disciples for certain occasions. There are also those who assume we are united if we all evangelize in the same manner, or conduct the assemblies of the church according to the same ceremony. Extreme views of forced unity would be assuming that the disciples must agree on all matters of opinion and interpretation. All such efforts to impose unity are superficial, if not sectarian in their very nature. Since all such things lie outside the authority of the Scriptures, then to bind in these areas where the Scriptures are silent would be binding where God has not bound. If one binds where the Scriptures are silent, then one becomes sectarian and divisive when he is supposing that he is promoting unity.

The obsession of some who are orchestrating unity sometimes betrays their desire to muster legally all the saints together after their concept of unity. The first thing the unity obsessionist must understand is that his definition of unity may be outside the realm of God's definition for unity. Legalists always have a corrupted view of unity. Their understanding of unity is actually union. They seek to be unified when everyone marches according to their opinions and interpretations that they believe are binding. We must always keep in mind that cults are the most unified religious groups on earth. When legalists have produced "unity," they have actually produced a sect, or possibly, a cult.

We must never forget that cults and sects will always cast out of their fellowship those who come with fresh ideas, or challenging matters of opinion. There is no freedom in a denomination that is the result of a sectarian spirit. Even churches that were established on the foundation of biblical authority will often circle around and deny freedom of thought once their heritage is established as the foundation of their faith. Their "heritage of doctrinal interpretations" becomes the new catechism that destroys the freedom of the adherents. The evidence that a group is a denomination is if there is no freedom for biblical interpretation, or biblical application (methodology) within the denominated group.

Chapter 2

DISUNITY AMONG THE EARLY DISCIPLES

The early Jewish disciples of Jesus were born into a culture that promoted exclusion. They were Jews who were taught from their youth to exclude all other cultures. Throughout His ministry, Jesus' Jewish disciples struggled with their Jewish exclusiveness while they walked with Jesus. After the Holy Spirit manifested the kingdom of God through His baptism of the apostles in A.D. 30, the sectarian spirit of the Jewish Christians seemed to linger as the church moved from being predominately Jewish to predominately Gentile. In order to reflect on ourselves, we mention here the struggle the early disciples seemed to have with their Jewish sectarian spirit. Our study of their attitudes helps us define the nature of sectarianism. It helps us understand this attitude that was so contrary to the one universal body of Christ, and the fact that the first disciples, who were Jewish, were to go into all nationalities of the world.

A. Excluding others from the work of God:

During the ministry of Jesus, John and some of the other disciples, had witnessed the work of an unknown disciple who was not affiliated with their group. The unknown disciple was casting out demons in the name of Jesus (Mk 9:38-40). The disciples' reaction to what they witnessed is interesting. *"Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in Your name, and* ***he did not follow us****. And we forbade him* ***because he did not follow us****"* (Mk 9:38). Notice that the disciples forbade the unknown exorcist from casting out demons because he did not follow "us." Their reaction betrayed their sectarian spirit. The word "us" indicates that they would have continued in their sectarian spirit to the development of a denominational group if Jesus had not corrected them. Sectarians, as the disciples on this occasion, will always use "us" and "them" terminology. And in using such terminology, a denomination is formed.

The unknown disciple was not of their party, and thus, what he was doing, to them, was obviously wrong.

In the spirit of true sectarianism, they set themselves up as judges in the matter. They executed judgment on one who brought glory to Jesus, for what he was doing was "in the name of Jesus." But still, he was not of their party.

The disciples were sectarian in their thinking and behavior in these early days of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' response to the disciples concerning their sectarian spirit was pointed. *"**Do not forbid him**, for there is no one who will do a miracle in My name who can afterward speak evil of Me. **For he who is not against us is on our side**"* (Mk 9:39,40).

It is difficult for the sectarian to believe that God can work through other individuals who are not of his particular party. His party spirit hinders him from accepting the fact that God is out there working in order to bring about His purpose. When Paul said *"that all things work together for good to those who love God,"* we must not assume that all the work of God is solely with those who love God (Rm 8:28). He certainly works through others on behalf of the saints in order to bring about good for the saints.

When God promised that He will *"make a way of escape so that you may be able to endure"* temptation, we must assume that He works through others in order to provide a way of escape for His children (1 Co 10:13). The sectarian believes that God works exclusively through His children. But the fact is that **He works in all ways on behalf of His children**. Since His ways are past finding out, we should caution ourselves in limiting His work (Rm 11:33). **The spirit of sectarianism seeks to limit the work of God on behalf of His people**. And in the case of John and the other disciples, their sectarian spirit led them to forbid the good works of the unknown disciple because he was not of their party of disciples. Sectarianism has a narrow view of the work of God. The sectarian limits the work of God though God may choose to work through anyone in order to carry out His purpose of bringing His people into eternal dwelling.

B. Excluding other races:

The case of the disciples' encounter with the Samaritan woman was an opportunity for Jesus to make His Jewish disciples aware of their racial sectarianism (Jn 4:3-42). The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, who were a mixed race between the Jews and Gentiles. Though the Samaritans resided within the land of Palestine, the Jews separated themselves from the Samaritans. They did so because they believed that the Samaritans were not heirs of the promises of God. They based their argument on this thinking because the Samaritans were not the true Israel of God.

The occasion for the encounter of the disciples with a woman from Samaria happened when Jesus went through Samaritan territory on His way from Judea to Galilee (Jn 4:3,4). At about midday, Jesus and the disciples came to Jacob's Well that was near the city of Samaria. While the disciples went into the city to buy food for the journey, a Samaritan woman came to the well for water. It was there that Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, and set the stage for the disciples to manifest their racial sectarianism.

While the disciples were in the city, Jesus asked the woman for water. The response of the woman in John 4:9 explains the scenario that Jesus established for the sake of His disciples. *"Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink, since I am a woman of Samaria?'"* John, in his narrative of the account, added, *"(For Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans)"* (Jn 4:9). After the conversation of Jesus with the woman, wherein she realized that Jesus was greater than a prophet, His disciples eventually returned from the city and discovered that He was not only talking with a woman, but with a Samaritan woman. John recorded, *"**And they marveled that He talked with a woman**"* (Jn 4:27).

They were in Samaritan territory. Their marvel was not only that Jesus had a conversation with a woman, but their sectarianism went deeper. He talked with a **Samaritan woman**. As Jews, the disciples had no dealings with the Samaritans. The occasion manifested their racial sectarianism because of their reaction.

Sectarianism will often raise its ugly head when different races of people or tribal groups encounter one another in their fellowship as the body of Christ. There is probably nothing greater that destroys the fellowship of the saints than sectarianism that comes in among disciples who are of different racial or tribal groups. Wickedness is revealed when believers of different racial groups refrain from coming together because of either race, tribe or gender. God is no respecter of persons (At 10:34,35; Rm 2:11; Cl 3:25; Js 2:1-13; 1 Pt 1:17). Those who would show respect of persons in reference to either race, tribe or gender, therefore, are not behaving according to the character of God who created all races from one man (At 17:26). If one's racial sectarianism is manifested by racial discrimination, then one does not reflect godliness in his life. Paul concluded, *"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 3:28).

C. Excluding other cultural groups:

It was the custom of the Jews to keep themselves from fellowshipping with other cultures. They had been commanded by God throughout their history to maintain their Jewish identity as the Israel of God. The reason for this was that God wanted it to be manifested that the promise of the Blessing that was made to the fathers through Abraham was fulfilled in the coming of the Christ (Gn 12:1-3). And from the seedline of Abraham, through the nation of Israel, the Blessing came through Jesus (Gl 3:15-18; 4:4). After the fulfillment of the promise, the physical identity of Israel was to fade away in Christ (Gl 3:26-29). Unfortunately, some of the early Jewish disciples had a very difficult time in allowing their Jewishness to fade away in Christ. As a result, the social structure of their culture was contrary to the nature of the great commission of Jesus, for Jesus had commanded that the disciples go to every nation of people and preach the gospel to every ethnic group (See Mt 28:19,20, Mk 16:15).

With the preceding thought in mind, notice carefully what Peter said to Cornelius, a Gentile, upon his arrival at Cornelius' house (At 10,11). *"You know that it is an **unlawful** thing for a man who is a Jew to keep company with or come to one of **another nation**"* (At 10:28). If God had not shown a special vision to Peter to go to the house of this Gentile, we wonder if Peter would have carried out the great commission to preach the gospel to this one who was of "another nation"?

Peter's cultural sectarianism was strong. God knew this, and thus, He chose him as the one to whom the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles would be introduced. The message from God through Peter to all Jews was that if Peter, who was a true Jew, could go into the house of a Gentile and preach the gospel, then all Jewish believers should do the same. The unique case of Peter being led by God to the house of Cornelius was not only for the purpose of saving Cornelius and opening the gospel door to the Gentiles. It was also for the purpose of leading the Jews out of their exclusiveness of Jewish culture into every ethnic group of the world (Mt 28:19).

When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he took Jewish witnesses with him. The sectarianism of these Jews was manifested when they witnessed the coming of the Spirit upon the household of Cornelius. *"**And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished**, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out also on the Gentiles"* (At 10:45).

When Peter and the Jewish witnesses returned to Jerusalem, they were confronted by the Jerusalem brethren. *"So when Peter came to Jerusalem, those who were of the circumcision **contended with him**, saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them"* (At 11:3). However, after Peter explained what had happened, *"they held their peace and glorified God"* (At 11:18).

What is significant about the case of Cornelius was that it took a special vision from God to get Peter out of his Jewish cultural cocoon in order for him to obey the great commission. It took a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the household of Cornelius to convince Peter, and those Jewish brethren who were with him, that God wanted the Gentiles to hear and obey the gospel. It took all the preceding to convince the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem the same truth. Cultural sectarianism is ugly when it becomes a pattern of behavior that limits one's fellowship to a specific cultural group. It is a sin that hinders the preaching of the gospel across cultural barriers. It initially held up the carrying out of the great commission of Jesus to preach the gospel to every nation (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16).

D. Excluding others to start one's own "church":

Peter embarrassed himself in Antioch where the church was composed primarily of Gentiles (Gl 2:11-21). He knew better concerning how he behaved when fellow Jews came from Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he allowed his Jewish spirit of exclusion to be carried out in his behavior. He separated himself from the Gentile brethren when he was intimidated by his fellow Jews who came up from the heart of Judaism, that is, Jerusalem. Paul later wrote of the incident, *"But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because **he stood condemned**"* (Gl 2:11).

Now what Peter did in Antioch was serious since he stood condemned because of his behavior. Before the visitors came from Jerusalem, Peter behaved according to the spirit of unity that we have in Christ. *"Before certain men came from James* [in Jerusalem], ***he ate with the Gentiles**"* (Gl 2:12).

Peter's previous vision from God and encounter with Cornelius had proved to him that no racial or cultural sectarianism should manifest itself in the behavior of those who were one in Christ (At 10,11). He was thus having a good time in fellowshipping the Gentiles of the church in Antioch. *"But when they* [the Jews from Jerusalem] *came, **he withdrew and separated himself**, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the other Jews likewise joined in his hypocrisy, to the point that even Barnabas was **carried away with their hypoc-***

risy" (Gl 2:12,13). This could have been the beginning of "Peter's church" in the city of Antioch.

Peter, Barnabas, and his fellow Jews in Antioch, had no problem with fellowshipping the Gentile brethren before the Jerusalem visitors. But the legalistic Jewish brethren from Jerusalem threatened their Jewishness. Peter, Barnabas, and the other Antioch Jewish brethren, were intimidated by the legalistic Jerusalem brethren. As a result, when Peter behaved according to his cultural sectarianism, he "stood condemned" for his behavior. He essentially started another "church" that was composed exclusively of Jews. His behavior was a regression to church politics for the sake of conforming to the cultural sectarianism that was practiced by the Jewish brethren.

Peter, as well as the other Jewish brethren in Antioch, *"**were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel**"* (Gl 2:14). Regardless of the reasons, when one separates himself from other brethren for purposes other than false teaching, **he is not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel**. He is being hypocritical. He stands condemned. Practicing sectarianism in our relationship with the people of God will cause one to lose his soul.

What the Antioch case teaches is that in moments of confrontation concerning brotherhood issues, one should certainly guard himself from taking sides in matters of opinion. What the Jerusalem brethren initially brought was their cultural sectarianism from Jerusalem that was based on the Jewish rite of circumcision. Circumcision was an outward manifestation of one's conformity to a legal interpretation of law (See Gl 5:1-6). Peter, Barnabas, and the other resident Jewish brethren in Antioch "fell in line" with the party of Jewish legalists who came from Jerusalem. Their separation from their fellow Gentile brethren in Antioch brought them under condemnation because their behavior denied the very nature of the unity of the body of Christ. Add to this the fact that the foundation upon which they established the "circumcision church" was contrary to the freedom from perfect law-keeping that we have in Christ (Gl 2:16; 5:1).

E. Exclusion based on personalities:

When Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians, the church in Corinth was divided into at least three sects (1 Co 1:10-13). Each sect was loyal to their favorite personality. Some said, "We are of Paul." Some said, "We are of Apollos." Others said, "We are of Cephas." Nevertheless, there were the faithful who knew better, and thus, they said, "We are of Christ." **Anytime a group of people give their allegiance to a human leader over Christ, they become a sect**. Some of the Corinthians had become sectarian in their behavior because different groups aligned themselves with their favorite personality. Fortunately in this case, the personalities, Cephas, Apollos and Paul, **did not** promote such sectarian behavior. They were only the occasion for the sectarian spirit that existed among some of the Corinthians to manifest itself.

Paul began his correction of this sectarian division in the Corinthian church by pleading, *"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). This is the standing principle of unity by which the people of God should be judged. The spirit of sectarianism is contrary to this principle, and thus, sectarianism must be opposed whenever disciples find themselves being divided from one another because of personalities. **No disciple can have a truly Christ-centered faith if he allows his allegiance to some man on earth to stand between him and Christ**. Cults are started when some leader casts his spell over innocent people who give their allegiance to him.

Everything that we are exhorted to do as brothers and sisters in Christ speaks against the spirit of sectarianism. We are to be of *"one accord"* and *"of one mind"* (Ph 2:2). In order to preserve this unity, we must, as Paul wrote, *"let nothing be done through rivalry"* (Ph 2:3). We must not compete with one another. We must not do anything through *"empty conceit,"* thinking that we are better than our brothers (Ph 2:3). If we exalt ourselves over our brothers and sisters, then we are living contrary to the spirit of unity that must be characteristic of the body of Christ. In order to guard ourselves against a spirit of sectarianism that would lead to sects among us, we must *"in humility of mind let each esteem others better than themselves"* (Ph 2:3). By living this way, we will dwell in the unity of brethren (Ps 133:1). We will prevent ourselves from developing sects among ourselves similar to what happened among the Corinthian brethren.

F. Exclusion for the sake of power:

In some way Diotrephes had gained an authoritative position among the disciples to whom John wrote and who were in the area of where Gaius lived (See 3 Jn 9-12). The case of Diotrephes reveals the behavior of the sectarian who calls disciples after himself, and then, controls those disciples by his dominant personality. A

sectarian who seeks to dominate others, as Diotrephes, will (1) love to be first, (2) not receive other preachers from outside his group, (3) unjustly slander other evangelists with malicious words, (4) personally refuse to receive other brethren, (5) forbid others who receive other brethren, and then, (6) cast out of his party those who do not obey his demands (3 Jn 9,10). John referred to this sectarian practice as "evil" (3 Jn 11). And notice, *"He who does evil has not seen God"* (3 Jn 11). The sectarian who enacts his sectarian attitude by dominating others is doing evil. He does not know the Son of God who prayed that His disciples may all *"be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us"* (Jn 17:21).

Paul warned that dominant personalities would come who would rise up among the leaders of the church. *"Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things,* ***to draw away the disciples after themselves****"* (At 20:30). These "perverse things" would result from the twisting of the Scriptures, which some would do to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16).

A sectarian is often identified by his unique doctrine that has no biblical authority, which doctrine he binds on others. But even worse, some sectarian groups are defined by their twisted interpretations of the Scriptures. Some who build sects fail to study their Bibles, and thus, to them the Bible is hard to understand (1 Pt 3:16). Peter said that they are "untaught and unstable," and thus, they distort the Scriptures to their own destruction. Sectarian leaders are able to do this because there are many followers who ***"will not endure sound teaching****. But to suit their itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires"* (2 Tm 4:3). They will thus ***"turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables"*** (2 Tm 4:4). When we connect one who is untaught in the Scriptures, with those who have itching ears, **we always end up with another sect**.

We live in a world of Christendom today that is burdened with "pastors" and "prophets" who are untaught, and thus, are leading "itching ear churches" down a path of destruction. It would be good to mention here the warning of James. *"My brethren, be not many of you teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment"* (Js 3:1). Before one would assume the responsibility of leading a group of God's people, he should be sure he is a student of the word of God.

Some have often asked why God would allow untaught leaders to lead the people of God. The answer is simple. God created us with freedom to make our own decisions. However, as free-moral beings, we will give account before Him of our beliefs and behavior (2 Co 5:10). We must never forget what Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

> *... 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****.*

The fact that the early disciples had to grow out of their sectarian attitudes reveals that we too must grow out of ours. It is wrong to harbor a sectarian spirit by simply saying that this is the way we are. Sectarianism is something out of which we must grow because it keeps the people of God away from one another.

From the examples of sectarianism that are revealed in the Scriptures, we could draw some conclusions in order to correct any sectarianism that we may be harboring in our hearts. We must always keep in mind that the spirit of sectarianism is the foundation for division and denominationalism. An independent denomination may exist because of a particular identity that is promoted by the leader, or leaders. An independent denomination remains separate from all other independent denominations because of a spirit of sectarianism. Because of sectarian leaders, the members of denominations are often encouraged not to associate with those of other sects. They are encouraged to remain separate from others lest their denomination lose its identity.

If a group of denominations form a union, they too can manifest an exclusive spirit by keeping themselves denominated (divided) from other unions or associations of denominations who have identified themselves by different catechisms of belief or codes of conduct. Traditional religions usually keep themselves denominated from other traditional religions. They do so because each association of traditional religion has a heritage they must defend in order to identify and validate themselves as a unique association or alliance of denominations.

We must conclude that sectarianism runs deep in Christendom. The tremendous diversity of religionists who claim a part of Christendom reveals the fact that men covet their denominational identity more than oneness in Christ. They validate their identity as "Christian" by their membership with a particular denomination more than their personal relationship with Christ.

Chapter 3

IDENTITY OF THE SECTARIAN SPIRIT

As we study through the identity of the spirit of sectarianism in this chapter, we are sure each one of us will find himself somewhat sectarian in some area. What is important to remember, however, is that we must continually struggle against this spirit. It is the spirit of exclusion that keeps brethren away from one another, and subsequently, works against the unity that we have in Christ. It also keeps us away from those we may be able to bring to a knowledge of the truth.

The apostle Paul was nonsectarian in all his beliefs and ministry. And for this reason, he was not afraid to take the gospel to any man in any place. We would be of the same spirit, as he exhorted, *"Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Co 11:1)..

There are reasons why the spirit of sectarianism leads to a unique denominational group, and thus, encourages those of that group to shun others. The diversity of denominations that exists today manifests that there are many ways the spirit of sectarianism is carried out in the lives of religiously minded people. This is especially true in reference to the vast assortment of independent churches that exist under the umbrella of Christendom.

With the principles of the preceding two chapters in mind, it is essential to break down some of the reasons for the existence of so many sectarian groups that exist under the umbrella of Christendom. Either one or more of the reasons of this chapter must be strong in the minds of the denominated. Sectarian feelings are strong because disciples are led to ignore Jesus' prayer for unity among His followers (Jn 17:20,21).

Here are some of the reasons and curses of the spirit of sectarianism that has played itself out in causing so much division and denominationalism in Christendom:

A. Sects have religious identities.

All Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christian. The sectarian is truly religious. But because he has forsaken the authority of the word of God as the validation for his religiosity, he is simply religious. The sect of which he is a member is simply a religious sect that is not scripturally validated as Christian. If the sect is composed of a membership of people who have not obeyed the gospel, then it is only a sect of religious people. This is so because the word of God plays a very small role in the existence of the sect to which he belongs, for the members have little concern about salvation that is according to the instructions of the word of God.

We would not, therefore, criticize some sects because of their religiosity. Sometimes, they are very religious because of their lack of scriptural validation. In fact, the less Bible oriented the group, the more the adherents seem to seek validation through extreme religiosity. This is why many sects have tremendously noisy, and often chaotic assemblies. The emotional energy of their assemblies is the only proof they have that the Holy Spirit is supposedly among them. The more hysterical the assembly, the more it is assumed that God is among them.

For the preceding reason, sects are often more religious than they are "Christian." They are often very religious people carrying out religious ceremonies, but do not have the foundation of the Bible as the authority for their existence. The sectarian has lost his biblical orientation, and thus his scriptural relationship with Jesus. He trusts, therefore, in either a name, code of conduct, fellowship of loyal adherents, dress code, system or ceremony of assembly, or simply the emotional experiences of himself or his leaders. At least there is some unique trait that will identify the group and separate it from other parties. It takes only one sectarian mark of identity to build a sect.

B. Sects often focus on personalities.

Jesus knew the nature of people who were searching. *"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and were scattered,* ***like sheep having no shepherd****"* (Mt 9:36). It is easy for a dynamic personality or speaker to take advantage of the searching nature of the sheep. If one is focused on himself as a leader, he will with his gift of speaking flatter people into submission to his personality (See Rm 16:17,18). Such leaders will *"****by appealing words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the innocent****"* (Rm 16:18). The deceived followers may not have a sectarian spirit. But because of their loyalty to their leader, they will be drawn away into a sect of believers after their leader. They will then become just another denomination.

Not every member of a sect is sectarian. Some have innocently given their loyalty to a sectarian leader. However, if their loyalty to their leader leads them away from other believers, then they are being sectarian.

C. Sects often have legal identities.

It is inherent within the spirit of sectarianism to always establish traits of identity in order to keep adherents faithful to the denominated group. It is for this reason that the denominated group always calls for those who would join the group to adhere to some statement of faith that is often focused on one's commitment to the beliefs of "the church." Since "the church" is identified by specific traits that separate it from other "churches," then the newly "won" proselyte must conform to the legal identity of the group to which he has been converted. "New converts classes" often become indoctrination sessions where new converts are cloned according to the "identity" of the church to which they were converted, often forgetting that one is converted to Christ, not church.

We have found that many house churches fall victim to sectarian legalism in reference to meeting in the homes of the members. Some house groups have wrongly identified themselves as "faithful" because they meet in houses. Certainly, the early Christians met in their homes (Rm 16:3-5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15; Pl 1,2). However, meeting in homes was never a legal doctrine. Meeting in homes never validates one as a faithful Christian. Because some house church people have claimed such, they have at the same time identified themselves as sectarian because they have made the meeting in the homes of the members a code of identity. The leader of such house groups, as Diotrephes, may have had a falling out with some authority in an institutional church, and subsequently, pulled away his own group of disciples who now meet in their homes. This is sectarian behavior if we assume that faithfulness demands meeting in a home. It is not wrong to assemble in homes. But to teach that meeting in homes is a sign of either spiritual superiority or legal validation, is to allow our sectarian spirit to bear the fruit of denominationalism.

The early Christians did not meet in their homes because such was a matter of doctrine. They met in their homes out of necessity, and because they wanted to maintain a closer relationship with one another in small groups. It was their choice, not their doctrine. And so it is today. When disciples meet in small groups they maintain a closer relationship with one another. And in a closer relationship with one another they are better able to stir up love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25). But meeting in homes was never a mandate of the early church.

D. Sects demand membership:

It is the spirit of sectarianism to demand the allegiance of adherents to a particular party. Allegiance is required in order that the members indicate their separation from other groups. This is often done by calling on new adherents to "place membership" with the party to which they would sign their allegiance. The problem with this is that there is no such call in the Bible for one to "place his membership" with any particular group of disciples, or when one moves from one group to another.

Upon our obedience to the gospel, believers are recorded in the Lamb's book of life (Ph 4:3; Rv 3:5; 13:8; 20:12). One must always remember that when he obeys the gospel in baptism, God adds him to the ekklesia (church) of His people (At 2:47). The citizenship of baptized believers is in heaven (Ph 3:20). Membership is God's business, not ours. Disciples must take confidence in the fact that they have been enrolled by God as citizens in heaven, and thus, they do not need a second enrollment (membership) on earth with a particular sect. **Our membership with a sect on earth does not validate our citizenship in heaven**.

Denominations that are the result of the spirit of sectarianism, however, seek proselytes to place membership with their unique group. Once membership is placed with a specific group, attendance at the assigned assemblies of the group, or other codes of doctrinal identity, become the marks of one's "faithfulness" to the group. Faithfulness is thus relegated to a legal compliance with the catechism that identifies the sect.

The preceding call for "faithfulness" is illustrated by the sect of "false brethren" who came in among the brethren in Jerusalem. This was the case when Paul went up to Jerusalem after fourteen years of absence. On this occasion, he took with him, Titus, a Gentile (Gl 2:1,2). In the Jewish church of Jerusalem, circumcision was a legal code of faithfulness and identity among some of the Jewish disciples. Unless one was circumcised, he could not join in the fellowship of the disciples, and thus, he was considered unfaithful (At 15:1,2).

Paul stood against legalistic identities. He did so because it was a denial of the truth of the gospel. Many years after the Jerusalem visit, he wrote of the incident, *"But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised"* (Gl 2:3). Because some brethren sought to make circumcision a legal identity of their sect of Christianity, Paul referred to them as "false brethren" (Gl 2:4). They secretly *"sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus,* ***that they might bring us into bondage****"* (Gl 2:4). Paul's answer was clear to those who would seek a legal identity of their sect. *"To whom we did not yield in subjec-*

tion even for an hour, ***so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you****"* (Gl 2:5).

We must always remember Peter's exhortation in 2 Peter 2:19. *"For by whom a man is overcome,* ***of the same is he brought into bondage****."* Sects promote bondage. Those who would promote the bondage, are false brethren who come into the fellowship of the body of disciples in order to spy out their liberty. If we allow ourselves to be taken into bondage, the truth of the gospel will not continue with us.

E. Sects recruit proselytes.

This point of definition of sectarianism was manifested in the situation that Paul faced in the Galatian church. He wrote to the Galatians concerning the legalistic Judaizing teachers who had come among them, *"****They zealously recruit you****, but not for good. Yes, they want to exclude you* ***so that you might be zealous for them****"* (Gl 4:17). The sectarian leader recruits people to his camp of beliefs. His mission, therefore, is to save the saved. His outreach is often questionable because his recruiting is that others might follow him, not Christ. Sectarians move among the saved in order to recruit the saved to their unique opinions and Bible interpretations, or as Paul stated, to have a following for themselves (At 20:30).

One can know that he is sectarian in spirit when he seeks to manipulate people into believing his own opinions and interpretations. If a sectarian is gifted with speaking, he often creates a sect by convincing others that his opinions and interpretations are correct. Through his fair speech, he brings others into the bondage of his unique beliefs. And by doing such, **he excludes his followers from the true body of believers**. Followers of such leaders need to understand that when they are recruited by a legalistic leader, they are excluded from those who continue in the faith.

F. Sects are often competitive.

The Corinthian church had some among the disciples who were very sectarian in their behavior. As previously stated, they had denominated themselves into allegiances to at least three personalities: Apollos, Cephas and Paul (1 Co 1:12,13). Their sectarian behavior was defined by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:12 when Paul spoke of the apostles' behavior in their relationship with one another in comparison to the sectarian behavior of some brethren in Corinth. *"For we do not class or compare ourselves with* ***those who commend themselves****. But they,* ***measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves****, are not wise."*

The sectarian sees himself in competition with fellow brothers in Christ. His competitive nature encourages him to commend himself by seeking the chief seats (See Mt 23:6). Sectarians measure themselves with others in order to exalt themselves above others. When preachers are sectarian in spirit, they will compete with other preachers of neighboring churches. A sectarian preacher who compares himself with the following of another preacher can never understand the universal oneness of the church of Christ. He will always be concerned about what others are doing, or calling themselves, in order to do the same or better. For the purpose of self-exaltation, he often seeks to outgrow what he considers competing churches in the community.

Sectarianism that is manifested by a competitive spirit is clearly manifested in the titles that preachers seek to take upon themselves in order not to be left behind in the pastoral competition. One preacher will designate himself as an "apostle," so a preacher in a neighboring church must also call himself an apostle. One person is "ordained" a pastor, and all others also seek the ordination. One goes to Bible school in order to receive a diploma, and others feel they too must graduate with a diploma from a Bible school. One receives a Bachelor's Degree, but a competitor must have a Master's Degree. Those who compete against those with Master's Degrees seek Doctor's Degrees. This spirit of competition is subsequently continued in the sects for which these "degreed" leaders preach, for some sects will not support a preacher unless he has some degree, regardless of what degree of work he has done in the kingdom of God. So goes the competition of nonsense among the sects of preachers considering themselves above others and "measuring themselves with themselves." Sectarians need to read again Paul's exhortation to the sectarians in the Corinthian church, *"****that none of you take pride in one against another****"* (1 Co 4:6).

G. Sects always build fences.

The very definition of a sect is that there is some type of fence built around the adherents of the group in order to guarantee the allegiance of each member, and thus, continue the identity and existence of the sect. The fence, or fences, can either be loyalty to a dynamic leader, some unique doctrinal statement, an accepted tradition, heritage, or code of conduct. Fences are built for the purpose of separating one sect from another. Sometimes, fences are built by the sect in order to preserve what the sectarian believes is the true church. And since he believes that his is the true church, all other churches represent deception and darkness. A sectarian, therefore, is

one who defends his fence for the sake of preserving the unique identity of his sect as a beacon of light to the community, not realizing that his fence produces darkness. There may be light inside a stone wall fence, but the fences cast a shadow of darkness on the outside the perimeter of the fences.

It is the nature of any religious group to eventually develop unique traits of identity. We are creatures of habit, and in reference to our particular religious group, over time we establish unique marks of identity that often set us apart from others. When these marks of identity become entrenched in our group, they become the foundation of comfort by which we validate ourselves as a church.

When the marks of identity (traditions) are threatened, we feel that our church is threatened. And actually it is. Anyone who validates his faith by the traditional religious behavior of his particular group, will feel threatened when the traditions are challenged. Those sects that focus on their heritage or tradition as the authority for their existence will always feel threatened when the traditions are threatened. Unfortunately, when a particular group establishes its marks of identity, the adherents often fall into a zealous, if not vicious spirit of defense in order to perpetuate the existence of the sect. The validation for existence as a group is not the word of God, and thus, the members cannot resort to the Scriptures in times of threat in order to defend their existence as a church. It was for this reason that Paul challenged the Corinthians, *"**Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith**. Test your own selves ..."* (2 Co 13:5).

With the word of God, true Christians *"do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 Jn 4:1). A church that is based on the word of God will always seek those who speak as the oracles of God (1 Pt 4:11). They will not feel threatened when challenged, for they simply resort to the word of God. And no one is sectarian when the word of God is the foundation for his faith and behavior. However, a sect will shut the door to anyone who brings a Bible in order to test their existence according to the authority of the word of God. Sectarians can determine if they are a sect if they are fearful of Bible teaching.

H. Sects maintain comfort zones.

The irony of sectarianism is that it is emotionally more secure than walking by faith and trusting in the word of God. The sectarian finds more comfort in maintaining the heritage or traditions of the past, than in searching the Scriptures in order to continue the discovery of new teaching in the word of God (See At 17:11). And because of this, it is easy to fall into the trap of being a sect, rather than walking by faith.

We simply find comfort in following a legalistic pattern of behavior. Since the forefathers of our faith established the pattern, then it is easy to follow the pattern of our forefathers' faith. When churches start quoting as authority their forefathers, rather than the Scriptures, then we know that a sect exists. In such sects, leaders are usually sent to the schools that represent the sect in order to guarantee that their future leaders know the pattern of faith of the forefathers. The diplomas that hang on the walls of the sectarian leader, therefore, are a stamp of approval that the said leader has agreed to believe and promote the identifying trademarks of the sect. We feel very comfortable when we walk into the office of the sectarian preacher and the diploma from the sect's colleges and universities hang on his wall. His diplomas certify him as "one of us," and therefore, he can preach for us.

Establishing a comfort zone of legal religiosity was the problem with the sect of Pharisees in Israel during the days of Jesus'
ministry. Jesus confronted the Pharisees on a matter of legal comfort by saying, *"All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition"* (Mk 7:9). Jesus' illustration of the rejection of the commandment of God was in their tradition (heritage) of pronouncing something "Corban." He said, *"But you* [Pharisees] *say, 'If a man will say to his father or mother, "whatever I have that would help you* [parents] *is Corban"' (that is to say, given to God)"* (Mk 7:11). The financial assistance the children were to give to their parents was absconded by the religious leaders, the Pharisees. They conveniently pronounced that such assistance was "Corban," that is, "dedicated to God." Since this was a traditional teaching, the Pharisees were in the comfort zone of their legal theology that had been handed down to them by their forefathers. Of course, when something was "dedicated to God," it was given to them as God's representatives.

There is a great deal of comfort in the fact that our leadership is perpetuated by the certification of "our schools" that are supported by "our churches." We think this is somewhat different than the situation of the early disciples who were considered ignorant and unlearned men by the religious establishment (At 4:13). All the apostles had when they went forth as messengers for Jesus was Jesus and His word (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). We would assume that today this is still all that one needs to be a messenger for Jesus. There is no such thing in

the New Testament that one must be "ordained" in order to be qualified to go forth and preach the gospel. Only sects depend on the ordination of their preachers in order that they validate who can preach for them.

I. Sects use unique names.

In order to guarantee loyalty to a particular group, sectarians use names in order to identify their party of adherents. Sects can be very inventive concerning the use of names. We have on our files the "Jesus Celebration Church," "New Life Assembly of God Church," "The Alliance Church," "Christ Intervention Church," "Bible Evangelical Church," and so on. Sects manifest great ingenuity in selecting a name in order to identify their particular group within the community of numerous denominations.

Some seek to validate their groups doctrinally by the sectarian use of a reference to God's people in the New Testament. We thus have the "Church of God," "The Church of Christ," "The Family of God" or "The Church of The Firstborn." **The fact that there are several different phrases used in the New Testament to refer to God's people is clear evidence that God never intended to place a unique sectarian name on His people**. However, in order for the sectarian to set his group apart from others, he changes a simple description of the people of God in the New Testament into a proper name in order to separate his group from all other groups.

The problem in using a unique name in order to identify a unique assembly of people is that when individuals assemble under the name, they lose their individuality in their relationship with Jesus. When Jesus said that He was the vine, and the apostles were the branches, He was not talking about groups as branches, but individuals (Jn 15:5). Our relationship as a member of the body of Christ is direct and individual with Jesus. Our relationship is not via a unique assembly of people that come together under a unique name. Paul referred to our individual relationship with Christ as members of the body when he stated, *"But now God has set the members, **each one** of them in the body, just as He has desired. And if they were all one member, where would be the body? But now **they are many members**, but one body"* (1 Co 12:18-20). The organic body of Christ exists because of the individual members. The members do not exist because the body exists. There would be no body if there were no members. When the first believer came out of the waters of baptism in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost, the body of Christ was born. It was born because repentant believers on earth submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus from heaven (See Ph 2:5-11). And when they submitted in obedience to the gospel, they became Christians (At 11:26). Baptized believers, therefore, individually live under the name "Christian" (See 1 Pt 4:16).

Regardless of where we are assembled any day of the week, we still have a personal and individual relationship with Jesus as a member of His body, and thus, live as a Christian. The body does not exist because of its assemblies. The place where members may be on Sunday does not infringe on their personal relationship with Jesus, neither does it determine their membership of the body. If it did, then we would be questioning a very clear concept that Jesus made in John 4:21-24. *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth"* **wherever they are** as individual Christians (Jn 4:24). This means that neither on a unique mountain place, nor in a favorite city place, as Jerusalem, is the true worship of individual Christians to be confined. But in "every place" individual believers can pour out their hearts in worship. Our worship of God is not validated by a unique place, nor by assembling under the name of a particular sect, regardless of the origin of the name. When one is added to the body of Christ by God, he is a member of the worldwide body of Christ every hour and every day of his life. If he is persecuted as a result of this commitment, then he is persecuted because of the name "Christian," not the name of some particular sect. Peter said that *"if **anyone** suffers as a Christ, let **him** not be ashamed, but let **him** glorify God **in this name**"* (1 Pt 4:16). The statement of Peter focuses on "anyone" and "him," not the name of some church. Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that we suffer in the name of the church.

J. Sects often reject one another.

Once the spirit of sectarianism has produced a denomination, then the sectarian spirit of the adherents is further intensified by the denominated members' judgment of other denominations. And because the denomination has identified itself as the "true" church, then it seeks to maintain its identity by giving itself a unique name and by keeping itself pure from other denominated groups. The sectarianism of the denomination is revealed in the fact that the adherents may view the assortment of local independent denominations as the identity of the universal church. They see themselves as just one individual autonomous group of the whole.

The problem with this view of the universal church is that it focuses on groups and not individuals. We must remind ourselves again that when Jesus said to the twelve

disciples that He was the vine and they were the branches (Jn 15:5), that the pronoun "you" did not refer to groups, **but to individuals**. A lengthy explanation does not need to be made to support the clear fact that our relationship with Jesus is individual, **not via a group of individuals**, that is, a "local church."

When Jesus approached the churches of Asia in Revelation, He always concluded, "*He* [individual] *who has an ear, let him hear ....*" (See Rv 2:7,11,17). There were faithful individuals among the assemblies of all the seven churches. Though the churches in the cities as a whole were moving into apostasy, some individual members of the universal church in the cities were remaining faithful. Jesus' relationship is always with individuals. And individuals always have a personal relationship with Him.

However, when a group of individuals manifest their sectarianism as a group, they will often separate themselves from other groups of individuals (churches) with whom they do not agree or consider unfaithful to the truth. Some churches have even gone so far as to disfellowship entire groups of individuals because they did not agree with the teaching of a particular individual who assembled with the disfellowshipped group of disciples. This practice is nowhere found in the Scriptures and is contrary to how Jesus dealt with the seven churches of Asia.

Diotrephes was sectarian in that he sought to covet and withdraw those disciples he dominated from all other disciples, even the apostle John (3 Jn 9,10). If others did not conform to his withdrawal from those with whom he disagreed, then he threatened to cast them out of his fellowship. His behavior was strictly sectarian in that he sought to develop an exclusive group that conformed to his beliefs and behavior. One who is sectarian in spirit always seeks to stand between Jesus and His disciples. If he is the leader of a particular group of disciples, he will stand between the group and Jesus by dominating the group and dictating their relationship with other groups of disciples.

K. Sects are inherently self-exclusive.

One can always identify his sectarian spirit by his unwillingness to reach out to others with whom he may disagree. The sectarian will often shun any association with those who are not of his faith. He will thus live within the comfort of his own religious cocoon. However, consider the nonsectarian behavior of Aquila and Priscilla. At one time in their ministry we find these two Christians meeting in a synagogue in Ephesus on the Sabbath (At 18:26). We do not know how long they had been meeting in the synagogue before they encountered Apollos. But if Aquila and Priscilla were sectarian in their behavior, then they would have never encountered the great evangelist Apollos in a synagogue. They would never have had the opportunity to instruct him more accurately in the word of God (At 18:26).

It appears that Aquila and Priscilla followed the custom of Paul, who regularly went from one religious center to another, specifically from one synagogue to another (At 17:1,2). At one time in his ministry, Paul even sought to go into the temple of Artemis in Ephesus in order to preach the gospel (At 19:30). His desire to speak to the riotous mob in the temple emphasizes his nonsectarian motivation to give everyone a chance to hear the gospel.

Sectarians are afraid to go into the temples and synagogues of religious people. They are often afraid because of their own spiritual insecurity. And in their insecurity, they misunderstand passages as 2 John 9,10, thinking that in some way they might be spiritually tarnished in the presence of unbelievers, or in some way giving heed to "false teachers." The sectarian will not give himself the opportunity of reaching out to other religious leaders. He will not because in his thinking, he feels that if others are empowered by more knowledge of the Bible than he is teaching his own group, others will go from his group to the rival group. And they should.

Unfortunately, the sectarian not only excludes others from his party, he will not allow himself to associate with those with whom he disagrees. Sometimes the problem goes beyond the preacher himself. He may want to make a friend of another religious leader. However, his sectarian group will not allow him to do so, thinking that he is befriending those against whom he should be in constant conflict. At least they may frown on his association with other religious workers because they are claiming his time. They do not want him "wasting time" with other religious leaders when he should be with them. Such churches need to talk to Jesus about this, for Jesus associated with whomever whenever (See Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34). Jesus would not allow His followers to keep Him from preaching the kingdom of God to others (See Lk 4:42-44).

L. Sects often minimize Bible study.

Everyone knows the response of the Bereans when Paul preached Jesus as the Messiah in the synagogue. They "*received the word with all readiness of mind and* ***searched the Scriptures daily*** *to see whether these things were so*" (At 17:11). This is not the picture of sectarian

behavior. In extreme cases as the Roman Catholic Church during the Dark Ages, the study of the Bible was actually forbidden. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church during those years of the 1500s and before, persecuted those who would even translate the Bible into the language of the people. William Tyndale was burned at the stake because he translated the Bible into English so that it could be read by the common people.

Sectarian leaders often behave as those about whom Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:7. There are those who are *"**always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**."* Though God desire that all come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:4), there are those, because of their prejudice as religious leaders, who can never come to the point of rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tm 2:15). Their questionable motives for being a religious leader will not allow them to be objective in their Bible studies. It is for this reason that those of their flock who have pure and objective motives in their Bible study must be suppressed if they come to the class with new truth that contradicts the position of the preacher on any matter of biblical interpretation.

Sectarian churches do not encourage participatory Bible classes where every person shares the results of his or her own personal studies. The reason for this is obvious. Sectarians must guard their identity by some tradition, doctrine or catechism. If the sect is led by a dominant leader, the leader believes that the group must conform to his understanding of the Scriptures. If in open Bible study one of the marks of identity of the sect is brought into question, then the validity of the sect is questioned. Religious leaders who lead sects, therefore, do not encourage their members to open their Bibles and *"examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves"* (2 Co 13:5). The sectarian is always in fear of discovering in Scripture something that might disqualify his sect. If one has built his "own church" according to his own religiosity, then he cannot allow the authority of the Scriptures to supplant his authority or the identity of his church.

M. Sects are often led by Balaamites.

This point is defined in 2 Peter 2:15 where Peter said that some *"**have forsaken the right way and gone astray**, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, **who loved the wages of unrighteousness**."* If there were ever a passage that spoke clearly about those who preach for money, this is the passage. Jude made a parallel statement in Jude 11. *"Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain and **have run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward** ...."*

It is truly unfortunate that there are religious leaders who preach the power of the gospel for the sake of increasing their purse. Through flattering lips, and emotional appeals for contributions, Balaamite preachers are often viciously sectarian in order to protect their flock for the sake of their salary. Their "evangelism" often has the ulterior motive of increasing the Sunday morning contribution for the sake of a raise in pay. Balaamite preachers are always sectarian, for their loyal adherents are the source of their paychecks. A preacher can sometimes determine the extent of his sectarian spirit by the degree by which he covets the contribution. And the adherents can often determine the level of the sectarian spirit of their preacher by the number of times he preaches on contributions.

This does not mean that we are not to support those who go forth for the sake of the name of Jesus. Mandates given in passages as 1 Corinthians 9 clearly teach that preachers must be supported. We must keep in mind, however, that we support preachers because they preach the gospel. They do not preach in order to be supported. And thus every supported preacher must ask himself if he would continue preaching if the church discontinued his support.

N. Sects often seek union, not unity.

It is not our plea in restoring Christianity to be detoured from our plea for unity by amalgamating different religious sects into unions or associations. True unity is God's business and blessing to all those who have obeyed the gospel. Unions are the efforts of men to bring independent sects, or denominations, together into alliances wherein each sect agrees not to debate or "sheep steal" from one another, nor to be involved in one another's autonomy. However, because sects confuse union as unity, they miss the unity of the Spirit that is the result of our common salvation (Jd 3).

Paul wrote that we are *"**eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**"* (Ep 4:3). Believers are blessed with unity when they obey the one gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gl 3:26,27). Unity is a blessing that is given by God, not orchestrated by man. For this reason, Christians are eager to maintain their blessing of unity that they have from God because they have obeyed the gospel.

Unfortunately, men seek to bless themselves with union by agreeing to disagree on matters of faith, while maintaining their own sectarian fences. They seek to be harmonious neighbors around whom each party has agreed to maintain its own doctrinal differences that often contradict one another. What many fail to see is that

the unity about which the Bible speaks is a spiritual oneness that is devoid of any sectarianism. No party spirit is to exist in the unity that we have from God. When one is baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he comes into unity with the (1) Father, (2) Son and (3) Holy Spirit that is based on the (4) authority of the word of Christ (Mt 28:19,20; Jn 14:15; 15:10; 1 Pt 4:11). If any one of these four essentials is forsaken, then there is no unity among the obedient. If anyone believes in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but denies the authority of the word of God, then he does not enjoy the unity that is a blessing from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If the authority of the word of God is forsaken, then the sectarian can never have God's blessing of unity. He cannot because he must deny the authority of the Scriptures in order to establish a union with those who maintain beliefs that are not based on the word of God. It is his binding where God has not bound that defines him and his adherents as a sect. For this reason, those who plead for true unity cannot call on the blessing of unity from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while at the same time they deny the authority of the word of God. **Christians enjoy the blessing of unity because they accepted the authority of the Scriptures in all matters of faith**.

The word of God must validate our faith. Our faith must not be validated by our traditions, feelings, heritages, or our catechisms of doctrine. True unity is a result of sincere baptized believers who trust in the authority of the Scriptures. Those who seek unity do not go to the councils of men in order to formulate an agreement for union. Unfortunately, we often send our admired leaders to councils to orchestrate a union of churches, while at the same time guard our sectarian behavior from becoming united with all those who have obeyed the gospel by baptism into Christ. We stand behind our iconic leaders, assuming that we have unity, when all they can produce is union that is devoid of the authority of the word of God. And in their state of sectarianism, many often cry out "Lord, Lord," and yet, never do the will of our Father in heaven (See Mt 7:21-23).

It is unfortunate that a sectarian spirit will divide those who call upon the one true and living God. Our common acceptance of the God of heaven as our Father does not guarantee that we will be united as the body of Christ. There is more to unity than accepting the same God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Brotherhood is guaranteed only when all those who accept the one God have submitted themselves to the authority of His will. One can claim to be a disciple of Jesus. However, Jesus said that one is His disciple when he obeys His will (Jn 14:15; 15:10,14).

When different fellowships of men give their allegiance to their favorite leadership, and subsequently reject loyalty to the authority of the word of God, they will never have unity. When we allow men to arise among us to draw away disciples after themselves, then we have denied our blessing of unity that comes by accepting the total authority that proceeds from King Jesus (At 20:30; Mt 28:18). Those who are sectarian in spirit always have favorite leaders. But those who defend the unity of the faith always focus their favoritism on Jesus and His word.

O. Sects often seek emotional validation.

It is the spirit of idolatry to create God after our own image and a religion after our own desires. The reason we do this is because we are often rebellious creatures who focus on ourselves. In our rebellious spirit, it is difficult for us to allow God to control us through the revelation of His written word (Hs 4:6). In our ignorance of His word, combined with our self-seeking religiosity, we create religiosity after our own intellect or emotional experiences. This is why there are so many sects in the religious world that find their validation for existence in some leader who has experienced a moment of emotional hysteria or had some illusive dream. Such sects exist on the foundation of human experience, and not on the word of God. And because these sects are founded on human experiences, it is quite difficult to turn such groups to the authority of God's word, since their personal experiences have priority over a "Thus saith the Lord."

The Bible is filled with warnings that men not follow after their emotional incantations in order to validate their religiosity (Dt 4:19; Is 44:25; 47:12,13; Hs 4:12; Zc 10:2; Mc 5:12,13). The Bible is filled with exhortations that believers exercise self-control in their behavior (At 24:25; 1 Co 7:5,9; 9:25; Gl 5:23; 1 Tm 2:15; 2 Tm 3:3; Ti 2:2; 2 Pt 1:6). And the Bible is filled with exhortations not to be deceived, even by our own emotional incantations and vivid dreams (Mt 24:4,5,11; Mk 13:5; 1 Jn 1:8; 2:26; 3:7; 2 Jn 7; Rv 2:20).

Emotional experiences and vivid dreams may validate people as religious, but we must always keep in mind that all religious people are not in a covenant relationship with God. Muslims and Hindus have ecstatic emotional experiences and vivid dreams. They are often intensely religious, and subsequently, validate their religiosity by their personal experiences and dreams. But this does not mean that their experiences and dreams

prove that they are of God. We do not deny that Christians have great emotional experiences, and sometimes, very vivid dreams. But we would question using such encounters with ourselves as proof that we are of God or God is with us. Many times our dreams and experiences contradict one another. Would we accuse God of sending conflicting messages? Regardless of our experiences, we must always center our discussions around Peter's exhortation, *"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Pet 4:11).

Some people endlessly talk about their supposed encounters with the Holy Spirit in their lives, but say little or nothing about the oracles of God. As long as there are enough people out there who have itching ears to hear and follow such things, there will be religious leaders who will lead "itching-ear churches."

There is a new witch doctor in town who has stolen concepts from the New Testament in order to make himself a "spiritual" leader of the people. He has mixed a little Bible with spiritualistic beliefs and come up with a spiritism by which he holds the people captive by his own emotional experiences. He has come with a message that all those who follow him can experience the same emotional hysteria by which he has validated his own faith. There are countless sects that are led by leaders who have deceived themselves, and thus, lead a church of deceived followers who know little of the word of God. God will allow such "spiritual" leaders to lead the deceived, but in the end, He will bring down judgment on all who loved and obeyed a lie (2 Th 2:9-12).

The leaders of emotionally validated churches are skilled in cheerleading audiences into "amens." With their personal experiences and dreams as a supposed validation of God's work in their own lives, these speakers lead others through their personal experiences and dreams, not the Bible. When cheerleading preachers are unlearned and untaught in the word of God, they always resort to personal experiences and dreams as the authority for their message, and their right to "preach." The people are subsequently convinced that God is working in the speaker's life, and thus, they are deceived into following a man and not the word of God. And so goes the leadership of thousands of independent churches that choose to follow someone's personal experiences and dreams, and not the Bible.

Belief is an emotional experience. But the difference between a sect of people who are emotionally out of control and the body of God's people is that God's **people do the will of the Father** (Mt 7:21). They have brought their minds and bodies under the control of God's word (See 1 Co 9:27). They add to their knowledge of God's word, **self-control** (2 Pt 1:6). They are a people who are controlled by God through their obedience to His word.

P. Sects deny the organic nature of the body of Christ.

Consider this last point in view of all those characteristics that identify many sectarian churches, which characteristics these churches often take pride in as a validation that they are a church of Christ. Jesus said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like **leaven** that a woman took and **hid** in three measures of meal until **the whole was leavened**"* (Mt 13:33).

The kingdom of God is within the hearts of the submitted (Lk 17:20,21). It is **hidden**. It **silently** works. Its effect goes throughout the **whole** community. The kingdom reign of Jesus moves the individual kingdom citizen to go about his or her community, patiently sowing the seed of the kingdom (Lk 8:11; At 5:42). There is no fanfare, for our desire is *"to lead a quiet life"* (1 Th 4:11; 2 Th 3:12). Kingdom citizens seek to *"lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty"* (1 Tm 2:2; 1 Pt 3:4). It is not the goal of kingdom citizens to be noticed, praised or promoted (Mt 23:6). The result of the kingdom reign of Jesus in the hearts of people moves them to organically influence communities for the glory of God (Cl 3:17; 1 Th 2:6).

The more we understand the organic nature and function of the ekklesia of Christ, the more we understand the difference between the expression of man-made religiosity and the true church of Christ. The spirit of sectarianism has certainly produced something strange in our world of Christendom today than what we see in the behavior of the early New Testament disciples. Sometimes we wonder that if the electricity went out for an extended period of time, many of the churches of today that depend on such would also go out.

If Jesus were to come personally today and begin anew His ekklesia (church) of disciples, He would probably establish something so different from the religious churchianity of the day, that all of us would feel that we were a part of something very strange. It would be something so different from what we see today in the denominational world that all of us would be struck with awe as to what He would have established.

We would also say that if the apostle Paul would come into one of our assemblies, he might find us so different from what he established in the house assemblies of the first century that we again would be struck with awe. Our assemblies inherently become customary, and often, our customary becomes traditional, then

unique, and then, sectarian. There is a great deal of freedom in reference to how disciples can assemble together. We are sure that the assemblies of many churches today are very different from the assemblies of the first century ekklesia. But because the Holy Spirit left little information on how we should assemble, then we assume that we have freedom to determine from assembly to assembly the nature of our coming together.

We must caution ourselves about becoming sectarian in reference to our assemblies. If we feel uncomfortable in attending the assembly of another group of disciples, then we should first caution ourselves about binding ceremonies where God has not bound. Simply because we are uncomfortable in the assembly of another group of disciples is not a mandate to judge or bind. Our uncomfortable feelings, when attending the assembly of another group, may betray our sectarian spirit.

The fact is that Jesus seeks to personally come into the heart of every penitent believer wherever he may be, regardless of where he assembles with other disciples. He said, *"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). He cries out, *"Take My yoke upon you and* ***learn*** *from Me"* (Mt 11:29).

Our problem is that we are hearing the voice of every self-proclaimed prophet and learning from every biblically challenged teacher. We have cursed ourselves with our desire to follow our favorites and educate ourselves in the mire of twisted scriptures. And it is all to our own destruction (2 Pt 3:16). We write to the religious world of Christendom wherein there are countless leaders who have established their own sects of faith and set themselves on an "evangelistic" effort to proselyte from one another. Such sectarian leaders take pride in their marks of identity, and thus, exalt one denomination over another, assuming that the message of each is the message to save the saved. Our sectarian spirit of superiority assumes that everyone else is inferior, and thus, our mission is to snatch single converts out of the camp of the enemy in the name of evangelism. Our arrogance lends us to being "sheep stealers" and "church splitters." We must remember that sectarianism is a vile sin that destroys the very spirit of unity for which Jesus prayed and died (Jn 17:20,21).

On the positive side of sectarianism among the disciples is what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:19. *"For there must also be factions among you so that those who are approved may be made known among you."* When there is sectarian division among the saints, those who are peacemakers are revealed. Those who are covetous for purse and positions are also manifested. Sectarian division among the disciples is an opportunity for those who are of the spirit of unity to identify those whose hearts are contrary to the spirit of unity. Those who "are approved" can be identified by their spirit of humility that they manifest when arrogant, self-righteous and pompous Balaamite preachers seek to draw away disciples after themselves.

So where would we go from here? First, we must remember the prayer of Jesus for unity among His people (Jn 17:20,21). If a particular leader is crying out for unity, then we know that that leader is on the same page as Jesus' prayer. Those who love the body of Christ and recognize the curse of sectarianism, eagerly work to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ep 4:3).

Second, we must restore the authority of the word of Christ as our center of reference for preserving the unity that we have in Christ. If we do not, we will be settling for a cheap union of churches that will carry on with the existence of religious sectarianism. The world will continue to mock every Christian group who proclaims that we are one man in Christ. We pray for the day when men sacrifice their traditions, opinions and power for the sake of submitting to the authority of Jesus who reigns from heaven through His word. It is for this reason that we call on all to repent of their sectarian behavior in order to join with others to be the one universal body of Christ.

Book 47

Fellowship & Unity Of The Organic Body

One of the most important truths concerning the body of Christ is that it is a universal fellowship of all those who have individually given themselves to Jesus through their obedience to the gospel. The universality of this body is manifested by how each member in the world has a functioning part of the body. The body is organic in that each member is important. The importance of each member is manifested by what every member supplies to the body. What each member supplies to this universal body keeps them as a part of the body, and thus, held together with the body. The participatory function of each member, therefore, makes the global body of Christ organic. It is an exciting thing to realize that though we are individual members, we are all a part of a worldwide family that is one. Each member participates in making this family alive and active in this world.

Some time ago I was staying overnight with a good preacher in the country of Namibia. In the early morning hours I secured my morning coffee and went outside to experience the awesome mornings of the Namibian sunrise. My host had the day before warned me about the barking dogs and was concerned that they might awake me in the early morning. But I have a habit of waking before dogs and birds, so I enjoyed the early morning quietness and tranquility while sipping on my fresh coffee.

My host had five dogs of his own, of various sizes, shapes and colors, none of which I am sure had any similarity with any other dogs. I supposed at the time that each was the beginning of some new species of dogs. Nevertheless, there were two other dogs in the neighbor's back yard, just across the fence that separated the two packs. The fence was somewhat ragged, but sufficient, I believed, to keep the two packs of dogs out of fellowship with one another.

As I sat there and enjoyed the tranquility of the early morning, all the dogs arose, stretched and then proceeded toward their respective side of the fence. And then all chaos broke out. The dogs on both sides of the fence just went after one another. You need to understand that the barking was fierce. They glared through the fence at one another with their eyes, their teeth were showing as they salivated from their mouths in their viciousy rage of fierce barking at one another. Their noses were right up against the fence as five on one side and two on the other, just barked with savagery at one another. I thought that if that fence were not there, these dogs would tear one another apart, limb by limb. It was really a terrifying scene to behold. Just pure animal savagery.

After the dogs had wasted themselves by going at one another across the fence, they quieted down and eventually wandered a short distance from the fence and laid down. I relaxed and everyone seemed to calm down after the storm. As I began to turn around and watch the continued sunrise, I stiffened as I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw one of the two dogs on the neighbor's side of the fence come through a hole in the fence that I had not before noticed. He stepped through the hole in the fence and I was terrified that I was about to witness the next level of this savagery as the five dogs would proceed to tear this poor dog limb from limb.

The other five dogs of my host got up, walked toward the intruder, and then something wonderful happened. Would you believe that those dogs acted like long-lost friends with one another? They all sniffed one another as dogs do, making sure that no one's hinder parts went without a sniff. One of my host's five dogs was a little female, and she made a special effort to rub up against the visitor, making sure that he felt welcomed.

After all the warm dog fellowship, the visiting dog proceeded to return through the hole in the fence in order to go back to his side. And then something quite interested happened again. The little female dog sat in front of the hole in the fence. She just sat there and would not move. It was as if she were thinking, "Don't go back on your side of the fence because I know what will happen." But the visitor was persistent and she finally relinquished to his desires. She stepped aside and he returned to his side of the fence. And you guessed it. As soon as he stepped through that hole to his side of the fence, the mortal "biting and devouring" through the gnashing of teeth and savage barking commenced again. They just went after one another with viciousness as they

starred at one another through that fence. As I witnessed this phenomenon, all I could think of was, "Preachers." And then I thought, if we could only tear down that fence, all of us could sleep in peace.

In the past several years we have had the wonderful opportunity of accepting the invitation to visit hundreds of church leaders and speak for hundreds of churches that are struggling to come out of mainline denominational religiosity. It seems that in all of these independent religious groups with which we have had contact that there is a deep-seated concern to work together in order to stand against the work of Satan in our communities. Our work has focused on helping these independent churches come to a greater knowledge of the word of God.

The rise of the independent church movement is truly an exciting phenomenon of these times, for millions of people have realized that the cold, formal religiosity of traditional religious institutions has worked against the spirit of the human being to have a deep and personal relationship with others in their journey to have the same with their Savior. Many have discovered that they were preaching church and not Christ. They discovered that they were preaching the promotion of their own denomination. In their preaching, they discovered that we cannot understand church without first understanding Christ. As a result, their refocus on Christ has led them away from denominational structures in order to restore the simply ekklesia of the New Testament.

As thousands of these people break away from organized institutional monstrosities in order to capture the spirit of Christ, in their independence they have realized that they must truly be dependent on one another in order to be successful in fighting against the wiles of the devil in their communities. And thus there has risen a renewed thirst for the word of God and a thirst for fellowshipping one another. We are in good times in the restoration of the true oneness and fellowship that God intended that we have in Christ.

There is much talk about unity among these groups. Churches are discovering that the church unions of the past were simply dysfunctional religious organizations of man. Church groups seek more than unions. They seek unity. Unity is a blessing from God, and to have this unity we must rehearse again the fellowship that God intended His people should have in Christ. A study of unity is certainly lacking if we do not understand fellowship. So because of the great emphasis and desire on the part of many to be united, we have sought in this book to first study what God intended fellowship should be among His people. Once we understand fellowship, and implement such in our lives, then the unity of the New Testament church becomes a realized serendipity. There can be no disunity among those who truly understand and practice the fellowship of the New Testament church. It just cannot happen. If there is disunity, then we have failed to implement in our lives the spirit of fellowship that was characteristic with the early church. In order to answer any problems concerning unity, therefore, we must first begin by restoring the fellowship that God intended that all believers in Christ should enjoy.

Chapter 1

THE CURSE OF CIRCLE DRAWING

When we discuss the subject of fellowship among disciples, each person seems to have a pen in his hand ready to draw his own circle of fellowship, within which are those with whom he would fellowship. Those outside the man-made circles are considered either rebels or heretics, those against whom slanderous remarks are justified and shunning from one's fellowship is rationalized. But those who are moved by love and mercy also draw circles. They draw circles of fellowship to include and take in those with whom they might often disagree. It is their thinking to include first, rather than exclude.

Those who have established a legal basis upon which to establish their religiosity are always drawing small circles of fellowship. Unfortunately, their circles become progressively smaller as they cocoon within their own legal theology. Eventually, they crystallize within their small realm of fellowship those they would consider "faithful" according to their legal or traditional measurements. Unfortunately, these folks wake up one day and find only themselves within their theological circle, slanderously parading against whomever on the basis of "contending for the faith." This does not mean that circles of fellowship should not be drawn. In our discussions concerning fellowship for the sake of unity, circles must be drawn. But who has the authority to draw the circle, ourselves or God? When we study fellowship and unity of the family of God, most people are quite astonished to discover that our circles of fellowship are almost always smaller than those drawn by God.

What should be frightening to us is the possibility that we might exclude from our circle of fellowship someone whom God would include. Steeped in our sectarian attitudes, we seek to be theologically safe. We are almost terrified of the possibility of fellowshipping someone who could possibly be in "error." But in setting ourselves up as professional judges and lawgivers in circle drawing, we could possibly exclude from our fellowship someone, after the coming of the Lord, with whom we might stand face to face in the presence of God in eternal heaven. Who would have the red face then? Would it not be best to err on the side of drawing a circle too large, rather than one too small?

For the sake of all small circle drawers we would remind them of what the Holy Spirit said through James. *"For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy"* (Js 2:13). You can be assured that if your circle of fellowship is smaller than God's, then you have erred on the side of having less mercy than God. Self-made judges and legalistic lawgivers are not known for drawing large circles.

We must always remember what God reveals, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity"* (Ps 133:1). It is our mission to allow God to determine who our brothers are, brothers that He would have us include in our fellowship. If we identify ourselves as exclusionist circle drawers, then we could be the one about whom Proverbs 6:19 speaks. The Lord hates the one *"who sows discord among brothers."* Or, we could apply the statement to mean, "The Lord hates the one who takes it upon himself to draw small circles of fellowship that excludes those whom God would receive."

The foundational nature of true fellowship is love. It is this loving fellowship that identifies the true disciples of Jesus. True fellowship in Christ is this way because of what Jesus commanded, and thus established as the signal of His disciples. *"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). The fellowship of the disciples of Jesus is based on loving cooperation, partnership, sharing, unity in diversity of opinions, mercy and grace. The community of our Lord Jesus Christ is a fellowship of Christ-minded and centered comrades in the faith. It is into this fellowship that God calls all men. *"God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"* (1 Co 1:9). We have been called into a community of mutual respect, sharing of one another's possessions, participating in works and needs, and forbearance of one another's faults (Ph 4:5).

The ekklesia (church) of Christ is first defined by its function as a loving fellowship of people. As a participatory family of those who have come into the Christ of a common salvation, the members of the body organically function in a community of mutual relationships. The members function organically in their separation from the world. *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers,* ***for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what fellowship has light with darkness?"*** (2 Co 6:14).

Our fellowship with one another is often defined by what we are not to fellowship. There can be no fellowship between righteousness and evil. There can be no fellowship between truth and error that defines fundamental teaching. The nature of being Christian prohibits the ekklesia of Christ from partnering with that which is contrary to the definition of what it means to be a Christian. And to be Christian means that we are "of Christ." We are "of Christ" because we have obediently submitted to and walk in the word of Christ. *"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).

It is quite difficult for one with a sectarian view of fellowship to understand the true nature of fellowship that Christians have with one another. Religious sectarians are always drawing their small circles that are either based on the traditions of their heritage or the elevation of opinions to the status of law. Theirs is a theology of exclusion and isolation.

With obedient believers it is different. Upon obedience to the gospel through the waters of baptism, obedient believers are added by God to a spiritual community. It is a community that is defined by organic oneness where each member functions in unity with one another. Members do not pass their time seeking to dismember the body through circle drawing, but in encouraging one another unto love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25). Their organic function is not as a legal organization, but as a participatory body that seeks to include and fellowship (See 1 Co 12:12-31). It is simply not the nature of the fellowship of this organic body to bite and devour itself. It is not a body that seeks to disfellowship members on the basis of opinions and trivia. On the contrary, it is a family of unlimited patience and forbearance in a pool of inexhaustible love and mercy, the same that was shown each member through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

A SHARING PARTNERSHIP IN CHRIST

Fellowship is one's total dedication to others in service for Jesus. Fellowship is not simply unity in teaching. Since the family of God is identified before the world with the signal of love (Jn 13:34,35), love first is the foundation of fellowship, and then teaching. In the New Testament, the Greek word that is commonly used to define this relationship is the Greek word *koinonia*. This word has been translated different ways throughout the New Testament because of its various meanings. These variations in translation have resulted in some confusion in defining fellowship. However, regardless of all the translations, and the contexts in which various forms of the word are used, the concept of mutual sharing in a participatory relationship is the fundamental meaning that is embedded within all uses of the word throughout the New Testament.

Fellowship defines the salvational relationship that Christians have with God and the unity that exists among the members of the body. In order to emphasize our fellowship with God and the unity Christians have in Christ, the New Testament writers exhorted us not to be in fellowship with the world. *"And have no **fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness ..."* (Ep 5:11). Christians have no fellowship with darkness because they have been called into fellowship with Jesus in the light. *"God is faithful, through whom you were called into **fellowship** of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"* (1 Co 1:9). Because Christians are called into fellowship with Jesus, they walk in the light of 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 1:7). Christians must have (1) no fellowship with darkness, (2) because they have been called into fellowship with Jesus, and thus, (3) they are in fellowship with one another as they walk together in the light of truth.

Discipleship means that we have been called into fellowship with the Son of God, and thus, we are to have no fellowship with those things that are contrary to the light. Our fellowship within the light calls for an active walk with Jesus in the truth. This common walk in the truth brings disciples into fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:3). In order to define the nature of this fellowship, there are at least six uses of the Greek word *koinonia* that must be examined. Each of these forms of the word in some way explains the disciples' relationship with one another and God. The commonly used English word to translate *koinonia* is "fellowship." But there is actually no single word in the English language that adequately translates the complete meaning of *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is simply one of those majestic words of the Greek language that is filled with a multiplicity of meanings. We would only conclude that the basic meaning of the word deals with fundamental principles of relationships between God and man, and man and man. The foundational meaning of the word would thus be a joint participation between those who have come into unity with one another.

In the Christian community, Christians have fellowship with one another in benevolence (Rm 12:13; 15:26,27; 2 Co 8:4; 9:1; 1 Tm 6:18), in the Lord's Supper (1 Co 10:16), in glory (1 Pt 5:11), in the divine nature (2 Pt 1:4), in preaching the gospel (Gl 2:9; 6:6; Ph 1:5), and in sufferings (2 Co 1:7; Ph 3:10; 4:14; Hb 10:33; 1 Pt 4:13). Christians participate in these relational functions with one another by walking together in the light. Our fellowship in these areas of discipleship are brought out in the following uses of the various forms of *koinonia:*

A. Sharing:

The use of the word *koinonia* refers to Christians partnering with one another in reference to contributions (*koninonia*) for the poor (Rm 15:26). *Koinonia* is also used when Christians fellowship with the blood and body of Jesus in the Lord's Supper (1 Co 10:16). It is used in reference to submitting to the instructions of those who teach the word of God (At 2:42). The noun form of the word is used throughout the New Testament in reference to our relational partnership with one another as we walk in the light (See also the use of the word in 1 Co 1:9; 2 Co 6:14; 8:4; 9:13; 13:14; Gl 2:9; Ph 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Pl 6; Hb 13:16; 1 Jn 1:3,6,7).

B. Giving:

The adjective form of the word *koinonia* is *koinonikos* which is used in reference to those who participate in the lives of others. In reference to Paul's exhortation to the rich, he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:18 that the rich *"be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share* [*koinonikos*]*."*

C. Partnering:

Koinonos is a noun form of *koinonia* which suggests the idea of partnership. *"James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners* [*koinonos*] *with Simon"* (Lk 5:10). Consider also Matthew 23:30. *"If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers* [*koinonos*] *with them in the blood of the prophets."* The definition of partnership is also emphasized in Paul's statement concerning his relationship with Titus. *"As for Titus, he is my partner* [*koinonos*] *and fellow worker concerning you"* (2 Co 8:23). The same definition of the word was used by Paul in his relationship with Philemon. *"If you count me a partner* [*koinonos*], *receive him as you would me"* (Pl 17; see also the use of the word in 1 Co 10:18,20; 2 Co 1:7; Hb 10:33; 1 Pt 5:1; 2 Pt 1:4).

D. Sharing responsibility:

The word *koinoneo* refers to sharing something with others. Emphasis is on taking part in something with others. Paul used this word when he referred to the Philippians who took part in his ministry of evangelism when he left Philippi and went to Thessalonica. *"Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared* [*koinoneo*] *with me concerning giving and receiving but you only"* (Ph 4:15). Paul used the word in reference to the financial support of the teacher by the one who is taught. *"Let him who is taught the word share* [*koinoneo*] *in all good things with the one who teaches"* (Gl 6:6; see also the use of the word in Rm 12:13; 15:27; 1 Tm 5:22; Hb 2:14; 1 Pt 4:13; 2 Jn 11).

E. Joint participation:

Another use of the word *koinonia* that closely relates to the preceding definition is a noun form of the word, *sunkoinonos*. This word also carries with it the meaning of being a joint partner in participating in the work and life of others. Paul wrote, *"And this I do for the sake of the gospel so that I might be a partaker* [*sunkoinonos*] *of it"* (1 Co 9:23). John also wrote, *"I, John, your brother and companion* [*sunkoinonos*] *in the tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ ..."* (Rv 1:9; see also the use of the word in Rm 11:17; Ph 1:7).

F. Partaking together:

The Greek word *sunkoinoneo* means to partake together with others, or to have fellowship with something that two parties have in common. This word was used by Paul when he wrote to the Philippian church in reference to their sharing with him in his suffering through their contribution. *"Nevertheless, you have done well that you shared* [*sunkoinoneo*] *in my affliction"* (Ph 4:14). The word is also used in reference to not partaking of the unrighteousness of this world. *"And have no fellowship* [*sunkoinoneo*] *with the unfruitful works of darkness ..."* (Ep 5:11). John wrote in reference to the sinfulness of fallen "Babylon," *"Come out of her, my people, so that you do not partake* [*sunkoinoneo*] *of her sins ..."* (Rv 18:4).

Koinonia and all its derivatives are used in different contexts of meaning in the New Testament. However, they all have the basic meaning of a relational partnering, sharing and fellowship in our work together for God. When it is used in reference to the disciples' relationship with one another, the fundamental meaning is that the community of God is a sharing and participatory fellowship of people. Our task in studying this subject, therefore, is to determine the nature of how we are to participate in one another's lives, as well as what the Bible says about the breaking of this participation. Since the disciples of Jesus are to be into one another's lives, then when and how can this fellowship be dissolved? But first, we must explore the extent to which fellowship must be extended.

Chapter 3

BIBLE BASIS FOR FELLOWSHIP

The one organic body of Christ is unified because of the common obedience to the gospel of all its members. One statement of Paul clarifies and establishes this fact. *"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). This is the fellowship of the saints in Christ. The saints thus seek to maintain the unity of the faith in the bond that they enjoy in Christ (Ep 4:3). Here is how that unity is preserved:

A. Common desire for a unified body:

Those who have been baptized into the one body (1 Co 12:13), naturally seek to function as members of the one body. Members of the body naturally seek to work together, not against one another. Since they are members of the body of Christ, they seek to follow the mandates for unified function of the body that originates from the head, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"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"* (Jn 17:20,21). The one Head assumes oneness of the body. If one would claim to be a member of the body with his focus clearly on the Head, then it is his natural desire to preserve and walk in the united fellowship with all the members of the body.

B. Common authority for unified organic function:

There can be no unity among the members of the body if the members do not agree upon a common standard by which they will function as the body. Jesus said, *"If you love Me* ***you will keep My commandments****"* (Jn 14:15). *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me"* (Jn 14:21). Jesus has all authority (Mt 28:18). Upon the foundation of what He commands, the members of His body maintain their unity. The unity and fellowship of the members, therefore, is based on the obedience of the members to His word, not on a negotiated agreement of codes, creeds and earthly authorities agreed upon by the members. Neither is unity determined by all members working in the same way or assembling according to an established ritual of assembly.

There can be no fellowship, and thus no unity, if those who claim to be Christian do not organically function with the word of Christ as the foundation of their faith (See Rm 10:17). This means that one's religious heritage or traditions can never be allowed to be a common foundation upon which unity and fellowship is based. All religious people have their favorite religious traditions, and all people come into Christ from different religious heritages. When one comes into the fellowship of the saints through obedience to the gospel, however, he must be willing to sacrifice any tradition that must be sacrificed in order to preserve the unity of the body. At the same time, one must be given the freedom to retain any tradition that does not conflict with the word of God. Unity has nothing to do with accepting and agreeing upon a common creed of traditions that we would use to identify our fellowship.

Every baptized disciple has religious traditions that came as baggage with him into Christ. However, these traditions cannot be made factors to determine his fellowship with others who have a heritage of different traditions. Unity between two people with different traditional baggage can happen only if both parties agree that their unique traditions can never be the standard by which they will determine their fellowship with one another. One may not feel good about the traditions of others, but as long as those with different religious traditions do not bind their traditions as law, then one is bound by love to accept into fellowship those with different religious traditions that they do not bind as law.

We must keep in mind that we might not feel comfortable with someone's religious traditions or method of work and assembly. But if the traditions or methods do not conflict with the word of Christ, nor become a religious law to be bound on others, then our personal feelings can never be used as "the law" to judge someone's religious traditional methods of work as wrong. Love is proven by one's acceptance of another's traditional function about which we might not feel comfortable.

C. Respect for the silence of the Scriptures:

In view of the preceding principle, the concept of the "silence of the Scriptures" has been a most misunderstood and misapplied principle of biblical interpretation. This misunderstanding has led many to misapply the statement that was made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:6. In the context of the Corinthian problem of exalting what one personality above another, Paul wrote, *"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes,* ***that in us you might learn not to think above what is written****,* ***that none of you take pride in one against another****."* Keep in mind that this statement is made in the context of verse 5, which says, *"Therefore, judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will manifest* ***the motives of the hearts****, and then will everyone have praise of God."* The context of 1 Corinthians 4:6 is **personalities**, not teaching. The Corinthians had denominated over listening to what certain personalities said (1 Co 1:12,13). The context is talking about hearts and motives in reference to exalting one personality said which was not inspired Scripture. Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to "take pride in one against another." They must not take pride in being called after Apollos, Cephas or Paul. From their hearts, they must be called after Christ

alone and what He says. Therefore, when Paul mentions that we not go beyond that which is written, he is not referring to our lack of biblical authority for things we do that are not in the word of God. He is focusing on following Jesus for who He is as the Christ. We must not add to His teaching the uninspired teaching of either Paul, Cephas or Apollos.

Silence of the Scriptures gives freedom. It is true that we must not go beyond that which is written in a way that would contradict that which is written. We must not go beyond in binding where God has not bound (See Rv 22:18,19). 1 Peter 4:11 is a concept that applies here. *"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God."* Now if the oracles of God say nothing in reference to what we might want to do, then there must be freedom. There is freedom if what we want to do does not contradict or work against the Scriptures. And everyone does numerous things religiously about which the New Testament says nothing. In our religious behavior, all of us go beyond what the Scriptures say in practicing our faith. Using the phrase "unbiblical," therefore, can be an erroneous statement. Simply because one has a campaign, or crusade, which things are not mentioned in the New Testament, he is not doing something that is "unbiblical." Only when one does something that contravenes Scripture is he doing something that is "unbiblical." The rest of the time, "unbiblical" actions are in the area of freedom.

Now think for a moment. If one builds a building for the assembly of the saints, has he gone beyond the teaching of Christ because doing such would have no authority in the word of God, for there is no mention of church buildings in the New Testament. Is his church building therefore "unbiblical"? There were no "church buildings" in the 1st century, thus there is no scripture to which we can go that would "authorize" a church building. Has one violated the "silence of the Scriptures" by building a building for the assembly of the saints? What if one seeks to rent a public hall for preaching the gospel? Since there is silence in the Scriptures for doing this, has one gone beyond the teaching of Christ? Certainly not. "Silence of the Scriptures" simply means that one has freedom when nothing is said in the Scriptures. One has freedom if his actions do not bring him into conflict with other clearly understood teachings of the Scriptures.

In order to maintain the unity of the fellowship of the disciples, therefore, disciples must learn to guard one another's freedom in areas of the silence of the Scriptures. As long as one does not violate Scriptures in his methods of work, then there is freedom, not restriction. Silence simply allows freedom for individual judgment. God has given the principle of assembly. We have the freedom to build, or rent, or do whatever in order to bring saints together in one place.

D. Respect God's boundaries:

In order that the ekklesia of Christ exist, there must be boundaries that define and differentiate the ekklesia from all man-made religions. The church would have no distinctiveness if there were no boundaries by which to identify her existence. Since the church belongs to Christ, then only Christ can determine these boundaries. And since Christ only can determine the boundaries of the ekklesia, then it is only in His word that we find these boundaries.

The fundamental boundaries by which we identify those who are the church of Christ are not difficult to discover. They are not hidden in figurative language, nor do they come to us through human reasoning. For example, in 1 Corinthians Paul argues against the Corinthians being divided over calling themselves after certain men. *"Now I say this, that each one of you says, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I am of Apollos,' and 'I am of Cephas,' and 'I am of Christ'"* (1 Co 1:12). Now the name "Christian" means to be "of Christ." So Paul brings this meaning into the context of answering the divisive practices of the Corinthians. In verse 13 he answers, *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul **crucified** for you? Or were you **baptized** in the name of Paul?"* We all know that Christ was crucified for the Corinthians. No question about this. So in order for one to be "of Paul," Paul first had to have been crucified for the individual, and secondly, the Paulite had to have been *"baptized in the name of Paul."* The same would hold true in being "of Christ," or being Christian. Is this a boundary? Only those who have been *"baptized in the name of Christ"* are Christians. They are the only ones who are "of Christ."

The Thessalonians had some problems with certain disciples quitting their jobs and living off other brothers. In 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul referred to this as walking disorderly. And in reference to those who walked disorderly, Paul wrote, *"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 had left with the Thessalonian disciples was, *"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). So there is a bound-

ary here in reference to fellowship. *"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). If you do not work when there is work, then you cannot eat off the church (2 Th 3:10). This is a clear boundary of fellowship.

In reference to morals, there are also boundaries in our fellowship with one another. *"But now I have written to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother if he is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. With such a person do not eat"* (1 Co 5:11). This is another boundary of fellowship.

In reference to the legal oriented brother who was binding where God had not bound, Paul wrote of this person, *"Now I urge you, brethren, mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the teaching you have learned, and* ***turn away from them****"* (Rm 16:17). If someone seeks to bind that which is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament, then he is binding where God has not bound, and by doing such he is sowing division among the brethren. Such a person is to be identified and shunned. This boundary was also explained to Titus. *"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; see 2 Tm 2:23).

There are moral and doctrinal boundaries to fellowship that must be identified in the New Testament and maintained in order to preserve the identity of God's people. If such boundaries are not honored, then there will be no distinctiveness to the people of God in a world of religious people. All Christians are religious, but not all religious people are Christians. So unless one discovers in the word of God that which identifies one as a Christian, then he will not be able to determine if one is simply religious, or is a Christian whose life is "of Christ." (More on this later.)

We must conclude that those who are in fellowship with one another have no other creed but Christ. And when one is baptized into Christ, he comes into this fellowship by the induction of God (At 2:47). Thus it is not our responsibility to receive one into fellowship when he obeys the gospel. We receive all baptized believers because they are added to our fellowship by God. We receive one into fellowship because God received him. We are the ekklesia (church) regardless of our prejudices, ignorance or lack of understanding concerning God's worldwide fellowship of baptized believers.

Fellowship and unity in Christ, are not something about which men negotiate in order to accomplish. Negotiated unity is only union, for such is the product of men. Fellowship in Christ is the gift of God. Our fellowship is not a success story of negotiation, but the result of individuals who have joined themselves to Christ as their head. Therefore, fellowship is first vertical, and then it is horizontal. We first connect to Christ through obedience to His death, burial and resurrection. Then we are brought into fellowship with one another through this common salvation. If our fellowship was the product of theological negotiations, then it would simply be based on each one's conformity to a set of man-made rules. The fact is that when we were baptized, we were brought into a covenant relationship with God and into fellowship with every other baptized believer throughout the world who is also in a covenant relationship with God. We may not recognize or appreciate our fellowship with the worldwide family of God, but we have it regardless of our recognition and appreciation.

Chapter 4

ORGANIC FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship involves how one's life touches another, and that life another. In the community of God, fellowship is one life touching another to the point that lives are forever changed for the better. This motivation was in the mind of Paul when he wrote to the Roman disciples, *"... making request, if by any means now at length I might have a successful journey by the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to the end that you may be established"* (Rm 1:10,11).

The concept of the organic church is that lives affect lives for the better. And unless lives affect and change lives, then our faith becomes a stagnant codification of legal actions whereby we convince ourselves that we will somehow be rewarded with eternal life. Though the preceding statement of Paul was in the context of carrying out his apostolic responsibility of imparting the miraculous gifts to the Roman brethren (At 8:18), what he could do as an apostle was to bless others to the extent of his abilities, or as in this case, his apos-

tolic responsibilities. It is nothing less for us. Our lives must be a blessing to others

When we talk about total commitment to Christ, we really mean total touching of others. One disciple seeks to totally touch another disciple to the point that lives are changed for the better. In order to carry out this ministry, disciples must eat together, work together, pray and study the word of God together. Christians *"rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"* (Rm 12:15). We jokingly correct ourselves for reducing the concept of fellowship to having a good meal with the brothers and sisters. But keep in mind that "fellowship meals" are an opportunity for the sisters to minister to others with their good cooking. Sometimes sisters are limited in what they can do. But they can cook. And in their cooking they can be a blessing to others. And sometimes the beltline of some brethren is evidence that our sisters have done well. We would urge church groups to restore the love feast of the New Testament church. Eating together as the body of Christ is a function of the organic church at work in the kitchen.

But we must be cautious about relegating our fellowship to food alone. Fellowship is more than a social gathering to eat. Fellowship can never be defined by external, and often communal gatherings around food. When Christians love one another from the heart, the love feast happens. Love feasts without love, however, are simply occasions for indigestion. It is as Walter Chrylser said, "The real secret of success is for people to do things because they want to and not because they have to." When people put a loving heart into their service of one another, fantastic things happen.

Here is an example. In 1 Timothy 4:13 Paul exhorted Timothy, *"Until I come, give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching."* Long before we were able to individually listen to the reading of the Scriptures on our own personal DVD players, our religious heritage fellowshipped in the reading of the Scriptures as a group. Farming families in a region would come together for several days, bringing their Bibles and their food. They would conduct what was called "Bible Readings" in the farming regions of central Kansas, a middle state in America. Readers would take turns reading aloud the Bible from beginning to end before the multitude of gathered listeners. They would read the entire Bible and no one would go home before the last verse was read in Revelation. That was fellowship over the Scriptures.

Interactive and participatory fellowship always results in happier lives. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus, our Creator (Cl 1:16), made a profound statement concerning how He created us. *"If you know these things, happy are you* ***if you do them****"* (Jn 13:17). When we serve others we are happy. Jesus made us this way. It is the created nature of the human spirit. Happiness is a by-product of a serving fellowship. And thus, fellowship is never defined by people simply gathering together in an assembly. Spectator religiosity has never produced happy spectators. Church buildings are filled with unhappy people who have no relational fellowship with anyone else. The greatest failure of the church in these modern times is that we have convinced ourselves that the "fellowship" we orchestrate in assemblies will somehow make us happy people. This is a devil's lie. One may disguise his unhappiness in a concert-oriented assembly that excites the spirit. However, the day after the emotional experience is gone, we are still unhappy people.

Jesus' words in John 13:17 are still true. Happiness comes by touching lives, not focusing on a concert placebo where we forget our sorrows for a moment during an energetic experiential assembly. The fact that church houses are full of unhappy people should give us some impetus to search our Bibles in order to understand what Jesus demonstrated in "foot-washing fellowship" that should be characteristic of His disciples.

Our quest to understand true fellowship should begin with one phrase that is used throughout the New Testament. It is the phrase "one another." In the context of our fellowship with one another, the phrase is used over and over in reference to something that is being done. Jesus said, *"... happy are you* ***if you do them****."* True fellowship in washing one another's feet results in happiness. If one wants to be happy, therefore, he needs to take a towel and look for dirty feet. The New Testament is saturated with ways we can wash one another's feet:

Care for one another (1 Co 12:25)
Forgive one another (Ep 4:32)
Be kind to one another (Ep 4:32)
Be hospitable to one another (1 Pt 4:9)
Teach and admonish one another (Cl 3:16)
Submit to one another's ministry of service (1 Co 16:15,16)
Serve one another (Gl 5:13)
Submit to one another (Ep 5:21)
Bear one another's burdens (Gl 6:2)
Love one another (Jn 13:34,35)
Comfort one another (1 Th 4:18; 5:11)
Encourage one another (Hb 10:25)
Confess our faults to one another (Js 5:16)
Give honor to one another (Rm 12:10)

We could go on, but we get the point of what the Holy Spirit is trying to say in reference to true fellow-

ship among the saints. No isolated Christian by himself can fully understand fellowship. Fellowship involves two or more people interacting and touching one another's lives. Therefore, the less we participate in the lives of others, the less we understand the nature of the fellowship that identifies the organic body of Christ.

The organic fellowship of the body of Christ is not a one-way street. It can never be. In other words, one cannot complain about the lack of fellowship in his or her life by saying, "Why doesn't anyone come and visit me?" "The preacher doesn't love me because he never comes and visits me." These complaints of a warped concept of fellowship are introverted, self-centered, and sometimes on a deeper psychotic level, narcissistic. Those who have this narcissistic concept of the Christian community have missed entirely the nature of the fellowship that God would have us enjoy. When Jesus said "love one another" (Jn 13:34,35), He did not place the responsibility to love on the shoulders of just one party. The "one another" statement means that all individuals must express love in order for the magic of fellowship to happen. True Christian fellowship is based on two or more parties putting into the fellowship pool all they have to give to one another. No one can stand on the sidelines and cry out for fellowship when he does not get involved in the lives of other people. Hermits never understand fellowship.

From the preceding illustrations of "one another," the concept of one another is always connected to a verb. Fellowship is a participatory action. *"Happy are you if you **do them**."* There is no fellowship without action on the part of everyone involved in the fellowshipping community. Fellowship is an initiative on the part of individuals to get involved in the lives of others. And when one comes into the fellowship of the Christian community, he has come into a community of people who seek to be involved in the lives of people. Yes, hermits often do not want to become Christians because they know that they will have to involve themselves in service to others, and others will be involved in their lives.

Now we are beginning to understand the foundational meaning of James 2:14-26. In the middle of James' exhortations concerning an active faith, he stated, *"But someone may say, 'You have faith and I have works.' **Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works**"* (Js 2:18). Was he really meaning, "Show me your fellowship without your works, and I will show you my fellowship by my works"?

One key point never to forget in reference to fellowship is that it must always be from the heart. It is for this reason that a legal oriented religiosity can never produce the level of fellowship that God wants us to enjoy with one another. Our Christianity is not simply a "camaraderie for the faith" because we all believe the same thing. Fellowship is more than socializing around commonly accepted doctrines.

We must always remember when seeking a definition of Christian fellowship that coming together in assembly is only an outward manifestation of a heartfelt desire to be with one's brother in Christ. If we can keep coming together, there is progress in our bonding with one another. But assemblies produce only a certain level of fellowship, a level with which we must never be satisfied. When we start working together in service to all men, then we will start understanding the nature of true fellowship (See Gl 6:10). Remember what the Roman Caesar Marcus Aurelius said, "Humans are all made for cooperation. We've been given like hands, like feet, like upper and lower teeth, like eyelids–these are made to work together. To act against one another, then is contrary to Nature." In organic fellowship, it is only natural that all the members of the body work together in order to accomplish the mission of the Head.

Chapter 5

FELLOWSHIP ASSUMES ONENESS

The New Testament teaching on true fellowship assumes unity. All Christians have a common salvation (Jd 3) in that they have all come into a covenant relationship with Christ by being crucified with Christ on the cross, buried with Him in a tomb of water, and resurrected with Him to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:1-6; Gl 3:26-28). The fellowship of the obedient with one another, therefore, is the blessing of God when He adds us to His community of people (At 2:47). Unity in fellowship is not something that is orchestrated by man, but the God-given serendipity of our common obedience to the gospel. And since this unity can be disrupted through immoral living and rejection of the truth of the gospel, the Spirit writes that every disciple must be *"eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ep 4:3).

The legally oriented person will try to discuss unity without correcting fellowship problems. The error of

his proposition is that unity cannot exist without brethren being in fellowship with one another. We might legally agree on a certain outline of doctrines, opinions and methodologies, but unless we are able to be in fellowship with one another our unity is only surface. It will break apart when personalities clash. Euodia and Syntyche certainly had unity with one another because their names were written in heaven (Ph 4:2,3). However, they struggled in their fellowship with one another because of some disagreement. Therefore, unity without love will last until there is some disagreement over opinions or methodologies.

When discussing the fellowship among the saints, we must not confuse ourselves by seeking to promote unity with orchestrated negotiations that actually lay the foundation for disunity. We must keep in mind that unity in fellowship is a blessing from God, not something that is negotiated by all parties involved. Common acceptance of common views, interpretations, opinions and methodologies may produce union, but they can never take the place of God's blessing of unity that results from our common obedience to the gospel.

We must concede that one endorses some of the views of those with whom he does not seek to be in fellowship. At the same time, all of us claim fellowship with those with whom there are some views that we do not endorse. For example, the Jewish brethren from Jerusalem did not endorse Peter's going into the house of Cornelius (At 11:1-8). Nevertheless, they endorsed Peter as a brother in Christ. Paul did not endorse John Mark going on the second missionary journey (At 15:39). Nevertheless, he continued to endorse Barnabas as a fellow soldier of the cross, though Barnabas took John Mark. We are often very inconsistent in this area of fellowship. This is particularly true in reference to our fellowship with those who come into Christ with a different religious heritage, and baggage, with which we try to do two things. We seek to clone the new convert after the baggage of our heritage, or we refuse to fellowship fully those who have a different religious vocabulary or way of carrying out faith in their lives.

Accepting into fellowship those with views with which we do not agree would be the application of Paul's discussion in Romans 14 concerning the "meat eating" brethren and the "vegetarian" brethren. Paul's instructions to both parties was that they receive (fellowship) one another (Rm 14:3). The lesson from the context of Romans 14 is that God receives those who have different opinions, life-style habits, and in this case, diets. This is illustrated by God's acceptance of the faithful in the seven churches of Asia, when at the same time there were in some of the churches those who believed erroneous teachings and behaved immorally (See Rv 3:1-6). Though the faithful were a part of a church wherein there were those who taught erroneous doctrines and behaved immorally, Jesus would not hold the faithful accountable for the false doctrines and behavior of the erring (See Rv 2:18-29). Each disciple will be held accountable for his own teachings and his own behavior (2 Co 5:10; see Js 3:1). We should be cautious about excluding from our circle of fellowship everyone with whom we cannot endorse in matters of opinion, interpretation and methodology. If there is a disciple among a group that believes erroneously, God accepts that disciple because of his personal obedience to the gospel. Those who surround us do not determine our eternal destiny. The one beside whom we may sit on Sunday does not determine our eternal destiny.

If we contend that we as a group must have perfect agreement in all matters of opinion and work, then this would mean that even God could not have fellowship with us. Certainly God does not endorse all our behavior and thinking. However, because of His mercy, He maintains fellowship with us as we walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). The Corinthian church was filled with a great deal of nonsense, and yet, God still addressed them as the "church of God" (1 Co 1:2). It is doubtful that "small circle drawers" would have claimed fellowship with the church of God in Corinth.

Possibly the word we need to use here is "harmony." Our fellowship with one another is not based on everyone walking in complete harmony with one another. Harmony is our goal in fellowship, but its reality is quite difficult. Harmony assumes that everyone agrees on everything in the same manner. But since we are human, complete harmony is always outside our reality of accomplishment while we are in the flesh. Fellowship, therefore, cannot be conditioned on harmony, though we seek to be in harmony with one another as much as possible. Because we are in fellowship with one another, however, our goal is to walk in harmony with one another. But we must remember that there is no statement in the Bible that mandates that in order to have fellowship with one another there must be complete harmony. It is just not there. God did not create us to walk as robots. He created us with free-moral choice, and in doing this, He knew that we would struggle with having a harmonious walk. Amos 3:3–*"Can two walk together, except they have agreed?*–is not a passage that is calling us to be cloned robots. Free-moral individuals will always have disagreements. Nevertheless, they can agree to disagree, and thus walk together in discussion, not argumentation.

The goal of fellowship is harmony, but complete

harmony is that illusive dream to which we aspire. We must not be frustrated in our efforts to be united if we are sometimes out of harmony. Our goal is not to be cloned, but to be in fellowship with one another as all of us seek to focus on Jesus. If we assume we have division among us because we are not in harmony with one another, then we have established a condition for unity that will never exist. In our frustration we will be driven to clone if we confuse perfect harmony with fellowship. We will be driven to legalize codes to which all must conform in order to establish a superficial unity. When we do this, we are no more than a cult. If we establish legalized codes to bring harmony (unity), we will eventually splinter when people start freely thinking for themselves.

It was for this reason that the Catholic Church burned Bibles during the Dark Ages. The leadership did not want the people reading the Bible in their own language. Today, the denominational world discourages personal Bible study, and often, refuses to have open Bible classes during their assemblies. They do not want the people to personally study word of God, since such has been left to the clergyman who controls the group through the intimidation of his many years of study, though he is often *"always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Tm 3:7).

We must not forget that the names of sister Euodia and sister Syntyche were written in heaven. They were sisters in Christ and in fellowship with one another. However, Paul wrote, *"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"* (Ph 4:3). These two sisters certainly were not in harmony with one another at the time Paul wrote. However, they were in fellowship with one another because their names were written in heaven. In such cases of fellowship in diversity we should read Philippians 2:1,2. *"Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love and being of one accord, of one mind."* If any church would illustrate the truth of the preceding concepts it would be the church in Corinth. They remained the "church of God" regardless of their lack of harmony (1 Co 1:2).

Now we would challenge your thinking concerning the historical assembly situation of the early church. This is a challenge that is often ignored by most Bible students on this subject simply because of the custom of corporate churchianity that prevails throughout Christendom today, something that would certainly be strange in a New Testament setting. Nevertheless, it is a historical fact that the early Christians in every city met in the homes of the members. There were no purpose-built church buildings, which buildings did not come into existence until the early part of the 4th century when Caesar Constantine wanted to bring Christianity into the context of pagan temples throughout the Roman Empire by building church buildings.

Among many scriptures in the New Testament on house assemblies, one is of special interest in Romans 16:5. *"Greet the church that meets in their* [Priscilla and Aquila's] *house."* Now suppose you lived in Jerusalem, or Rome, or Ephesus, or Corinth and assembled with a small group in someone's house (See also At 5:42; 20:20; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15; Pl 2). This was the customary assembly of the early church. No Bible historian denies this fact. If you were regularly meeting with a small group in a house every Sunday, would you not crave the fellowship of the extended family of God throughout your city? "Greet-the-church-that-meets-in-their-house" was a signal to fellowship all house fellowships. This was only natural because of the worldwide fellowship and unity of the disciples in every city. No small house group made a declaration of independence from the rest of the house groups in the city. Doing such would have been totally contrary to the desire of people of a common salvation to maintain their fellowship in the midst of paganism and persecution. It would certainly be the death of a small house assembly to rise up and claim some independence from the rest of the family of God in any particular city. It would simply be unnatural, if not divisive. This seems to be what Diotrephes was trying to do in separating those over whom he assumed authority from other groups meeting in houses (See 3 Jn 9:10).

It is contrary to the organic fellowship of the body of Christ for groups of disciples to declare their independence as groups from one another. On the contrary, **it is natural that the body declare its oneness in Christ**. This is certainly what the members do when the universal body of members partakes of the one bread (1 Co 10:17). All the house groups in Corinth proclaimed their being one body in Corinth where they all ate of the one bread. Why in our rush to crystallize into groups and declare our division we forget 1 Corinthians 12:12? ***"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."*** The "one body" is not a collective of individual and independent bodies. We are members of **one universal body of Christ**. In the New Testament discussion concerning fellowship, the discussion is not about fellowship between groups, but mem-

bers. There is only one group. This is the one universal church of Christ. There are many members. But all these members, though scattered throughout the world, are one body.

Throughout the years we have witnessed a breakdown of the universal organic body of Christ in those areas where groups of disciples have taken it upon themselves to declare their independence from all other disciples in a particular area. When they declare their independence from others, they assign for themselves their own authorities on earth, thus minimizing the **all** authority of the one universal Head, Jesus Christ (Mt 28:18). The result of their declaration of autonomy under their own authorities has left them forever small, dysfunctional and backward. Their spirit of isolation has left them uncooperative and unable to accomplish any significant works in cooperation with their fellow disciples who have also declared their isolation. They have thus doomed themselves to being hermit churches with a selected theology outside which they are fearful to venture in order to make contact with others who are struggling to come out of religious confusion. Evangelism means to convert one over to the cocoon of the theology of an independent group, rather than to Christ. The isolated thus preach church, and not Christ.

Fellowship is about individual disciples of Christ staying connect with one another. It is not about groups. And because a disciple assembles in a particular group, does not separate him from disciples that assemble in other groups. Our fellowship with all Christians does not depend on where we sit on Sunday morning.

Chapter 6

WALKING AWAY FROM THE COVENANT

Unity among disciples is based on a common covenant relationship with God. Only when one walks away from the conditions of this covenant does he walk away from his fellowship with the rest of the covenanted people of God. There are three ways one can walk away from his covenant with God.

A. Behavioral denial of the lordship of Christ:

One is identified with Christ by his loving behavior (Jn 13:34,35). This principle is addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5. He introduced a problem among the Corinthians by referring to the immoral behavior of one who continued in fellowship with the Corinthian church. *"It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication is not even practiced among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And you are arrogant and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed* ***might be removed from among you****."* If one adopts a life-style that is contrary to God-defined moral behavior, then those who are of Christ must remove such a one from their fellowship. Those who live immoral lives have violated the sanctity of their covenant relationship with Christ, and thus, have no part with the body of Christ.

The sin of immoral behavior in fornication is taking a member of the body of Christ and laying it with a harlot. Paul rebuked the Corinthians, *"Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ?"* (1 Co 6:15). Now if one takes one of the members of Christ's body and lays it with a harlot, then he has actually taken a part of the body of Christ into fornication. *"Will I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot?"* (1 Co 6:15). Paul's answer to his own question was, *"Certainly not!"* (1 Co 6:15). Then he asked the Corinthians, *"Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her?"* (1 Co 6:16). When one comes into Christ, he is no longer his own. He has joined his body in a covenant relationship with Christ, and thus the Spirit of God resides within him. *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ... glorify God in your body"* (1 Co 6:19,20). If one joins himself to another in fornication, he has violated the body of Christ. Such a one can no longer be in fellowship with those who have kept themselves pure from immoral behavior.

B. Doctrinal denial of fundamental principles:

All Christians are in error somewhere in reference to matters of opinion. But our lack of knowledge of all things does not sever us from our covenant relationship with God. The Father loves His children, knowing that His children do not know all that is to be known. However, if one rebels against those fundamental salvational truths that come to us, not by interpretation, but through clear and declarative statements, then he has violated his covenant relationship with God.

What we must understand in order to come into a

covenant relationship with God is that which needs no interpretation. However, once we are in a covenant relationship with God, all truths are certainly true, but not all truths are fundamental to maintain our covenant relationship with God. There are truths we learn from Bible study throughout our lives. Those truths that we do not understand after coming into a covenant relationship with God are truths to learn. Learning new truths does not invalidate our obedience to those truths we had to know to come into a covenant relationship with God. We would call those truths that are necessary to establish a covenant relationship with God as truths that are fundamental. Those truths that we learn through Bible study throughout our lives are true, but not truths that would disengage us from our covenant relationship with God, and thus, not be truths to lead us to disengage with one another.

What motivated us to come into a covenant relationship with God was our realization that Jesus was the resurrected Christ and Son of God. A denial of these truths would certainly negate our fellowship with Christ (See 1 Co 15:1-5). How could one be in fellowship with the One whom he denied to be the Son of God. Our rejection of who Christ is and what He did would sever us from Him, just as our acceptance of Him and what He did moved us to connect to Him. One can be wrong about a lot of things, and yet, still be in fellowship with Jesus if he continues to believe those fundamental truths that moved him to come into a covenant relationship with Jesus. But if he rejects those truths about Jesus that moved him to obey the gospel, then he has removed himself from his fellowship with Christ and those who continue to believe the salvational fundamentals of the gospel.

It was these to whom John referred in 1 John 2:19. *"**They went out from us**, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out so that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."* Those who have gone out of the fellowship of the saints because they gave up that which brought them in, are as those about whom Peter wrote, *"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). The latter state is worse because the gospel message of the Sonship and atonement of Jesus no longer appeals to them. *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakers 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 ..."* (Hb 6:4-6).

C. A divisive spirit:

If one is arrogant and sectarian, he establishes an atmosphere of division among brethren over matters of opinion, his opinions. If such a person is unresponsive to all admonition to refrain from promoting his opinions to the division of the body, then he has made his opinions a legal rule by which to promote division. This is the meaning of Paul's thoughts in Romans 16:17,18. There were among the Roman disciples those who elevated their thinking to law, and thus, they brought into question the grace of God by their meritorious law-keeping. These were brethren who were of the opinion that they must bind their opinions where God had not bound. They were thus causing *"divisions and offenses contrary to the teaching you have learned."* Paul admonished those who were troubled by such legalistic teachers, *"... turn away from them."*

If one persists in binding on the people of God those things that are either tradition or matters of opinion, then the people of God are to turn away from that person. Paul's explicit mandate to evangelists is, *"Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned"* (Ti 3:10,11). These are those who seek to involve others in "foolish controversies" (Ti 3:9). If a person has a spirit of controversy, therefore, he has walked away from giving all heed to keep the unity of the Spirit. He must be marked and turned away from. He has forgotten Paul's admonition to Timothy, *"And the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient"* (2 Tm 2:24).

Division begins when one who has a sectarian spirit recruits others to his opinions which he things are binding as law (Gl 4:17). He then leads his party in setting up standards by which to judge whether others are faithful to his position. Those who do this *"are worldly-minded ones who cause divisions"* (Jd 19). The sectarian often commits the same transgression and sin as those to whom Isaiah spoke. *"Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness"* (Is 58:4; see Js 3:12-18). One who is arrogant, assuming that he is right on every issue, is often morbidly craving for controversy. *"He 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 ..."* (1 Tm 6:4,5).

D. A lazy spirit:

The context of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 is a situation wherein some had quit their jobs, and were subsequently living off other brothers and sisters. This was not a poverty situation. There was work, but those who could work terminated their work. Such people cannot live in fellowship with the saints of God. Paul clearly instructed the faithful, *"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 of that he received from us"* (2 Th 3:6). The tradition that Paul had left with the Thessalonian disciples was, *"... we worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you"* (2 Th 3:8). To enforce the disfellowship of the idle brothers, he added to his instructions, *"if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat"* (2 Th 3:10). *"... note that man and have no company with him so that he may be ashamed"* (2 Th 3:14). If one seeks to live off the church when there is work to be done, but he will not work, then he must be disfellowshipped from the family of God. This concept of Christ-like behavior was the foundation 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."*

We would conclude that there are only four areas for which the church has grounds to withdraw their fellowship from one who would persist in sin. (1) We would withdraw fellowship from those who through their immoral living deny that Jesus is the resurrected Christ and Son of God. (2) Fellowship would be withdrawn from those who reject the belief that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, and thus, the source of our life and the foundation for our faith as the united body of Christ. (3) We would withdraw fellowship from those who would seek to fragment the body by legally binding either religious traditions or opinions by which they set themselves up as judges and lawgivers, and thus have supplanted Jesus as the head of His body who has all authority. (4) The church family should disfellowship those who refuse to work in order to take ownership of their financial responsibilities. These are the only four situations in the New Testament whereby the body can on the foundation of the Scriptures withdraw fellowship from any person. All other reasons are thus illegitimate and contrary to the spirit of unity in Christ.

If this is true, then fellowship among brethren allows a much greater spectrum of differences than most of us are willing to either admit or concede. There would certainly be a broader category of opinions, interpretations, and doctrines that would be allowed through the spirit of freedom than what most would accept. We would conclude that if a view or opinion does not contradict areas of fundamental belief and behavior, then we should consider the exhortation of James in James 2:13. *"For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. And mercy rejoices over judgment."*

Chapter 7

OPINIONATED OPINIONS

In matters of faith surrounding salvational principles, God has spoken clearly through direct commands or declarative statements. There is no room for opinion in these areas of teaching, nor necessity of interpretation. When there is a "thus saith the Lord," we have moved outside matters of opinion and interpretation. But when we come to matters of opinion in reference to our interpretation of various passages that are not clear, or need deductive reasoning to understand, then there is room for tolerance, longsuffering and freedom of personal interpretation. It is a time for discussion, not debate. If we must use human reasoning and a great deal of study in order to deduct truth, then we must be patient with one another. When determining fellowship on the basis of our knowledge of the word of God in areas of opinion and interpretation, no Christian should be eager to disfellowship someone who is a brother. Matters of disagreement in the area of opinion are areas of discretion and patience.

What often happens in areas of opinion is that we move into an area of what we might call "selected theology." We determine which opinions are to be canonized as "law," and then we bind on everyone these "laws" (opinions) who would be accepted into our fellowship. We then seek to fellowship only those with whom we have the same "selected theology," or those we have convinced that we have the right theology. We draw a circle of fellowship around all those who conform to our selected theology, and then, exclude as "liberal" those who do not conform. We have now become a "selective fellowship."

In order to easily identify those who have conformed to a particular selected theology, we identify ourselves with a "selected name." Whether this name is derived from the New Testament, or just dreamed up by our imagination, we can quickly use the name to pick out of the crowd those who have adhered to the canonized selected theology of each particular group. Being "Christians only" is simply not good enough because those of the selected theology have assembled under this name, regardless of how the New Testament defines one to be a Christian. After a name has been chosen to identify those who have adopted and adhered to a particular selected theology, the division among Christians is encased, and now, the adherents to each body of selected theologies are validated as true denominations. The only thing left is to chisel the name in stone on church buildings throughout the world. Our mission now is to promote the church of the selected theology while we minimize our message of the Christ of the church.

With our hermeneutics we determine that everyone within this selective fellowship that is now named has been cloned after the selected theology. Unity is assumed to prevail when everyone conforms to the code of opinions and interpretations of the selected theology. A sectarian denomination is thus formed when all adherents cannot determine the difference between fundamental truths, and those truths that are only matters of opinion or interpretation.

When we establish authorities to determine what opinions are correct, then our sectarian spirit has created a new religious denomination. Bible schools are established within the selective fellowship of churches in order to continue the "selected theology" of the "faithful." These schools are often established by those who seek to indoctrinate young conformists to the accepted cliques, vocabulary and codes of fellowship. Within a closed environment (the classroom), the students are taught and tested over a "pattern of theology" in order that when they are handed a diploma at the end of the cloning process, they will be considered "faithful" to the theology of the denomination. We know of few Bible schools that teach students to think freely and guard the freedom of their brothers (Gl 5:1).

In reference to this subject, there are some Spirit-inspired statements in Scripture that we have already mentioned, but demand a closer review. Many of these scriptures are often twisted out of context by legalistic clonists who fail to appreciate that in Christ we have been set free from the bondage of legal religiosity. An appropriate introduction to these statements would be 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."* This is a fundamental principle of thinking among the people of God. It is a command that should alert every disciple to be on guard against being brought under the bondage of anyone or any teaching that would endanger our freedom in Christ.

A. Colossians 1:18:

*"And He is **the head of the body**, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, **so that in all things He might have the preeminence**."*

So how would a statement as this apply to unity and fellowship? Simple. **There is brotherhood (fellowship) only among those who have accepted Jesus as the one head of the universal body**. Accepting the universal headship of Christ means that Christ has all authority (Mt 28:18). Jesus' universal headship means that He was the universal center of control for the disciples in Ephesus (Ep 1:22), as well as those in Colosse. Those in Colosse were not autonomous from those in Ephesus because the disciples in both cities were under the universal control of Jesus. There is no autonomy between those who have accepted a common head. On the contrary, those who have accepted a common center of reference have been united into the fellowship of one body. And since the one head has all authority, there should be no squabble for authority among the members of the universal body who have submitted to the one authority over all things.

We must keep in mind that when men among the disciples start assuming some of the authority of Jesus, they seek to separate a group of the disciples unto themselves over which they would exercise their authority. And unless their authority over their group is questioned or challenged, they declare autonomy or independence of their group from all other groups of disciples who also have separated their groups unto themselves (See At 20:30). The result is that the universal fellowship of the church is broken into splintered camps that often go to war with one another, and often disfellowship one another. No such teaching is found anywhere in the New Testament.

Universal headship and all authority are inseparable and belong to Jesus. When disciples in one area begin to think that they have authority over those who assemble in Colosse, and those in Ephesus do the same, then there is division between the disciples in both locations. But if the disciples in Colosse and Ephesus maintain that Christ has all authority, then they remain the one universal body of Christ under the headship of Christ. The disciples in Colosse assume responsibility over their own ministry in Colosse, and the disciples in Ephesus assume

responsibility for those in the city of Ephesus. In this way the one universal body organically functions worldwide. But taking ownership of the ministry in one's area (assuming responsibility) does not mean that the disciples in different cities have stolen some authority from King Jesus. They have only assumed responsibility to do the work of Jesus in their areas.

But when groups claim authority and declare independence, and yet seek unity, some organized monstrosity often develops. When such autonomous groups seek unity, they end up producing unions. Union is created out of independent groups coming together in order to negotiate a compromise. When a negotiated compromise is agreed upon by all parties involved, then a "united council of churches" often develops. Before we progress to this point, we need to take another look at restoring all authority to King Jesus. When those in Colosse and Ephesus agree that King Jesus is the only head who has all authority, then there can be no negotiations over headship, authority and doctrine. We are simply the one universal body of Christ seeking to work together in ministry with the Bible as our only road map in teaching. When our particular ministries touch one another, or when there is a famine that affects a particular region where part of the body is located, we seek to work as one body in doing good to all men in that region (Gl 6:10; see At 11:28-30). The universal body of Christ works as one when Christ remains the sole head with all authority. When He remains preeminent over all disciples throughout the world, then the church remains one.

There is no man or group of men on earth who have the right to designate one law for the body of Christ. It is the work of the elders to make sure that this never happens among the saints (See Ti 1:9). There is only one lawgiver for the flock of God, and He has already given His law (Jn 12:48; Jd 3; Rv 22:18,19). Whenever a group of men on earth assume the prerogative to make laws for the church, then that group of men have assumed the position of Christ and stolen some of His authority over the universal church of Christ. Whenever a group of men, a committee, an organization, or a Pope, assumes authority to delegate laws to men by which they must work and be identified, then that group of men or individuals have infringed on the authority and dignity of the Son of God.

Universal fellowship of the body of Christ is endangered between groups who claim their own authority over themselves other than Christ. There can be no true unity among such groups. They may negotiate for unity, but they will end up with a union, or simply a "working agreement." This is not the unity of the church about which the New Testament speaks. Negotiated union can never produce the fellowship about which the New Testament speaks.

B. John 17:20,21:

"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."

This statement was made first to the twelve apostles. However, it extends to all those who would believe in Jesus through their word. The Father and Son are one in relationship. All Christians are one because they have all been baptized into the one body. This is the theme of Paul's discussions concerning the oneness of the body in 1 Corinthians 12. *"For by one Spirit we were all* ***baptized into one body****, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondservants or free ..."* (1 Co 12:13). Though the members differ in their gifts, social status, or culture, they are still connected to one another in the one body. Though they differ in methodologies of work and opinions, they are still the one organic body of Christ.

The Father and Son functioned in different areas in reference to our salvation, but they were still one. We function in different ways to carry out the mission of Christ in our lives, but we are still one body. "Be one," therefore, does not mean that we are cloned. And being different does not mean that we are being divisive. Since we are the one body, our blessing from God is that we are the one body. When those of the world witness our unity in diversity, they understand that the church is real. It is real because everyone knows that everyone is different. Everyone has different gifts. But when different people can call themselves after Christ, and yet be one in Christ, then they understand that Christianity is not something of human origin where everyone is cloned and crystallized as in a cult.

The identity of a man-made religion is in the fact that the group is held together by everyone conforming to a set of man-made rules or traditions. The identity of that which is from God is that everyone is held together because of a common submission to one divine Head who speaks through His word. Unity, therefore, can never exist between men unless all men submit to the authority that extends from heaven to men through the word of God.

The oneness about which Jesus was speaking in John 17:20,21 was in reference to the "divine nature" of which all of us must take part in order to be one man in Christ. *"Through these are given to us exceeding great*

and precious promises, ***so that by them you may be partakers of the divine nature*** *...”* (2 Pt 1:4). Partaking of the “divine nature” does not mean that we have assembled under a supposed scriptural name and legalized a particular ceremonial structure of worship. It is having the heart of Christ. To be one as the Father and Son are one involves being so saturated with the word of the Father and Son that when we speak, we speak as the oracles of God (1 Pt 4:11). It is having the mind of Christ. *“Let this mind be in you that as also in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 2:5). It is as Paul wrote, *“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake so that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh”* (2 Co 4:11). When the “divine nature” is within us, we love one another in our diversity, and yet, remain the one body of Christ. We are one body because we *“have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered”* to us (Rm 6:17). Only God can produce a fellowship as this. It is beyond the ability of man.

C. 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.”

Does this statement of Paul infer that those in fellowship with one another must know all the truth and understand its application alike in order to be united? Some have assumed that 1 Corinthians 1:10 is teaching this. But such a concept of unity is humanly impossible. We cannot assume that we understand alike every single passage of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. If we assume that we must in order to be in fellowship with one another, then we would be arrogant, self-righteous, and calling for an impossibility.

Some have erroneously assumed that having the “same mind” means to have a unified understanding of all New Testament revelation by everyone who is to be in fellowship with one another. But the objectivity of those who would suggest such a claim might be questionable. The same people who make such a claim have tried and failed to understand alike difficult passages within their own ranks. Even the apostle Peter would never make a claim that we all understand difficult passages alike in order to have the “same mind,” and thus, be unified in fellowship. He wrote, *“... as also in all his* [Paul’s] *letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are* ***some things hard to understand****, which those who are untaught and unstable distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures”* (2 Pt 3:16). Would we question Peter’s fellowship if he did not understand all the revelation that was given through Paul? Would we be so arrogant as to claim that we do have “perfect understanding,” and thus base our fellowship with others on the foundation of our understanding? Do we have a right to disagree with Peter’s interpretation of some of Paul’s “hard-to-understand” statements? We must keep in mind that when we are in a classroom studying the revelation of God, Peter is seated right there beside us as God teaches all of us through revelation. He is raising his hand just as we are in studying those “hard to understand” points of revelation.

The fact is that those who claim to understand everything in the New Testament, and thus set themselves up as standards of interpretation, are actually doing what Peter stated, *“... those who are untaught and unstable distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures.”* If we affirm that others must conform to our understanding of difficult Scriptures, then we are distorting the word of God to our own destruction. We are destroying the unity of the body by forcing on others our own interpretations of difficult passages.

Does Paul assume in 1 Corinthian 1:10 that we all understand all Scripture in the same way? This cannot be the case simply because there are some scriptures over which we will always disagree. We all have our personal opinions concerning the interpretation of difficult passages. It is true that there are some scriptures that are more clear and easy to understand than others. Those scriptures that are less clear cannot be used to establish doctrines that determine fellowship and unity. If we assume that they should, then who is the authority to determine the correct understanding of the passages? Whose interpretation has authority over others? If a particular passage is not clearly understood by a brother, another brother cannot assume that his understanding is correct, and thus, not fellowship the brother who does not clearly understand the passage because he is new in the faith. We cannot use passages over which we find ourselves in disagreement as “proof texts” that determine fellowship. If we do, then we have elevated some teachers as the authoritative interpreters of the Scriptures. Some religious groups have done this, and thus, denominations have written books of enthroned authoritative interpretations of their forefathers in order to preserve their identity. In the Catholic Church this authority is simply placed in the hands of the Pope, whom the Catholics claim to speak by inspiration.

This brings us back to a better understanding of 1 Corinthians 1:10. In the context, **Paul is simply not talking about doctrinal differences**. The context is discussing division among the Corinthians concerning

personalities, not doctrines. He is rebuking them in the context for calling themselves after certain individuals, when they should be calling themselves after Christ alone (1 Co 1:12,13). This is what he means when he said that they must "speak the same thing."

The phrase "speak the same thing" is a Greek idiomatic expression. It means "to be on the same side, and not in a civil war." In the context, our allegiance to Christ is commanded. This is the context of 1 Corinthians 1:10. The Corinthians had all been baptized into a covenant relationship with Christ, and thus, they were all on the same side. They were destroying this relationship by going to "civil war" with one another over personalities. What Paul was commanding was that they restore their allegiance to Christ alone. They must understand that all baptized believers are on the side of Christ, not the side of Paul, Apollos or Cephas. Therefore, it is Christ alone who can bring all believers together into fellowship. This is not the work of man, but the work of our Savior.

D. Ephesians 4:1-6:

"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 and forbearing one another in love, being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace****. There is one body and one Spirit, even as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."*

The foundational teaching of Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-6 is Jesus' statement in John 17:20,21. The three of the Godhead is the foundation for the oneness of the body. The unity among the three is the basis for the unity among the many members. The disciples of Jesus are in unity simply because of the oneness of the Godhead. *"For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body"* (1 Co 12:13).

The spiritual qualities that maintain the unity of baptized believers is humility, gentleness, forbearing one another, and an eagerness to stay together as the family of God. In verse 4 of Ephesians 4 Paul moves from the hortatory to the declarative. He moves from telling them **what should be** to telling them **what is**. What is is the fact that there is one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism and God. This is the reason why Christians should be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4-6 brings the oneness of the Godhead into the oneness of the body. The body is one because the Godhead functions as one. There are three statements of truth made in Ephesians 4:4-6 that focus around the Spirit, Lord and Father. There is a triad of truth that is symmetrical, and thus, illustrates the oneness of the body because of the oneness of the Godhead. God, the Father, is above all and in all. Those in whom the Father dwells have come into a covenant relationship with Him through the one faith and one baptism. And it is the one Spirit that dwells in the one body that is called into one hope. Spirit, Lord and Father are one. The one body, hope, faith, and baptism result from the one God. The unity of the one body, therefore, is traced back to the oneness of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those who accept the unity of the Godhead, respond through faith and baptism to become the one united body of God's people. The unity of the respondents, therefore, is a testimony to the world that there is one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Jn 17:20,21).

Now the growth of the body unto maturity is explained by Paul in Ephesians 4:13-16. He explains that the body comes *"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"* (vs 13). It is our oneness in unity that matures with our spiritual growth. This is something that cannot be commanded. It comes naturally as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. It is something into which we grow individually over a period of time. Therefore, it is with maturity that we grow into oneness. When we grow in the *"grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18), we grow to think as one. Our bonding with one another in Christ, therefore, is our continued objective as we grow in Christ.

Our oneness in heart is not where we begin, but where we seek to end in Christ. This is the goal that Paul set forth in 1 Corinthian 1:10, and the goal that we seek to realize because of our love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). In order to accomplish this oneness, Paul concluded Ephesians 4 in reference to the bond of peace, *"****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****"* (Ep 4:31,32). There could not have been a better statement made to conclude an exhortation on unity and a description of the fellowship we have in Christ. In all our differences, Ephesians 4:31,32 is us as the body of Christ. It is not that we have arrived at perfection in these areas, but that all who are in Christ have this road map to oneness in fellowship with one another.

E. 2 John 9,10:

*"Whoever goes ahead and does not abide in **the teaching of Christ**, does not have God. He who abides in the teaching of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring **this teaching**, do not receive him into your house and do not give him greeting."*

Those who have obeyed the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Co 15:1-4; Rm 6:3-6), find themselves in the common salvation (Jd 3) that is in Christ. In Christ we are to grow in this unity that comes as a blessing from God (Ep 4:3). Because Christians have been called by the gospel (2 Th 2:14) into fellowship with Christ (1 Co 1:9), they are to work out of their attitudes any spirit of contention or sectarianism. Christians are Christ-centered because of their faith in "the teaching of Christ." This "teaching of Christ" must dwell in them in order that they continue in the faith. But in the statements of 2 John 9,10, we understand that this teaching can be forfeited, and thus, fellowship with those who have forsaken the "teaching of Christ," must be broken.

In order to understand what John was writing, we must keep an axiomatic truth in mind: **Whenever something is possible because it depends on the existence of something else, then when the foundational truth ceases to exist, then that which stands on its existence must also cease to exist**. Now apply this truth to John's context. Our unity in Christ is based on the fact that Jesus is the Christ and the incarnate Son of God. If in one's thinking Christ ceases to be this, then one must forfeit his unity with those with whom he was blessed with fellowship in the one body. Now we bring this thought into the context of 2 John 9,10 to help us understand the one who was not abiding in the "teaching of Christ."

Both 1 John and 2 John appear to be written around the same time, though to different recipients. Both deal with a prevailing problem that threatened the church. Consider 1 John 1:2. *"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**."* Now compare this statement with 2 John 3. *"Grace, mercy and peace will be with us from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, **the Son of the Father**, in truth and love"* (See also 1 Jn 2:24; 4:1-6,9,14,15; 5:1,5,6,9,10,20). Both passages deal with a rising problem of Gnosticism (antichrists) that would in the 2nd century take about half of the church into apostasy. In 1 John 2:18,22, John continues, *"... 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"* (vs 18). *"Who is a liar? **It is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ**. **This is the antichrist**, the one who denies the Father and the Son"* (vs 22). In 2 John, John follows up on what he said in 1 John. *"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; see also 1 Jn 2:19-20,28; 3:7,23,24; 4:1-4; 5:13,20).

John was writing to those who were continuing in that which they had heard from the beginning (1 Jn 1:1-3). He rejoiced over their faithfulness (3 Jn 3,4). However, he warned the recipients of his three letters (1 Jn, 2 Jn, 3 Jn), that there were those who were giving up the foundational truth of the incarnate Christ that they had heard from the beginning. These were the deceivers and antichrists (2 Jn 7). John's warning to the faithful was, *"Look to yourselves so that you do not lose those things that we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward"* (2 Jn 8). He thus reminds his readers of 2 John that if they lose the teaching concerning who the Christ was, they would also lose God. If they left Christ as the incarnate Son of God, they would leave God. This was exactly what the Gnostic teachers were doing. They were giving up the simple teaching that Jesus was incarnate in the flesh (See Jn 1:14). They were denying the incarnation that Jesus was continuing in the flesh. By denying this teaching of Christ, they were thus giving up God. If they said they were "Christian," therefore, they were liars. One cannot deny the Son, and at the same time honor the Father. *"He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father **who has sent Him**"* (Jn 5:23). *"**Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father**"* (1 Jn 2:23). And then, *"**Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God**, God dwells in him and he in God"* (1 Jn 4:15).

Honoring the Son as to who He was could not be terminated, and still remain in fellowship with those who continue to believe in the incarnate Son. One could not deny who Jesus was, and yet remain with the Father. Who the Son is establishes the foundation upon which our faith stands and our fellowship continues. If Jesus were not who He said He was, then we are of all men to be pitied.

The context of 2 John is seated in the historical context of those who were denying that Jesus had come in the flesh, was continuing in the flesh, and would come in the flesh. Now we must think on this context in view of the fact that so many people completely miss the point of understanding 2 John 9,10. 2 John 9,10 is not talking about someone with whom we might have a disagreement of interpretation over a difficult passage, or one who does not conform to our "selected theology." It is not talking about differences of opinions. It is not talk-

ing about differences of methodologies. To use 2 John 9,10 as the foundation upon which to reject, or not even eat with those Christ-believers with whom we have some differences in interpretation, is a gross twisting of the meaning of what John was saying. We certainly know of no one in Christendom today who denies that Jesus came in the flesh. It would be just as wrong to use this passage to withdraw from some brother with whom we might disagree as it would be to deny the truth that Jesus was the Son of God who came in the flesh.

We must keep in mind that 2 John 9,10 is talking about the incarnate Son of God in view of His present and future existence. This is "the teaching of Christ." We must keep in mind that the word "teaching" is singular, not plural. Therefore, reference is not to a codified outline of teachings, but to a teaching. And that teaching is that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

F. 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 ...." Maybe we should follow this statement with Proverbs 22:10. *"Cast out the scoffer and contention will leave, yes, strife and reproach will cease."*

The question is, "Who are the ones to be marked?" The answer, "Those who cause divisions and offenses." But who are these? Verse 18 answers this question. These are those who *"serve not our Lord Christ but their own belly."* This is not the brother who has a different view concerning cups at the communion, differences concerning the final coming of Christ, assembly order, or some other matters in reference to opinions or methodologies. Those who are to be marked are those who are doing what Paul explained in Galatians 4:17. *"They zealously recruit you, but not for good. Yes, they want to exclude you so that you might be zealous for them."* Or, consider also his exhortation to the Ephesian elders. *"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). Those to be marked are those who recruit others for the sake of having a following. In doing such, they develop sects among the believers. In the Galatian context it was the legalistic judaizing teachers who were seeking to bind where God had not bound, and thus bring into the bondage of meritorious works those who had been set free in Christ (See Gl 5:1). In the context of the Ephesian elders it was those who sought to use their work as a shepherd to gain a following. In both case, reference was to those who sought to gain a following. Those who recruit and seek a following may have used a particular set of opinions to identify their schism. But in doing this they are drawing away disciples after themselves, and thus, they are to be marked. This has no reference to working in areas of freedom. The context of these scriptures was in drawing away disciples unto either personalities or doctrines that they would bind where God had not bound.

Those in the context of Romans 16 were those who had a sectarian spirit. They wanted to create their own party. The context of Romans 16:17,18, therefore, is in reference to personalities, not some doctrine. And since the entire book of Romans is about being set free by God's grace, then Romans 16:17,18 would be in reference to those individuals who sought to bind where God had not bound in order to draw disciples away after themselves.

But view Romans 16:17,18 also from a situation in which the minority sometimes finds themselves. The same principle applies. Suppose a minority within a group seek to function in the realm of freedom to work in a different way than the majority. They have the freedom to so work, but usually draw the condemnation of the majority because they are not walking according to the norm of the majority. In this case, the majority are violating the principle of Romans 16:17,18 because they are binding in the area of freedom those things that are simply the tradition of the majority.

Whenever the majority seeks to bind norms that are in the area of opinion, and thus in the area of freedom, they have identified themselves as a religious denomination, and thus, they have become exclusive in their fellowship. It is in this way that denominations are formed. The majority seek to infringe on the freedom of the minority through social pressure that they conform to the function of the majority. They do this by threatening disfellowship, or more subtly, by ignoring those with whom they disagree in areas of freedom of function. By their actions they have defined themselves as a sect that is governed by an unwritten code of function. The majority are the ones who have thus caused the division, not the minority who are working in the area of freedom in Christ.

This is the contextual meaning of what Paul discussed concerning the judaizing teachers who were binding circumcision as a test of fellowship (See At 15:1,2). Of these brethren who would bind their matters of opinion (circumcision) on the Gentile brethren, Paul stated– and read this very carefully– *"I could wish that those who are troubling you* [those binding circumcision] *would cut themselves off from you. For you, brethren,*

have been called to liberty ...” (Gl 5:12,13). If you were a Gentile brother living in Jerusalem during the early days of the church, you would be in the minority. You would have been compelled to be circumcised, that is, to conform to the norms of the majority. But Paul would never stand for such, that is, the majority seeking to compel the minority to conform to the wishes of the majority in the realm of liberty. Such he said on one occasion when he took Titus, a Gentile, on a trip to Jerusalem. *“But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised”* (Gl 2:3).

Chapter 8

RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER

We have heard some interesting ideas throughout the years concerning what is “biblical.” We were once confronted by a delegation who disagreed with baptizing people in a stationary baptistry wherein there was no running water. We have heard of others proclaiming that clapping hands in assembly somehow brought people into some hypnotic trance. We have heard of those who would not partake of the fruit of the vine until it set out at room temperature long enough to ferment into wine, and thus, become “biblical.” And we have seen those who believe that only one cup can be used to serve the fruit of vine, even to a massive audience of hundreds of people. This list could go on. And this brings us to the context of Romans 14. Paul’s teaching in this one chapter should encourage us to be cautious about drawing circles of fellowship, or at least to see opportunities where we can show love by being patient with those with whom we disagree. The Holy Spirit’s instructions in this chapter give us some principle guidelines by which to maintain the unity of the Spirit in our diversity, while at the same time we respect one another’s uniqueness.

A. Unity in diversity:

This is a real life principle that teaches that there can be unity, though there is diversity of thought and behavior in areas of freedom. This “unity in diversity” must exist between the mature (strong) brother and the weak brother. Paul assumes, therefore, that there are levels of maturity that the strong must understand in order to maintain unity with the weak brother who is growing in the faith. In the following chapter 15 Paul summed up his principle for unity. *“... so that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore,* ***accept one another as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God****”* (Rm 15:6,7). Paul’s admonition in Romans 14, therefore, is, *“Do not let him who eats despise him who does not eat. And do not let him who does not eat judge him who eats,* ***for God has received him****”* (vs 3). The first principle to understand in establishing unity is that God has received both parties who may be involved in a controversy. In our disagreements as brethren, we must never forget that both our names are written in heaven.

In the fellowship of the saints there are the mature brothers and there are those who are young brothers who are new converts. Each must receive one another in order to preserve the unity with which they were blessed upon their baptism into Christ. God accepted them with all their baggage, therefore they must accept one another. Our fellowship with one another does not mean that everyone is mature spiritually. And it does not mean that everyone is mature in understanding that which is beyond fundamental teachings. It does mean that we must be lovingly patient with one another as we grow together in Christ.

In the context of Romans 14 the vegetarian brother was wrong in thinking that it was wrong to eat meat. However, to him personally it was wrong to eat meat because he still associated idol worship with the meat that was sold in the market. If he ate the meat, he would sin (Rm 14:23). In order to help this brother overcome his thinking in reference to food, Paul instructed, *“I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself”* (vs 14). The strong brother was to exercise patience until the weak brother came to this conclusion.

Now if the vegetarian was one who had been long in the faith, then this would be an entirely different context of instruction. Paul would be writing as to the Galatian judaizing teachers who were making matters of opinion matters of salvation. They were making matters of opinion salvational by binding their opinions as law. If one who had been in the faith for several years would seek to bind vegetarianism as a law, then Paul would have written judgment concerning him because he would have been binding in the realm of freedom in which Christians live in Christ (Gl 5:1).

B. The strong and the weak:

In the context of Romans 14 the weak were the vegetarian brethren who thought that they were to abstain from anything that was associated with idol worship (vs 2,6). Some esteemed one day above another (vs 5,6). In these things they were somewhat contentious (vs 6,15,20,21,23), and thus, judgmental of the strong (vs 2,3,10). But Paul's exhortation to the weak was that they not judge the strong (vs 3,4,10). They were to receive them (vs 3,7), and thus not bind on the strong their misconceptions (vs 2,3). If the weak sought to bind on the church vegetarianism, then they would be binding where God had not bound.

The strong in Romans 14 were the mature brethren who knew that there was nothing in what one ate, nor any significance to a particular day of the week. The strong knew that there was nothing in what the weak believed concerning the eating of meat (vs 2,5). But they had a responsibility to the weak in reference to maintaining fellowship with them. They were to receive the weak (vs 1; 15:7). They were to avoid any divisions in reference to their fellowship with the weak (vs 1). They were not to despise the weak because of their beliefs in reference to vegetarianism (vs 10). Though the strong were free from the scruples of eating meat, they could not bind on the weak their freedom to eat meat. The weak could not bind their vegetarianism on the strong, and the strong could not bind their freedom to eat all foods. Both parties were exhorted to guard one another's freedom in Christ until the weak grew out of associating meat with idols and any religious significance in reference to particular days.

C. Teach what is right:

Another important lesson we learn from Romans 14 is that the truth must always be taught. Regardless of the inhibitions of the weak brother in reference to eating meat, the truth must be taught that God created all foods to be eaten (vs 14). The truth must be taught that the kingdom of God is not food and drink, *"but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (vs 17). In the context of Paul's instructions to the weak, he assumed that the weak would eventually grow out of their scruples in reference to eating meat. In their growth, they would soon eat meat without any reference to idols. But until that time, Paul never instructed the brethren to divide into the "meat eating church" and the "vegetarian church."

D. The responsibility of the strong:

It is the responsibility of the strong to create an atmosphere wherein the weak can grow without being intimidated to do that which is against his conscience. Since the weak can only abstain from that which goes against his conscience, then it is the strong brother who has two options. He can abstain or he can eat. He has freedom to do both. But until the weak grows out of his feelings that eating meat reminds him of things offered to idols, he must abstain. The strong is truly free, but he is not free to encourage the weak to eat that which is against his conscience. If he does, then he is not walking in love. And if the weak eats by the encouragement of the strong, then the weak is not walking by faith (vs 23). He is thus encouraged by the strong to sin against his conscience. The strong must restrain their freedom for the sake of the weak, and by doing such, they walk in love (vs 15; see 1 Co 9:21).

Paul is not discussing in Romans 14 the whims of those who are supposed to be strong. This matter is between the strong in the faith and the new convert, not those who have been in the faith for years. If one has been in the faith for many years, then he is the strong. He may disagree with another strong brother who is walking in an area of freedom. But because he may not agree with a particular point of opinion of another strong brother who is exercising his freedom in Christ, does not give him the right to intimidate or speak against the actions of another strong brother who is exercising his freedom to do things differently. If he does, then he is cantankerous, and thus has a spirit of contention. A strong brother who speaks against the actions of another strong brother who is walking in the rights of his freedom is a brother who must be approached for his spirit of contention. This is when the church must follow the mandate of Titus 3:10. *"Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition."*

Chapter 9

FREE IN CHRIST

There is a fundamental principle of unity taught by Paul 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."* Maintaining the unity of the Spirit is seated in the principle that Christians are free from meritorious law-keeping and works.

Since Christians have also been freed from the doctrines and commandments of men, they are mandated by Paul in the preceding statement to guard their freedom. It is incumbent on all Christians to help one another to remain free from anything that would bring them into the bondage of men.

When we focus on freedom, we are focusing on keeping our minds on Christ and His word, and not on the religious restrictions and laws that come from man. Freedom, therefore, is not from Christ, but from man. We are free from man in order to obey Christ. Any who would authoritatively bind religious man-made laws on God's people are stealing away their loyalty to Christ alone. We have been set free from the confinement of the laws of man in order to submit totally to the law of Christ. Any religious authority on earth that would supplant the authority of Christ, weakens our focus on Christ. Any religious code of laws that we would bind on ourselves, weakens our total commitment to the word of Christ as the foundation of our faith.

Maintaining the unity of the Spirit is impossible for those who have submitted themselves to the religious laws of man. It is for this reason that God gave us the Bible. The Bible is our freedom charter. It is the standard of judgment by which we accept others into fellowship. We are not left to ourselves to determine standards of fellowship. That responsibility has been assumed by Jesus (Jn 12:48). Therefore, any standard of authority for fellowship other than the word of Christ, is a standard that has inherent division.

Freedom and a sectarian attitude oppose one another. The sectarian is legalistic in his beliefs, and thus his fear is that someone will discover an inconsistency in his theology. The sectarian fears freedom of thought, for freedom releases one from the confines of that which identifies a sect. Those who have been confined in the bondage of sectarianism are kept there because some forefathers wrote a creed book to guarantee their legacy and identity as a denomination. It is even more difficult to escape the bondage of those denominations that have written no creed of identity. Such groups are often perpetuated on the basis of conducting regular meetings wherein the marks of identity of the group are rehearsed and adherents are continually brought into conformity by the intimidation of the whole. Whether written or unwritten, the creeds of men are contrary to the freedom that every believer has in Christ.

Freedom in Christ does not assume that we are free to believe and practice whatever we so choose. There are beliefs and practices that are *"contrary to sound teaching"* (1 Tm 1:10). It is as Paul warned Timothy, *"Hold fast the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in faith and love that is in Christ"* (2 Tm 1:13). When one is baptized into Christ, he is baptized into a realm of freedom wherein he is released from the bondage of man-made religious laws. He has been born into a realm of instruction by the word of Christ (Jn 12:48). Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when those who had come into Christ would no longer desire to continue in a faith that was under the direction of Jesus. *"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). Elders have the specific responsibility of guarding the church against such apostasy, for 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).

The word of Christ sets us free from the bondage of man-made religiosity. It is for this reason, therefore, that every disciple must school himself in the word of God. In order to appreciate and maintain our freedom in Christ it is absolutely necessary that every disciple be a noble-minded student of the word of God (See At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15). Those who are ignorant of the word of God, therefore, are not free. They are in bondage to their own religiosity. It is in ignorance of the word of God that thousands of churches have resorted to either favorite personalities or concert assemblies in order to maintain the attraction of the people. Adherents to such churches are not truly free. They may feel good after their assemblies, but they are not free. It is only the truth that will set one free from himself (Jn 8:32). And if one is ignorant of the truth of God, he is not free. Churches that do not encourage Bible study can never be free. They will always be in bondage to their own religiosity, and thus, divided in fellowship from all other groups that are doomed to the same destiny of division.

Our freedom in fellowship, therefore, is based on the word of God. This does not mean that we agree on every detail of Scripture. Unity does not depend on a uniformity of interpretation of every verse of Scripture. Those who would seek unity by cloning interpretations have simply established another denomination. Our unity comes as a gift of God upon our baptism into Christ. Unity can be maintained between covenanted disciples only when each disciple gives other disciples the freedom to approach the Scriptures as an individual interpreter.

No person has a right to be the final authority in opinions and interpretations. No one group has the right to establish the correct code of law. When free individuals are given the right to approach the Scriptures

from their own understanding, then we are set free from one another. We are thus guarded from being brought into the bondage of one another's opinions and interpretations. Being a teacher of the word of God, therefore, does not assume that one has authority over another to bind where God has not bound. Since all authority rests with Christ, then we are simply communicators of His authority that comes through His word. When we are teachers of His word, it is our task to keep Jesus on His throne in the lives of our students. Our vast knowledge of His word as a longtime student does not give us a place of authority among the disciples. If we do not maintain this attitude as a teacher of the word, we will bring our students again into bondage, our bondage.

If we give one another freedom, we protect one another from intimidation. We protect one another from authorities that might rise up among us to steal sheep away from Jesus (At 20:30). But if we keep one another focused on Jesus through His word, then our fellowship is strong, for our Head is unmovable.

Chapter 10

FELLOWSHIP vs ECUMENISM

Ecumenism is the belief that as long as one believes in Jesus, he is a part of the "universal church," and thus, in a saved relationship with God. Regardless of what one believes in reference to conditions for salvation and "the truth," one is fine with God. There is a strong ecumenical movement among religious people today. We would commend the rise in religiosity, but religiosity without truth is void of our desired goal of true fellowship and unity that is based on the word of God.

Embedded within ecumenism are the seeds of its own destruction. If there is no absolute truth to which men must conform in order to be obedient unto God, then there is no revelation from God that would demand our obedience and fellowship with one another. The answer for unity among all religious people is not to scrap the Bible. It is to seek out God's standard by which we can come together as His one family.

Ecumenism teaches that unity of all believers is based on the desire of all believers to simply have a mutual fellowship with one another. But this is deceptive. **Unity among believers cannot originate from the believers themselves**. It originates from God. Jesus' prayer that they all be one, *"even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You"* establishes the foundation for true unity. Unity among believers must always originate from the Father and Son. They are one in all, and thus, that "even as" foundation must be communicated to those who seek to be in fellowship with one another. This is the concept that John sought to convey to us. *"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). Anytime men come together to create an artificial unity that is hammered out at a table of negotiation, then we know that the result is a man-made union based on compromises. Only the oneness of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the basis upon which true unity is made. And since this is true, all who would be Christians, and subsequently one in Christ, must assume that God has revealed His standards for unity and fellowship among His people.

Those who would support an ecumenical solution for religious division miss the point. The foundation for unity is beyond the inventions of religious people. It involves the complete truth of Christ and a total focus on His word. True fellowship and unity is the joyous serendipity of those who have been obedient to the gospel, and thus the obedient feast on the revelation from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When people obsess over the word of God, they emerge from it in obedience to the gospel. Every person anywhere in the world who is like-minded in study and obedience comes forth from the waters of baptism to be added to the one universal church of Christ (At 2:47). This is not something that is orchestrated by man. It is a God thing that is produced by His word. And thus, it is the word of God that produces true unity. It is the word of God that is the effective medium through which unity among all believers is realized. This is the thought of Peter when he stated, *"... having been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides"* (1 Pt 1:23).

Peter also wrote, *"... to those who have obtained a like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 1:1). It is the word of God that produces this faith (Rm 10:17). Therefore, it is the faith first, and then the unity. There is no unity where there is no like precious faith. And thus, there can be no true unity unless there is a common acceptance of the divinely inspired word of Christ that produces faith. Men are drawn together in unity when they are first drawn to Christ together through His word. Any

other concept of "unity" is only union that has been negotiated by religious people.

Those who seek to establish ecumenical unions are seeking to usher into Christendom a false premise upon which to establish unity. Their erroneous assumption is that believers can be united if they hold common forms and beliefs in religion. Sharing common religious formalities is believed to be sufficient grounds upon which to be "united." But the fallacy of such thinking is obvious. We share certain beliefs with the Jews, but the Christian is not in fellowship with Jews. Christians share certain beliefs with Muslims, but Christians are not in fellowship with Muslims. Christians share religiosity with Hindus and idol worshipers, but this does not bring Christians into fellowship with such religions. Must we be reminded of what Paul wrote to the former idol worshipers of Corinth. *"And what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he who believes with an unbeliever? And what union has the temple of God with idols?* (2 Co 6:15,16). If unity in fellowship is simply based on common points of religious contact, then we must scrap the word of God. We must throw our common faith out the window. If we accept Belial into our fellowship, then the Bible must go.

If the word of God is our foundation for faith, then only on this word must our fellowship be established. Any other foundation for fellowship is man-made, and thus false. It is a fellowship that is political and doomed to destruction. It is for this reason that there can never be any real fellowship between a Bible-believing Christian and those who have no respect for the word of God. No believer has any part in fellowshipping a religious unbeliever whose foundation for faith is anything other than the word of Christ. Fellowship in Christ is not an open-door policy to allow every religious person in. Jesus is the door to fellowship with His fold, and the way in is through His instructions (See Jn 10:1-21).

We must keep in mind that **things equal to the same thing are equal to one another. But those things that have some common features, but features that identify themselves as different from others, are not the same thing**. In the world of Protestantism there are many religious groups. Among all the different groups are some common features. But there are also those features that identify each group as unique and different from the others. Unity is never established on the basis of bringing these groups together on the foundation of their common features. Each group will continue to fight for their peculiar identity by maintaining their unique names and doctrines. Their union in a "council of churches" will only be an artificial "unity" that is based on a political acceptance of one another. No one group in the council seeks to return to the word of God as the foundation for faith. In fact, the opposite is true. They entrench their marks of identity in order not to be lost in the maze of the religious organization.

Some have been critical of those who seek a restoration to the word-based faith of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Scriptures. They consider that the differences that exist among restorationists invalidates the restoration plea. Or, they view the restorationist as hypocritical in calling people out of denominational division into a movement that has its own denominational division. The critic has missed the point.

Those who call for restoration are not calling people to religious cloning. They are calling people back to the authority of the word of God, with freedom in the area of opinions and interpretation. Calling people back to the authority of the word of God means calling people back to fundamental truths that need no interpretation. Once one returns to these fundamental truths, then there is freedom to study the word of God the rest of our lives without being intimidated by traditions or some religious heritage. It is freedom to restore Bible classes where Bible students can come together in an atmosphere of free thinking, without the pressure to defend some religious tradition or heritage.

What history has revealed is that there are thousands of people throughout the world who find the plea for restoration refreshing. Thousands have throughout history escaped the bondage of a protestant religion of creeds and power structures in order to find freedom in Christ. They have turned from catechisms and creed books in order to enjoy the liberty that comes from being focused exclusively on Christ and His word. Thus the plea of the restorationist has worked effectively. The plea for restoration has been effective because it is not a plea to "start another church." It has been effective because millions have discovered that the church was already started two thousand years ago. And if one wanted to be added to this church of God's people today, then he simply needs to believe and obey the gospel. No schooling in catechisms and creed books are required.

Chapter 11

THE RISE OF THE PARTY

When we read the description of those with whom Christians are not to fellowship, an interesting picture develops. Paul described those who are to be marked as serving *"their own belly"* (Rm 16:18). These are *"factious"* in their relationships with other disciples (Ti 3:10). Paul refers to factious people as "perverted" and "self-condemned" (Ti 3:11). Some disciples walk disorderly (2 Th 3:6). They are busybodies, going about living off the wealth of others (2 Th 3:11). They have gone beyond the teaching of Christ (2 Jn 9,10). They practice "evil deeds" (2 Jn 11). These are deceivers and liars (2 Jn 7). Now is this a description of the local preacher down the street who is preaching for a church against whom we would not dare seek to associate in any manner? Is this a description of our neighbor across the street with whom we have had many discussions over the Bible, and yet have not been able to come to an agreement? Please think on these things. We often go to war with those about whom the Bible speaks nothing concerning the "error" of their way.

There is certainly an appeal in the Scriptures that we contend earnestly for the faith that is based on the truth of God (Jd 3). But sometimes our field of contention is outside the realm of Scripture where we should be contending. Instead of lumping everyone with whom we disagree into the crowd of these about whom the Scriptures define as "false teachers," it would be best that we should be a little more patient with one another.

We must keep in mind that our task is not to convert someone to our views on opinion, but to Christ and the authority of His word. And in working with others in reference to the Bible, there are some things that are perfectly clear that are made in declarative statements and direct commands. Over such things no opinion of interpretation is to be made. But there are other areas that are not so clear. Therefore, we must work cautiously in areas of opinion where interpretation is needed. Some things may be clear to us, but not clear to others. And simply because they are clear to us does not make us the authoritative interpreter for others. For this reason we cannot make conditions for fellowship those teachings that are based on passages that are not clear, but need more time for study in order to understand. This is true simply because we have no inspired interpreters among us who can be our authorities for interpretation.

Now in view of the fact that there are scriptures that are not clearly understood, a religious phenomenon arises that often denominates believers into different theological camps, each conforming to the accepted interpretation of the camp as a whole. In the development of these camps around their "selected theology," the group of adherents have agreed to overlook certain disagreements over opinions and interpretations in order to develop their party. At the same time, when the selected doctrines develop in the group in order to identity the party as unique and distinct from all other parties that they conclude are in error, then there is strict conformity to the accepted identifying doctrines of the party by all adherents. When everyone chooses to conform to the agreed doctrines, then unity is supposed to prevail. What has happened in the evolution of this distinct party is that a legal adherence to the selected doctrines of the party have become the standard by which other parties are judged to be in error. If others do not conform to the selected doctrines of the party that assumes to have "the truth," then they are judged to be in error. At the same time, the party that has championed its selected doctrines has become a denomination itself because of its theology that has resulted from enshrining selected opinions and interpretations. As a result, they have separated themselves from everyone else.

What this scenario produces is an embedded basis for division within the group. Our desire for unity is misled because we have sought to orchestrate unity around agreed upon opinions and interpretations that we champion as marks of identity of the church. In order to have unity we convince ourselves that we must all conform to the accepted theology (opinions and interpretations) of the party, while rejecting those who might have come to other conclusions in reference to our proof texts. Our dilemma is that we seek to have unity wherein our conscience is governed by all the accepted codes that identify our particular party. Since we have a host of scriptures under every point of the codified outline that identifies the uniqueness of our party, we are at ease in our conscience.

The problem with this theological mentality is that we have always had disagreements over understanding certain scriptures on our outlines. But since we have agreed to conform to a selected few points of scripture that are supposed to have been interpreted correctly by our forefathers, then we have taken it upon ourselves to be "defenders of the faith," not knowing that we are actually defending our forefathers' interpretation of those

passages that supposedly validated the unique nature of the church. The old and established principle of Bible study that says "all familiar passages must be reexamined," is thrown out the door.

Now that we have consciously conformed to our "pattern" of "sound doctrine," we have bred factionalism into the ranks of our own party. Any who would not conform to the accepted interpretations of the proof texts of our outline that supposedly identifies the true church that Christ established are criticized and ostracized. Free thinking is terminated, and thus, a legal religiosity that is void of the spirit of Christ is sacrificed for legal conformity to the accepted doctrines of identity. What we have theologically maneuvered to be the foundation for unity has now become the occasion for division.

Here is where we often go wrong in the initial stages in the evolution of our isolation. If we assume that our intellectual agreement on certain opinions and interpretations to which we all must conform is the foundation for our unity, then we have gone wrong in two areas. First, **we have erroneously assumed that our human intellect has the ability to determine a theological outline of opinions and interpretations upon which we can identify ourselves as a unique body**. In developing this outline, we add to the fundamentals that truly identify the church. Nevertheless, by elevating minor points of opinion and interpretation that we suppose must also identify the church, we have produced an identity of the church that is the foundation upon which division is rife. But in order to reassure ourselves that our outline is correct, we assume we have theological "scholars" among us in whom we have vested authority to determine what are the correct minors. However, these minor points are based on texts over which there is often disagreement, even among the ranks of the "scholars." But because we have agreed on our selected interpretations that would supposedly produce unity and identify us as the church, we have confused fundamental teaching with opinionated interpretations. Our outline of the church is rife with points of disagreement, and thus, we go to war with one another over minor points of opinion. We major in theological minors. What theological humbugs we are.

Secondly, **we have wrongly assumed that every believer will come to the same conclusions at the same time when he comes to Christ**. But this is erroneous thinking because babes in Christ have a lifetime to study the word of God. Only those things that are fundamental to salvation are clearly and immediately understood, and thus establish our fellowship with the people of God. As new babes in Christ continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pt 3:18), they often come to different conclusions in their studies because of their different religious backgrounds or amount of study of the word of God. After the fundamentals for salvation are known and obeyed, different conclusions in Bible study cannot be grounds for disfellowship since all disciples are in a process of growing in the grace and **knowledge of Christ** (2 Pt 3:18). Only when one comes to a conclusion that violates plainly stated truth are there grounds for "marking" and "rejecting."

As we study the New Testament, we will continue to come to some different conclusions in understanding various passages. We seek to acquire as much knowledge of the word of God as possible. However, acquiring this knowledge is a process. It takes time. It takes a lifetime of study, and thus our learning is progressive. **Nowhere in the New Testament is it revealed that we must come to a certain knowledge of the word of God at a specific time in order to be brought into the fellowship of the church**. Therefore, love must prevail between individual interpreters on their journey to study the word of God. It would be against the principle of forbearing one another on this journey of learning if we seek to criticize and ostracize continually those with whom we may disagree along the journey. Validating ourselves as faithful Christians while we criticize and ostracize others over matters of opinion is certainly not Christian.

The road map of our journey (the word of God) will not lead us in different directions, directions that lead us to different theological camps, or denominations. The road map is correct. It was never written to produce disunity. Men produce disunity, not the word of God.

What must continually be brought into check is our attitude and the methods by which we come to our conclusions in our study of the word of God. If our methods of study produce factionalism among the sojourners, then we must bring into question our methods of Bible study and our attitudes. The Holy Spirit never inspired the word to be written in a manner that would produce division among sincere Bible students. If division occurs, then we must question ourselves and our methods of study, not the Holy Spirit. And before we question our methods of study, we must first check our attitudes to make sure we have a forbearing heart (Ph 4:5).

In our struggles to agree along our journey of understanding the word of God, we must be cautioned about throwing around the term "false teacher." This term was used in the New Testament in reference to those who denied either the resurrection or incarnation and sonship of Jesus. This is far from the beliefs of those with

whom we might disagree on matters of opinion and interpretation. One is not a false teacher who has disagreed with our selected interpretations on unclear passages that we have used to identify our particular party.

What we must understand is that in a Christendom of disagreements, every conclusion cannot be true. When we come to different conclusions in matters of opinion over unclear passages, one of us has to be wrong. But we might never know who has the wrong conclusion because it is a matter of opinion. The problem comes when we move opinion into law by allowing the "scholars" among us to be the authoritative interpreters to whom we have given the right to canonize their particular interpretations. When we do this we have set up little popes who roam the land, or establish their schools in order to train conformists to continue their selected theology.

In all the trumpeting about who has come to the correct conclusion in all matters, we have ignored one very important point. Can a brother be wrong in his conclusions of study and yet be saved? The legalist who trumpets conformity to the selected agreements of doctrine must answer no. But this assumes he has come to a correct conclusion in all matters of study. He is thus arrogant, assuming that his study of the Scriptures has given him the right to reign over those novice students of the word who have just begun their lifetime of study.

If anyone assumes that we cannot be saved because we have come to some wrong conclusions over matters of opinion, then no one can be saved. No one can be saved because there is no one alive who knows all the truth of all scriptures in all the Bible. Now if we can be saved with our false conclusions on certain scriptures, then we must deal with another challenge. What erroneous conclusions in our personal study of the Bible can be maintained, and yet we be saved? If there are specific doctrines that we have developed that would bar us from heaven, then we have burdened ourselves with the responsibility of identifying those doctrines and proclaiming them as fundamental to our salvation. Imagine the emotional turmoil into which we have now cast ourselves?

If we feel that this responsibility is too great, then what we often do is turn this responsibility over to another. We often hear the statement, "Let me ask my pastor." This person has given his brains over to another because he will not deal with the word of God himself and the supposed consequences of his conclusions. Not only has he centered the existence of his party around the pastor, he has revealed that his approach to the word of God is insufficient. He has refused to take ownership of the conclusions of his own Bible study. Asking the pastor may be justified if one wants a second opinion on matters of interpretation. But when we are dealing with fundamental matters of salvation, one need not ask for another person's opinion. What is necessary for salvation is stated clearly right there in the Bible. Concerning these salvational matters we must always keep in mind what Paul wrote. *"Therefore, when you read **you can understand** my knowledge in the mystery of Christ"* (Ep 3:4). Paul instructed no person to "ask his pastor." Those things that are fundamental and necessary for salvation are clearly understood. One usually wants to ask his pastor only when he is confronted with fundamentals that contradict his previous claims to salvation.

Chapter 12

AVOIDING POPES

If we assume that unity in fellowship can be achieved only through a uniform conformity to an established man-made creed of identity that is agreed upon by all adherents, then there must of necessity be authorities within our party to proclaim what opinions or interpretations are authoritative. Some religious groups write down their deducted opinions and interpretations, and thus a creed book becomes the authority. Other groups do not write their accepted deductions down, and thus establish through history living authorities to whom the adherents must go in consultation as to what is the correct teaching on all matters. Some establish schools to which they call all adherents in order that young minds be indoctrinated with the selected and accepted theology for the preservation of the heritage of the party. In the independent church movements, the "ask-my-pastor" thinking has set up the local preacher as the final authority. Regardless of where the authority rests, conformity to a selected theology of opinions and interpretations apart from fundamental and salvational teachings, must have a human final authority if the party seeks to maintain its identity as a unique group. This is of necessity true since all of us within our chosen parties have come to different conclusions on certain passages within our parties.

The problem we often develop is that we make "doctrinal correctness" in every area of study a condition upon which we are church and upon which our sal-

vation depends. In reference to church, we identify unity upon the basis of everyone conforming to a codified selection of teachings that have been determined by previous "authorities" among us. We fellowship only those who conform to the identity that our "authorities" have developed in order that we all "speak the same thing."

We must affirm that there is absolute truth that we would call fundamental and necessary for our salvation. To these fundamentals all must comply for salvational purposes. However, we must also conclude that **we do not absolutely know all truth**. As we grow throughout our lifetime of Bible study, we come to know and understand more truth that is revealed in the Bible. However, we must keep in mind that nowhere in the Bible is there a specific time established in the journey of Christian growth that we must come to a knowledge of all truth that would validate our salvation, and thus our fellowship with one another. And since there is no point in time demanded, then we must assume that we should be patient with one another as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

After obedience to the gospel, every individual is at a different level of knowledge of the Scriptures. As the erroneous conclusions of our past religious confusion are dispelled through personal Bible studies, who are we to judge one another concerning fellowship? All of us are on this journey of discovery. Must we not accept one another as we grow? Or must we establish "new converts classes" in order to indoctrinate one another as soon as possible in order to guarantee that no one passes from life with a "half" knowledge of the "selected theology" of "our" church? At which stage of knowledge must we allow others into our fellowship? Who determines that we know enough truth after our obedience to the gospel to guarantee that we are saved with our erroneous conclusions that we have not yet dispelled through continued Bible study?

Our erroneous conclusion that there is set of doctrinal conclusions to which we have all agreed, which doctrines must be known and adhered to in order to guarantee salvation, has moved us to twist some scriptures out of their context. For example, as previously mentioned, in the context of 2 John the apostle was writing concerning those who denied the incarnation and sonship of Jesus. But in our eagerness to conform others to our conclusions, we have twisted the phrase "teaching of Christ" to refer to our code of opinionated conclusions. John was not referring to a code of teachings, but to the teaching of the deity and incarnation of the Son of God. We have subsequently betrayed our erroneous interpretation of this passage by rejecting those who have not conformed to our code of conclusions that identify our particular party.

So we might find ourselves in a situation of division or diversity. And we might understand how we got to where we are. But the question is how to deliver ourselves from our predicament in order to establish the fellowship about which God intended we have in Christ. The following are some points of beginning:

A. Recognize that we are human, but sincere:

The first thing to do is to admit that we are human and we are not where God would have us be. This is in the area of spirituality and knowledge of His word. People have convictions and want to do that which is right. However, we must not be so arrogant as to think that we are right on all matters, and thus, think that everyone must come to where we are before there can be fellowship and unity. Only the arrogant believe that they have all the answers and that their code of deductions is the measure by which everyone must be aligned before there is fellowship and unity.

We must remember that Christianity is a faith of growth. Consider these statements: *"...until we all come to the unity of the faith ... to a complete man ..."* (Ep 4:13). *"... we may grow up into Him in all things ..."* (Ep 4:15). *"... causes growth of the body ..."* (Ep 4:16). *"But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord ..."* (2 Pt 3:18). Get the point. In this process of growth after obedience to the gospel, it is incumbent on all disciples of Jesus to be patient with one another. We must be patient with our wrong conclusions and misunderstandings of the Scriptures as we learn to handle correctly the word of God (2 Tm 2:15).

B. Honor the conscience of others:

We adhere to our accepted code of deductions because we seek to conscientiously do what we think is right. We seek to please God, and thus we establish our legal code of doctrine in order to do that which we think is right in the eyes of God. However, we must remember that legal codes promote division and exclusions. They hinder us from receiving one another with all our wrong conclusions and novice understanding of the word of God. Notice the principle that was given by Paul after discussing the division in the Roman church over eating meat and the religious vegetarianism of new Christians. *"Therefore,* ***accept one another as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God****"* (Rm 15:7). We may not agree, but we must agree to accept one another even as Christ also accepted us in all erroneous beliefs. We cannot demand uniformity in belief concerning matters

of opinion, but we can accept one another in our differences. If we understand that Jesus accepted us in all our fallibility, then we can accept one another with all of what we might consider incorrect interpretations and deductions of the Scriptures. Even with our lack of knowledge of all truth, Jesus still accepts us. We must expect no less of one another.

C. Accept one another on the basis of salvational fundamentals:

We can maintain our fellowship and oneness when we reconsider again the fundamental teachings to which we initially responded that brought us together into Christ. We need to focus again on our understanding of being justified by the blood of Jesus. We need to rehearse our faith in the gospel event of Jesus' death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). Regardless of our differences in opinions and methodologies of work after our obedience to the gospel, if we reassure ourselves that we have all obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through baptism, then we can be assured that God has added us to His body of people (At 2:47). Reaffirming the fundamentals that brought us into this body reaffirms our brotherhood and our fellowship with one another. We are brothers, and thus we have God's blessing of being one man in Christ. We need to remember Galatians 3:26-29. We are *"sons of God through faith in Christ."* We have been *"**baptized into Christ**,"* and thus we *"have put on Christ."* We are *"**one in Christ Jesus**."* We are all *"Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."* If we can remember these things, then we will begin being more kind to one another, putting all slander and maliciousness aside for the sake of the wonderful fellowship that God has blessed us with in Christ (See Ep 4:31,32).

D. Forbearing one another:

In the midst of our squabbles over nonessential matters of opinion, we need to remember the words of Paul in Philippians 4:5. *"Let your forbearance be known to all men."* Every disputant in a controversy must ask himself the question, "Am I known for being a forbearing person?" When Peter said, "Love the brotherhood" (1 Pt 2:17), he meant that I must forbear my brother in my differences with him over matters of opinion. If we are not forbearing, then we do not love our brother. Small circle drawers have revealed that they are having a difficult time in loving the brotherhood, and thus, being forbearing.

E. Deductions cannot be made tests of fellowship:

Each of us conscientiously holds to our personal deductions from difficult scriptures we have studied. Our personal deductions often conflict with the deductions of others. Nevertheless, we must be given the freedom to study the Bible for ourselves without the intimidation of some hierarchy of authorities who would judge us because we have not conformed to the accepted code of deductions of our heritage. But since we will always have conflicting deductions that we conscientiously hold, we must agree that we will remain one in fellowship regardless of our differences.

The idea of a unity that is based on conforming everyone to the same deductions is an illusive phantom in which is embedded all sorts of demonic division, the curse of which many live today. We must come to the conclusion, therefore, that our personal deductions that come from our personal study of the word of God must never be the foundation upon which we would cast one another out of fellowship. We simply cannot test one another's fellowship with a systematic code of selected deductions that we have formulated through our personal studies.

We can differ without dividing. If we honor and respect one another's right to personally study the Scriptures and come to our own personal conclusions, then we can be assured that we will at times come to different conclusions. We would not be so arrogant as to believe that we have been guided by the Holy Spirit to come to our personal understanding of difficult passages that are not so clearly understood. It may be that those who believe that the Holy Spirit personally and directly inspires individuals to interpret the Scriptures will have a very difficult time in this area. They will assume that their deductions are Spirit inspired, and thus, must be added to the canon of law to be bound on the church. But we would not go down that road of arrogance and self-righteousness, for that road leads only to division, destruction and one setting himself up as a judge and lawgiver. It leads one to set himself up as the authority in matters of interpretation, and thus, it leads one to making himself the pope of Bible interpretation. This is the one about whom Paul described as being "self-condemned" (Ti 3:11). Such a person always draws a small circle.

Chapter 13

DETOURED FROM UNITY TO UNION

Disunity will always prevail among the world of denominations in Protestantism who maintain their identity through unique traditions, names and teachings that are inherently divisive. When men count sacred the heritage of their uniqueness, and subsequently seek to continue such, they will maintain coined names and traditional teachings that distinguish them from others. Because of this there will always be "united councils of churches" when such groups that seek some type of political union with one another. Therefore, we do not forget what and who causes the Protestant disunity of Christendom.

We have had the privilege of working with hundreds of independent religious groups throughout the years who have broken away from the mainline denominations of Protestantism. Some have been independent from mainline churches for so long that they crave the companionship, or fellowship, of other independent groups. These groups know that they do not want to go back to traditional, mainline churchianity. However, in their efforts to form unions and alliances among themselves, they are destined to return to that from which they fled. Some of these groups are often so desirous of fellowship with others that they seek to establish alliances or forums that are similar to the unions of mainline traditional churches. They thus become ecumenical in their movement toward union.

There is a conservative side to the independent church movement that is somewhat different from the experiential religions that often make up the family of independent churches. These groups are struggling to return to the authority of the word of God. These groups are willing to sacrifice the baggage they brought from their mainline forefathers. The good news is that these groups are on the right road. It is these groups that must be patient with one another as they make their way back to the word of God as the sole authority in matters of faith. This is a good movement as these groups discover one another in their common desire to restore the word of God as the foundation of their faith.

A. Fundamental points of fellowship:

In their efforts to bring some union between themselves, there are about six basic beliefs upon which independent groups seek to align with one another in their communities. Some would refer to these as fundamentals upon which union is based.

1. *The Bible:* All independent groups agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God, though respect for and obedience to what it teaches may sometimes be questioned. By respect for what it teaches we mean that when it clearly teaches something, we must change our lives and beliefs in order to comply with its teachings. Nevertheless, everyone has some respect for the authority of the Bible as the word of God. Though often mixed with traditions and experiential emotionalism, the Bible plays a central part in the theology of most independent churches.

However, the lack of respect for the word of God is common among the leadership of some independent churches. An unwillingness to base faith on the word of God has produced little desire in the hearts of some adherents to move past experiential-based religiosity to a faith that is based on a knowledge of the word of God. It is for this reason that most independent groups focus on the validation of their faith through personal experiences rather than Bible knowledge. Their infatuation with "miracles," "prophecies," "tongue speaking," and concert assemblies is often the center of attraction among such groups. Invariably, such experiential groups can be identified by the fact that they have no Bible classes where adherents come together to focus on open Bible discussion. It is unfortunate, therefore, that such groups are led about by the ignorance of preachers who know very little about what the Bible teaches.

Regardless of those independent churches that are led about by either charismatic preachers who know little Bible, or the personal experiences of the adherents, there is a conservative group of independent churches who are discovering again the awesomeness of the word of God. As these groups continue to discover one another in their regions, restoration movements are arising out of a common focus on the authority of the Scriptures in matters of faith.

2. *Jesus as the Son of God:* This belief is not questioned among independent groups. Faith in Jesus is absolutely central to their faith. In fact, focus on Jesus is often stronger in validating faith than those who seek absolute doctrinal validation. This is especially true in reference to traditional churches. While traditional churches validate their existence in reference to their heritage, conservative independent churches are mov-

ing toward focus on Jesus and His word. We have never heard among these groups anyone who would question either the messiahship or sonship of Jesus as God in the flesh.

3. *The atoning sacrifice of Jesus:* Central to the theology of all independent groups is the cross. That Jesus was incarnate in order to make an atoning sacrifice for all men is central to the faith and teaching of those who are on their way from the baggage of Protestant denominationalism. However, we would question the absolute respect for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus as central to these groups. We would question such because of the lack of emphasis that is placed on observing the Lord's Supper on a regular basis, which Supper was specifically instituted by Jesus in order that we not forget His atoning sacrifice (Lk 22:19).

4. *Salvation only through Jesus:* Jesus is so central to the theology of independent churches that it is correctly believed that there is no eternal salvation outside Christ (At 4:12). Though some efforts of unions among mainline Protestant churches have invited in the Hindus and Muslims, this is unheard of and abhorred among independent churches who believe that one cannot approach God outside Christ Jesus. These groups would repudiate the thinking that union could ever be established on the basis of simply having a belief in a Higher Power and maintaining some standard of morality.

5. *Working response to faith:* Good deeds flourish throughout independent churches. They believe that a faith that is unexpressed is a dead faith. Enthusiasm to work for Jesus is thus adhered to as a way of life. Though the expression of faith may sometimes be based on a legal approach to salvation, these groups are great believers in community efforts to bring glory to Jesus.

6. *Freedom from denominational control systems:* Many independent groups originated when leaders fled the control systems that are often very strong among Protestant churches. In their efforts to submit to Jesus alone, groups were started in rebellion against those political structures that discouraged the freedom of individuals to serve Jesus at will and according to their own studies. Unfortunately, the power structures in independent groups have often simply changed from the power structures of the groups from which they fled, to individual church power structures where the pastor is at the top and in control. Some have fled Catholicism simply to become independent Catholic churches in their autonomy from other churches.

Regardless of the struggles along their road to independence, there are thousands of groups and their leaders who are on a road from Protestant denominationalism to restoring Jesus as the central focus of their lives and His word as their road map. The preceding are often referred to as the fundamentals upon which unity in diversity can be maintained while traveling down this road. There is a great deal of diversity between these groups. Nevertheless, in their diversity we have found that independent church leaders give one another more freedom of thought than most mainline traditional churches. Where traditional churches are quick to excommunicate someone who does not conform to the accepted "statement of faith" of the particular denomination, independent churches give one another a great deal of freedom in which to work and believe. It is in this environment of free thought that many of these groups will make their way back to the word of Christ as their authority in matters of faith. They will study their way out of experiential religiosity to a faith that is based on the Bible. The word of God will become the basis of their fellowship with one another in order to restore the unity of the Spirit.

B. Fundamental truths in which to grow:

Though independent groups may find some comfort in unity based on the preceding beliefs, there is room for growth. There is a great deal of theological baggage from the past that must be discarded. There are many truths to learn that would be fundamental for fellowship and unity. Some consider themselves fundamental evangelical churches, but some fundamental truths have been ignored in an effort to establish fellowship with other "fundamental" churches.

Many independent groups are on a journey to discover the truth of God's word. On this journey there are some areas of their heritage that they must overcome. Many are simply doing the best they can with what they know. When they learn more, these who are truly searching for what God says on every matter are ardently obedient to newly discovered truth in the Bible. This is a very encouraging attitude among some of these groups because learning and obeying the word of God are essentials that bring people together in fellowship with one another. It also encourages each group to resist the desire to cocoon within their own ranks, and thus become as denominational and power-structure oriented as the denominations they left.

There is a real spirit of restoration among many non-experiential independent groups throughout the world. Unfortunately, many of those who have "branded" the concept of restoration have already become so denominational that they would have no fellowship with those who are just starting their restora-

tion journey. These groups have already circled around and become that from which they fled, or they have given up those teachings that identify the ekklesia of Christ. In an effort to become ecumenical, some have forsaken fundamental teachings simply to become one with the whole who fellowship others solely on the basis of the preceding six points.

But for those fundamental independent churches that are on their journey of restoring Christianity, the following are fundamentals that must be restored in order to be the ekklesia of the New Testament:

1. *Obedience to the gospel into a covenant relationship with God:* When Paul went to Corinth, the **first thing** he preached in the city was the historical event of the gospel (1 Co 15:1-4). He did so because he knew what would eventually happen to those who do not obey the gospel when Jesus comes again. He wrote to the Thessalonians, *"... 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***. ***These will be punished with everlasting destruction*** *..."* (2 Th 1:7-9). This was the answer to Peter's question of 1 Peter 4:17. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us,* ***what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God****?"* Paul knew what would be the end of the Corinthians if they did not obey the historical event of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus had said, *"He who believes and is baptized* ***will be saved****"* (Mk 16:16). It could not be more simple than this.

For the Roman disciples, Paul rehearsed the necessity of obedience to the gospel. *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were* ***baptized into Christ Jesus*** *were baptized into His death? 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 6:3,4). When one believes that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, that belief, if it is true and sincere, will move him to go with Jesus to the cross (Rm 6:6). It will move one to be immersed with Jesus in a tomb of water, and then be resurrected with Him to walk in newness of life in Christ. Believing that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God is fundamental. But it is fundamental also that in order to begin the Christian journey in newness of life, **one must obey the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in baptism**. In order to be a new creation of God in Christ (2 Co 5:17), the old man of sin must be buried in order that all past sins be washed away (At 2:38; 22:16). This fundamental teaching is so clear throughout the New Testament that there need be no interpretation. This is the fundamental truth upon which all fellowship must begin. If two people do not obey the gospel, they can be friends, but they cannot be in fellowship with one another, for fellowship is not a proclamation we make for ourselves, but a blessing from God. Of necessity this is true because our fellowship in Christ is not something we determine for ourselves. It is God's work to bring us into fellowship with one another by adding us to His people after we have obeyed the gospel (At 2:47).

The problem is that many independent groups have come out of a "faith only" salvation heritage. The result is that they have failed to see obedience to the gospel as the primary condition upon which fellowship is established and unity continued. That one comes into Christ and has the remission of sins at the time of recognizing that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God is not what the preceding passages are saying. One may think that when he simply confesses that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God that he is saved. But he has missed a most important point in reference to our salvation before God. **Salvation is not something that we personally declare for ourselves before God**. Salvation is **declared by God** through the revelation of His word. One cannot personally lay claim to salvation while at the same time he ignores God's declaration that one is saved once the old man of sin dies with Christ, and one is washed of sin in the waters of baptism. This is why Peter wrote, *"The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us ..."* (1 Pt 3:21). It was necessary for Peter to make such a clear statement because so many people have such a strong conviction that faith alone will bring them into the family of God's fellowship. Some believe they can declare their fellowship with the family of God without the approval of God upon obedience to the gospel. If we self-proclaim ourselves a part of God's family without joining God's Son on His cross, burial in His tomb and resurrection, then we have simply made a presumptuous proclamation.

It is at the point of baptism that God declares one saved. It is at that point that fellowship begins among all those who have submitted to the gospel. On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, about three thousand people were baptized for the remission of their sins (At 2:41). On that day God added these baptized believers to the fellowship of His people (At 2:47). Therefore, one comes into the fellowship of the people of God once he is baptized. This is a fundamental truth that cannot be ignored when we discuss fellowship and unity. And since unity is the blessing of God among all those who have obeyed the gospel throughout the world, then one cannot have

this blessing unless he has been added to the fellowship of God's people by God at the point of baptism. It is not that we negotiate our fellowship with one another. It is not that we accept one another's fellowship because of our personal and emotional repentant experiences. It is God who brings us into fellowship with one another after we have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of His Son. Until baptism, therefore, God has not added us to the fellowship of His people. We are not declared to be His child until we are dripping with water from baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of His Son.

2. *Celebration of the Lord's Supper:* Many of the independent churches that we have visited still do not realize the centrality of the Lord's Supper to the fellowship of the universal body of Christ. Paul wrote, *"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****? For though we are many,* ***we are one bread and one body****, for we are all partakers of that one bread"* (1 Co 10:16-17). It seems almost inconceivable that a group of people who would call themselves after Christ would either minimize or fail to celebrate the Supper that proclaims the reason for their existence.

Paul added, *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,* ***you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes****"* (1 Co 11:26). We may proclaim the Lord's death with our mouths. But what Paul is calling on us to do is to manifest our faith through action, the action of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Partaking of the Lord's Supper is a proclamation to the world that the church is the one universal blood-bought body of Christ. In an era of history wherein Christendom has obsessed over concert assemblies that would match the professional production of any rock concert, there are few who realize the centrality of observing the Lord's Supper as often as possible in order to proclaim our fellowship as the blood-bought body of Christ. Churches that obsess over miracle healings, but do not obsess over proclaiming the blood and body of Jesus in observing the Lord's Supper, have deceived themselves into thinking that they are the church of Christ.

Those who would profess to be Christ-centered have actually fallen short of fellowshipping the body by expressing their religiosity while ignoring or avoiding the memorial of that which identifies one's focus on Jesus. Observing the Supper is fellowshipping the blood of Christ. It is fellowshipping the universal body of Christ. We are many members of the body, but in the Supper we proclaim our unity. Can unity prevail among those who count insignificant that which proclaims unity?

The 1 Corinthians 10:16,17 statement of Paul is that the one bread represents the living fellowship of the members of the one body. It is "one bread and one body." If we are not partaking of the bread as often as possible, then we are refusing to fellowship the rest of the body. In other words, those who do not celebrate the partaking of the one bread have disfellowshipped themselves from the one body of Christ. They have proclaimed their lack of desire to fellowship the body. If we would come into fellowship with the blood and body of Christ, therefore, we must restore the Lord's Supper to the centrality of our fellowshipping one another.

3. *Faith response to the grace of God:* 2 Corinthians 4:15 is crucial to explain the difference between meritorious obedience and good works and a faith response to the grace of God. *"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."* This is an evangelistic statement. It is not a passage in reference to the behavior of the church in response to the grace of God, though such is also true. In his own response to grace in his Christian walk of life, Paul stated the same motivation in 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).

True believers obediently respond initially to the grace of God by obedience to the gospel. Obedience to the gospel is our way of expressing thanksgiving to God for the death, burial and resurrection of His Son for our sins. When we come out of the waters of baptism, our life is as Paul's. Paul abounded in the work of the Lord because he continued to be motivated by the grace of God. This is what Paul stated in Philippians 2:12,13, *"... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you ...."* Paul did not say we should work for our salvation, but to work out our salvation that we have because we have been baptized into Christ. We have been *"created in Christ Jesus for good works ..."* (Ep 2:10).

Obedience to the gospel can never be a meritorious work of obedience. It is a faith response to the grace of God that was manifested through Jesus (Ti 2:11). Our salvation is by faith in response to God's grace. If there is no obedient response to grace, then the faith is dead. If faith does not result in repentance and washing of sins (baptism), then it is useless in reference to bringing one into fellowship with God and His family of believers. Those religious groups that stop short of an obedient faith response to the grace of God have missed the point. They have missed the point at which time God declares through His word that one has remission of sins (At 2:38).

They are thus still old creatures, never having been born again into the household of God (Jn 3:3-5; 2 Co 5:17).

By meritorious works of law no person can be saved, *"for by works of law no flesh will be justified"* (Gl 2:16). Unfortunately, some have cheated themselves of the fellowship of the body of Christ by equating obedient faith with a meritorious work of law. And in avoiding the water, they have revealed their lack of thanksgiving for the grace of God that was revealed from heaven through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Unfortunately, we cannot assert our own salvation on the basis of any confession of faith or "sinner's prayer" if we do not obediently respond to the grace of God. We will continue outside the fellowship of the one body simply because one comes forth from the grave of baptism to newness of life (See Rm 6:3-6).

Fundamentals need no interpretation. They come to us from God in declarative statements or direct commands. When we consider fundamentals in reference to our salvation, the old principle of Bible study holds true, "It means what it says, and says what it means." We would assume, however, that Satan will do his best work in confusing the minds of the people concerning those things that are most important to establish one's fellowship with God. In the 1st century, the Gnostics confused the people concerning the incarnation of Jesus. In this century, Satan encourages people to simply cry out "Lord, Lord," but at the same time he confuses people in how to establish a saving relationship with God that brings one into the fellowship of the saints (See Mt 7:15-23). We would be naive to think that Satan would not mess around with the minds of people in reference to obedience of the gospel of Jesus' death for our sins and resurrection for our hope and eternal life. It seems that Satan has done His work well. He has deceived thousands to believe that they are in fellowship with God and His people when actually they are not seeking to go to the cross and tomb with His Son.

Chapter 14

INCLUSIVE

Our study of fellowship in the New Testament often reveals one characteristic about ourselves. God seems to be much more inclusive in His fellowship than we allow ourselves to be. It is certainly not our responsibility to determine how inclusive God should be in reference to the fellowship of the ekklesia. What we must understand, however, is that we include in our fellowship all those who have obeyed the fundamentals of the faith in coming into Christ, and who have maintained their belief that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God through moral living in obedience to the word of Christ. Nevertheless, it is often our inclination to denominate into sects and parties those who have come into a saving relationship with God. But in doing so, we have promoted some concepts that are contrary to the very identity of the fellowship we claim to be sustaining.

We often become experts in minors. We often obsess over issues and opinions to the point that the weak brother turns away in disgust at our inability to show love and mercy toward one another. Our obsession with a particular issue often steals our joy of coming together in assembly.

Sometimes our obsession over a particular issue or matter of opinion becomes so strong that we ourselves are turned away from that which we are supposed to be doing. It is our work to preach the gospel to the world. But when minds are obsessed with trivial matters, evangelism is the first work to cease. A church that is biting and devouring itself has no zeal for evangelistic outreach or appeal to lost souls.

The result of our lack of evangelistic outreach is the loss of souls. Before we become obsessed over a particular matter of opinion we need to step back and see where this obsession will lead us. If two people disagree over a point of opinion, then one, or both, have to be wrong. If we heatedly engage one another, the first people we will forget in our confrontation are the lost. The lost, therefore, will continue to be lost because of our inability to judge something to be a simple matter of opinion, and thus, something over which there should never be debate.

Now consider those who might walk in on our heated discussion concerning matters of opinion. Will they be drawn to a church that is biting and devouring itself over nonsense? Or, will they be driven away? They will certainly be disgusted with those who claim to be united, but are at the same time actually going to war with one another. Paul referred to such a situation in Galatians 5:15. *"But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you not be consumed by one another."* The group that persists in biting and devouring over nonessential issues will cease to be evangelistic. They will forget the mis-

sion of their Master. And those unbelievers who show up for a visit, will certainly be turned away. Such a church has thus consumed itself. Biting and devouring brethren can never convince the unbelieving world that they are a fellowship of love and mercy (See Ep 4:31,32).

Pride and prejudice always sustain division over issues. Saul, and later Paul, certainly dealt with pride while he campaigned against the people of God. While stricken on the road to Damascus, Jesus said to him out of heaven, *"It is hard for you to kick against the goads"* (At 26:14). If our pride is hurt, then there is a fever of sickness that will prevail to keep brethren spiritually sick and apart from one another. We can understand why Paul told both evangelists, Timothy and Titus, not to engage in foolish controversies that generate strife (2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9-11). Solomon gave some wisdom to the wise on this matter. *"**It is an honor for a man to cease from strife, but any fool can start an argument**"* (Pv 20:3; compare Js 1:26). When it is a controversy over a "genealogy issue," then it is a controversy over issues and opinions about which we should not engage one another. Controversy generates strife, and strife division, and division is sustained and continued by the sickness of hurt feelings. Solomon explained, *"The beginning of strife is as when one lets out water, therefore leave the quarrel before it breaks out"* (Pv 17:14). Therefore, *"let us walk ... not in strife and jealousy"* (Rm 13:13; see 1 Co 3:3; Gl 5:19,20).

We must come to our differences over matters of opinion and nonessentials with a spirit of humility. Solomon wrote, *"A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger appeases strife"* (Pv 15:18). *"An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression"* (Pv 29:22). *"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins"* (Pv 10:12). These would be passages that we should remember when in disagreement with our brother over matters of opinion.

It is always good to doubt our own conclusions, knowing that they may change with more study. And we must be willing to change if we come to deductive conclusions that prove existing beliefs to be wrong. In our controversies to defend our beliefs, there is one axiomatic truth that must always be remembered in reference to differences over opinions: "**We can both be wrong, but we both cannot be right**." We must never assume that we are always right and our opponent is always wrong. We can never determine who is right in a controversy over a point of disagreement if we assert that we are always right. If we are arrogant enough to assume that we have all "the truth," then we will never be objective to discover new truth from our personal study of the word of God. We will always be listening to those who represent what we believe is "the truth." In our arrogance, we will listen to our opponents only out of courtesy. If we feign "listening" to our opponents out of courtesy, then we can never say that we are objective Bible students. If we listen only for the purpose of finding some contradiction or misquoted scripture in our opponent's position, then how can we say we have a spirit of objectivity? How can we set ourselves forward as objective students of the word of God who are seeking truth, regardless of where it originates? When we are humble enough to doubt our views, then we are open for truth to be spoken and received from any source. When we always challenge ourselves in what we believe, then we are open to learn more. We will continue to study our Bibles. The word of God can then have a free course to *"reprove, rebuke, exhort,"* in our own lives (2 Tm 4:2; Ti 2:15).

Epilogue

All pleas for unity and fellowship in the New Testament are directed to Christians as individuals, not groups of Christians. Since each individual disciple will give account of himself before the Lord (2 Co 5:10), and we are individually immersed into a covenant relationship with God (Gl 3:26-29), then each individual is responsible for maintaining his or her gift of fellowship with the universal body of Christ. There is no emphasis in the New Testament on uniting groups. All emphasis is on individuals to stay united in Christ. Regardless of what a group as a whole may decide on a particular teaching, it is the responsibility of individual Christians to take ownership for unity with Christians in general, wherever those Christians are located in the world.

Fellowship in Christ, therefore, is not a "them" and "us" fellowship between groups. It is all "us." When Paul wrote letters to churches and individuals, it was "us." "Us" is not groups. "Us" refers to individual disciples in cities who were first united with one another in their cities, and then, united in fellowship with the one universal church of Christ. "Us" is not autonomous from another "us" because of assemblies in different places. Assemblies of Christians were never meant to be an occasion for division. Assemblies were opportunities for edification and to remember the one universal body through the breaking of the one bread.

The fellowship of the ekklesia of Christ is worldwide. When one is added to the ekklesia by God upon immersion into Christ, he or she is brought into a global fellowship of saints throughout the world. One can never be separated

from this global family by where he or she sits on Sunday morning. Assembly is a blessing and serendipity, not a legal mark of faithfulness or validation of membership in the universal fellowship of the body of Christ.

When one comes to believe in Jesus as the crucified and raised Son of God, responds to the good news by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and then is added by God to His universal family, even before he shows up somewhere for an assembly he is in our fellowship. As the almost 3,000 on the day of Pentecost were added to the universal family of God before their assembly the following Sunday, so every obedient believer is immediately in fellowship and united with the global body of Christ immediately upon being resurrected with Jesus from the grave of water. God does not wait until Sunday morning to add souls to His family.

As fellow obedient believers we must accept one another into the fellowship with which we were blessed by God. In order to do this we might have to tear down some fences and stop drawing our small circles of fellowship. We need to give our circle drawing pencils back to God, and with love and patience accept others where they are on their journey of discovering God through their personal study of His word.

Book 48

The Cross-Centered Faith

An Eternal Sacrifice To Restore Fellowship With Our Creator

A METAPHORICAL HYPOTHESIS

(Imagine with me for a moment. Just a moment to look into a hypothetical conversation in eternity. It could have taken place before the creation of the world between the Father, Son and Spirit. After all, something gave birth to the idea of our creation. And in trying to discover that something, be patient as we imagine an awesome conversation that possibly took place between the three eternal existences of Deity before the creation of the world.)

At the eternal planning table, the Father brought up the subject, *"We three are love. Is it not the nature of true love to express itself toward others? Must we dwell in eternity without objects on which to lovingly express ourselves? How can true love exist without expression? How can we be defined as love without having in our eternal presence those who must have our love showered upon them through our grace and mercy?"*

"It is truly our nature to be expressive," responded the Son. *"It is our nature to manifest ourselves to the existence of something other than ourselves. If we are who we say we are, then we must love. We must create something upon which we can pour out our love."*

The Spirit added, *"But if we bring into existence those who are not after our nature, then there will be problems, a lot of problems. In order to bring into existence that which can truly be an object of our love, there must be conditions. And the conditions might not justify the act of creation. Are we really willing to take this risk?"*

"I know," lamented the Father. *"But if we are who we say we are, then we have no other choice. Love must be expressed. It must have an object upon which the most profound nature of its essence can be showered. Otherwise, we do not exist as true love."*

"Therefore," replied the Son, *"We must do the act. Regardless of all the risks, we have no choice because of the nature of who we are. We are love, and love must love. True love cannot exist without the existence of that which is frail and finite."*

"But for the act to be real," interjected the Spirit, *"We cannot hold back in what we create. What we seek to create must also have volition as we. Our created creature must be able to make choices, and because of their wrong choices they will become broken. If we create, but do not give the right and freedom of our creation to make choices, then they will judge us to be hard, fiendish, ... even unloving for sending into destruction those who cannot live perfect before us. In the midst of the results of their bad choices, they will question why we even created them in the first place."*

"And if we create such beings," continued the Spirit, *"most will simply rebel against us. In fact, because most will rebel they will think that we have destined many of them to a destruction concerning which they had no choice. They will then judge us to be fiendish, something that is totally contrary to who we really are. Is this a risk that we are willing to take? Because so many will reject our love, some will even deny that we exist because our creation will appear to have all gone wrong."*

"Regardless of the risks," sighed the Father, *"we all want to bring into existence those on whom we can eternally shower our love. We cannot be loving without expressing love. It is a truth about us that we cannot ignore, and thus, we must do what must be done."*

"But I want to remind all of us," cautioned the Spirit. *"If we go through with this plan, we will bring upon ourselves all sorts of grief. We will mourn with pain as our creation goes wrong. Since in our creation there must be the freedom of the created to make choices, then we know what will happen. Those who make all the bad choices will bring great pain and suffering into the lives of those of ours who will respond to our love. We know that no preprogrammed robots can be created, for no robot can truly respond to us by saying, 'I love you*

too.' And because no robots can express a reciprocal love, most of the creation will go wrong because the majority will move away from who we really are."

"I know. I know," replied the Son. *"But we cannot just sit here and allow love to go unexpressed ... idle in eternity. We must do something. Therefore, I am willing to make the move regardless of the consequences. I will create the object of our love and I will take ownership of what I create, including doing whatever is necessary to bring our creation into eternity with us."*

"If you do that, my Son, it will cost you dearly," grieved the Father.

"I know, but what else can we do? I know that if we truly create those who can truly respond to us with their love, there are risks, tremendous risks. In fact, most of those we create will simply deny through their behavior that we even exist. But again, what else can we do to unleash our love? It is simply not in the nature of who we are to sit idle. So because we are the true eternal existence of love, we must do what we have to do. We must create."

The Spirit again cautioned, *"Must I remind everyone here that this cannot be a one-man show? We are one, and because we are one any one existence of ourselves must act as the whole. If we go ahead with this plan, everyone will be involved. I will take the part of hovering over what we create. Since we are about to create those in whom we will invest the power to make choices, I will make sure that they are not left without direction. We simply cannot allow our creation to wander in obscurity in the environment for which we will create for them. They must know what we expect of them, and they will always need a road map back to us."*

The Father also volunteered, *"I will assume the totality of control, and thus be the occasion and object for love to be revealed to those who are created. In order for love to be illustrated, we must be as that which we desire of our creation. But Son, again, do you fully understand that if you go through with this plan the personal cost to you will be overwhelming?"*

With a tear in His eye, the Father continued to remind the Son, *"If you go through with this, you will never again be as we are now. We will all continue to be one, but your existence will change forever for the sake of those whom you are about to create. Can you eternally drink of this cup of sacrifice?"*

"I will take ownership of what I create," the Son confidently affirmed. *"I know the sacrifice will be humiliating and eternal, but being in eternity without reflecting our love on others is worse than giving up that which I am in order to identify with our creation. The benefits far outweigh the eternal sacrifice."*

"But you know the risks," the Spirit also reminded the Son. *"If you create a being that has the right to make choices, you will be bringing into existence moral chaos that will result in untold suffering and evil. Because of so much suffering and evil they will accuse us of being both cruel or fiendish, if not deny our existence altogether because of so much suffering and evil that will result from their freedom to make choices. Are you willing to be overwhelmed with the suffering that will result from this sacrifice that you are about to make in order to bring our creation back to us into eternal dwelling?"*

"I am!" the Son confidently responded. *"What else can we do? We have no other option. We are love, and love can do nothing else. I am willing to create what will become a moral mess and I am willing to clean up the mess, regardless of the extreme sacrifice that is necessary to make it so."*

"So then," the Father sighed, *"Let it begin."*

"*In the beginning God created ....*"
(Genesis 1:1)

All that has existed throughout history, and into the future of mankind, centers around the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God on the cross. The destiny of the obedient in the loving eternal arms of God depends on a planned offering that happened two thousand years ago outside Jerusalem. From the seed promise to Eve, through the call of Abraham, to the birth and existence of national Israel, and finally to the very foot of the cross, all of God's struggles with man in human history was to bring His Son to an atoning sacrifice on a cruel cross. The community of God since the cross is the result of that event, for the cross was more than an historical event. It was the pinnacle of a preexistent "table plan" to bring those of faith into the eternal dwelling of a loving Deity. Without our focus on the centrality of the cross, we can never fully understand and appreciate the work of God throughout history. We can never understand God Himself. We would conclude, therefore, that without the

Spirit explaining through revelation the six-hour cross event, we could never understand the meaning of our lives and the reason for our existence. The cross is the explanation for all things. It is the foundation upon which we discover why we are here, and God's intended destiny for us who believe.

Chapter 1

NOTHING BUT THE CROSS

Have you ever wondered why the apostle Paul made this statement: *"**For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**"* (1 Co 2:2)? If you have, then you, as we, are on our way to restoring again our focus on the cross. Now to what extent did Paul believe what he said in this statement? If what he just stated is true, then it is possibly time to reconsider our legal outlines on "church" and look again at what should be the central message of our preaching. It is time to rethink our faith and regenerate our commitment to God, for we may have strayed from the very foundation upon which all history exists, and the answer to our very existence.

It was the eternal plan of the infinite God that a mediator between God and man be offered for His creation. This plan was established before the creation of those whom He sought to deliver from this world in order to bring into eternity (Rv 13:8). To accomplish this plan, there had to be a divine link between God and man. That link was the incarnate Son of God. *"For there is one God and **one mediator between God and men**, **the man Christ Jesus**"* (1 Tm 2:5).

The message of a crucified mediator is unique with Christianity. It is contrary to the hero worship of man-made idol religions and revered icons. For this reason, the concept of a faith based on a cross does not appeal to the rich and famous. It is repulsive to the proud and arrogant. *"**For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God"* (1 Co 1:18). The wise men of the world will always consider "cross Christianity" a scandalous religion. But those who come to understand the awesome beauty of the Suffering Servant of God on the cross will have a life-changing experience.

Even in the early days of Christianity the warning went out to the rebellious. In the context of Acts 13:38-41 Paul quoted Habakkuk 1:5 concerning the prophesied astonishment of people at the mystery of God. It would be unbelievable by those who were consumed in their own religiosity. Paul warned the Jewish audience of Antioch of Pisidia, *"Beware therefore, lest that come on you which is spoken in the prophets"* (At 13:40). Habakkuk had prophesied, *"Behold, you despisers, and marvel and perish! **For I work a work in your days, a work that you will in no way believe, though a man declare it to you**"* (At 13:41; see Hb 1:5).

So why would the concept of the cross be so difficult to believe by most of the world? The concept of a crucified incarnate God was contrary to the nature of arrogant men and man-made religions. Men conceive of gods who crush and punish. But the one true and living God gave out of Himself on behalf of His creation. And in this giving, there was incredible sacrifice. It all began with the lowest death the Son of God could have experienced in His incarnate flesh. When the text says, *"He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, **even the death of the cross**,"* (Ph 2:8), there was no accident about the foreplanned event of the eternal God. Our Savior knowingly sought to bring on Himself shame and humiliation, even cruelty, in order to give us hope and the opportunity for eternal dwelling. It was an incredible plan of suffering. It was one that would manifest the core nature of a true God who created man, but not with predestined punishment because of man's fallibility. It was a plan of hope to come into the presence of our eternal loving Father.

The cross defines the God who is beyond the definition of any word in our dictionaries. And because it does, it was a mystery to men throughout history until its revelation two thousand years ago. In some ways, it is still a mystery as we struggle to look through the metaphors that explain the event in order to comprehend the sacrifice that took place on the "old rugged cross." If we would understand God, therefore, we must open the "dictionary" of the cross. We must step through the doors of metaphors in order to understand in some way this God who allowed Himself to be crucified by those He created. Rousseau was right when he said, "Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus Christ died like a God." Therefore, we seek to understand the God on the cross in order to understand the God beyond the cross.

A. The shame and humiliation of the cross:

The Greek word for "cross" is *stauros*, though the word *skolops* is used as a Greek synonym in some texts. Throughout early church history crosses were portrayed as upright beams upon which a cross beam was attached to either nail or tie the arms of the condemned. To the Romans, the cross was a cruel instrument to humiliate the criminal in order to bring about his death. It was meant to strike terror in the minds and hearts of the beholders. Throughout their early history, the Jews considered hanging on a tree a thing only the cursed should suffer (See Dt 21:23; Gl 3:13). Because of their repulsion of such a form of death, many Jews rejected the crucified Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

Cicero, in *Pro Rabirio*, spoke of the cross in reference to Roman culture, "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears." Since crucifixion was such an abhorrent form of execution in Roman culture, one can only imagine the extent to which the Jews rejected the crucifixion of the One who was truly their Messiah. But at the same time, we consider in awe those early Jews who looked past the abhorrence of the cross in order to discover the Christ of the cross, and thus, the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Suffering Servant of God.

The cross was an ancient form of execution that was meant to terrorize any who would oppose a conquering army or violate the law of a dominant government. Alexander the Great crucified 2,000 Tyrian captives after the fall of the city of Tyre. Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Persians and Babylonians all crucified the rebellious. Because crucifixion was considered by the Romans to be the means of death and punishment of rebellious slaves and hardened criminals, they exempted any Roman citizen from the indignity of such a death.

But when an angry mob was asked what to do with Jesus, they cried out, "**Let Him be crucified**!" (Mt 27:22). Their cry for Jesus' crucifixion was the worst possible means of death that could be brought upon the one they opposed. The Jews considered the cross a means of death for the cursed, as well as a means to subject Jesus to the most indignant manner of death possible. The religious leaders of Israel wanted Jesus to suffer the death of a common criminal, the death of one who had rebelled against their traditional religiosity (See Mk 7:1-9). And thus Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. *"And He made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death .... **Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him**"* (Is 53:9,10).

And all this "pleased the Lord"? Isaiah's prophecy startles us! Why would God resort to the most humiliating and cruel means of death for Himself in order to redeem by sacrifice those He had created from the dust of the earth? Why would God incarnate and die for clods of dirt in which there is a spirit in order to bring them into eternity? The message of the cross is a message of shame and humiliation on our behalf. Nevertheless, it is a message that reveals the true God of heaven. There is a grandeur in the thought of a God who would come so far and go so low in order to lift so high those He had created out of the dust of the earth. It is such an incredible concept of love. It is so incredible that those of the world simply reject such as foolishness. But for those who see the cross as a manifestation of the God of love, they are overwhelmed to the extent that they are willing to sacrifice their total being in response to that love.

B. The public spectacle of the cross:

Jesus was not allowed to die a quiet death in some obscure place. He was taken outside the city of Jerusalem and put on open display before thousands of onlookers (Mt 27:27-31). Those who cried out for His blood rejoiced in His public display on a cross before all to mock and ridicule. *"Then they **spit on Him**, and took the reed and **struck Him** on the head again and again. And after they had **mocked Him, they took the robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him** away to **crucify Him**"* (Mt 27:30,31). *"Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, **were mocking Him**, saying, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe in Him"* (Mt 27:41,42).

If we were theologians in a room planning the development of a new religion, then the event of a crucified leader would certainly not be the foundation upon which we would establish our movement. The public display and picture of a bleeding leader on a cross would not be appealing to those whom we would lead in our new faith. In fact, the concept would be repugnant, if not repulsive. Adherents would not be drawn to our new faith, but repelled. How could our new faith be built on the shame of a crucified leader? It could not unless there was something Divine about the event.

As we seek to discover the indignity of the cross, we are led to believe that God planned something that was so incredible that it would be difficult to believe. But He had a plan. And the plan was first indicated from the mouth of a man who wore animal skins and ate grasshoppers. *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?"* (Jn 1:29). That crucified "Lamb of God" would draw out of humanity all the "animal

skinned clothed and grasshopper eating" believers who could identify with the Lamb Himself who was worthy to be their leader into eternity.

C. The innocent victim of the cross:

Isaiah had prepared the minds of the faithful in Israel in reference to the coming Messiah. *"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"* (Is 53:7). *"**He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth**"* (Is 53:9). If Jesus were a common criminal, He would have been justly punished under Roman law. But he was found innocent. Even the Roman official Pilate reminded the people who cried out for His crucifixion, *"**I have found no reason for death in Him**"* (Lk 23:22). If Jesus were innocent of any crime, then the cross was a scandal. It was a misnomer of justice. Would such a "misnomer of justice" be considered the foundation upon which a new faith could be founded and continued throughout history?

If Jesus were only a man, then certainly no one would be so naive as to sacrificially dedicate his life to such a victim of injustice. We are almost led to believe that God intended that the cross be so humiliating, so repulsive, and such a miscarriage of justice, that it would attract only those who would be willing to suffer the same in their own lives. It would appeal only to those who have been abused and used, exploited and unjustly spoken against, even those of society who have had to scrape a living out of their environment by wearing only animal skins and eating bugs to survive. If this is the "way of the cross," we cringe, but we are also held in awe at its appeal to the poorest of the poor. We then wonder at the God who would have conceived and planned such a lowly appeal to the lowest of humanity. What God is this in which we believe? If the "way of the cross leads home," then do we really want to be at home among the poorest of the poor, the most humble of society? We most certainly do since it will be in the presence of our Creator! So we cry out to the innocent victim on the cross, "Take us there! Take us home!"

D. Political victimization of the cross:

We must keep in mind that the Jews had no power of capital punishment since Palestine was an occupied land by the Romans during the days of Jesus. Only the Roman government had this power, and thus, if Jesus were to be crucified, only by the authority of the Roman government could this happen. And such was the case.

The times were volatile, and thus, Pilate, the Roman representative of Palestine, sought to pacify the mob of Jews by reasoning with them concerning the innocence of Jesus (Lk 23:22). However, he had to succumb to their pleas to crucify Jesus. He did so in order to prevent what appeared to him to be a potential uprising of the Jews on this most volatile occasion of the Jewish Passover and Pentecost feasts when the most radical Jews were in town. It was the Romans, therefore, who nailed Jesus to the cross. Jesus was crucified according to the laws of Rome, but at the wishes of the angry Jewish mob. The rebellious Jews bore the guilt, but the Romans did the act.

From the viewpoint of the Romans, therefore, the cross was a result of the politics of the times. Jesus was a victim of a political struggle between Rome and the Jews. Nevertheless, Pilate's efforts were only temporarily successful as the resistance of the Jews continued to grow to the point of rebellion against Roman occupation. It grew to the point that in A.D. 70 Rome rendered a final crushing blow to Jewish nationalism by the destruction of the Jewish state and Jerusalem. In all this political turmoil in the last years of national Israel, to the Romans the crucifixion of Jesus was simply just another execution of a supposed "king" of Israel who would seek to lead the Jews in rebellion against Rome (Compare At 21:38).

But in the plan of God, the occasion for the event in history was right. *"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son ..."* (Gl 4:4). There is more in this statement than a simple fulfillment of prophecy. The prophecy was fulfilled because the time in history was right to redeem the broken. Throughout the millennia, the political landscape had been laid by God for the crucifixion of the incarnate God.

We must never assume that the cross was an accident, and thus, an unplanned work of God. Some have been so mistaken concerning the foreplanned event of the cross that they have affirmed that because the Jews rejected Jesus, God postponed a supposed earthly kingdom reign of Jesus. He postponed the kingdom reign on earth and then supposedly established the church as an after thought. Such an insidious teaching strikes directly at the heart of the eternal plan and purpose of the cross in history for the salvation of man. Such a theology nullifies all prophecy concerning the suffering servant who would give Himself in order that the people be healed. Such theologies minimize the importance of the cross in reference to God's eternal plan to bring His creation into His eternal presence. And for this reason, it is almost impossible for those who maintain such theologies to understand fully the predestined fate of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

E. Fulfilled destiny of the cross:

At the time of the cross, the disciples had lost all hope that Jesus would be their expected earthly king (See At 1:6). Their hopes were dashed, and subsequently, they went their way. Two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus said to Jesus, whom they did not recognize, *"But **we were hoping** that it was He who was going to redeem Israel"* (Lk 24:21). In a similar emotional state, Peter despondently said, *"I am going fishing"* (Jn 21:3). The point is that the disciples were looking for no martyrs for their faith. Death by the cross was a complete surprise. The One they thought would be a conquering leader who would lead them in the restoration of national Israel was hanged on a cross outside Jerusalem, just like the false messiahs that had previously risen in Israel.

Martyrs are the result of the hopes of followers whose faith in them motivates the continuation of a movement based on the thinking of the martyrs. But Jesus was to be no martyr. What the disciples did not understand at the time of the crucifixion, and even after the resurrection, was the fact that destiny was fulfilled in Jesus. They did not at first understand that the cross was the foreplanned mystery of God for the salvation of mankind. They did not understand this until Jesus explained all the prophecies concerning the event. He rebuked them by saying, *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. **Was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things** and to enter into His glory?"* (Lk 24:25,26). They needed to be taught, even though they were standing right there in the presence of the resurrected Redeemer. Jesus continued, *"And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (Lk 24:27). It was as Paul later wrote, *"He made known to me the mystery"* (Ep 3:3). And now we have that mystery revealed and written for our learning. *"Therefore,"* Paul continued, *"when you read you can understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ"* (Ep 3:4). The cross was a mystery until it was revealed, and thus Jesus' death was not an accident. It was His destiny.

F. Betrayal and the cross:

If we view the cross from a strictly human standpoint, then its event was simply the result of a plan gone wrong. On the night of betrayal when Judas *"drew near to Jesus to kiss Him"* (Lk 22:47), what was in his mind was more than thirty pieces of silver. We would assume that Judas had in mind a scheme to force the earthly kingship of Jesus, for such was an erroneous hope of all the disciples (At 1:6). To the time of the Last Supper in the upper room, *"there was also a dispute among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest"* (Lk 22:24). This was the last hour Jesus was with His disciples, and yet, they were disputing among themselves as to which one should be considered the greatest in a supposed earthly kingdom. They were looking forward to something in the future, which thing Judas possibly thought he could expedite by his betrayal actions.

But the actions of Judas all went wrong when the riotous mob in Jerusalem took control of the situation by taking control of Jesus. In remorse, Judas threw down the thirty pieces of silver and hanged himself. Jesus went to the cross. And the disciples simply lost all hope and either went home or went fishing. This is not a planned foundation upon which to develop a new religion. And this is simply not something in which followers would take pride. Who would preach a faith that was based on a betrayal scheme that went wrong? Who would give his life to preach a message that was started by eleven disciples who sought to rewrite a betrayal scheme of their crucified leader?

The fact is that the betrayal scheme was part of God's eternal plan. And because it was, history changed by the changing of lives. The evidence of the changed lives of the disciples clearly reveals that the cross message became so deeply embedded in their very souls that they were able to stand up before all opposition and confidently proclaim, *"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).

G. Shame in defeat at the cross:

Now view the cross from the standpoint of all the supposed failed promises that were made by Jesus. *"And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die"* (Jn 11:26). *"... upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"* (Mt 16:18). *"I am the door of the sheep"* (Jn 10:7). *"And I give to them eternal life. And they will never perish, neither will anyone snatch them out of My hand"* (Jn 10:28). *"And no one has ascended to heaven except He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man"* (Jn 3:13). We could go on.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus promised victory. But at the cross, His enemies seem to have won the battle. From the viewpoint of the bystanders at the cross, therefore, Jesus would be shamed in all His false hopes and promises that He had stated throughout His ministry.

There had to be more to the cross than promises. From the viewpoint of man, the cross meant shame and embarrassment. What intellectual would be drawn by such a One who reneged on all His promises?

Jesus knew that many would mock Him for all the supposed failed promises He made. *"He saved others,"* they mocked. *"Himself He cannot save. He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe in Him"* (Mt 27:42). Jesus was willing to take the risk of being mocked for His supposedly failed promises. He was willing to be mocked for the sake of those who were sincere and honest of heart. The supposed shame of the cross, therefore, actually became the occasion and opportunity for the sincere and honest to reveal themselves. Those who would accept the shame of the cross of their Savior would later declare through their faith in the cross, *"**For I am not ashamed of the gospel**, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes ..."* (Rm 1:16).

H. Failure in discipleship at the cross:

Judas was with Jesus for over three years. He listened to and sat at the feet of the Son of God. He was in the company of great men who would go on to be world-changing personalities. And yet, Jesus seemingly failed in His efforts to truly disciple this person. But David foretold this part of the eternal plan. *"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trust, who ate my bread, **has lifted up his heel against me**"* (Ps 41:9).

If the encounter of Judas with Jesus was viewed simply from a human standpoint, then the cross would mean embarrassment for Jesus in that He went to death having been unsuccessful to disciple all those who were closest to Him. If we view Jesus as simply an innocent Jewish teacher who suffered execution as a common criminal, then certainly He failed. But the story never began with Jesus as simply a man and good Rabbi of Palestine. He was the incarnate Son of God who came with eternal redemption. But from the viewpoint of unbelievers, the fact that Jesus could not keep all His disciples faithful to His cause was a sign of failure. Would the cross, therefore, have any appeal to the wise of this world who value accomplishment and success? If Jesus on the cross were viewed from the eyes of the successful of worldly leadership principles, then the world at the time of the cross event viewed Jesus as a failed leader. If the story of the gospel stopped at the cross, we might come to this conclusion. But it did not. What followed was an empty tomb. The empty tomb validated the work of God on the cross, for we remember what Paul wrote, *"Now if Christ has not been raised, **then your faith is vain**. **You are still in your sins**"* (1 Co 15:17). Jesus not only died for our sins, He was raised for our sins. The event of the gospel was successful, regardless of the thinking of the world.

The cross is repulsive to the wise of this world who have no concern for the eternal plan of redemption by God. Even the first disciples turned away because they did not understand the meaning of the cross. The two men on the road to Emmaus expressed it well: *"... we were hoping ..."* (Lk 24:21). The eleven disciples returned home to Galilee. Their initial understanding of the cross was simply earthly, and thus, there was at first no salvational joy in the event. Those who are wise of this world consider the cross foolishness, and therefore, they often pity those who understand that the cross is the centrality of all history and the focal point of eternal redemption for all men. However, because God revealed the eternal plan of the cross, we who believe rejoice in the marvelous work of God. And because we rejoice, *"we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**"* (1 Co 1:23,24).

Chapter 2

THE GOD REVEALED AT THE CROSS

As we venture further into our cross-centered faith, we begin to understand that the cross is the lens through which we look in order to build the world view of our faith. It is the gyroscope that keeps us level in times of turmoil, and the cornerstone in which we find a measuring rule to judge all the false philosophies of misguided men. When Paul reminded the Corinthians that we "**stand**" on the event of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, his metaphor pointed to mental and emotional stability (1 Co 15:1-4). The cross brings to our inner most soul an unmovable rock of hope that will keep us focused on Christ through the greatest turmoil that life has to offer. The Spirit said it through David. *"**The Lord is my rock and my fortress***

and my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I will trust, my shield and the horn of my salvation and my high tower" (Ps 18:2). What a statement! **And David said that without any knowledge of the cross**. So when Paul said that we stand on the gospel, he meant just that. If our faith is not cross based, then it is a faith that is simply built on our own will to believe, not the power of the death, burial and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God.

A. The heart of God revealed at the cross:

*"**For whatever things were written before were written for our learning**, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope"* (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). These were things that were written in the Old Testament. In this statement, Paul refers us back to the Old Testament Scriptures in order that we learn and understand those things upon which we can rest our hope. And in our context of inquiry, we seek to understand the longsuffering of God. In our mourning over our sin, we need a very longsuffering God, which God is revealed as He patiently worked through a rebellious people in order to bring the cross plan into reality.

In His enduring patience with Israel, we understand the hurt of God in Israel's rejection of Him. He mourned over the spiritual adultery of His people with whom He was in a covenant relationship. Of His covenanted people, God charged, *"But you were as a wife who commits adultery, who takes foreigners instead of her husband"* (Ez 16:32). The apostasy of Israel to the gods of foreign powers was extreme. And so God's hurt for His people was extreme. Jeremiah's metaphor (anthropopathism) of God is vivid. *"When I would comfort Myself against sorrow, My heart is faint in Me"* (Jr 8:18). *"For the hurt of the daughter of My people am I hurt. I am mourning. Astonishment has taken hold of Me"* (Jr 8:21).

We learn the heart of God as He patiently remained with Israel through times of rebellion, even to the foot of the cross. However, our understanding of God's loving heart was still limited until we come to the cross. Our understanding of the heart of God through the Old Testament Scriptures was based on knowledge and historical events, not on the reality of the incarnation and crucifixion of God Himself by those of His own people who were misguided. We never truly understand the loving heart of God until we find ourselves at the foot of the cross looking up to the suffering incarnate God whose blood dropped on our sin-ravaged souls. It was there that we heard the awesome heart of God speak from His lips, "Forgive." And so the crucified God did what no man is able to do. *"**Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more**"* (Hb 8:12).

The Israelites before the cross could never fully understand the nature of a loving God until God was on a cross outside Jerusalem. When God made Himself vulnerable to His creation, shaming Himself even unto death, yea, the death of the cross, then we begin to comprehend somewhat the nature of His loving heart we could never have imagined after our own emotional inventions. Religions that bypass the cross, therefore, are grossly inadequate in understanding the one true and living God. They are guilty of creating gods after the corrupted imaginations of men who have hidden agendas or ulterior motives. The God of heaven makes men, but religions make gods. And when we come to the cross, no religion of man has ever been able to create the God that we see there. Never!

B. The true God revealed at the cross:

Men have throughout millennia created gods after their own imagination. However, they could never have conceived of a God who would be and behave as the one true and living God that we experience on the cross. To conceive of a God who humbles Himself to weakness in order to become the victim of His creation, is simply beyond the invention of human minds. We just do not conceive of gods behaving this way. The cross, therefore, exposes the true loving heart of God for His creation. If He were not truly love, then He would never have been there in the first place.

It is for this reason that the cross is our road map to the God of heaven. Such was the message of Paul's poetry of Philippians 2:5-11. This text is not simply an outlay of historical facts. Paul is talking about our minds identifying with the mind of a humbled God. He is not giving a simple history lesson on the incarnate God. *"Let this mind be in you"* (Ph 2:5) means to *"be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind"* (Rm 12:2). The mentality into which we must be transformed was the humbling journey of the Son of God from the form of God to the form of the cross. It involves knowing that which we have to sacrifice. It is knowing and willing not to live for ourselves, but for Christ Jesus (Gl 2:20). Jesus was before *"in the form of God"* (Ph 2:6). The cross, therefore, means transformation from one state of mind to another. *"He made Himself of no reputation ... being made in the likeness of men"* (Ph 2:7). The cross means humbling oneself to being vulnerable to humiliation. *"He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:8).

If we are willing to take this journey of transformation with the Son of God, then we will reign in life with Him. *"God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name"* (Ph 2:9). And for those who are willing to take this transforming journey with Christ, there is also reign. *"For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness* ***will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ****"* (Rm 5:17). *"For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we suffer,* ***we will also reign with Him****"* (2 Tm 2:11,12). The only way for the incarnate Son to reign in heaven was through the death of the cross. Likewise, our only way to "reign in life" with Him is through the cross of Jesus. Jesus knew this, and thus, He was willing to lead the way for us to discover our reign with Him through the bearing of our cross. So when He said, *"And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple"* (Lk 14:27), He meant that we must look for a cross in this life, not for crowns. And until we find the cross of Christ and take ownership of it as our means of being transformed to the mind of Christ, we will never understand the God of the cross. This is the God we can never understand if we do not go to the cross with His Son.

Now could any man in his wildest imagination come up with a "theology" as this in order to start a new religion? The one true and living God is as this. The imagined gods of men urge us to seek crowns before crosses. They encourage us from pulpits throughout Christendom to buy and wear silk-skin suits, not animal skins of goats. They sit us at the tables of fine cuisine, not to search around for grasshoppers to eat. They encourage us to build mansions on earth for ourselves, not to find fox holes in which to dwell. Our created gods move us to buy and lavish ourselves with gold. But those who have the mind of the One who went to the cross sends forth His disciples to say as Peter and John, "Silver and gold have I none." Could we have imagined the God of the cross as depicted by some unknown writer in his words below when he compared Alexander the Great of the Greek Empire with Jesus?

JESUS AND ALEXANDER

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;
One lived and died for self; one died for you and me.
The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross.
One's life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss.
One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone.
One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own.
One gained the world in life, and lost it in death.
The other lost his life, to win the whole world's faith.
Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;
One died in Babylon; the other on Calvary.
One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave.
One conquered every throne; the other every grave.
The one made himself God; the God made Himself less.
The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless.
When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords.
But Jesus died to live forever, to be Lord of Lords.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.
The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.
One built a throne on blood; the other built on love.
One was born on earth; the other from above.
One gained all the earth, to lose all earth and heaven.
The other gave up all, that all to Him be given.
The Greek forever dies; the Jew forever lives.
He loses all who gets and wins all things who gives.

C. Drawn from far away by the cross:

We can never understand how far away from God we were because of our sin until we understand how far God had to come to reconcile us again unto Himself. When Isaiah said that our sins separate us from God (Is 59:2), we can never comprehend the magnitude of that separation until we realize that the Son of God became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, in order to restore our fellowship with Him. When we begin to comprehend the God who became flesh on our behalf (Jn 1:14), then we begin to understand the tremendous ransom price the Son had to pay for us. This is the foundation of John's self-reflective statement, *"If we say that we have no sin,* ***we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us****"* (1 Jn 1:8). How can the truth be in one who is not moved to mourn over the cost of the cross? Our entire emotional being is wrapped up in the truth of the cross, for the cross reveals how far God had to send His Son from the "form of God" in order to bring us back into His fellowship. The more we understand these things, the more life-changing they become.

The cross not only reveals the God of love, it reveals ourselves to ourselves. Paul wrote, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men"* (Ti 2:11). Paul was speaking of the revelation of the God of grace in Jesus. Through Jesus, God was reaching out for us through the cross. The apostles were privileged to experience Jesus personally. John reflected on his early experience with Jesus by explaining, *"And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn 1:14). Jesus means more than a set of teachings, as was characteristic of the Old Testament law of Moses. *"For the law was given*

through Moses, ***but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ****"* (Jn 1:17). The coming of Jesus was about Him and what He brought for our problem of sin. He brought Himself as our Deliverer in order to deliver us from that which we could not deliver ourselves. Through Him we understand what He meant in Matthew 5:4. *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* When we understand how distant the One on the cross was from *"being in the form of God,"* then we begin to comprehend the statement, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..."* (Jn 3:16). Who would not be driven to mourn over his sins when understanding the loving grace that was revealed on the atoning cross by the incarnate Son of God? John was right. Whoever does not confess his sins, has no truth in him because the cross does not move him to mourn over his sin.

It is hard for those with too many success stories in their lives to confess up to failure in sin. It is almost impossible for the overconfident to turn from gazing at their shelves of trophies and awards to gaze upon an old rugged cross. It is for this reason that the self-confident and earthly awarded find it difficult to confess failure to God at the foot of the cross. On the other hand, it is easy for those who have been wrecked by a cruel world to confess their fallibility. They have few success stories for which they have been awarded trophies. Their character, therefore, has not been hardened by much glory and self-proclaimed accomplishments. To those who have been humbled by the struggles of life, the cross is an opportunity to confess their failures and claim the crown of victory. The cross appeals to those who find it easy to confess their sins.

The revelation of the extent to which God had to go in order to reconcile us unto Himself, magnifies the ugliness of our sin and its dire consequences. Self-realization of our sin should humble us to confession. The cross manifests the total inability of man to reconcile himself unto God. The cross reveals this sickness in ourselves. It humbles our arrogance, our narcissistic confidence that "we are the man." In all of our ego, arrogance, and selfishness, we are shocked by the cross. We are *"cut to the heart"* by its message (At 2:37). We are driven to our knees and cut to the very inner being of our existence. The cross digs out of our inner soul those corrupted lusts on which we have depended so much in a life of individualism, competition and awards. The cross helps us understand why "few that are in high places are called." But many do respond to the message of the suffering Savior. It is these who can write, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation ..."* (Rm 1:16). It is these who have cried out and thanked God, *"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). As Paul, we all thank God for delivering us from our brokenness in sin.

D. A new community order of love from the cross:

"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). How else would we identify those who have responded to the loving heart of God? Since God is love, those who are His would be signaled before the world by their behavior of love. Because He "so loved" them (Jn 3:16), they show His love before the world. *"He who does not love does not know God,* ***for God is love****"* (1 Jn 4:8). Any faith, therefore, that does not manifest the heart of the loving God must be suspect. We know those who are of the way of the cross because of their love for one another. Paul wrote, *" ... for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another"* (1 Th 4:9). We are taught this love by the love of the cross. It is an ongoing teaching as the love is ongoing in the community of God.

The loving community of the cross was described by Jesus with hyperbole. *"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). Matthew's record of Jesus' statement serves as a commentary to Luke's hyperbole. *"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). Those of the community of God love as they have been loved. John stated, *"We* ***love because He first loved us****"* (1 Jn 4:19). But the extent of this love is not fully defined in John's brief statement. The new commandment involves the intensity of the love the disciples have for one another. *"Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in* ***sincere love*** *of the brethren,* ***love one another fervently with a pure heart****"* (1 Pt 1:22). Our love for one another is as the loving Father so fervently loved us that He gave His Son for us. The cross, therefore, is the definition of the love by which the new commandment is taught to the disciples of Jesus.

When we thus come into the community of God, we come into a community of slaves who seek to serve one another out of love (See Mk 10:42-44). We come into the ekklesia (church) wherein we are directed, *"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting*

nothing in return ...” (Lk 6:35). *“You will then be the children of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful”* (Lk 6:35,36). When we lose grip of ourselves, the loving Father grabs hold of our hearts through the cross. We thus give of ourselves as He gave to us. We give our time. We give our possessions. We discipline our lives in order to bring ourselves into the subjection of one another’s love. This is the direction to which our understanding of the cross will lead us. Many people, therefore, walk with caution when they come to the cross. They are fearful that the cross will call out of them more than they are willing to give. But we remember what the apostle of love said. *“Beloved, if God so loved us, **we ought also to love one another**”* (1 Jn 4:11). *“If we love one another, **God dwells in us and His love is perfected in us**”* (1 Jn 4:12). Therefore we also remember, *“There is no fear in love, but **perfect love casts out fear** ...”* (1 Jn 4:18).

Chapter 3

RESTORING THE APPEAL OF THE CROSS

The world has moved into a “You Tube” generation where our emphasis has been placed on “broadcasting ourselves.” We have our pockets full of smart phones in order that others can contact us at any moment. And when the cell phone rings when we are in a personal conversation with another, we take the call first, ignoring our personal conversation. We have a generation of people who have grown up in front of their own Facebook cameras, and thus, a generation that is focused squarely on itself by inventing electronic media devices that make us feel important. Pictures of ourselves are pasted everywhere in our environment. We crave to build our “followers” list to which we can tweet ourselves. We are narcissists by training from childhood. We are a generation of people who have been awarded trophies from youth for every minor accomplishment, and thus, our self-esteem that our parents were so cautious to insure has turned us inward into ourselves. We are “winners” in every aspect of a life where there are no losers. The result has been that we have changed our religion to a narcissistic faith where we are concerned about ourselves more than our neighbor.

Our assemblies have changed from worshiping God to being concert encounters during which we seek to motivate ourselves for the coming week. We have thus conveniently brought our egocentric behavior into our faith. Our faith, therefore, “is all about us.” The result of this itching-ear (narcissistic) generation is that it has heaped upon itself every sort of “feel good” preachers who have long since given up preaching Bible. If the behavioral function of our faith does not make us feel good, then we move on to one that will. In all of this self-oriented religiosity, there is little appeal from a cross that means sacrifice, slavehood and self-denial. The cross is totally about others, and none of self. Those who are all about themselves create religions that make them feel that they are the center of the universe.

Nevertheless, we must not allow ourselves to believe that the appeal of the cross is hopeless to those of self-oriented cultures, for the inhabitants of such cultures often feel quite lonely in their competitive relationships with one another. When the apostle Paul stepped into a city that was not much different than a typical modern-day city of self-centered hedonistic religionists, he brought the most important message of history. *“For I delivered to you **first** of all that which I also received, that **Christ died for our sins** ...”* (1 Co 15:3). Is there room for this message today among the assortment of religionists who claim some stake in Christianity? Does the suffering servant of the cross have any appeal to a self-centered, narcissistic generation?

Let’s see. We wear golden crosses around our necks, but can we say as Peter, *“Silver and gold I do not have ...”* (At 3:6). We wear a cross as a symbol of our faith, but in a culture of entitlement, we shun the call, *“And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple”* (Lk 14:27). We take pride in our Christianity, but often confuse it with churchianity. We love the blessings of a loving social fellowship, but we revolt at the principle, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gl 6:2). Have we not created a “churchianity” that is convenient, one that allows us to live at a distance from the needs of humanity? Have we come to the point in our faith, or religion, that “missions” is a word that will be lost in our vocabulary. Or maybe our definitions have digressed to what *Time Magazine* referred to as “vacationaries”? We are confident to do “missions” for two weeks, but not as long as a lifetime of cross-bearing and cross-cultural sacrifice. Is the era of the “missionary” gone? Have we generated a generation of too weak missionaries who are good for only two weeks?

There is something about the message of the cross that strikes squarely at the pride of the self-oriented person who is inbred with the curse of entitlement. The cross is a message that says we are entitled to nothing but to give ourselves to others. It is a message that cannot be comprehended by the human reasoning of both materialists and the exploited. In fact, we would state that in this life where we are confined to the finiteness of our powers of human reason that we will never be able to comprehend the full meaning of the sacrificial Deity on a cross outside Jerusalem. For Deity to incarnate into the form of His creation, and then go to the cross for the salvation of dust and spirit, is somehow beyond human comprehension. If we think we have figured out this God who would do such a thing, then we have probably come up with the wrong god. We not only worship a God who can give up His entitlement of being in the form of God in order to wash the feet of His creation (Jn 13:1-17), we worship a God of what we would conclude to be extremes, the extreme of the cross. What God would do this? Surely, no god we could create after our imagination could or would do such a thing for His creation. A totally selfless God has little appeal to a narcissist.

There would be no Christianity if there were no cross. The cross is the epitome of the revelation of the love of the God we cannot fully comprehend. He is the God who is beyond the definition of the words of our dictionary. It is the mystery of this lack of total definition and comprehension that draws us. It is a mystery that draws us to know this God who loved us so much in spite of ourselves. We seek to conceive, to understand, to experience something so wonderful as a God who existed in eternity, but was lovingly willing to incarnate for the purpose of transforming us into eternal beings in His presence. If this is not life-changing stuff, then we cannot be changed. It is a message that has awesome power in the transformation of lowly creatures who have been confined to an environment that seems to have gone wrong. However, the environment is the best of all possible environments for the habitation of truly free moral agents. The environment did not go wrong. The free-moral inhabitants of the environment did. And maybe this is the very beginning of our urge to change, for we reason that this world is not all there is. We are thus willing to make whatever changes that are necessary in our lives in order to become as the One who came to fetch us from this harsh environment of existence. We view the cross, therefore, as a means of escape.

When we begin to understand that the cross was a manifestation of love, then we are on our way. Love generates love. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19). The Son of God did not invade earth for the purpose of holding back the wrath of a God who was ready to mash us like flies. The atonement of the cross was not to fend off a God of wrath, but to reconcile a wayward, and often rebellious child of creation, back to a God of love. We thus study the cross, not to understand the Scriptures, but to understand the God of love revealed in, but beyond, the Scriptures. The objective of our search of the Scriptures, therefore, is to somehow understand this God who can affect and change our lives so much. The more we understand this God of love, the more the aroma of His love is reflected to others through us as His love was poured out on us through the cross.

In our religious heritage we may have been the result of catechisms and rituals, doctrines and commandments. The validation of our faith may have been in the correctness of an outline of statutes that were claimed to be "biblical" by a listing of "out-of-context" scriptures under every point. But is it possible that we have been sidetracked into thinking that our faith is unmovable because of our doctrinal correctness? We would suggest that our plea for restoration is not to restore a correct doctrinal outline by which we would validate our faith. Our plea is to restore the cross to the centrality of our faith and behavior. Only when this restoration is begun can we truly begin to understand the outline of His teaching. We thus start with the man Jesus in order to understand what He said, for His teaching means little without understanding who and what He did as an atoning sacrifice.

The gospel is the historical event of the death of Jesus on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection. But our understanding of the cross must go beyond our faith in an historical event. If we cannot get beyond the event, we cannot get to the One who died there and was resurrected. The message of the cross is more than an event of history. It is a life-changing transformation by One who eternally changed from God to us on our behalf. Most people fail to experience the life-changing experience of the cross because they fail to move beyond the facts of an historical event.

And such is the curse of legal-oriented religiosity and literalistic interpreters. The legalist is infatuated with the validation of his faith through correct facts, that is, understanding the Scriptures correctly. He thus manufactures a correct outline in order to define who we are as God's people. In struggling to create a consistent outline of interpretations, he often suffers from the same twisting of the Scriptures as the literalist. The literalist struggles to interpret the profound metaphors that take us as close as possible with human reason to the essence of the meaning of the cross. Being confined to the facts

of Bible statements, however, he struggles to imagine beyond the hermeneutic "it means what it says and says what it means ... literally." And thus, the literalist often has an idol god with eyes and a nose that he is ready to carve out of a piece of wood.

The legalist is ready to argue his outline with the correct proof texts. The literalist is still trying to create a god after his own image. The literalist cannot get beyond the wood and the legalist cannot get beyond the outline in order to understand what the Spirit is trying to reveal through the metaphors of the cross. Both the legalist and literalist are held up by human deductive reasoning or childish interpretations.

One of the primary shortcomings of the legalist and literalist is that it is very difficult for both to understand the profound depth of the meaning of the cross. As a result, there is only intellectual change and not behavioral transformation. We affirm that there is information about the cross that we must intellectually perceive and understand, which things are revealed in the Scriptures. However, unless we move past an intellectual knowledge of the cross, we will never experience the life-changing profoundness of the cross. We will not be able to experience the adventure of the mystery of the cross that goes far beyond facts and figures, far beyond words and paper. We would confidently assert, therefore, that when Paul walked into town, his message was not about facts and historical events alone. What he brought to the people was life-changing. There is no other way to answer the results he had in places like Philippi when a small group of two wage-earners with their dependents continued to support him sacrificially once and again as he carried the message of the cross to other cities (See Ph 4:10-18). There is no other way to explain why the Thessalonians broadcasted the message they received in every place only a short time after Paul left their presence. *"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). What makes pagan idolaters drastically transform into being and doing things as this? When we discover what makes such a radical personality transformation, then we are on our way to understanding the life-changing message that the early evangelists took from one city to another. We can be sure that the life-changing motivation was not an outline of Scriptures, but a message of the cross.

Chapter 4

METAPHORS OF THE CROSS

There is mystery in metaphors. A metaphor is using something that is earthly and physical in order to convey a truth of something that is greater and often spiritual. When we say, "He runs like a rabbit," we are not saying that a particular person is a rabbit. Our metaphorical meaning is that the particular person about whom we are speaking is very fast. David said, *"The Lord is my rock ..."* (Ps 18:2). This does not mean that the Lord is a literal rock. It means that He is immoveable and solid as a rock. David wrote concerning the "face" and "eyes" of God (Ps 34:15,16). But God does not have a face and eyes. He is spirit (Jn 4:24). In David's use of metaphors, we are challenged to ponder what he meant. This is the mystery of metaphors, and often, one of the most difficult areas of revelation for the literalist to understand. Because it is difficult for him to conceive of a God without eyes and ears, so it is difficult for him to think beyond the wood of the cross, the iron nails, and blood dripping from the brow of Jesus. We are often so held up by our Mel-Gibson-*Passion*-movie scene of the crucified Son of God that we cannot see the Son of God beyond the cross.

The Bible is loaded with metaphors. This is why it is often difficult for the literalist to think beyond the physical or earthly figure of the metaphor of the cross in order to comprehend the spiritual significance of what the Holy Spirit is trying to convey to us through the cross. We have found it interesting that in many languages of the world there is no word for metaphor. Though the people speak daily in common language by using metaphors, their schooling is sometimes quite elementary in explaining what they are actually meaning through the use of metaphorical figures of speech. When understanding the Bible, especially the spiritual significance of those truths that are illuminated through metaphorical figures, it is sometimes challenging for some to grasp the full meaning of various important texts. For this reason, this difficulty has led many to be literalists in understanding the Bible. This is particularly true in reference to understanding the Psalms and those apocalyptic books that are saturated with metaphors. In our study of the cross, we often rob ourselves of the full significance of the cross by having a shallow understanding of the metaphors that are used to reveal the "atoning sacrifice"–

that is a metaphor–of the cross.

Because we fail to see the beauty of metaphors that are used in reference to the cross, we restrict our understanding of what God did for us through Jesus. The cross was more than an historical event. Its significance is more than wood and blood. Because we minimize our understanding of the cross, we often relegate our response to the cross to obedience of facts only. We conclude that Jesus historically died on a cruel cross. From here the sermon progresses into explaining the gore of the cross and the tremendous physical suffering that Jesus endured while nailed to the cross. He subsequently died, was buried, and then was historically and victoriously resurrected from the dead. We then move on to encourage our audience to obey these facts. They are subsequently buried with Jesus in baptism in order to be raised with Him from the tomb of water. Our message, therefore, settles around knowing the facts and "getting baptized" as a simple act of obedience to the facts. All is conveniently outlined and charted in order for us to affirm confidently that we have obeyed the historical event of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. All the facts of the event have been learned and obeyed and we move on, forgetting that the event of the cross was an historical event around which all creation exists and its destiny will be terminated.

But the gospel cannot be reduced to precise actions in obedience to historical facts. Metaphors take our understanding of the gospel into the realm of mystery. Through the metaphors of the cross the Holy Spirit seeks to move our minds beyond what we can historically perceive. He seeks to move our thinking to a higher level of understanding in order to determine the teleology of the cross. Once He has "inspired" our thinking, then He has brought us into the reality of metaphorical mysteries by which we begin to comprehend the nature of the one true and living God whose eternal sacrifice was revealed through the cross.

Though we have connected the fact of the gospel with the fact of our baptism into Christ, the Holy Spirit wants to take our minds far beyond the events and facts of history. He seeks to do this through the richness of metaphors over which we meditate day and night in order that we be held in awe at the wonder of God who desired to reconnect us to His loving presence. We would not, therefore, cheat ourselves. We must not by relegating our understanding of His wondrous work through the cross by our resistance to step through the doors of metaphors by which the Spirit has revealed the atoning sacrifice of a loving God. We will thus take this journey to step through the doors of metaphors in order to see a greater reality. It is only when we take this step that we can appreciate the transcendent God who is seeking to break through into our cocoon of the physical. If on our part we can release our minds from the confinement of our physical environment, then we will discover in amazement the essence of a God who is truly loving. He is not a god who would arbitrarily create souls, and then predestine them to destruction. On the contrary, He is a God who seeks to lovingly reach down from His eternal realm of existence in order to offer an invitation to all His creation to come and join Him in eternal bliss.

Since the audience of the New Testament letters was primarily a Jewish audience, our first "dictionary" to understand the metaphors that are used in reference to the crucifixion of the Messiah would naturally come from the Old Testament. The metaphors do find some of their meaning in their use in the common language of the day when the letters were written. However, **we would assume that God laid the foundation for Israel's understanding of the cross by His work with Israel throughout their history**. Our search for an understanding of the physical and literal foundation of the metaphors of the cross, therefore, must find their primary definition in God's work with Israel (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). The Old Testament, therefore, is our first dictionary to understand the metaphors of the cross. The following chapters explain some of the beautiful metaphors used by the Holy Spirit in order to explain from God's viewpoint what took place at the cross.

Chapter 5

THE REDEEMER OF THE CROSS

From the Old Testament, the word "redemption" is used in reference to property or people (See Lv 25:25-27; Rt 4:4-12). The one who sought to "redeem" something had to sacrifice something of his own in order to acquire that which was desired (Nm 3:51; Ne 5:8). Throughout the Old Testament, the meaning of redemption was deliverance or purchase. That which was purchased was delivered to the one who paid the redemption money. In this sense, God redeemed Israel out of Egyptian captivity (Dt 9:26; 2 Sm 7:23; 1 Ch 17:21; Is

52:3). Israel's redemption was based on the fact that they could not redeem themselves because they were in captivity. Redemption, therefore, carries with it the meaning that the one who pays the redemption price desires that which he seeks to redeem or purchase. It also assumes that the one redeemed could not of himself pay his own redemption price.

In reference to God's deliverance of Israel from captivity, the nation of Israel belonged to God as His claimed people because they were the descendents of Abraham to whom God had made a promise that He would make a great nation of his seed (Gn 12:1-4; Dt 15:15). He had established a covenant with Abraham, and at the time of their deliverance, He desired to establish a covenant with the descendents of Abraham as a nation. And thus, God obligated Himself to redeem Israel out of captivity because of His own promises to Abraham and His desire to make a covenant with the seed of Abraham (1 Ch 17:21; Ps 25:22). Because He had created the nation He desired to covenant with the nation in order to bring the Israelites into the rest of the promised land (Compare Hb 4).

Since God had promised Abraham that through his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (the cross) (Gn 12:2,3), God's work to redeem Israel set the metaphorical stage for His redemption through the One who would come to be a blessing to all people. God's redemption of Israel was something the Jews could not do for themselves. God had to step in and do the deed. This story of redemption was subsequently recorded for a future redemption when people would be purchased and delivered out of the captivity of sin. Israel, as we, desired to be free. But only when One came to their rescue could they, as we, be delivered to freedom.

At the cross, Jesus obligated Himself to redeem us as His created people. *"In Him we have redemption through His blood ..."* (Ep 1:7). Since Jesus was the Creator (Cl 1:16), He obligated Himself as our Creator to deliver us from that which we could not deliver ourselves. He redeemed us from our separation from God because of our rebellion (Is 59:1,2). Since we were in the captivity of our own sins that separated us from Him, the Son of God had to come for His creation through the cross. We could not deliver ourselves through the keeping of law, for none of us could perfectly keep any law by which we could redeem ourselves, *"for by works of law no flesh will be justified"* (Gl 2:16). Therefore, *"Christ* ***redeemed us from the curse of the law***, ***having become a curse for us****, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'"* (Gl 3:13).

Zacharias was right in reference to his announcement of Jesus being the fulfillment of the promise to bless all nations through Israel. *"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and* ***redeemed His people****"* (Lk 1:68). And Paul concluded, *"****He redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus****, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* (Gl 3:14). Jesus redeemed *"those who were under law,* ***so that we might receive the adoption as sons****"* (Gl 4:5). He *"gave Himself for us so that He might* ***redeem us from every lawless deed*** *and purify for Himself* ***a special people*** *who are zealous for good works"* (Ti 2:14). The payment of redemption, however, was costly. *"You were not redeemed with corruptible things ...* ***but with the precious blood of Christ*** *..."* (1 Pt 1:18,19; see Rv 5:9; 14:3,4). The church, therefore, is the family of God who is redeemed from all the nations of the world (Rv 14:4).

"All things were created through Him [Christ] *and for Him"* (Cl 1:16). Since Christ created us for Himself, then because we were created free-moral individuals, through law He could only direct our lives. No system of law could bring us into His eternal fellowship since all sin is against law (Rm 3:23). Our redemption, therefore, could only be accomplished through an incarnate offering that would atone for our inability to demand eternality based on our keeping of law. Law kept us in bondage. Grace through our Redeemer set us free. There was, therefore, only one option in reference to the salvation of those who were created. Jesus had to do something, and that something cost Him dearly, for He had to eternally sacrifice being on an equality with God and in the form of God in order to bring His creation back into the presence of God (Ph 2:5-8).

While we busy ourselves with concern over bearing our own cross, we should take another look at the eternal sacrifice of the One who bore a cross in order that we have the privilege of bearing our crosses. Our lifetime cross bearing seems to pale in view of the cross that Jesus had to bear, and still does, for we assert, therefore, that the cost for our redemption went far beyond Jesus' death on the cross.

We must not forget that before the cross there was the incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God. In order to go to the cross, it was as the Hebrew writer stated of the Son of God, *"A body You have prepared for Me"* (Hb 10:5). Though in the form of God, and as God, the Son of God emptied Himself into the body of a man (See Jn 2:1,2,14; Ph 2:5-8). Paul's response to this phenomenal sacrifice on the part of the Son of God was total: *"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).

Chapter 6

THE RANSOM PAID AT THE CROSS

In order that something be redeemed, a ransom price had to be paid. Something was given for something. With the metaphor of redemption, therefore, there also comes the ransom payment. Ransom assumes the inability of the redeemed to deliver themselves. The Psalmist wrote that even the wealthy could not pay a ransom for their own deliverance. *"They who trust in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means* ***redeem*** *his brother or give to God a ransom for him–****for the redemption of their soul is costly*** *and money can never suffice ..."* (Ps 49:6-8). The metaphor of ransom sometimes indicates a price that is too high to be paid. The picture of ransom that is often used in the Old Testament sometimes focuses on one's inability to settle his debt with another (See Pv 6:35). Atonement money was to be given as a ransom for souls so that they would not be touched by a plague (Ex 30:12). If one was deserving of death, however, no ransom could be paid for his deliverance (Nm 35:31). If one would flee to a city of refuge, no ransom was to be given to deliver this person from his punishment (Nm 35:32).

Isaiah was specific in identifying the foundation of the metaphor of ransom for Israel. In Isaiah 43, Isaiah focused the minds of the apostate Israelites on the day when they were created as a nation when God redeemed them from Egyptian captivity. *"But now thus says the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear,* ***for I have redeemed you****."* (Is 43:1). In order to be redeemed from Egyptian captivity, the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea on dry land (Is 43:2). But their deliverance from captivity came at the price of other nations. *"For I am the Lord your God, the Holy one of Israel, your Savior.* ***I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place****"* (Is 43:3). The ransom paid for the redemption of His people was **the death of the firstborn and armies of Egypt**. God took the firstborn of the Egyptians in death for a ransom payment to deliver the children of Israel from captivity.

God wanted Israel to remember that their birth as a nation did not come at a small price. Their birth cost the price of the lives of many firstborn sons and daughters of other nations, as well as the army of Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba. Isaiah then spoke of a time when the faithful remnant would remember the high ransom for Israel's redemption from Egyptian captivity. He reminded the Israelite remnant of their day of redemption. *"Was it not You who dried up the sea and the waters of the great deep, who has made the depths of the sea* ***a way for the ransomed to pass over****?"* (Is 51:10). Jeremiah added, *"For the Lord has* ***redeemed*** *Jacob and* ***ransomed*** *him from the hand of him who was stronger than he"* (Jr 31:11). And then Hosea looked into the future to a day when God would pay the ultimate ransom price for His people. ***"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death"*** (Hs 13:14).

The cross is a picture of a ransom paid, the high cost of the ransomed firstborn and only begotten Son of God. We have been ransomed by the blood of the eternally incarnate and crucified Son of God. Jesus came into the world in order to pay this high ransom. *"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). Jesus gave Himself as a ransom to provide all people with the opportunity to be delivered from sin (1 Tm 2:5,6). *"For He has made Him who knew no sin* ***to be sin on behalf of us*** *..."* (2 Co 5:21).

The metaphor of ransom paid at the cross is not a picture of arrogance and selfishness. It is a picture of a lowly sacrifice of self on behalf of others who could not pay the price for their own deliverance through meritorious works of law or good deeds. And since we could not work ourselves out of captivity into which we had given ourselves through sin, God had to pay the ransom. It was an unselfish gift of grace.

The cross does not have much of an appeal to a narcissistic generation that is consumed with broadcasting itself through a collection of self-portraits on the internet. The selfish find little appeal of the selfless ransom paid at the cross. The behavior of the cross is about broadcasting a ransomed servant and exalting others before oneself, just as Jesus. To a self-centered generation of people, the Holy Spirit would say, *"For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself"* (Gl 6:3). *"... God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble"* (1 Pt 5:5). We must be cautioned, therefore, that if we follow the ransom metaphor to the cross, we will end up as slaves.

Central to the nature of true Christianity is the example of its Founder as a ransom price on the cross for all who would respond. *"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). Paul goes further in explaining

the sacrifice of Jesus by saying that Jesus gave *"Himself **a ransom for all**"* (1 Tm 2:6). The ransom price was not offered for a few chosen. If any teaching strikes at the heart of the false doctrine of individual predestination it is the ransom of Jesus on the cross for all people. God is not willing that any of His creation should perish (2 Pt 3:9). Therefore, Jesus was given as full payment for the sins of all who would respond to His offering from the cross.

We must always keep in mind that God ransomed the firstborn of Egypt for Israel. But this was not a guarantee that many Israelites would not later rebel at Mount Sinai. Though delivered from captivity, the ransom price did not cover the latter rebellion. Those who gave themselves over to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were destroyed (Nm 16). Those who lacked faith to enter immediately into the land of promise fell in the wilderness. The point is, one can be delivered by responding to the ransomed price of Jesus, but if he does not walk in the light as Jesus is in the light, the ransomed blood of Jesus does not cleanse him of his rebellion in sin (See 1 Jn 1:7,8). If we sin willfully after being ransomed, then the blood of Jesus will not redeem us from destruction, *"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). Therefore, we must make a choice to remain faithful, and thus, stay in contact with the blood of Jesus.

Chapter 7

THE SACRIFICIAL OFFERING ON THE CROSS

Redemption necessitates sacrifice. And sacrifice necessitates death. In the Old Testament, a living animal was given as a sacrifice for the deliverance of the people. Throughout the history of Israel, all their blood sacrifices reminded them of the first blood offering of the Passover lamb whose blood was poured out to protect each household from the death of their own firstborn in their deliverance from Egyptian captivity (Ex 12:22,23). Israel's firstborn lived, but the Egyptians' firstborn were given as a sacrificial ransom for their deliverance (Is 43:1-3). A lamb of the Passover was sacrificed for the protection of Israel's firstborn, but the protection of their firstborn meant the death of the firstborn of all unbelieving Egyptian households.

Sacrifices were also used to ratify covenants. When God established His covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai after they came out of captivity, life was again given in order that the people be sprinkled with a blood offering for the covenant (Ex 24:3-11). A living covenant was thus established by the death of that which was sacrificed. Moses said to the people, *"Behold **the blood of the covenant** that the Lord has made with you concerning all these words"* (Ex 24:8).

Throughout the history of Israel, once a year on the Day of Atonement, an unblemished animal gave its life on the altar as a sin offering of blood for the people (Lv 4:1-35; 16:1-34). God reminded Israel, *"**For the life of the flesh is in the blood**. **And I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls**. **For it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul**"* (Lv 17:11). In the atonement (meaning, "the covering of sins") life was sacrificed for the sins of the people. Year after year, therefore, the minds of the people of Israel were being prepared for a final blood sacrifice that was to come in their future. It would not be the sacrificial blood of animals, but the blood of life from the incarnate Son of God. It would not be a Passover offering to save the firstborn, it would be the offering of the Firstborn of God for all those who would choose to be born again. Once this blood was poured out as an offering, never again would an animal be killed as a blood offering. Such was what the Hebrew writer wanted us to know when he spoke of Jesus being our high priest *"who does not need daily as those* [Old Testament high priests], *to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people's, for this **He did once for all when He offered up Himself**"* (Hb 7:26,27).

In establishing the foundation for the metaphor that would eventually lead to the flesh and blood sacrifice of the incarnate Son, we must keep in mind that the animal sacrifices that were brought to be offered in Israel were eaten, both by the Levites and those who participated in the offering (Lv 6:16,18,26,29; 7:6,15). This opens the window for understanding our eating of the flesh and blood of Jesus. Jesus spoke metaphorically of such during His ministry. *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life"* (See Jn 6:52-56). This was a difficult saying for the disciples to comprehend, but a simple statement laid on the background of their knowledge of the sacrificial offerings of Israel (Jn 6:60). At the time Jesus made the statement they did not understand the atoning sacrifice of the cross that was yet in

their near future. And they knew nothing at all about the Lord's Supper that would come after the sacrifice. In John 6 Jesus was speaking metaphorically of eating His sacrificed flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper. We do not eat literally of the fleshly body of Jesus, nor drink of His literal blood. But in the institution of the Supper meal, Jesus took the bread of the Passover meal and said, *"This is My body"* (Mt 26:26). Of the cup of the fruit of the vine, He said, *"This is My blood of the covenant"* (Mt 26:28). Through the institution of the Supper on the eve of His betrayal, therefore, Jesus was preparing the minds of the disciples for His sacrificial offering, as well as their remembrance of it through the Supper until He comes again (See Lk 22:18; 1 Co 11:26).

When we venture to the cross, the minds of the people had been prepared for the concept of the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Sacrifice is the message of Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus gave in and gave up in order to give for His creation. He gave up *"being in the form of God"* in order to give into being an obedient sacrifice. He became our sacrificial sin offering. *"For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us ..."* (2 Co 5:21). *"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,* ***God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh****"* (Rm 8:3). *"Whom God has set forth to be* ***an atoning sacrifice by His blood*** *..."* (Rm 3:25). Therefore, *"****Christ our Passover was sacrificed****"* (1 Co 5:7; see Hb 9:6-14; 10:15-18).

It was impossible for the blood of that which was created out of nothing to be a sufficient sacrifice for that which would be eternal. For this reason, it was impossible for the blood of animals to be a sufficient sacrifice for those whom God would bring into eternal dwelling (Hb 10:1-4). Only that which had eternality could be a sufficient sacrifice. However, in order for this sacrifice to be sufficient, there had to be a sacrifice on the part of the One who would give Himself for us. There was the necessity, therefore, for the eternal to become as those for whom He would choose to make a sacrificial offering. And for His sacrifice to be more than a brief thirty-three years in a state of incarnation on earth, it had to be eternal. A thirty-three year sacrifice would not be a true sacrifice if the incarnation could be reversed. There is no revelation in all of Scripture that speaks of any reversal of the incarnation.

So what sacrifice did Jesus actually make that made Him worthy to be our Passover sacrifice? By the time of Jesus' coming into the world, thousands of rebellious Jews had already been crucified on crosses throughout the Roman Empire. Numerous insurrections had been put down, resulting in the crucifixion of rebels across the Empire, specifically in Palestine. The Jews knew the horror of crucifixion. Many had personally witnessed the crucifixion of criminals. On some occasions, they had witnessed the crucifixion by Roman authorities of friends and family who had participated in various insurrection plots. They knew the agony of death on a cross. Sometimes death would not soon deliver the crucified victim, and thus, the authorities would break the legs of the crucified. It was an agonizing death that would linger on for hours. But eventually, death would release the condemned from life, and thus bring to an end hours of suffering on a cross. The Jews were not unfamiliar with crucifixions.

So we reconsider the crucifixion of Jesus. According to the timeline of Jesus on the cross, the length of time was about six hours before He gave up the life of His fleshly body (See Jn 10:17,18). We know the death was agonizing. We know the excruciating pain that must have ravaged His body. But when life on a cross would go on for hours, if not a day, we wonder if the sacrifice for eternity was only for six hours. We think not. We must consider that Jesus' sacrifice for us was more than six hours of pain on a cross outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. We must consider the possibility, or reality, that when He humbled Himself, and was born into the likeness of men, **it was forever**.

John alerted his readers to this reality in 1 John. John was writing many years **after** the cross and resurrection. He wrote, *"And we know that the Son of God* ***is come*** *..."* (1 Jn 5:20). He uses the Greek present tense. It was not that the Son of God had come, but "is come." The Son appeared on earth, but there was something about His coming that continued to exist by the time John wrote 1 John. In 1 John 4:2 John revealed this truth in another sentence structure. *"Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ* ***has come in the flesh*** *is from God ...."* The obvious conclusion to this statement is that Jesus had come in the flesh for His earthly ministry, but He was still in the flesh for His heavenly ministry that was taking place at the time John wrote. He was in some way **still in the flesh**.

In 2 John the apostle looks to the future in reference to the coming of Jesus. *"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). John is emphatic in this statement about Jesus still being in the flesh, aligning a denial of such to mark one as antichrist. His statement refers us to the "going" of Jesus from this earth at His ascension. At the ascension, the two angels said to the apostles as they watched Jesus bodily ascend into heaven, *"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). Now relate this thought with what John revealed 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****."* Jesus bodily ascended into heaven. He will bodily be coming again from heaven in the future.

Now consider seriously the conclusion to the above statements. When Jesus was resurrected, His body was changed, but it was the same body. His incarnation was into a natural body. But in death *"it 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). Jesus' natural body was raised a spiritual body. The apostle John handled the body of Jesus after His resurrection. However, he did not understand the nature of this body (1 Jn 3:2). But it was a spiritual body that the apostles could handle, one with which Jesus ate (Lk 24:39-42). When Jesus comes again, He *"will* ***transform*** *our lowly body so that it may be fashioned according to* ***His glorious body****"* (Ph 3:21). In order for us to be fashioned according to His "glorious body," He must still have a body in which He will be revealed from heaven.

We are now beginning to somewhat comprehend the totality of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. When He gave up being on an equality with God in order to be fashioned in the body of man (Ph 2:5-8), **it was forever**. His sacrifice was not for what would be a momentary period of thirty-three years in the flesh in comparison to eternity. **His suffering for six hours on the cross was not the finality of all His sacrifice for us**. The sacrificial offering on the cross was made, but the eternal sacrifice of His existence in our likeness was forever. He gave His form as God and being on an equality with God in order to pay the ransom that was necessary in order to deliver us from sin and the bondage of this world.

When the New Testament speaks of "believing in Jesus," therefore, it is commanding more than a simplistic "sinner's prayer" of mourning. It is commanding a total life-changing obedience in response to the God who transformed to be as us in order to dwell together with us in eternity. Therefore, let us never again try to get by with a cheap "faith only" response to His eternal incarnate sacrifice. Such is a mockery of what the Son of God humbled Himself to be in order to go to the cross for our sins. It is a weak response to what the Son of God gave up in order to forever be our high priest.

We thus view the sacrifice of Jesus to be more than the cross offering. The Hebrew writer shed some light on this. *"Therefore, in all things* ***He 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). The cross was a moment in time for the atoning sacrifice. However, being made "like His brethren" exemplifies the sacrifice beyond our comprehension. Could the Son of God give up forever being on an equality with God in the very form of God? He came in the flesh (Jn 1:14). He lived in the flesh (1 Jn 1:1). His flesh died on the cross, was buried, and subsequently raised to be victorious over death. His natural body was raised a spiritual, glorious body. And in this body He ascended on high. In this same glorious body He will come again for His people, with whom He will dwell as His brethren for eternity. When we consider this awesome sacrifice of the Son of God in order to bring us into eternal dwelling, we faint to our knees ... speechless. His was a sacrifice that is simply beyond our comprehension. We can never fully understand this because we can never take this journey with the Son of God. In view of this sacrifice that was to come, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah rightly described our Savior as the coming Suffering Servant.

Chapter 8

THE SUFFERING SERVANT ON THE CROSS

In order to carry out the eternal purpose of creation, that is to bring created beings into eternal dwelling with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, someone had to come from the infinite to the finite. One of Deity had to make the eternal sacrifice in order to bring into the presence of the Eternal Love those who would be gifted with eternality by being in His presence. This Mediator would not only bring reconciliation between the eternal and mortal, but would immortalize the mortal for eternal dwelling.

As human beings, we would expect a glorious entrance of God into the environment of man. We would expect a spectacular invasion with a galactic display of heavenly bodies. We would then look for angelic knights in shining armor. But such was not the case. Such a heavenly entrance into our world would not provide the

opportunity to draw out of creation proper candidates who were fit for eternal dwelling in the presence of a God. Only those who would follow His example of humbling Himself unto death, even the death on a wooden cross, would be qualified to eternally dwell in His presence.

As free-moral individuals who often choose ourselves first, we needed an example of someone who chose Himself last. We needed a messenger of humility, meekness, one who could show kindness and mercy to our fallibility. We needed a servant, but not only a servant. We needed a servant who in all things would be *"tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hb 4:15). Through such a One we could thus *"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). And so, the picture of the coming Messiah of Israel that was painted by the prophets was a picture of a suffering servant, one who would suffer just as those He sought to deliver into eternal dwelling. It was only logical that He be such.

Isaiah paints the greatest metaphorical pictures of the coming suffering servant (See Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 – 53:12). He introduced the coming servant of the Lord with these words: *"Behold My* ***servant*** *whom I uphold. My elect in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth judgment to the Gentiles"* (Is 42:1). *"He will not fail nor be discouraged* ***until*** *He has set judgment on the earth"* (Is 42:4). Until He would die on the cross, the suffering servant would endure great pain and suffering in order to accomplish His mission. The suffering servant would say, *"**I gave My back to those who struck Me and My cheeks to those who plucked off the hair**. **I did not hide My face from shame and spitting**"* (Is 50:6). Isaiah continued to paint the picture of this servant. *"Just as many were astonished at you, My people,* ***so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men****"* (Is 52:14). We are sure Isaiah's hand became weak as he was led by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to write these words concerning the coming servant: *"**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**"* (Is 53:3). *"**He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted**"* (Is 53:4). *"**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 53:5).

The inspired writers who recorded the ministry and gospel of Jesus wanted us to understand that Jesus fully realized His mission. There were no surprises as He led Himself to the cross (See Jn 10:17,18). Jesus identified Himself as the servant who was anointed by the Lord to come to His people (Compare Lk 4:16-21 with Is 61:1,2). As was pictured by the words of Isaiah, Jesus' ministry as the servant of the Lord was one of healing (Compare Mt 8:16,17 with Is 53:4). Through the records of the ministry and gospel of Jesus are revelations of Jesus knowing that He was the One who was to suffer for the people of God (See Mk 8:31; 9:12; 10:33,34; 14:21).

Contrary to the expectations of the religious elite of Israel, the servant of the Lord who would heal the spiritual wounds of the people was not the military hero they expected. He was the lowly servant of God who was despised, rejected, spat upon and crucified by those to whom He came. The suffering servant, therefore, became the opportunity for individuals to determine their own eternal destiny. *"He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him,* ***to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name****"* (Jn 1:11,12). If one would accept as God the One who was crucified as a common criminal on a cross, then it would be this one who had a right to be a child of God. The picture of the Redeemer as a suffering servant on a cross exemplifies the right of any individual to make a choice to reveal whether he or she is of a character that is fit for eternal dwelling.

Jesus reminded His disciples, *"... 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; see Mk 10:45). As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus came to serve our sin problem, and to do such, He had to suffer the cross of humiliation. Jesus was truly our servant who suffered on our behalf. Those who submit to the cross by taking up their crosses, are of a like-minded character, and thus worthy because of the cross to be considered sons of God. Paul reminded the Galatians, *"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).

It is not only about obeying the gospel in baptism. It is about living the gospel by which we have been saved. Many find it easy to be baptized, but difficult to live the sacrificial gospel offering of Jesus. These are the matters one must consider before going to the waters of baptism. If one is not willing to live the gospel, then he or she should take another look at obeying the gospel. One should first consider the cost of building a "gospel barn" before he or she starts building (Lk 14:25-35).

Chapter 9

RECONCILIATION AT THE CROSS

The sin offering of Israel laid the foundation for understanding the reconciliation that would come through the offering of the suffering servant. In the sin offering, the blood of the sacrificed animal was not to be eaten (Lv 6:30). When reconciliation was accomplished, animals died in order *"to make reconciliation"* for the people (Lv 8:15). For example, when Israel was reconciled again unto God, animals had to die. *"Then the priests killed them and they* ***made reconciliation with their*** [animal] ***blood*** *on the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel"* (2 Ch 29:24; see also Ez 45:15-17). Reconciliation came at a price, the price of a sacrificed life. Through the cost of the sacrifice of animals year after year in Israel the stage was being set for the coming of the One who would offer the price of His blood as the medium by which God's people could be reconciled unto Him. It was a coming sacrifice that would terminate all animal sacrifices.

The Son of God intervened in the history of humanity in order that broken souls might be able to approach unto their Creator. Reconciliation was the initiative of a loving God to reach out to His creation. The cross, therefore, was God's signal to His creation that all who would come to Him have a way home. Reconciliation at the cross was Jesus opening the door throughout which the broken could find their way to the One who could heal their brokenness. When Jesus was lifted up to the cross, the drawing power of reconciliation was awesome to those who mourned over their sin-ravaged souls.

If we view God from the perspective of who He is, the God of love, then reconciliation was an initiative on the part of God to bring man again into His fellowship as it was before the sin of Adam. *"God was in Christ* ***reconciling the world to Himself****, not counting their trespasses against them"* (2 Co 5:19). In order for God to bring man into His fellowship, something had to be done for man's broken soul because of sin. We would conclude this because creation was also the initiative of God. He created a free-moral individual He knew would exercise his free-moral right to rebel. But since God is love, He needed to stand as a just God by offering man an opportunity to be reconciled to His fellowship through the blood of Christ.

If God did not offer the opportunity for reconciliation, then He would not stand as a just God if He separated anyone unto eternal condemnation. But because God is a God of love and justice, He did not create with the intention of judging His creation without an opportunity for reconciliation. If He had, then He would be judged a fiendish God for creating man in the first place. And if He intentionally predestined some of His creation to eternal punishment, it would correctly be concluded that He was a fiendish and unjust judge for creating individuals who were destined to punishment.

Depending on one's version, translations use words as "atonement" and "appeasement" to render the Old Testament Hebrew words that refer to reconciliation. In atonement, or propitiation, sins are covered by the blood of sacrifices in order that we may approach God. In appeasement, the wrath of God (judgment) is calmed in order that man be reconciled to God without being condemned because of sin. Some have viewed the foundation for reconciliation to be based on the necessity that God's "anger" or "wrath" be appeased before men could approach Him. Those of this thinking contend that in some way God's wrath had to be appeased in order to make it possible for Him to enter into a covenant relationship with man. But basing reconciliation on the concept of appeasing God's anger or wrath seems to stand against God's effort of reconciliation in the New Testament. It also seems to be contrary to the very nature of a loving God. If God is love, then He is not seeking to condemn or unleash His wrath upon His creation. He is lovingly seeking to reconcile His creation to Himself. It would be as Jesus said, *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (Jn 3:17). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should respond to His pleas to be reconciled again to His fellowship. But in order for a loving God to justly bring those tarnished with sin into His fellowship, something had to be done about their sin-blemished souls.

We would view **Romans 5** as the dictionary to define the work of a loving God to reconcile His creation unto Himself. *"Therefore, having been justified by faith,"* Paul introduces his argument, *"****We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ****"* (vs 1). It is through the cross of Jesus that we have access to God because it was our own sin that took us away from God (vs 2). Paul turns to the initiative factor that *"****because of the love of God****"* the Spirit has been poured out for the believer (vs 5). All that Paul discusses in this chapter is based on this truth: "Because of the love of God."

The fact that God is love, He took the initiative to reach out to man. *"For when we were still without strength, at the right time* ***Christ died for the ungodly****"* (vs 6). Here is the point: *"But God demonstrates His love toward us,* ***in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us****"* (vs 8).

The cross did not happen because of the plea of man to be reconciled with his Creator. It happened because of God's love for His creation. God was active in reconciliation and man was passive. Now that Christ died for the undeserving, and we have responded by faith, Paul continued, *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from wrath* [judgment] *through Him"* (vs 9). We would understand the "wrath," not as the character of God toward man, for if such were the case, then the cross would never have happened. The wrath refers to justice, for we cannot be reconciled to God with the blemishes of our sin. Sin (rebellion) cries out for justice, judgment and punishment. Love answers with grace and mercy.

In Romans 5 Paul then brings into the picture the resurrection. *"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"* (vs 10). Our confidence, therefore, is in the power of the cross to bring those of faith unto the throne of God. So Paul concludes our rejoicing. *"And not only this, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,* ***through whom we have now received the reconciliation****"* (vs 11). *"Therefore, as through the offense of one* [Adam's sin separated himself and all humanity from God], *judgment came on all men to condemnation,* ***even so through the righteousness of one*** [Jesus did that which was just by going to the cross], ***the free gift came to all men to justification of life****"* (vs 18).

The means of reconciliation with God has already been accomplished. It is past tense in that Jesus poured out His blood in order to clean us of sin. Our cleansing was for the purpose of Him presenting us without blemish before the Father. The washed are presentable to the Father because ***"they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb****"* (Rv 7:14). The blood was poured out at the cross. The Father has now sent out the invitation to all to be immersed in the blood of reconciliation. So when the Scriptures say that *"in Him we have redemption through His blood"* (Ep 1:7), then we need to search the Scriptures in order to discover how we can come into Christ wherein the blood of Christ flows freely from Calvary (See Rm 6:3,4; Gl 3:26,27). (It is now that we are beginning to understand what happens at the point of baptism into Christ. The next time you witness someone being baptized, envision them going down into a pool of the blood of Jesus in order to be "washed in the blood of the Lamb.")

God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 Jn 1:5). And because there is no darkness in God, then no darkness of sin can come into His presence. Since the very purpose for the creation of man was to bring mortal beings of love into the eternal presence of love, then something had to be done for the sin of a truly free-moral individual who was blessed with the opportunity to say, "I love you too." Thus when the Scriptures speak of the wrath of God being revealed, reference is to just judgment of those who have not been qualified by obedient faith to come into the eternal light of God's love. Sin separated us from God, and thus, there needed to be a means by which sin would be washed away so that we could approach God (See At 2:38; 22:16).

Paul wrote, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"* (Rm 1:18). The wrath of God is revealed by the revelation of the righteousness of God through Jesus. Jesus is the way, truth and the life (Jn 14:6). But for those who would rebel against His way and ignore His truth, they have no opportunity for His life. *"But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such* [evil] *things"* (Rm 2:2; see 2 Th 1:6-9). In order that men have the opportunity to escape the coming just judgment of God, the gospel was revealed, for in 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 order to bring His creation into eternal dwelling, those who were separated from God by their rebellion in sin had to be brought back into the fellowship of Deity. The mission of Jesus, therefore, was a mission of reconciliation. It was a mission that the suffering servant accomplished by paying the ransom of His blood for our sin. Through the cross, He *"disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public display of them, triumphing over them in it"* (Cl 2:15). The power of sin was disabled at the cross. Through the resurrection, Jesus was exalted *"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). Through the resurrection and ascension, the Father *"put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church"* (Ep 1:22). He did so in order *"that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Ph 2:11). The cross and resurrection, therefore, changed history because the sacrificial work on the part of Jesus draws out of the hearts of men the true image in which they

were created after God. And so the prophecy of Jesus of Himself was fulfilled. *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth,* ***will draw all men to Me"*** (Jn 12:32). So now, all those who have responded to the outpouring of the love of God on the cross have also assumed the responsibility of the ministry of reconciliation (Read 2 Co 5:11-21). We go forth to preach the good news of reconciliation, therefore, in order to find those who seek to be restored unto their Creator.

Chapter 10

JUSTIFICATION AT THE CROSS

The word "justify" is a legal term. It was a term used in the Roman court system to refer to the legal proceedings of judicial law. Understanding its meaning must be determined in the context of the work of an advocate (lawyer). The advocate pleaded the case of the defendant. He sought to argue the case of the defendant in order that the defendant be given mercy from the grace of the court. If mercy was granted, then the defendant was acquitted (justified) of his crime.

When we bring this metaphor into our state of condemnation in sin, the crucified Savior works as our advocate to plead our case before the eternal court of justice. He not only pleaded our case at the cross, He actually stood in to take the blame for our crime. Taking our broken soul upon Himself was so great that He cried out from the cross, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Mt 27:46).

John reminded his readers, *"And if anyone sin, we have a* ***Counselor*** [advocate] *with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 Jn 2:1). Not only did Jesus bring justification for all sin through the cross, John indicates that the representation before the Father in reference to our sin is continuing. *"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). Through the resurrection and ascension, Jesus is able to do this because He has now entered *"into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God* ***for us"*** (Hb 9:24). Justification was a one-time work of God in the past, but intercession on the behalf of the justified is ongoing. It is continuing because He lives.

What exemplifies continued intercession for us is the justification for us in the past that took place at the cross. To a great extent, the religious world has distorted the teaching of justification by focusing on man, rather than the work of Christ. This distortion has gone to the extreme in many religions because adherents are led to believe that there is no justification except that which is validated by the merit of man. They fail to see that **justification was something that God did for us, not what we do for ourselves**. It was the work of God through His Son to justify, for our sin was against Him. It is the work of the redeemed to obediently walk with Jesus because they have been justified. We walk by faith, but our faith does not minimize the justifying work of Jesus that took place on the cross. We are cleansed by His blood through obedient faith as we walk in the light as He is in the light. *"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). Our walk is an obedient walk because we have been justified, not in order to be justified. It is because we have been justified that the blood of His Son continues its work in our lives.

The story of justification is explained in God's covenant relationship with Israel. God established a covenant relationship with Israel at Mount Sinai. With any covenant of the Old Testament, blood was offered to ratify the covenant. But with the establishment of covenants, there were conditions for the maintenance of the covenant. God established conditions for Himself, and He established conditions for Israel to maintain their part of the covenant. Within the covenant with Israel God made promises. His keeping of these promises defined His faithfulness to the covenant. He is a righteous (just) God because He keeps His promises. The righteousness of God, therefore, moved the faithful to remain committed to keep the covenant because they desired to receive the promises of God. By faith they trusted in the righteousness (faithfulness) of God to keep His promises. It is for this reason that Israel had to walk obediently by faith in God who keeps His promises.

Israel's history is a testimony of the fact that though God is righteous (He is just by keeping His promises), Israel's walk was often rebellious. They were disobedient to the law that came as their conditions for keeping the covenant. Whenever we speak of God's righteousness in the New Testament, therefore, and our trust (faith) in Him to keep His promises, we must think of an obedi-

ent faithfulness to His will. It is not simply a "faith only" walk, but an obedient faith that moves us to keep our conditions of the covenant we have with God. However, we know we cannot keep the conditions perfectly. We sin, and thus, we need the continuing blood of Jesus in order to remain in a covenant relationship with God. But if we rebel by turning away from the covenant, then there no longer remains a fulfillment of the promises on our behalf. The Hebrew writer reminded us of this. *"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).

This thought is summed up in the words of Micah 6:1-8 who pronounced judgment on Israel for their unfaithful walk in turning away from their covenant with God. Micah wrote that *"the Lord has a complaint with His people"* (vs 2). God had fulfilled His part of the covenant by delivering the Israelites from Egyptian captivity and bringing them into the promised land. He did this so that they might *"know the righteousness* [faithfulness] *of the Lord"* (vs 5). But many centuries later when Micah prophesied to the nation, they had faulted on their responsibility to remain faithful to God. So what would God require of them in order to restore their covenant relationship with Him in view of the fact that He was faithful (righteous) to fulfill His promises of the covenant? *"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"* (vs 8). They must renew their faith by renewing their commitment to the covenant.

Any discussion in reference to the justification of God must be defined in the context of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Through His righteousness (faithfulness to keep promises), God delivered on His covenant promises. Except for the faithful remnant that He restored from captivity, the majority of Israel turned away from the covenant when they ran after idolatrous gods. Nevertheless, God fulfilled His promises to the faithful remnant. Justification at the cross did not depend on their righteousness, for they were dead in sin when the Advocate pled their case before the Judge at the cross (Rm 5:8). The righteousness of God, however, was manifested at the cross for God fulfilled all His promises concerning the Seed that would bless all mankind.

This profound subject is introduced by Paul in Romans 1:16,17, but is often misunderstood. Paul first speaks of the gospel. According to his definition of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4, the gospel is the justifying work of God in the death of Jesus for our sins on the cross. It is Jesus' death and resurrection. This good news event is the power of God unto salvation. In order to be this power unto salvation, two things had to take place. First, the righteousness of God must be revealed to those with whom God seeks to bring into a covenant relationship. This was accomplished through the cross. *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men"* (Ti 2:11). Second, there must be a faith response by those who seek to come into this covenant relationship with God. The faith response would be obedience to the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17).

In reference to the gospel, Paul continues to explain that *"it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith ..."* (Rm 1:17). The sending of His Son to die for our justification was God's faithfulness to bring His creation into a covenant relationship. The cross, therefore, revealed the faithfulness of a just God to His creation that could not be saved by their own righteousness. He would not allow those who seek Him to go without a covenant. He so loved the world that the general invitation was made to all men through the cross to come into His covenant that He sought to establish with those who choose to obey the gospel. The righteousness of God was revealed by His faithfulness to His creation in order to establish a covenant that would in turn require faithfulness on the part of man (Rm 1:17).

The gospel was a manifestation of "faith to faith," (God's faithfulness connected to man's faithfulness). Here is where so many have missed the point in reference to justification that is based on God's faithfulness that inspires our faithful response. This is also where many of the Protestant world have based their theology on a misunderstanding of justification that was brought out of the Reformation Movement. Experiential religionists assumed that justification relied on a meritorious experience whereby one justifies himself before God. Seeing the futility, and rightly so, of any meritorious works of law or deeds being able to justify oneself before God, "faith only" theologians have run in the opposite direction. They have concluded that since we cannot be justified by meritorious works, then justification must rest solely on our faith. John Calvin corrupted this theology even more. He unfortunately based his understanding of justification on the foundation of a concept that God predestined some to eternal destruction regardless of their choice in the matter. Since Calvin could not make everyone righteous before God through obedient faith, he assumed, therefore, that God had created some for eternal destruction regardless of their choices. He destroyed the free-moral obedience of all men, and thus imagined a fiendish Creator who would unjustly condemn to eternal hell those He predestined to such a fate. But all these theologies of men have made something

simple so complex. And in reference to the theology of Calvinism, they have the created a god who was a respecter of those who were supposedly unconditionally elected to eternal salvation, and fiendish to those who were unconditionally predestined to eternal damnation in a fiery hell.

The righteousness of God was revealed at the cross. It was there that our justification was initiated by the faithfulness of God to keep His promises to the fathers of Israel. Paul revealed this faithfulness of God in Galatians 2:16, a passage that is often obscured by some translations. The *International King James Version* has the correct reading. *"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."*

At the cross, **justification resulted from the faithful work of Jesus Christ**, as opposed to the futile meritorious efforts of men to keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves. Some translations have unfortunately been influenced by their thinking that places justification on the shoulders of men. They translate the phrase "the faith of Christ Jesus" in Galatians 2:16 to read "by faith in Christ Jesus." But the reading in Greek is "faith **of** Christ." It was because of the faithfulness of Christ to accomplish the eternal plan of redemption on the cross that God was able to reconcile the world unto Himself. Through the cross, God *"has reconciled us to Himself through Christ"* (2 Co 5:18). Through His Son, the Father was justifying those who were dead in sin because of their inability to keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves.

God was faithful to fulfill His promise that He originally made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. He was faithful to fulfill His promise to Abraham that in his seed all nations of the world would be blessed (Gn 12:3). God was faithful through the faith of Christ to take Himself to the cross in order to call all men to join Him in a covenant with the Father. The justification of the cross was not simply a blanket declaration that all men are now unconditionally justified. It is a call by the gospel message to all men to come with obedient faith into this covenant. Through the appeal of His righteousness revealed on the cross, God pleads to all men for *"obedience to righteousness"* (Rm 6:16). He is *"not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pt 3:9).

The gospel is power unto salvation from "faith to faith" (Rm 1:17). It was initiated and executed on the cross because of God's faithfulness to keep His promises. God now calls on those who seek to come into a covenant relationship with Him to act on their faith. If God were willing that no one should perish, but did not offer the cross, then He would not have been faithful to keep His promise that was made two thousand years before to Abraham (See Gn 12:1-4). Israel was called by God to be faithful because He was faithful to keep His promises to the fathers. But if we think we can respond to the faithful actions of God that were revealed at the cross with a simple "sinner's prayer" that does not move one to do anything in response to the faithfulness of God, then we are asking God to respond with His atoning work at the cross to an unresponsive faith.

Inactive faith was the core to James' thought when he wrote, *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"* (Js 2:14). James gave the example of obedient Abraham. *"Was not Abraham our father* ***justified by works*** *when* ***he offered Isaac*** *his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works,* ***and by works was faith made perfect****"* (Js 2:21,22). Now listen to James' conclusion to the actions of Abraham. *"And the scripture was fulfilled that says, '****Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness****'"* (Js 2:23). Abraham acted on his faith. It was not a dead faith. And because he had an active faith, he was credited to be righteous, that is, justified. One is not righteous (justified) before God without an active response to God's action on the cross. It was for this reason that the eunuch asked Philip, *"What hinders me from being baptized?"* (At 8:36). It was for this reason that Ananias asked Saul, *"... why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins ..."* (At 22:16). And it was for this reason that in the same hour of the night the active faith of the Philippian jailor moved him to take action in reference to his new knowledge of the saving power of the cross. *"And immediately he was baptized ..."* (At 16:33).

Therefore, when Paul made the statement, "faith to faith," he meant from God's faithfulness to take action at the cross for our justification, which faithfulness should draw the same active response out of those who come to the cross. There must be a faith response to God's faithfulness, otherwise, our faith leaves us in death at the foot of the cross until we do what Jesus said to do in reference to our sins. *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved"* (Mk 16:16). It cannot be more simple than that (See At 2:38; 22:16).

Must we remind ourselves of 1 Peter 4:17. *"What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* If one comes to the cross with faith only, without obedience to the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6), he is not justified simply

because his faith has not moved him to faithfulness. Salvation by the gospel is by "faith to faith." God has been faithful in offering to His creation an opportunity to be justified before Him. Unless one reciprocates with faith in action, the cross will accomplish nothing in reference to one's justification that is freely offered at the cross.

The cross is the revelation of the righteousness of God toward His creation. *"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 3:21,22). Jesus was faithful in taking Himself to the cross for those He had created (See Jn 10:17,18; Cl 1:16). The cross now calls on all who would believe to respond to the cross. Because all have sinned (Rm 3:23), the call of the cross is to respond to the justification that is offered there for our sins (Rm 3:24). When one responds to the cross by obedience to the gospel, he has access to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:26,27). Through the cross, God *"has set forth* [His Son] *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). Therefore, *"as through one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of one* [Jesus] ***will many be made righteous*** [justified]*"* (Rm 5:19).

Chapter 11

CRUCIFIED WITH HIM ON THE CROSS

Paul wrote the well-known statement, *"I have been* ***crucified*** *with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but* ***Christ lives in me****"* (Gl 2:20). "Crucified" in this statement is the Greek passive, and thus at some time in the past Paul was **acted upon** by being crucified with Christ. The tense of the verb does not indicate something that Paul personally did, **but something that was done for him**. That something was the work of Christ at the cross. Because Paul was acted upon by the work of Christ on the cross, there was power in his life to live the cross-bearing life. *"And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God ..."* (Gl 2:20). When Paul wrote to the Philippians, we now understand what he was saying when he wrote, *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (Ph 4:13). It was not Paul of himself who was able to lead the crucified life. It was the crucified Christ who lived within him. His "can do" was not "I can do myself." Paul wrote, *"But in all these things we are more than conquerors* ***through Him*** *who loved us"* (Rm 8:37). Our power to conquer is not within ourselves. It is "through Him" who loved us on the cross.

Paul's continued walk under the power of the cross was maintained by his obedient faith. This would be the life-style that Jesus indicated when He stated, *"Whoever wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and* ***take up his cross*** *and follow Me"* (Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 14:27). The joy of bearing our crosses for Christ, therefore, is in our knowledge of and faith in what Jesus did on the cross. This is certainly behind the statement of James when he encouraged his readers, *"My brethren,* ***count it all joy*** *when you fall into various trials ..."* (Js 1:2). Cross-bearing disciples are full of joy because they realize that it is the crucified Christ who is working in them for the glory of God.

Paul's crucifixion with Christ takes us back to the cross of Christ. Paul wants to remind us that our old man of sin was crucified with Christ at the time Jesus died on the cross. He wrote in reference to our problem of sin in Romans 6:6. *"... **knowing** this, that our old man **was crucified with Him** so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be bondservants to sin"* (Rm 6:6). In using the word "knowing" (Gr. *ginosko*), Paul wanted the Roman Christians to understand, grasp and comprehend something that was very important concerning their salvation. He wanted them to realize that they were who they were in Christ because of what Christ did on the cross for them. The word "crucified" in his statement is the Greek passive, that is, the object (us) was acted upon by another. In the Romans 6:6 statement the "old man of sin" was acted upon by Christ at the cross. The "old man of sin" was taken to the cross **with** Christ. So in answer to the question of when the old man was crucified, it was when Jesus was crucified.

There is no such thing as self-crucifixion. Though our crucifixion with Christ will motivate us to take up our cross and follow Jesus, we are not crucifying our old man of sin, for such would be impossible. In crucifixion, someone was always acting upon the victim to nail him to the cross. And when we are discussing the problem of sin, only the One against whom we sin has the authority to forgive that sin. While on earth, the Son of God had the authority to forgive sin directly, immediately and personally (Mt 9:6). And while He was on the cross, the Son of God was there to forgive our sins by allowing Himself to be crucified for our old man of sin.

As a reminder that He had the power to forgive while on earth, in His last moments on the cross He personally forgave another by saying to the thief on the cross, "... *today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Lk 23:43).

We could not of ourselves crucify our old man of sin. The cross was about forgiveness and crucifixion. If by faith we come to the cross, realizing that the Son of God has taken care of our old man of sin, then in thanksgiving we go to the grave with Him in order to enjoy newness of life when our sins are washed away in the waters of baptism (At 22:16). We are thus born again as a new creature in Christ. *"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).

On the cross Jesus was active in taking our old man of sin with Him to be crucified. Through the obedient faith of Christ to go to the cross, we can have faith that our old man of sin was crucified. But as His faith was active in taking our old man of sin to the cross for crucifixion, our faith must also be active in doing that which is necessary in order to have life. Through obedience to the gospel (baptism) our faith is active in taking the crucified old man to the grave. We were passive in Jesus' work to crucify the old man of sin. However, we must be active in burying the old dead man. Therefore, **through the power of the cross our old man of sin was crucified with Jesus**. **But by faith, we choose to have the old man buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life** (Rm 6:5).

We must keep in mind that though the old man of sin was crucified with Jesus when He went to the cross, we are all as dead men walking. We have no life before resurrection, as Jesus was in a tomb before life came after the resurrection. There is *"no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rm 8:1) because those in Christ have buried the old crucified man (See Gl 3:26-29). However, outside Christ he is in condemnation. But when one is *"baptized into His* [Christ's] *death,"* that is, *"united in the likeness of His death,"* it is then that he can be raised with Him *"in the likeness of His resurrection"* in order to walk as a new creature in Christ (Rm 6:3-6; 2 Co 5:17). Once the old man of sin is buried, a new man is born who has been blessed with eternal life in Christ. John reminds us, *"And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life* ***and this life is in His Son****"* (1 Jn 5:11).

Paul brings out the above meaning in Ephesians 2:8. *"For by grace you are saved through faith, and that* ***not of yourselves****, it is the gift of God."* The grace of God appeared on the cross on our behalf (Ti 2:11). It was grace that brought salvation, both through the faith of Jesus and the faith of ourselves. Our salvation could not be accomplished on our own. It had to come only as a gift of God, which gift we accept through faith. This is the power of the gospel that is from "faith to faith." God did what we could not do for ourselves. Paul continues his teaching on this matter in Romans 6 by reminding the Roman disciples, *"Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you should obey the lusts of the body"* (Rm 6:12). On the contrary, he exhorted, *"present yourselves to God,* ***as those who are alive from the dead****, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God"* (Rm 6:13). Herein is the power of grace. We know that we are under grace, and not under the necessity of performing law perfectly in order to save ourselves. Therefore, *"sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace"* (Rm 6:14). The power of the cross is that we know that our insufficient performance of law will not separate us from the love of God. Since God gave His only begotten Son in order to crucify the old man of sin, then there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm 8:39).

The curse of experiential religion is that the adherents of such faiths have little faith in our total justification by Jesus on the cross. The power of the gospel is minimal in the mind of the one who questions his salvation by the grace of God. The experientialist seeks to cleanse his conscience of guilt through the performance of emotionality, and often, meritorious good works. It is difficult for him to step aside and get out of the way of Jesus who has taken care of the old man of sin. Some fail to realize that we are *"created in Christ Jesus* ***for*** *good works"* (Ep 2:10). We are not created in Christ **by** good works. When we understand that God saved us at the cross of grace, that realization moves us into action. It is that grace that causes thanksgiving (2 Co 4:15). Paul's life was an example. *"****But by the grace of God I am what I am****. 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). That is a very powerful statement! God's grace took Paul far beyond what he could ever have accomplished by his own self-will to work meritoriously in obedience to law. When Paul said, *"for you are not under law, but under grace"* (Rm 6:14), he meant that we are not under the motivation to keep law meritoriously in order to be saved. On the contrary, we are under the motivation of grace to live for Jesus. By being motivated by faith in God's grace, we understand Romans 3:31. *"Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law."* Under faith we cry out to our Father to instruct us concerning the right way.

Chapter 12

REFOCUSING ON THE CROSS

Throughout the centuries there have always been efforts to relegate the cross to a subpoint on a theological outline. The more a religion was based on the traditions of the fathers, the less emphasis there was place on the significance of the cross in the theology of the religion. The more organized a religion focused on the authority of men on earth within the organized structure of the religion, the less adherents focused exclusively on King Christ and His leadership through the cross. The worst scenario is a religion that sets up its own church head on earth. Add to all this religious chaos the fact that the more legalistic a church becomes in its theology, the less the mystery of the cross fits into its systematic theology.

Salvation, it was presumed by the traditionalist and the legalist, was based on faithfulness to "the church" and its established doctrine. It was faithfulness to the church, and subsequently, the church would get one into heaven. Regardless of one's response to the cross, "faithfulness," which meant faithfulness to the church, would determine one's destiny. The result of this obsession with traditional church structures and legal theological outlines, was that church and doctrine were highlighted, with the message of the cross being relegated to a subpoint at the conclusion of the sermon. The result was that campaigns and crusades alike were organized efforts to promote one's church in contrast to the supposed error of all other churches. Preaching church became the center of our "evangelistic" sermons, and the cross was added only at the conclusion of a theologically engineered presentation of "church doctrine."

Those who were more legally oriented in their theology viewed the cross simply as the back drop of their focus on a manufactured "plan of salvation." Acts 2 became the center of reference to their preaching, and subsequently, they were able to bring people to baptism without even mentioning the cross. Some realized the error of this legal approach to salvation, and then ran through Jerusalem to focus exclusively on Jesus alone. They walked with Him and His disciples down the roads of Palestine, but they lost their emphasis on the incarnate God who was nailed to the cross to ransom their souls. Jesus became a folk hero, good teacher, a personal friend, someone with whom we sought to identify as our personal Savior. But in our listing of the teachings of Jesus, the atonement of the cross was marginalized for a simple conversation with Jesus as a good friend. Jesus became our personal Savior, but not to the extent of being our "personal God" before whom we will be judged. The emphasis in reference to Jesus having an impact on our lives changed from what Jesus did for us to what we could do for Him. The result of this change in focus led some to a works-oriented faith whereby they sought to justify themselves before God. The result was that we never really felt good about our salvation because we never really felt good about our works, for we knew that our works were never enough to merit our intended yearning for eternal life.

Then those who fell under the persuasion of John Calvin simply gave up works altogether. In their fear of a faith that would manifest itself through an obedient response to the incarnate and crucified God of the cross, they simply affirmed that salvation was by faith only on the part of the predestined. No works required! They forgot that what Calvin used as his primary text (Romans) was introduced and concluded by "obedience of faith." *"We have received grace and apostleship, **for obedience of the faith** ..."* (Rm 1:5). And lastly, Paul concluded, *"... the mystery ... has been made known to all nations for the **obedience of faith**"* (Rm 16:25,26).

Add to a "faith only" response to the cross the doctrine of individual predestination, and the Calvinistic religionist seems to have a religion that appeals to the carnal nature of man. It appeals to the materialist who would consume the world upon himself. Regardless of what one did morally, or how much he consumed upon himself, he was still predestined to heaven, and thus, he could live without endangering his soul. What one preacher said to one of the young members of his group emphasizes the point. The young man confessed to the preacher that he was struggling with moral temptations in his life. The preacher reassured the young man by saying, "That's fine. As long as you understand that you have been predestined personally to eternal life, it doesn't matter." Individual predestination moves one to divert his life from the cross. If one believes that he or she is individually predestined, then there is no fear of losing one's soul. One person recently called us and stated, "I have never heard of apostasy. What does it mean?" The cross has little appeal to the religiously arrogant. It has little motivation for those who believe they cannot fall from the grace of God. After all, who would really want to bear the cost of the cross when he believes that he is already individually predestined to eternal life? The faith

of the individual predestinationist, therefore, is not in the work of the incarnate Son of God on the cross, but in his individual predestination. Once one believes that he is individually chosen by God, then there is no need for faith in the work of the Suffering Servant on the cross.

What Calvin and those who followed his teaching actually did was to make senseless the atoning sacrifice of the cross. Calvin negated any love response to the love act revealed on the cross. If one was predestined at birth to eternal glory, then what need would there be for any eternal atoning sacrifice? If certain individuals were already destined to glory, why pay any ransom? Why would God even need to incarnate in the flesh of man in order to make a redemptive offering? If the Calvinistic doctrine of individual predestination were true, then we would question why the Son of God even showed up at the cross. If God predestined individuals to eternal glory, then certainly He could have just taken them on to heaven without all the intervening scandal of the cross. He could have taken them without all the suffering and salvational planning throughout the centuries for the sake of a free-moral individual who really was not free in the first place to take ownership of his own eternal destiny.

The shocking reality about this theology is that a vast number of religionists throughout the world today believe in the Calvinistic theology of individual predestination. It is an appealing theology because it makes God a respecter of specific people, not because it draws individuals to the cross of love. We must not underestimate the theology of individual predestination to a narcissistic generation that is consumed with adding individuals to their Twitter follower list as they have presumed that God unconditionally added them to His Twitter family before they were born.

But we would base our faith on the fact that because a loving God was not willing that any of His creation should be lost, His love was revealed at the cross through His Son. We thus seek a restoration of emphasis on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus as our primary message to the world, a world in which *"**whoever believes in Him** should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (Jn 3:16). The message of the cross is "Him." God sent Him into the world as an opportunity for every person to have access to everlasting life. The reward of believing in Him is being a part of the covenanted people of God.

Jesus brought more than a set of doctrines to "establish" churches. He brought Himself, and thus our message to the lost must not be a simple set of outlined doctrines to "identify the church." Our message to the world is the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God. Our message is not only on a crucifixion event outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Jesus came in the flesh for the cross. He was resurrected to stay in the flesh. And He is coming again in His glorified body in order to dwell with His brethren in His glorified body. We thus look beyond the six hours of suffering on the cross in order to see the God who eternally gave up being on an equality with the eternal God in order to be made in the likeness of His brethren with whom He has chosen to dwell forever. Our message, therefore, is not a law of condemnation, but a message of deliverance from the bondage of sin through the ransom that was paid for our redemption.

We must keep in mind that the message we preach is not a catechism of teachings. The gospel, the good news, is not a system of law. Law only infers duty and discouragement, for we cannot keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves. The covenant that God seeks to establish with us is more than a contract of duty. If the gospel is simply a contract that is based on obligations to keep the laws of the contact, then we have brought ourselves again into the bondage of our inability to keep law perfectly. On the contrary, the gospel is a message of joy and hope. It is a message of deliverance and freedom from the bondage of law. If our covenant with God were simply a contractual agreement, then we would be subjugated to a set of obligations that we must keep perfectly in order to preserve the contract. And we know we cannot do such in order to save ourselves.

God's covenant with us is different than a contract. God reaches out through the cross to covenant with us, though in our rebellion we seek to turn from Him. As in Israel, God continually sought to turn Israel from her wayward rebellion (See Hs 2:9-23; 8:14; 11:5-9). God's covenant with us today is a covenant of grace. He seeks to nurture us into eternity through the drawing power of His love and grace (See 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). Through the cross, He manifested Himself as a loving God who is reaching out to the wayward in order to bring them again into His eternal fellowship.

The cross is a manifestation of God's love that suffers with us through His Suffering Servant. Therefore, when one in repentance seeks to return to God, he does not come to God pleading on the basis of his works, but pleading that what he could not pay through works of law would be paid by the ransomed blood of the incarnate Son. When God grants forgiveness, which He always does, it is a grant that is given regardless of our imperfections. This is grace and mercy. This is the good news of the cross. Upon the basis of our mourning over our sins, God grants righteousness regardless of our imperfections. He considers us faithful (righteous) regardless of our inabilities. The righteousness of Jesus, there-

fore, becomes the imputed righteousness of the believer. It is for this reason that the believer does not have to depend on his own righteousness, for he knows that all sin, including himself. We must depend on the righteousness of Jesus at the cross, *"knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ..."* (Gl 2:16). We need to remember the words of Paul to the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Perga. *"Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man* [Jesus] *is preached to you the forgiveness of sins, and* ***by Him all who believe are justified from all things which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"*** (At 13:38,39).

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the Dearest and Blest,
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.

A Metaphorical Epilogue

"Are they all here?" the Father joyously asked the Son.

"Every last one!" the Son reassured the Father. *"I did not leave one behind."*

"Oh, this is so wonderful. They're so glorious, as white as snow," the Father added. *"Son, you have to thank yourself for this."*

"He surely does," added the Spirit. *"You wouldn't believe the mess they were in at the time He arrived to clean them up. They needed a real scrubbing. And once they were cleansed, it was sometimes a challenge to keep them drawn in the right direction by our love. The deceiver was constantly roaring in their faces. But, he is gone and it is all over."*

"Was it worth all the struggle, My Son?"

*"It was, Father. Just look at them. They are truly a loving community of people who reflect our nature. Though I gave up so much to go get them, they went through so much to follow Me here. We need to thank the Spirit for being with them in every struggle along the w*ay."

The Spirit added, *"It was easy after they responded to our grace that was poured out for them at the intervention. They were so thankful that all they needed was a little protection here and there to keep them safe. Because of their love for us, they were so willing to follow our instructions of the book."*

Then the Father concluded, *"So now, it's time to move them on into eternity. Our love has been fulfilled and forever we have those in our presence who have reciprocated our love. Their presence in our company is proof that We are Who We are."*

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand,
'*Come, you blessed of My Father,*
inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world'."
(Matthew 25:34)

Book 49

Escape From Bondage

– A Narrative Commentary Of Galatians –

God created man with a desire to seek after Him. He *"made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord"* (At 17:26,27). We are spiritual beings, seeking God who is above our mortal creation. In our seeking, and without revelation, we will create a god after our own imagination. We will thus bring ourselves into the bondage of our own created religiosity. No civilization has been found throughout the world that did not have some practice of religion, and some belief in either spirits or gods. But without revelation from the one true and living God, men will bring themselves into the bondage of their own religiosity.

Even when God does reveal His will to man, we are traditional beings and will almost always add to the word of God our countless traditions. We will blend God's word with our traditions and come up with a bondage of religiosity by which we divide ourselves from one another. In writing to religious Gentiles who became Christians, and yet were looking back to those ordinances of men from which they had been delivered by their obedience to the gospel, Paul asked, *"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 ordinances?"* (Cl 2:20). So why do we submit ourselves to our man-made religious ordinances? Such *"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 letter to the Galatians was possibly the first inspired document to be written to the early Christians. It was sternly written as a letter of rebuke to those who had been delivered from the bondage of the religosity of men. Nevertheless, the Galatians were seeking to return to a legal system of justifying themselves before God by performance of commandments and meritorious works. After their initial conversion, the Galatian Christians were being influenced to return to a practice of religiosity that demanded perfect keeping of law. It was a religiosity that focused on man's performance of law, and thus, they were minimizing the grace of God. This is Paul's defense of the sufficiency of God's grace. It is his urgent appeal that the Galatians not become entangled again in a religiosity that focused on the perfect performance of man in order to justify oneself before God, for law was never given as a system of salvation. It was not simply because no man can keep law perfectly. All have sinned. And no man can do good works to atone for one sin. Salvation is thus by our faith in God's grace to bring us into eternity regardless of our inability to keep law perfectly.

Chapter 1

GREETINGS

1-3: Paul reminded the Galatians that he was a Christ-sent apostle. He was not sent out by men, nor did his apostleship exist because of his desire to remain in fellowship with those who recruited disciples for their own selfish reasons. He was called directly by Jesus Christ on a Damascus road and by God the Father. His calling was thus mandated by God who raised Jesus from the dead. The letter he writes was also coming from all those brethren who were with him at the time of writing. It was addressed to all the assemblies of the disciples throughout the region of Galatia.

3-5: The letter came with his wishes that God's eternal favor be with them, which favor would result in their peace of mind because God's grace had been poured out on them for their spiritual well-being. God's grace

was manifested through Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross. It was Jesus who gave Himself for our sins, for no sacrifice of animals could ever atone for the sins of man. Therefore, Jesus became our atoning sacrifice in order to deliver us from the evil of this present world. Jesus' death was not an accident because the Jews had rejected Him. The atoning sacrifice of the cross was according to the eternal plan of God to bring believers into a covenant relationship with Him. The Jews had sought an earthly king, but Jesus came as a saving King who would reign from heaven. Because God took the initiative to save us from our eternal doom because of our sins, all glory must go to Him, not only in this time, but throughout eternity. When all Christians finally come into an eternal dwelling with Jesus, then they will fully understand the blessing of salvation that came through Jesus.

THE OTHER GOSPEL

6-10: As one would be amazed at the occurrence of a miracle, so Paul was amazed that the Galatian disciples were so quickly turning away from the freedom that they received when they obeyed the gospel. Their initial joy for freedom from the bondage of the legalistic religions of men was fading as they were being tempted to return to a system of meritorious righteousness. They continued to believe the gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. However, the grace that was revealed through the cross and resurrection was being subsidized by other requirements for salvation, specifically, works of the Old Testament law as circumcision. Some were binding on them things that were not bound by God, and thus making requirements for salvation that God had not made. This constituted another gospel that was being preached among the Galatians. Since they had formerly found confidence and joy in the gospel of freedom that Paul had initially preached to them, those who were adding further requirements for salvation were troubling the Galatians. Those who trouble the disciples are those who add requirements for salvation that God never required. What these teachers were actually doing was twisting, or perverting the simple gospel that Paul had preached. Their preaching of other requirements for salvation other than obedience to the gospel was a perversion of the gospel. At the time the Galatians had heard the gospel, Paul said that there were no more requirements for salvation than their simple obedience to the gospel and faithfulness to their commitment to serve God. Therefore, even if an angel came after him and preached other requirements for salvation, that angel must be rejected. Paul says that that angel who would preach another requirement for salvation is accursed, or destroyed from the presence of God. Paul is emphatic in these statements. He goes beyond angels to anyone who might come and preach another gospel other than the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. Obedience to this gospel was by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of the gospel. If anyone would preach less of this truth of the gospel, then he is not preaching the gospel. If anyone would preach more, then he is preaching another gospel. If one would do such, then he is under the condemnation of God. Paul had known that there would be others who would come after him and preach other gospels. His admonition was thus based on warnings that he had proclaimed to them while he was yet in the regions of Galatia. The accusation had been made against Paul that he was preaching in order to remain in favor with men. They accused him of such, assuming that he did so in order to remain in favor with men. Since all men have the desire to be accepted by others, instead of being persecuted, some among the Galatian disciples assumed that Paul was no different. But if he were still pleasing men as in his former days before he crucified himself with Christ, then he would not be preaching the gospel that brought hardship in his life. Those who would be bondservants of Christ, therefore, must not allow their desire to be accepted by others to turn them from preaching the truth of the gospel to preaching twisted versions of the gospel.

DIRECT REVELATION FROM GOD

11,12: Paul preached the good news of the revelation of God's grace that was revealed through the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. He preached this message throughout the regions of Galatia. However, he wanted the Galatians to understand that the message he preached was not the invention of men.[1] It came to him by direct revelation from God. Therefore, the gospel was not passed on to him as a teaching that came from his Jewish heritage. He did not go to a Bible school to learn it.[2] It came to him directly from God. It came by revelation, and was preached and written by inspiration. We are reassured, therefore, that we can believe the message to be true because it did not originate from men.

13-14: In his former days of persecuting the church, the antagonism of Paul against the church was well known throughout the world of Judaism. His former religion was the Jews' religion, for it was the Old Testament law that was combined with countless Jewish religious traditions. As a former Jewish religious leader, he, as well as his fellow religious leaders, had developed their own religiosity. Though this religiosity was based on the traditions of the Jews, with the added be-

liefs of Jewish tradition, Paul wanted his readers to understand that his former religion (Judaism) was not from God. Judaism, therefore, was the Jew's religion, not a faith that came from God. The vast majority of the Jews failed to see the fulfillment of the prophecies in the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. For this reason, Paul and the Jewish religious leaders initially poured out great persecution against the disciples in Judea, for they thought that Christianity was a breakaway sect of Judaism. In his efforts to promote the Jew's religion, Paul zealously took every opportunity to destroy the church. Paul's legal approach to the Jews' religion (Judaism) was carried out in his zeal to work against anyone who worked contrary to what he believed. He had studied the oral and written traditions of Judaism, advancing above his fellow students of the religion. His zeal was in protecting his religious heritage, the traditional religion of the Jews. Because of his great respect for his religious heritage, he was zealous to persecute anyone who worked against his Jewish heritage. He was thus blinded by his heritage because he could not see in Jesus the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah.

15-17: God allowed Paul to persecute the church. It was a time in the history of the church when the early believers needed to have a faith that was tested by fire. Persecution thus grew the faith of the early disciples. But God knew what He would eventually do with Paul, even before Paul was born. Paul was being used by God to strengthen the faith of the disciples through his persecution of the church. At the time Paul persecuted the church, he reasoned that he was working against an apostasy from his Jewish heritage, a heritage he assumed was from God. Though he was working against God's work through the church, he was actually working for God to strengthen the church. But when the time came for God to use Paul for the defense of Christianity, Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road. His call, therefore, was by grace, not because he had earned the calling. His argument to the Galatians was that he was not called by man, but by God. He was so far away from God's work through His church that only God could call him to his destiny. His calling, therefore, was by grace because of the behavior of his life in persecuting the church of God. Thus Jesus personally revealed Himself to Paul for a special purpose, that is, that Paul be a special witness to preach the gospel of grace to the Gentiles. However, when he was called on the Damascus road, Paul did not seek the instruction of men concerning the gospel that was revealed to him. He did not go to Jerusalem where the gospel was first preached. Instead, he went to the deserts of Arabia. Because he was so entrenched in his convictions for Judaism, he needed time alone in order to mentally reconcile the revelation of the gospel with his Jewish religiosity that had twisted the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Arabia was thus a time for reflection. He possibly spent a long period of time in Arabia before he returned again to Damascus where he had first obeyed the gospel.

18: When Paul returned to Damascus, he went to work preaching the gospel. However, it was not long before the Jews rose up in persecution against him. Though he was formerly their champion in persecuting those who believed in Jesus, he was now their enemy because he preached Jesus. After escaping the Jews by being let down in a basket over the wall of the city of Damascus, Paul returned to Jerusalem. We can only imagine the surprise of Peter when Paul knocked on his door. It would have been great to have sat in on their conversation for the fifteen days that Paul remained in Jerusalem.

19,20: As Paul continued his historical argument to the Galatians, he wanted them to remember that he preached the gospel first in Damascus even before he stayed with Peter for fifteen days. His stay with Peter, therefore, was not for the purpose of being instructed in the gospel, but to let Peter know that they were both on the same page concerning the grace of God. When in Jerusalem, Paul did not see any of the other church-sent apostles. He saw only James, the brother of Jesus. At this time in history, James was a prominent leader of the church in Jerusalem, and was known as such throughout the world. That which caused him persecution in Damascus, the preaching of the gospel, was known by Paul before he saw either Peter or James. The brothers in Damascus could confirm this truth, and thus, Paul reassured his readers that he was not fabricating a lie.

21-24: After his visit to Jerusalem, Paul went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. He thus went back home to Tarsus of Cilicia, possibly to teach his family what had been revealed to him. Before Barnabas brought him to Antioch of Syria, he was possibly in the regions of Syria and Cilicia for five years, during which time he made no trips to Judea in order to be known by the brothers of Judea. After his obedience to the gospel, therefore, he spent only fifteen days in Jerusalem, and then went on to Syria and Cilicia. He was thus not schooled in the faith by anyone in Jerusalem. He was not sent out by the churches of Judea, for they did not know him. The only thing they knew about him was that he had been converted. Since they did not know him personally, he could not have been sent out by them to preach in the regions of Galatia. What the Galatians heard from him, therefore, was the result of God's direct revelation. The faith of the Galatians was based on God's revela-

tion to Paul. Though the Judean brethren had not personally met Paul after his conversion, they glorified God because of his obedience to the gospel. They did not glorify Paul, but God who through His grace revealed the power of the gospel to man through Jesus. The converting power of the gospel was so great that even one who zealously persecuted the church could be convinced that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God.

Chapter 2

VISIT TO JERUSALEM

1,2: In stating that it was fourteen years from the time of his first visit to Jerusalem to see Peter and James until he visited Jerusalem again, Paul continued his argument to the Galatians by stating that he had no other opportunity to go to Jerusalem. It was only when God revealed to him that he should go to Jerusalem that he eventually went. He thus did not seek to consult with others in Jerusalem concerning the message that he preached, for he was confident in the revelation of the gospel that he had received from Jesus. After fifteen years, however, he went to a meeting in Jerusalem to participate in discussions that are recorded in Acts 15. He took with him Barnabas, his companion in his first missionary journey, and Titus a Gentile evangelist. When he arrived in Jerusalem, Paul revealed the gospel of grace that he was preaching among the Gentiles. He had discussions with some of the key leaders of the area. He met with them in private in order to make it clear that he preached the gospel that was revealed directly to him by God. He met with these brethren concerning the message in order to verify that all of them were preaching the same thing in reference to the preaching of the gospel of grace. And because they were preaching the same revelation of the gospel, there was no need that he work under some supposed authority by the Jerusalem leaders.

3: While in Jerusalem some legalistic teachers had come in among the brethren and were teaching that unless one was circumcised, he could not be saved. A heated discussion ensued between Paul and these Jewish teachers. At the time, they were seeking to force Titus, a Gentile, to be circumcised. But on this occasion, Paul stood for the truth that one is saved by grace, and not with the added work of circumcision. Circumcision was not a requirement for salvation. Those who were teaching the gospel plus the necessity of circumcision, or legal works of law, were actually false brethren. They were false because of their legalistic view of salvation, and thus, their efforts to recruit followers by compelling the saved to be circumcised. They believed, as Paul would later explain, that one earns his salvation by meritorious works of law.

4,5: : We are not told the origin of these false brethren. They could possibly have been brought into the fellowship of the church by those who were opposing Paul in the matter of legal salvation by works of law. Paul had been preaching among the Gentiles. He was not asking the Gentiles to be circumcised. With some of the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem, this was a threat to their legal system of salvation with which they interpreted their conduct as Christians. These brethren evidently recruited others to align with their side in the controversy, and thus, they brought in support by Jews who were actually not baptized believers. They came in secretly as spies. They sought to spy out the freedom that we have in Christ. Legalistic brethren behave as spies. They seek to spy out where someone might not be in obedience to what they consider to be legal requirements of law. In this case, they were seeking to spy out the freedom of the Gentiles who were not to be circumcised in order to be saved. The Gentiles were free, and thus no legalistic spy could bring them under law in order that they be saved by circumcision. When one gives up his freedom in order to be obedient to the religious traditions of men, he has brought himself into bondage. If one turns the law of Christ into a legal system of justification by works, then he has brought himself into bondage. If Paul had succumbed to the pressure of the Judaizing teachers, and thus encouraged Titus to be circumcised, then he would not have continued in the truth of the gospel of freedom in Christ. The truth of the gospel is that we are saved by grace, not through meritorious works of law or good works. If we would continue in the truth of the gospel, therefore, we will not submit ourselves to the bondage of legal obedience to those things that God does not bind on us. Neither will we submit ourselves to focus on our own performance of law and good works.

6-10: Some had assumed that the leaders among the Judean disciples walked with authority in reference to what they said. It was the people who considered them important, and thus, they assumed that their proclamations were authoritative in reference to what the church should do. But in reference to what is required for the church to do, Paul did not consider the pronouncements of key figures in the church to be important. What was binding on the church, was spoken clearly by God, not man. Since the gospel was all-inclusive concerning

what was necessary for salvation, then no man had any right to include any other requirements. When it comes to understanding what is the law of God, only that which God says is important, for God shows no partiality between those who would be leaders of the church and all the church members. In this case, therefore, those who were considered to be important by the disciples could not by their proclamations reveal any further truth to Paul than what he already knew concerning the truth of the gospel. However, those who seemed to be important did see something wonderful in Paul. They saw that God had destined him to be a special apostle to the Gentiles. As Peter had a special mission to preach to the Jews, so Paul was given a special mission by God to preach to the Gentiles. What they understood was that it was God who was effectively working in the life of Peter to reach the Jews. As Peter was effective with the Jews, so Paul was effective in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. When the key leaders in the church in Judea, James, Peter and John, realized that God had commissioned Paul to the Gentiles, then they gave their full agreement and consent to what Paul and Barnabas were doing in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Therefore, they did not require the Gentiles to be circumcised. They agreed that Paul and Barnabas should continue to reach out to the Gentiles, while they, James, Peter and John, should continue to reach out to the Jews. In coming to this conclusion, they realized that each person has cultural skills by which he can better reach different cultural groups of people. Regardless of the people groups to whom they went, as they had done in Judea, so they encouraged Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor. Paul reminded them that in his preaching of the gospel, that to the best of his ability he was eager to help those who were truly suffering from the unfortunate times of economic depression. Because he was a self-employed tentmaker by profession, Paul was always eager to help the poor.

IMPOSSIBILITY OF JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

11-13: At one time Peter came from Jerusalem to the Gentile church of Antioch of Syria. We do not know if he had been designated an elder of the church in Jerusalem by this time, though it was about fifteen years after the establishment of the church. He was a Christ-sent apostle, but on this occasion he behaved contrary to the gospel of grace that both he and Paul had preached. His behavior was so contrary to the gospel of freedom that he stood condemned in reference to his salvation. When Peter first came to Antioch, he openly and willingly fellowshipped with the Gentile disciples of the church. But certain Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, whose coming possibly threatened his Jewish heritage, and thus, his fellowship with his Jewish brethren. He was intimidated by these brethren who came. Though he was previously eating with the Gentiles, which was contrary to Jewish custom, the coming of fellow Jews intimidated him, and thus, he discontinued his relationship with the Gentile brethren. As a result, he openly separated himself from the Gentiles in the presence of both the Gentile and Jewish disciples. He was afraid of the intimidating cloud of authority that came with those who came from Jerusalem. His example also spread to the other Jewish brethren in Antioch. They too joined with what was considered hypocrisy, for they preached fellowship in Christ, but they practiced separation when intimidated by those of their own culture. Barnabas was also carried away with this behavior which contravened the gospel of freedom and unity in Christ.

14-16: The truth of the gospel was the fact that Jesus died for all men, both Jews and Gentiles. When one obeyed the gospel, he came into a fellowship of disciples where neither race nor nationality can separate one disciple from another. What Peter, Barnabas and the other resident Jews of Antioch did was to behave contrary to the spirit of fellowship that all people have in Christ. Their behavior was so contrary to the nature of the gospel that Paul dealt with the matter in a public confrontation with Peter before the entire church. Before the legalistic Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, Peter was living as the Gentiles. But when the Jewish brethren arrived from Jerusalem, his behavior taught that they should live as the Jews, and thus maintain their separation from the Gentiles. Peter stumbled for a moment in thinking that his Jewish heritage was more important than living by the faith of Jesus that resulted in His death on the cross. Therefore, if one died with Christ, then he died to any cultural heritage that would keep him away from fellowshipping all those who had obeyed the gospel. One is not justified by perfect keeping of law, nor does he atone for sins by doing good works, or keeping his cultural heritage. When Peter and Paul initially recognized that Jesus was the grace of God who appeared on the cross, they and all Jews by faith fled for deliverance from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to obey the gospel. They did so because they realized that they could not keep law perfectly in order to save themselves. And since they could not keep law perfectly, then they had to walk by faith in the grace of God. They had no choice because they were honest enough to realize that one cannot perform the works of the law perfectly, and thus, demand salvation on the basis of works.

17-21: If one seeks to be justified by works of law, while at the same time he seeks to be justified by Christ, then he is a sinner, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself. Christians, therefore, cannot make the law of Christ a legal system of justification. They cannot because all men sin, and sin condemns. Jesus did not bring us into the bondage of having to keep law perfectly in order to be saved. He delivered us from the curse of the law by our faith in Him. Christians must be careful about reverting to their former life of seeking to be legally justified by the rites of former religiosity. If one makes the law of Christ a legal system by which to justify himself before God, then he has made himself a transgressor who has no hope. He has made himself a transgressor of law because no man can keep law perfectly in order to earn his salvation. Law kills because no one can keep it perfectly. When one realizes that he cannot keep law in order to save himself, then he will, as Paul and Peter, flee to Christ for justification by faith. Law kills, but faith brings eternal life. It is for this reason that we crucify our efforts to seek justification by perfect keeping of law. The Christian has been crucified with Christ in that he has denied his own efforts to save himself in order to trust in the grace of God that was revealed on the cross. The result of one's crucifixion with Jesus is that he no longer lives for himself, but for Christ who lives in him. Our living, therefore, is not an effort to justify ourselves, and thus boast in our performance of law. The Christian lives because he has been justified by faith in the Son of God, who because of love, died on the cross to set us free. The Christian life, therefore, is a life of thanksgiving in response to the grace of God. The point to the argument is that if we could justify ourselves before God with perfect keeping of law, or atoning good works, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die on the cross. Therefore, through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we do not nullify the grace of God. Christ did not die uselessly because we assert ourselves righteous before God because of our legal performance of law and good works.

Chapter 3

LAW AND THE CURSE

1-4: There were social dynamics being played out in the Galatian Christians' move back to a legal system of religiosity. Behind the scenes, there was a debate raging between the influence of those we would refer to as Judaizing teachers and what the Galatians were taught by Paul when they obeyed the gospel. Because of the freedom that came from the bondage of legal religiosity, Paul proclaimed that they were foolish to consider going back into the legal bondage of law. He had clearly manifested before the Galatians the freedom that they had received when they became Christians. Therefore, there was some intimidation by those who cast a spell of deception over them that they should return to the "Jew's religion" from which they had been set free. Therefore, Paul asked them some very penetrating questions, questions for which they knew the answers. He wanted them to identify who was bewitching them to leave the freedom of grace in order to go into bondage again in legal religiosity. They had been endowed with the spiritual gifts that came through the laying on of Paul's hands. They did not receive the Holy Spirit because they earned His blessings through perfect obedience of law. The receiving of the gifts was a blessing of the Spirit that came with their obedience to the gospel. It was a result of their faith, not their works. Now that they had begun a new life in Christ, they were foolish to believe that they could go on to perfection by efforts to justify themselves through perfect keeping of law. Their works in the flesh could not perfect what was started by the Spirit. If they believed that they could through the flesh justify themselves before God, then their persecution that they endured when they first became Christians was useless.

5-9: Jesus provided the Spirit to them through the laying on of Paul's hands. And it was Jesus through the Spirit who worked powerful miraculous wonders among them. In other words, the coming of the gospel to them through Paul was not in work only, but with the confirming miraculous works of the Spirit. Paul worked miracles among them, but he did not do such because of law, but because of faith. Abraham acted on his faith in God. And because he was obedient because of his trust in God, he was justified before God. Those who are obedient in response to their faith in God, therefore, are the true sons of Abraham. Through promises made in the Old Testament, God revealed that He would justify all men through faith, not by keeping of any law, including the Old Testament law. Since no man can be justified by perfect keeping of law, then all men must come to God through faith in Jesus in order to be considered righteous before God. This good news was first revealed to Abraham when God called him from among the nations. His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 was that from the seed of Abraham, all nations would be blessed when the Messiah came. Those who are of faith, are blessed by the coming of Jesus because they believed

that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. In response to their belief, they obeyed the gospel. Because Abraham believed the promise of God, the blessing of the gospel came from his seed, and thus, all men of obedient faith have been blessed because Abraham walked by faith.

10-12: If one would seek to be justified by perfect keeping of law, he is under the curse of the law. The curse of the law is that one sin condemns one as a law-breaker. Since no one can keep law perfectly, then all men are under condemnation, for all have sinned. The curse of law, therefore, is that no one can keep law perfectly in order to justify himself before God. Now if one resorts to law-keeping in order to be justified, then he would have to keep the law perfectly. But the fact is that no one is justified by keeping law, for no man can keep law perfectly. All honest people confess their weakness in keeping law. They realize that law was never given by God as a means to acquire salvation, for all men sin by breaking law. Therefore, the righteous seek to live by faith by trusting in the grace of God. It is for this reason that legal law-keeping is not a walk of faith. Law-keeping is walking by faith in oneself to keep law perfectly.

13,14: Through His atoning death on the cross, Jesus delivered us from the necessity of having to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Those who walk by faith, therefore, have been delivered from the curse of having to keep law perfectly. Those who walk by faith, therefore, have been purchased by the blood of Jesus in order that the blessing to all nations that would come through Abraham might be poured out on all nations. This blessing was poured out in order that all the obedient by faith might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit by faith, not by perfect keeping of law. Through law, we could not receive the Spirit, for we could not keep law perfectly in order to put God in debt to award us with the Spirit.

THE PROMISE VERSUS THE LAW

15-18: When two men make a covenant with one another, once the covenant is ratified by the agreement of the two parties, the conditions of the covenant cannot be changed, neither can the covenant be annulled. Now God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendents. The covenant that God made with Abraham was that through his seedline the Blessing (Christ) would come into the world for all nations. The promise was made that the Blessing would not come through seedlines other than Abraham's seedline. From the seedline of Abraham, the Christ would come into the world, bringing the blessing of salvation by grace. Now the promise was made to Abraham before the giving of the Old Testament law, which law came with the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. The making of the covenant with Abraham, therefore, did not depend on Abraham's keeping of the Old Testament law, which law was given only to Israel. The law came 430 years after the making of the promise to Abraham. And when the law came, it did not annul the covenant that God had made with Abraham concerning the promise. The covenant had already been ratified with Abraham before the coming of the Old Testament law. The inheritance of the promise, therefore, did not depend on one's keeping of the Old Testatment law, which law was given only to Israel. The promise and its fulfillment did not depend on the ability of men to keep the Old Testament law. If the fulfillment of the promise depended on the keeping of law, then the promise could never have been fulfilled, for no man can keep law perfectly. The Blessing that would come through the seed of Abraham, therefore, had to be by promise, not law-keeping.

19,20: But why did God give to Israel the Old Testament law? It was given because it is not in man to direct his own paths. If Israel did not have the tutorialship of the Old Testament law, then she would have gone in the way of all those who were destroyed by the flood of Noah's day. Guidelines of obedience (law), therefore, were necessary in order to preserve a portion of humanity (the seed of Abraham, Israel). The promise came through the seedline of Abraham, and thus, the seedline had to be preserved by the guidelines of law. The law preserved the seedline in order that the promise be fulfilled. It was for this reason that the Old Testament law was given through angels to Moses who mediated on behalf of the nation of Israel. But Moses' mediatorship was not for Israel alone. He mediated on behalf of Israel in order that through Israel the Blessing might come for all nations, for God is the God of all mankind. For this reason, Moses mediated for all men in that through Him the law was given in order to preserve the seedline of Abraham, the nation of Israel.

21-25: So one might ask if the Old Testament law was against God's power to fulfill the promise of the Blessing. The fulfillment of the promise did not depend on keeping of the law, for if such were true, then the promise could never have been fulfilled. Now if there could have been a law given that would guarantee the fulfillment of the promise because of the performance of man in keeping law, then certainly such could have been accomplished through the giving of the Old Testament law. The law was given by God. It was holy, just and good. It was the best law that could have been given if justification were through law-keeping. The problem

was not with the law, but with men who cannot keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God. So if a law could have been given in order to give men eternal life, then certainly such a law could have been given to man by God. The fact is that the Old Testament law themselves condemned men to sin. And since all are confined to sin because of law, then the promise had to be given to those who responded to Jesus by faith. The giving of the promise to Abraham was based on the faith of Abraham. The acceptance of the blessing of the promise is based on the faith of the recipients. Before all this was revealed through Jesus, those who were of the faith of Abraham were in bondage. They were in the bondage of their own sin which was the result of man's inability to keep law perfectly. They were guarded in bondage by the law, for those who were of the faith of Abraham knew that they could not keep the law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God. In this way, the Old Testament law was a school headmaster who controlled those who were of the faith of Abraham until they were handed over to Christ through their obedience to the gospel in order that they be justified by faith. Now that those who are of the faith of Abraham have been handed over to Christ, the headmaster, the Old Testament law, was released from its duty. Christians, therefore, are no longer under the guard of the Old Testament law.

SONS THROUGH BAPTISM

26- 29: The Gentile Christians were sons of God because of their obedient faith, not because of their perfect obedience to law. Law was established in their lives by faith. Faith was not established by law-keeping. When they were immersed into Christ, they put on Christ. They were thus dressed in the garments of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. And having put on Christ, they stood justified before God. It was at the point of their immersion in obedience to the gospel when they were brought into a saving relationship with Christ. It was not by perfect keeping of law, or meritorious good works. And when they came into Christ, their nationality or race no longer separated them from one another. Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the resident Jews in Antioch, had withdrawn from the Gentiles on the occasion when Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Such an action contravened the nature of the Christians' oneness in Christ that resulted from their baptism into Christ. Their behavior of separation manifested an effort to return to the law of the past, which law had fulfilled its purpose in bringing us to Christ. So now that we belong to Christ because of our obedience to the gospel, we continue the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith, not by keeping any ordinance of the Old Testament law. We thus inherit the promise that was made to Abraham, the Blessing that blessed all nations. We have inherited the salvation that Jesus, the Blessing, brought into the world.

Chapter 4

1-5: In order to illustrate our inheritance of the Blessing that was promised to Abraham, consider the fact that when a son is an heir of his father, while the father is still alive he is no different in reference to the possessions of the inheritance than one of the father's bondservants. Though he will eventually inherit all that the father owns, he is still subject to the father, just as the bondservant. He is under the guardians and stewards until the time that the father has appointed when he should receive the inheritance. Therefore, the Jews were under the bondage of the Old Testament law until the time appointed by the heavenly Father when they should inherit the Blessing. But when the time set by the Father was completed for the fulfillment of the promise, the Father sent for His Son in order to deliver all those who lived under the bondage of the law. The promise was made to Abraham. The Old Testament law was given to Israel only for a determined period of time. When this period of time was fulfilled, the promise was given, and thus, the law was taken away. It had fulfilled its purpose of bringing the heirs to the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus. When Jesus came, therefore, He delivered us from that which we could not deliver ourselves. He set us free from the bondage of the law in order that we might be the adopted sons of the Father.

6,7: Now that they had become sons of God by their obedience to the gospel, God has given to them the Spirit, which Spirit moves the adopted sons to look to the Father as the source of their salvation. Their thanksgiving is to the Father for their salvation, not to their own abilities to walk meritoriously by law in order to justify themselves. Because we have responded by faith to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we are no longer bondservants without an inheritance. We have been adopted by the Father, and thus, we are sons of God.

8-11: As the Gentiles, and thus bondservants of our own imagination, we were idolatrous in our behavior and beliefs. Because we had created gods after our own imagination, we did not know the one true and living

God. We believed only in that which was imagined, and thus, the gods in which we believed were not gods at all. Now here is the problem facing those who would seek to justify themselves through law and works. God adopted those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus, the obedient are known by God to be His sons. But if His sons turn back to those things that were useless in reference to salvation, then the gospel will benefit one nothing in reference to salvation. If one returns to the bondage of his vain religion which he had created after the imagination of his own thinking, then his obedience to the gospel will be nullified. In the case of many of the Galatians, they were legally observing certain days, months and festivities that related to their idolatrous religions of the past. If they returned to these legal systems of religiosity, then Paul would have labored in vain to preach the gospel to them. His labors would have been useless because they would have fallen from the grace of God.

12-16: Paul thus pleaded with them to remain as he in the grace of God. Paul had previously in his life lived in the legal system of law, being obedient to the Judaism that he had received from his Jewish fathers. However, when Jesus called him, he remained faithful to the calling. If the Galatian Christians fell away from the grace of God, they would not endanger his salvation, for he had fulfilled his responsibility of preaching the gospel to them. They would endanger their own salvation, for each person is held accountable for his own behavior. It was not easy for Paul to carry out his mission to preach the gospel to the Galatians. They knew that he had to endure great physical weakness in order to stand before them and preach the grace of God. They knew that he was suffering physically while carrying out his mission to preach the gospel. Whatever his physical infirmity, we are not told. But when he initially came into Galatia, the Galatians looked past his physical infirmity in order to hear what he had to say concerning the gospel of Jesus. They were so interested in his message, that they received him as the messenger of God, even as they would have personally received Jesus. It may have been that Paul was suffering from some eye ailment. We are not told. But the Galatians' compassion for him while he was with them was sincere. It was sincere because they understood the blessing of salvation that they received as a result of his labors for them. But now, it seems that he had become their enemy because he was chastising them with the truth by telling them that they were ungratefully turning away from the message he had preached, as well as turning away from him as the messenger of God.

17-20: Now what was happening among the Galatian disciples was the recruiting by those Judaizing teachers who were seeking a following among men. With great zeal, these teachers were turning the people away from Paul, and thus, away from the message that Paul preached. But such was not for the good of the Galatian disciples. It was not good because if they did return to a system of law-keeping, they would be cut off from the grace of God. They would also be cut off from the fellowship of the worldwide body of Christ. These political Judaizers, therefore, were playing church politics. They were seeking the favoritism of the people in order that the people listen to them. Now it is always good to be zealous. But if one uses his zeal in order to recruit others to follow him, then his zeal is being wasted on matters of selfish ambition. The Galatians were zealous to receive Paul when he was with them. But they must continue to be zealous for him in his absence, lest they stop believing the message that he preached to them. Paul was as a father to them in that he fathered them in Christ by the preaching of the gospel. He personally labored in their presence as a loving father. Now he was again laboring as a woman in birth pains in order to keep them faithful to the grace of God. He was writing with sternness in his words, for he was laboring for their salvation. If he were present with them, then he could nurture his words with love in order to encourage them to be true to their confession.

HAGAR AND SARAH

21-27: The Galatians needed an illustration from the Old Testament in order to understand that the Old Testament law had been cast out. In order to better understand that the Old Testament law was cast out in order to make room for the new covenant, Paul gave them an allegory that was based on the historical incident of a confrontation between Hagar and Sarah. Abraham had two sons. Isaac was born to Abraham through Sarah. Ishmael was born to Abaham through Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. Hagar was a bondwoman, but Sarah was the wife of Abraham. Ishmael was born as a result of Abraham and Sarah making a plan that Abraham have an heir through whom the promise of God would continue. Through works, therefore, they sought to work out the promise of God. He and Sarah were old in age, but had no son. Therefore, they formed a plan that Hagar go in to Abraham, and from this union, an heir would be born to continue the promise of God through the seed of Abraham. But this was a work of Abraham and Sarah. In order that they might know that it was God working in the matter to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac was born to Sarah in her old age. She was the freewoman who would give birth to the One who would eventually

come into the world and deliver to freedom all those who were confined to the bondage of law. Thus Isaac was born according to the work of God to bring about His promise. Ishmael was born according to the works of Abraham and Sarah. The two sons, therefore, illustrate two covenants. The first was God's covenant with Israel that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai. However, this covenant, with its law, the Old Testament law, was a covenant of bondage, for by works of the Old Testament law no one could be justified before God. Instead of bringing life, therefore, the law of the old covenant brought death. The law was thus a curse in reference to salvation. No one could keep it perfectly in order to justify himself before God. All those who would seek to be justified by keeping of the Old Testament law, therefore, are still under the bondage of the law. In contrast to the Old Testament law that brought sin and death, the new brought freedom from the curse of sin and death. It brought freedom from the necessity of having to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Sarah is thus the mother of the free. Sarah broke forth with joy when she became pregnant with Isaac. She became the mother of many nations. She brought forth the one who would continue the heritage of Abraham, and thus the fulfillment of the promise that would come about two thousand years later on a cross outside Jerusalem.

28-31: Because Isaac was the result of God's work to carry out His plan of fulfilling His promise to Abraham, we become children of the promise. We are not children because of the Old Testament law, but children by the grace of God that was poured out on Sarah in her old age to bring forth Isaac. When Isaac was but a small child, he was persecuted by Ishmael because Ishmael was jealous of him. Ishmael had been born to Abraham because of the works of the flesh, the plan that he and Sarah had devised that Hagar go in to Abraham in order that Abraham have an heir. Isaac, however, was born according to the Spirit of God who worked in the womb of Sarah that she give birth. But as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so the legalistic Jews who continued to cling to the Old Testament law, persecuted those who believed in Jesus and had obeyed the gospel. God told Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael in order to bring peace to his family. He was to cast them out because the fulfillment of the promise would not come through Ishmael. It would come through Isaac. We must keep in mind, therefore, that we are not sons of God through Ishmael. We received the fulfillment of the promise that was promised to Abraham that came through the working of God. We are heirs of the promise that continued, not by the flesh of Abraham and Sarah working to fulfill the promise, but by God working through Abraham and Sarah in their old age to continue the fulfillment of His promise to them through the birth of Isaac.

Chapter 5

SET FREE, STAY FREE

1-6: In view of the fact that we must remain in our freedom that came through our obedience to the gospel, Paul reveals a fundamental principle of the Christian life. It is the principle that in Christ we must remain free from believing that we must keep law perfectly in order to be saved. It is imperative, therefore, that we stand fast in our freedom in Christ in view of the sacrifice that Jesus paid in order to make our salvation possible. Christians must make every effort not to become entangled in the web of religious doctrines and practices that are a burden to all those who seek to retain such in their lives. They must not view the law of Christ as a system by which they would justify themselves before God. If one would seek to be circumcised as an indication that he was returning to a legal system of religiosity in order to justify himself, then the atoning sacrifice of Christ would not profit him in reference to his salvation. If one would seek to return to efforts of perfect keeping of law in order to justify himself, then he must keep perfectly the law he chooses to obey. But the fact is that no man can keep any law perfectly, even the law of Christ. It is for this reason that no man can be justified before God through the keeping of law. Law, therefore, was never given to save man, or as a means of salvation, for by works of law no person can justify himself before God. If one would seek to justify himself through law-keeping, then he is actually fallen from the grace of God by which he was once saved. He is fallen from grace because his faith is not in the all-sufficiency of the grace of God that was revealed through the gospel. But those who walk by the Spirit, have hope of eternal life because of their faith in the grace of God. One can eagerly wait with anticipation for the coming of Jesus if he puts his trust in the grace of God and not in himself. If he puts his faith in his own works, then he will always be in doubt concerning his salvation, and thus, will always be apprehensive concerning the coming of Jesus.

7-10: Some Christians, as the Galatian disciples, start off their Christian life well. They begin with their trust in Jesus, but then begin to establish religious codes by which they bring themselves into their own bondage.

If there are those who would bind on Christians those things that God has not bound through His word, then they are hindering the salvation of Christians. Those who would teach the traditions of men to be binding on men are thus hindrances to the salvation of those they teach. We must keep in mind that law-keeping as a means to salvation was not brought into the world by Jesus. He came to set us free from the bondage that is of our own making. It is men who bring people into bondage, not Jesus. Christians must keep in mind, therefore, that a few teachers can bring into bondage the whole church. If bondage teaching is not stopped, it can affect the church as a whole. It is for this reason that Christians must be diligent not to bind traditions on the church that are not bound in the word of God. They must not turn the law of Christ into a legal system by which they would seek to justify themselves. Paul had confidence in the sincere obedience of the Galatians. He knew that once they remembered their faith with which they started their Christian life, they would not be moved away from that faith. But the teacher who was troubling them with the binding of religious codes that God did not bind would suffer judgment for what he was doing in reference to disturbing the household of God. Those who would trouble the church by teaching their religious traditions, or teachings that are found nowhere in the word of God, will give account for leading the church into bondage. The same is true of those who would use the law of Christ as a legal system of justification.

11,12: The fact that Paul was not teaching a legal system of religiosity was proved by the fact that he was suffering persecution from those who were teaching such a system. Legalistic brethren, therefore, always persecute those who preach freedom in Christ. The free are persecuted with slander, and sometimes as in the case of Paul, with stoning as he suffered while in Galatia. Therefore, one's persecution is often the result of his defense of the freedom that we have in Christ. Since the fundamental principle of freedom in Christ is a foundation upon which our salvation depends, then Paul wished that the legalistic brethren would disfellowship themselves from the free. If division in the church must result in order to maintain our freedom from those who would bind where God has not bound, then division must occur. The freedom of the church must never be sacrificed in order to remain in fellowship with those who would bring the church into the bondage of legalistic religiosity.

13-15: Christians have been called by the gospel into the liberty that they have in Christ. They are free from the necessity of having to keep law perfectly in order to be saved, for they understand that law was never given as a means to salvation. It was given to direct our lives, not as a standard by which we would be saved. However, though we are set free from the necessity of keeping law perfectly in order to be saved, then we must not feel that we have the freedom to sin against the law of God. Love is the identity of the family of God. Christians serve one another because of love, not law. And thus, instead of using our freedom to ignore one another, or cause another to sin after the flesh, Christians should respond to the needs of one another because of love. Christians keep the law of God because of their love. They do not love because of law. If one serves his neighbor, therefore, it is out of love, not law. If there is no love among brethren, the brethren will be involved in quarrels by which they will destroy their fellowship with one another. A church of people who have lost their love for one another will eventually cease being a church of Christ.

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

16-18: If one walks according to the law of love, he will not seek to please his own selfish desires. Walking after the Spirit, therefore, is a walk of focusing on others. It is a walk that is not directed by law, but by love. If one walks according to the Spirit, he is not seeking to live for himself. If one thinks that life is about himself, then he is working against the Spirit who would direct us to live for others. Living according to our own will, therefore, is against what the Spirit would have us do as Christians. If one would walk according to the desires of the flesh, then he cannot accomplish the work of the Spirit. When Christians are led by love, they are walking after the desires of the Spirit. When one is walking according to love, he needs no law to direct him to do good to his neighbor.

19-21: Now one who would seek to live according to his own desires will not live in order to serve the needs of others. He will commit those sins that violate relationships between people. He will commit sexual immorality wherein people are hurt. He will live an impure life of filthiness. He will become involved in lewd dancing, sensuality, debauchery, immoral dress and conduct. He will create a god after his own imagination by which he will convince himself that his god is pleased with his immoral behavior. Some will become involved in drugs and senseless behavior by binding on themselves fictitious beliefs of imagined spirits and ghosts. Others will harbor enmity toward others, manifesting a behavior of contention and jealousy. They will not be able to control themselves in their relationships with others for they think only of themselves. And because they think only of themselves, they have a contentious spirit, speak-

ing those things that are contrary to the truth. They will have a sectarian spirit that promotes division rather than unity. Their relationship with others will always be strained because they thirst for the possessions or positions of others. And because of their low self-esteem and baseless life, they will seek to escape reality through intoxicating liquor, the result of which will be a life of excessive drunken parties. Such behavior manifests a walk according to the lusts of the flesh. In such behavior, one cannot have a correct relationship with his fellow man. One can have no hope of dwelling in eternity with others who live according to behavor that destroys relationships.

22-26: Contrary to the walk after the lusts of the flesh, the walk after the Spirit is based on love. Those who seek joy, will seek peace with their fellow man. And in order to have peace, one must be patient with the faults of others. Patience depends on showing kindness to others. And when one is kind he seeks to do good to others. In order for two people to maintain a relationship with one another, both people must remain faithful and committed to one another. When two people remain faithful to one another, they manifest a spirit of gentleness in order to maintain their relationship. They thus control their behavior and speech in order not to endanger their relationship. Christians, therefore, have given themselves to others. For this reason, they do not walk according to their own desires. They put their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ first, and thus maintain their relationship with the family of God. Therefore, those who would live in the Spirit, must walk according to the instructions of the Spirit. Upon the foundation of love, the Spirit directs through the word of God. In order to maintain our relationships with one another in Christ, we must desire the good of others, not seeking glory for ourselves. We must be patient with one another, kind and gentle in spirit lest we provoke others to lose their gentleness toward us. Those who are disciples in Christ, exalt and encourage others to do their best. Christians are not in competition with one another as to who is the greatest. The family of God is a community of servants who seek to serve one another's needs.

Chapter 6

OBEDIENT FAITH

1-5: In reference to the disciples' relationship with one another, it is a principle of fellowship that those who are more mature in the faith have a responsibility to those who are new in the faith. Therefore, if one who is new in the faith is overtaken in a sinful behavior that is according to the works of the flesh, he must be encouraged to remain faithful to his commitment. It is the responsibility of those who are strong in the faith to seek to restore the fallen. They must do this with a spirit of gentleness, knowing that every disciple can be overcome with sin, and thus, fall from the grace of God. It is thus our responsibility to carry one another's spiritual burden of faithfulness. We are responsible for one another. By being responsible for one another, we fulfill the law of Christ, that we love one another as Christ also loved us. But if someone thinks that he is too good to help others, then he has deceived himself. If one thinks that he is better than others, and thus not able to be tempted to fall, then he has deceived himself. There is no room for boasting among disciples. If one would prove his work, then he must look to God for approval. One must never become involved in comparing his works with the works of others. Since every disciple has been given different abilities or gifts, then no disciple can ever compare his works with another disciple. So because each person has been given different abilities or gifts, then each person is responsible for his own works. He is not responsible for the abilities or gifts of another, neither can he compare the benefit of his gifts with the benefits of the gifts of another disciple.

6: It is a principle of brotherhood, the furtherance of the gospel, and continued teaching of the word of God, that the students of the word should financially support the teachers of the word. If one teaches the good things of the word of God, then he deserves to be supported by those whom he teaches. Those who neglect their responsibility to support the teachers of the word have not understood the principle by which God intends that the word of God be taught.

7-10: One must not think that he can live a life after the flesh and not at the same time reap the consequences of such behavior. God has stated that we will reap the consequences of sinful behavior. If one lives according to the sins of the flesh, he will reap the consequences of such by suffering in this life, both physically and in his relationships with others. But if one lives according to the directions of the Spirit, then he will reap eternal heaven. For this reason, we must not become tired of doing that which is good to others. When we do good to others, then they will do good to us in life. We will also reap eternal life as a result of our good

life. Since we will reap eternal life as a result of living after the Spirit, then we must take every opportunity to do good. Christians must do good not only to fellow Christians, but to every person who is in need. In fact, one cannot be sincere in his goodness if it is poured out only on those who are Christians. Christians do good works toward those who are disciples of Jesus, but such goodness also spills over to everyone with whom one comes into contact.

11-15: Paul's message to the Galatians, and all Christians, was critical. It was critical because the Galatian Christians were in the process of being influenced by those teachers who were teaching a legal system of justification. If the Galatians succumbed to the influence and teaching of the Judaizing teachers, then they would fall from the grace of God. Therefore, with his own hand he wrote this urgent letter to the Galatians. It seems that some Judaizing teachers had succumbed to the intimidation of their fellow Jews. They thus taught what they were compelled to teach because they did not want to suffer persecution for preaching the gospel of freedom from law-keeping. The irony of the situation was that those who were forcing the Galatians to be circumcised in order to manifest their keeping of the Old Testament law, were themselves not able to keep the law perfectly. The real reason they were compelling the Galatians to be circumcised was that they wanted to boast to the Jews that they had circumcised so many people, manifesting that they had converted the saved. Paul's boasting was only in the sufferings of Jesus for the salvation of all men. And because he was willing to suffer for preaching the gospel to the world, the things of the world meant nothing to him. It was Christ who was living in him, and thus, the things of the world did not detour him from his destiny of preaching the gospel to the world. Works as circumcision cannot accomplish salvation. If one remains uncircumcised, it still does not accomplish anything toward salvation. What does count is if one has been immersed into Christ in order to become a new creation in Christ. Obedience to the gospel, therefore, is what is important in reference to our salvation, for obedience to the gospel is not a work of merit, but a response to the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

16-18: All those who walk in response to their obedience to the gospel will have peace of mind and peace with God. God's mercy will be upon them. Peace and mercy will be individually upon all Christians, as well as upon the spiritual Israel, the church. Paul wanted no further debate on this matter. If there were those who wanted to return to law-keeping as a means of salvation, then they must cut themselves off from the church of God. Paul had sought to be faithful to his calling to preach the gospel. As a result, he suffered the persecution that came from his fellow Jews. If one would walk according to Paul's life, therefore, then the grace that was manifested through Jesus would continue with him.

Book 50

Perceptions And Postulations

This book is an assortment of personal perceptions and postulations of what I feel are some general or overall characteristics of my experiences in Latin America, the West Indies and Africa. Throughout my travels to over eighty countries and living on three continents in the last six decades, here are some concepts and perceptions that I would suggest concerning the continued growth and edification of the worldwide church. I first wrote some of these perceptions in both *Africa Missionary Pilot* and *Preaching Through Africa*. They are published again here with some added revisions and additions that I feel are necessary in order to communicate the fact that church leaders must give urgent attention to the worldwide growth of the church.

On extensive cross-country trips I have made across Africa and my journeys around Latin America, basic challenges in the church become very noticeable, specifically on the continent of Africa. The origin of these challenges varied from one place to another. However, there were some common challenges with which the Africa church must deal in order to sustain church growth in the future. As evangelists who must generate church growth by the teaching and application of biblical principles, we must be concerned about matters that affect the existence of the church, that it not be diverted to a churchian existence in the midst of a religiously misguided world.

It is not ironic that some of the basic African church challenges were also experienced in Brazil and the West Indies. The reason for this is that the beginnings of the church in all three regions have their origin in the Western missionary. And because of these origins there is some Western baggage that was initially planted in the thinking of the first generation of converts.

Because I have worked for over two decades in the African scene, I base my primary focus on the African situation with reflections on Latin America and the West Indies. There are some common challenges that face the church worldwide because Western mission efforts were the primary catalyst for the beginning of the church in many places of the world. Because most of the churches in the areas of my experience find their beginning in the mission efforts of Western missionaries, there is some leftover baggage from such efforts with which churches must now deal. As a planted church in any region develops into a truly indigenous effort, foreign baggage must be discarded as local and regional disciples apply biblical teaching to their own situations. I see this as a maturing stage for the development of the universal church. It is maturing in that national churches are taking ownership of their nations, and thus asserting their responsibility to evangelize their own areas. In order to effectively do this, national churches must recognize and understand any foreign baggage that may have come with the missionaries. For this reason, therefore, I set forth these general postulations in hope that they will aid national churches to understand where they are in order to take ownership of the future of the church in their area.

Before we launch into the specifics, I should somewhat explain what I mean by baggage. First, and most obvious, baggage refers to cultural characteristics that are often attached to religious beliefs and behavior. For example, in the Western worship context the teacher is usually placed before the audience, either on a stand or pedestal. The audience looks forward in mute silence as the teacher lectures. This is not a biblical structure in every situation, but is commonly practiced in many assemblies of the church. Some cultures sit on the floor while others may sit in a circle. Another example of baggage is the use of a church building. While this religious culture dates back 1700 years to when Constantine built the first purpose-built building for Christian use in 323, buildings are not an essential part of church establishment or edification. There are a host of similar elements of the Western church that are not part of the simplicity of Christianity. What is important to remember is that everyone has some baggage. Because of the great mission efforts of the Western church throughout the years, we would suppose, therefore, that there would be more Western baggage in the world church than baggage from any other culture.

Another part of the content of the baggage that is often brought over to mission areas deals with orders and ceremonies. These orders or ceremonies are usually associated with the assembly of the saints, particularly the serving of the Lord's Supper. For example, one brother came to Cape Town and was disturbed con-

cerning the serving of the Supper in relation to the lesson. He had been taught by the missionary many years ago that the Supper should be served after the lesson, not before. There are numerous examples in reference to order and ceremony that are not mentioned in the Scriptures, but have become a part of our religious behavior. The problem is that if such baggage was initiated by early evangelists, new converts often took these examples very seriously, and thus bound them on the church.

A third category of baggage is in reference to biblical interpretation. I have found that many new converts in the West Indian and African context were not taught the skill of determining what is biblical, and thus binding, and what was "biblical," that is, mentioned in the Bible, and yet not binding. A very legalistic approach to Bible study was taught the first converts, and as a result subsequent generations did not have the interpretative ability to distinguish between the early misssionary's baggage and what was actually binding. This has resulted in a great number of debates and divisions in the church as the churches began to grow after the departure of the missionary. It is not my point here to go into any detail on these matters, but simply to alert all of us to the fact that "circumcision baggage" was brought to some areas, which circumcision baggage has caused some confusion with some.

Chapter 1

"DOCTRINAL CHRISTIANITY"

Many of the churches that were established by missionaries to Africa, Latin America and the West Indies previous to the 90's were generally churches that were based on conquest in debate over doctrine. The denominational churches had been in these regions for two centuries before the arrival of the Western missionary. Upon arrival of the Western missionary, therefore, conversions resulted from winning arguments in doctrinal matters.

Because of the religious atmosphere of doctrinal debates with churchian religions, early mission efforts subsequently placed more emphasis on doctrine than on Christ. Emphasis was thus on doctrinal correctness and not so much on ethics and holiness. Bible study focused on the epistles and not the cause of the epistles, Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Early efforts were primarily directed toward converting people from the error of denominationalism. As a result, much emphasis was placed on showing the difference between the structure of the church and the traditional ceremonialism of the denominations, the difference between truth and false doctrine. People were thus first converted to the church, not to Christ.

The emphasis of doctrine over Christ resulted in an intellectual church that emphasized doctrinal purity and not so much Jesus as a model for holy living. This resulted in a knowledge of the church that was memorized from an outline or chart on paper and not one written on the hearts of men. The "five steps of salvation" became the gospel and preachers forgot the fact that the church is based on Jesus. Understanding that the gospel is the death of Jesus for our sins and resurrection for our hope was not the center of reference to the thinking of many Western established churches.

A ceremonial worship was thus established in contrast to the ceremonial behavior of the churchian groups to which we went as missionaries. We had an outline of scriptures placed under every "act of worship" in order to justified our system of "worship." Our assortment of scriptures thus won the debates, but we established our own ceremonialism in worship which we justified by a legal performance of acts. We simply converted one from one ceremony to another as we "scripturally" performed the actions of what we perceived to be the fulfillment of acts of worship.

The negative result of this was that worshipers developed an "hour of worship" during which they performed a ritual of "acts of worship" between an "opening" and "closing prayer." Once outside this time frame, disciples were convinced that they were not in worship of God, and thus could behave like the devil, feeling confident in their performance of the "acts of worship" during the "hour of worship" on Sunday morning. To this day this legalistic view of worship plagues the church throughout Africa, most of Latin America and the West Indies.

One of our challenges in the 90's in Africa was to first reaffirm the gospel. You would think that this would be absurd in reference to the church. But think about this for a moment. In most of our seminars in Africa in the early 90's we made an effort to help church leaders understand that the gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and resurrection for our hope must be understood and emphasized to unbelievers. We must preach the gospel, not church, since the church is the result of the

preaching of the gospel. The epistles were directed to the building up of the body that results from the preaching of the gospel. Christ converts; doctrine fine tunes. This emphasis was highly received and one that greatly increased the results of public evangelism. When the emphasis was changed in public evangelism from condemning the denominations to proclaiming the cross, invariably more conversions resulted from the denominations.

In the early 90's I was once in northern Malawi in a seminar before almost one hundred preachers of the church. I held up a copy of the Bible and asked, "Is this the gospel?" All their hands went up. I said, "Wrong answer." Of course they gasped, wondering if I had gone off the deep theological end. But I told them that in five minutes I would convince them that the Bible is not the gospel. So in five minutes I explained from 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and Romans 6:1-6 that the gospel was an **historical event**, the event of Jesus on the cross for our sins and His resurrection for our hope of being resurrected in the future if we obey His death, burial and resurrection in baptism. The Bible, specifically the New Testament, is the inspired **report** of the **event** of the gospel. What these preachers had been doing was preaching as the gospel the response of people in the first century to the preaching of the gospel (hear, believe, repent, confess, baptism). So I asked the question again after five minutes, "Is the Bible the gospel?" Not one hand went up.

The "gospel" of "hear-believe-repent-confess-baptism" was taken into all the world through Western missionaries, who themselves had their biblical vocabulary confused. Therefore, unless the world church gets her vocabulary correct on this matter, preachers will continue to produce a legalistic response in the lives of those who respond to their preaching. They will subsequently produce legalistic churches. Once one has completed the legal "five steps," he or she must simply sit in on the "hour of worship" and legalistically perform the "five acts." The problem with this is that we continue to preach church, not Jesus, and thus build churchian groups who eventually turn on themselves with debates over legal obedience to the opinions of men. It is now happening in many churches of Africa. The turmoil is the result of a legal orientation to conversion and church.

There has been a great change in the missionary force that has come to Africa in recent years. Most of the missionaries after the 70's and 80s came to Africa holding Christ and the cross before the world. They made the cross the center of reference for church establishment. It is my observation that there are exciting things to come in the future in the African church because of this new focus on Jesus by evangelists who are working throughout Africa. Those preachers who are now out there preaching the historical event of the gospel by emphasizing Jesus are reaping the harvest. People are now coming to the cross in hope of the resurrection. Christ is being preached.

Chapter 2

CERMONIAL CHRISTIANITY

Now I must take the previous point to the next level in order to help us understand why we now sit with many churches who are biting and devouring one another in senseless debates over nonessential matters. When a church sits with a spirit of strife in the present, invariably the problem finds its roots in the manner by which the members were trained to interpret Bible. Those roots often go back to the initial establishment of the church or churches in the region.

The more illiterate and traditional the culture, it seems the more legalistic it becomes in its religious behavior. When one is not trained in objective or deductive reasoning, it is easy just to be given a checklist of "doctrine" and then check off the points that we have completed. No thought is needed to check off each item. In reference to assembly, one can go home from the assembly and feel that he has accomplished his religion after performing certain rites of the religion at a place of authorized worship. This ceremonial churchianity was presented to many African churches in past decades. As a result, some churches are set into a non-growth syndrome that is challenging to change. Some churches have simply become sectarian and denominational in thinking and practice. Division among churches is not uncommon because a spirit of legalistic interpretation was established in the early days of the churches' existence around which no compromise could be made. In reference to tradition, the traditional way of doing things became the only way it could be done, and thus churches divided over senseless ideas and issues that were simply church traditions. The present church is thus left with a religious legal behavior that lends itself to being divi-

sive when new ideas in the area of opinion are introduced by those who have grown out of ceremonial religion.

What continually happens in such situations is that someone gives newly converted babes an outline of "the church" when they are converted. They are instructed in the "five acts" for worship and "five steps" for evangelism in order to be doctrinally identified as the "true church." As a result of this legal approach to Christianity, there is little understanding among some leaders concerning the concepts of grace in reference to salvation and holiness in reference to behavior. It was not uncommon to find churches that were led by thieves, polygamist and drunkards. As long as one believed the outline of the church on a piece of paper, he could behave as he so chose.

The result of a legal form of belief and behavior is that our supposed Christianity is turned into a churchianity that is often described with the word "denominationalism." Because many infant churches have not been given the basic tools of simple biblical interpretation, they have digressed into churchian sects that behave no differently than the religious world in which they live. Because they are sectarian in thinking, they often turn on themselves, biting and devouring one another over senseless issues that God never intended should ever be bound on the disciples.

The problem with a legalistic approach to biblical interpretation among those who seek to restore New Testament Christianity is that legalism always leads one back to becoming that from which he flees. In order to teach the non-denominational nature of the church, the legalist establishes a denominational nature of the church. We then often become hypocritically denominational in our efforts to discourage denominationalism. The problem with restorational denominationalists is that they can never see themselves as behaving denominationally.

An example of the preceding is illustrated in a church "business meeting" I once sat in on. During the meeting the subject was brought up as to whether a tie should be worn by those who served the Lord's Supper. There was some discussion over the matter, then it was put to a vote. The vote was six to five in favor of the tie. The result of the vote was written in the business meeting notes, and thus the church became a sectarian denomination. There was no difference between the thinking of these brethren than the Methodist church who pride themselves in the many written methods of behavior of their church. They became the "Tie Church," which church set the foundation for biting and devouring over some other issue in the years to come. And you guessed it, that biting and devouring came about two years later when the church exploded over another issue of nonsense.

What is very promising in Africa is the birth of a new generation of leaders who are seeking to re-establish the fundamental teaching of unity of the body that is based on freedom. These emerging leaders seek not to be sectarian in either thought or behavior. A new wave of evangelists has also come who is emphasizing the fact that Jesus set us free from the burden of legalistic religion. This new wave of evangelists know their Bibles well enough to know what is not there, and thus what is not there is not a matter for meetings wherein we cast a vote. They refuse to bind where God has not bound. These churches have a great future as the leaders study the Bible for themselves without accepting everything that has come across the water from former Western missionaries.

During many of the seminars I have conducted I have challenged churches to enjoy the unity that we have in Christ, which unity can be enjoyed only if we give one another freedom in Christ. The problem in the past was that we never taught ourselves how to set one another free. Quite the opposite prevailed in the early days of the establishment of some churches. Instead of teaching new disciples how to set one another free, we taught them how to be watchdogs and to bind where God has not bound. The result was that the more dominant leaders enforced their opinions, or heritage, on the backs of the following generations of the church. When succeeding generations started studying the Bible, war broke out because a generation of Bible students arose who realized that some sacred practices were not biblically binding.

I remember one year in the latter 90's that I decided to teach the book of Galatians to as many churches as possible throughout southern Africa. I had written a commentary on the book, and a special section in the commentary on Religious Legalism. I thus loaded my vehicle with these commentaries and headed out across southern Africa. That year I taught at least twenty-five seminars for church leaders on the subject of Galatians, leaving the commentary in their hands in order to continue the trickle down effect of the seminars. Because of the legacy of past legalistic teaching, and the legal principle of hermeneutics that was engrained in the thinking of many churches, I would suggest that evangelists do the same, using Romans and Galatians as the textbook for refocusing the thinking of many churches on grace and freedom in Christ.

Churches must be challenged to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity among His disciples (Jn 17:20,21). In order to do this we must teach ourselves the biblical

teaching of grace and freedom as opposed to religious legalism. One of the very encouraging signs for future missions in Latin America, the West Indies and Africa is the arrival of second and third generation evangelists who seem to have a spirit of unity that is based on freedom in Christ. I envision great things from this generation of evangelists who are seeking to take the church out of an epic of legalistic churchianity and division over nonsense issues to an era of peace among brethren. Those churches who do not take advantage of the opportunity will continue to bite one another, and eventually devour one another in the heat of battle over some nonessential issues that have nothing to do with our salvation. I see an emerging group of evangelists who are taking the church to unity that is based on grace in the freedom of Jesus.

Chapter 3

CUFFED-HAND CHRISTIANITY

This is a generally a Third World problem among nations that were formerly colonialized, specifically Africa since Africa fell victim to colonnialism. Four decades of foreign aid by Western governments and handouts by Western churches to churches in Africa has developed a very dependant mentality on the part of the African in general, and the African church in particular. African governments have been kept on the Western world hand-out list for so long that the people look for help from every foreigner who walks by. This thinking filters into the church because it has become an African cultural value. For example, when I once arrived one church in Africa that numbered about 500 members, the preacher initially stated that they needed a missionary, by this he meant a Western missionary. What he was really saying was that they needed a "source of support." On another occasion this same request was made by a different church to a fellow Western missionary. The missionary responded, "What if I just send the money and clothes?" The response was, "OK, that will be just fine."

Because the Western missionary comes from a very affluent society, he can live sumptuously in the Third World compared to local economic standards of the common class. He cannot help the fact that he appears rich, for he is rich in comparison to, but not all, locals. Because of the cultural cuffed-hand thinking, the hands go out to those we deem to be rich, or at least have a source somewhere where they can collect funds for local use. The Third World church member thus sees a source of financial help from anyone who comes from the Western economic world.

This thinking, however, is not entirely the result of colonial powers handing out money to African governments throughout the years. In the colonial years the colonial governments became the new chiefs from whom money was to be asked for local development. In the tribal system, the local chief was the owner of all, and thus requests had to be made directly to him. In the tribal arrangement of African groups, the chief was the one from whom one sourced help. When something needed to be done, requests had to be made to the chief. There was no democratic system of making a decision in order for a group to democratically perform a task. If a road needed to be built in Africa, no tribe came to a democratic decision to build the road, and then as a group go about building the road. The decision was made at the top, and the task was completed. In such a society, cuffed-hand thinking naturally develops. The people simply developed the thinking that we must ask the chief who owns everything.

When the Western missionary arrived on the scene, a new chief and source of finances came to the village. Now you know the rest of this story that has been repeated a thousand times over in Third World cultures. In order to overcome this national thinking toward the Western evangelist, some Western evangelists have sought to live as a Third World resident. However, the African looks down on the Western evangelists who would seek to live according to the economic situation of his Third World plight. The Westerner is thus caught in a no-win situation. The fact is that there will always be an economic barrier between First World evangelists and Third World residents. No Western missionary really wants to say as Peter, "Silver and gold have I none." On the other hand, it would be rather unwise for the Western missionary to subjugate himself and his family to the diseases and conditions of those who live in urban shanties and huts. Not only would it be unsafe in many situations, but local brethren would not have respect for such fake identification, since the locals know that one from the West does not have to live in such situations.

Third World residents must understand that it is not what the Western missionary has, but what he is. The Western missionary is a very complex individual in comparison to the normal Third World resident. He is highly

educated, motivated, trained, experienced and equipped. Place this individual in a cultural situation of individuals who are uneducated, unmotivated, untrained, unexperienced and unequipped and you can understand the Western evangelist's dilemma. He can never really identify with residents of a Third World environment. And the question is, Should he? Should he somehow escape from himself and struggle to be that which he cannot be? Cultural identification of the Western missionary in the Third World environment is an illusive dream. It can never be fully accomplished. My only advice to the Western evangelist is do the best you can and live with the frustration of not being able to fully identify with your Third World brother. My advice to Third World brethren is not to view the Western evangelist with cuffed-hand thinking. If you do, you can never fully understand his heart that brought him to your village in the first place. There will always be that barrier between you and him. You must learn how to live with the rich, without coveting the possessions of the rich. In the New Testament, Philemon was a slave owner. Onesimus was one of his slaves. However, they met in the same house church (Pl 1,2). Only in Christ can an environment of fellowship be established where poor brethren do not covet the riches of rich brethren.

Chapter 4

INTROVERTED CHURCHES

It is true that the church in Africa is growing exceedingly. People are coming to the Lord every day. Church groups are usually started by self-supported individuals who seek to preach the gospel in their areas. At the same time, however, many African churches, especially urban churches, have not captured the vision of supporting evangelists to go out and start churches. There are areas where individual African preachers have accomplished a tremendous work of establishing churches on their own, unsupported by the African church. They have gone out on their own and often worked alone. All the time they have not been supported by their African brethren. If they have been supported, the support has too often come from the Western church. The concept of African churches supporting their own evangelists has really not yet come to Africa. When I was in the West Indies in the 80's, I knew of no West Indian church who was contributing to evangelists on the islands. Of course, there are those cases where national churches are doing a great job in this area. But generally, this idea is still in the future for most African, West Indian, and many Latin American churches.

Part of the problem for this lies in the fact that foreign churches have been doing this work for so long in Latin America, the West Indies and Africa that the churches in these areas believe that the West should be doing this work. If new areas are to be opened, it is the tendency of Third World churches to sit back and let the West do the work by either sending missionaries or supporting local evangelists.

Before we are too hard on Third World local churches, we must also consider the American churches' foreign outreach of the restoration movement, which church was basically Third World then according to your economic standards of Third World countries today. It took the church of the Restoration Movement in America over one hundred years to get into any significant foreign missions. And when it did, the efforts were puny until after World War II. I suppose, therefore, that we should be more patient with the church in developing countries.

Nevertheless, I would encourage Western churches to be very responsible in these areas. The old American/business principle of throwing money at something in order to make it grow does not necessarily happen in a Third World context. One can prime the pump, but if the pump continually needs to be primed, it is broke. And there are a lot of broken churches in developing countries that will continue to be broken in world evangelism because someone from outside the local scene continues to prime the broken pump.

Churches in developing countries must stop seeing themselves as mission points. Newly established churches should be taught the responsibility of "freely giving as they were freely given to" if they were established through the efforts of an evangelist who robbed other churches in order to preach the gospel in their area. Instead of seeing themselves as only recipients of God's blessings, they should be taught to take ownership of their nation and reach out with the gospel. Unless this is taught and learned, we have not yet completely understood the true nature of Christianity.

An illustration of priming broken pumps can be clearly seen in the "church building culture" of churches in developing countries. Numerous church buildings have been constructed in developing countries because

of the sacrifices of foreign supporters. However, those churches for which buildings were built rarely reach out to help other churches in their own nation to build a building. They freely receive the funds for building their own building, but they are not giving one cent to help others build a building in a neighboring city.

Churches that have had their buildings built for them by someone outside their locality need to think again about the selfish religiosity they are teaching their children. If some other church or churches helped in the construction of your building, then you as a church are obligated to help someone else. "Freely you receive, freely give." When this principle is violated in Christianity, then we have constructed a religion after our own selfish desires. Because churches have violated this principle that is at the core of Christianity, they have ceased to grow once they have been seated comfortably in their own church building.

Chapter 5

END OF THE BUILDING OBSESSION

In the two decades before the writing of this book, I have heard of no church buildings being built in large urban centers of developing countries in Africa. I know that some have, but not as it was in the forty years after World War II. The reasons for this are simple. First, the supporting churches, primarily Western American churches, have long since learned that building a church building does not help a church to grow. In fact, they have had enough experience now in this matter to know that in the long term churches often die in their buildings. The building craze in Germany after World War II was the first evidence of this fact. Twenty-five years after buildings were built in Germany for the German church, many of the buildings were left sitting empty. The church in America has now learned that brick and mortar do not convert people. It is people taking the gospel message to people that converts.

Second, the leadership that now leads the church in America is a postmodern generation who have learned that a building is not the evidence of our presence and discipleship. Neither does it help in establishing relationships between disciples. The focus of this generation of disciples is on relationships. I see this as a profitable paradigm shift in the religious culture of the postmodern generation. It has been a turn away from physical structures being the evidence of our presence and proof of our stickability. Our message is the gospel, and it is the gospel that establishes relationships, not buildings. This generation of postmodern leaders are no longer interested in sending thousands of dollars to build church buildings throughout the world.

Third, the cost of construction in Third World urban centers is prohibitive. The first indications that the church building craze was going out first started in the late 80's and early 90's. The construction costs in urban centers around the world at this time, regardless of whether these centers were in Third World or First World economies, started to skyrocket from tens of thousands of dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars. And then in the late 90's and into the 21st century, the costs went from hundreds of thousands of dollars to millions of dollars. This increase in the amount of funds that are needed to build a church building in urban centers marked the death of the church building phenomenon in missions.

So now we are left with our relics of past methodologies, but have not yet awaken to the revelation that the building of church buildings in urban centers throughout the world is over. I suppose it will take another decade or two to wake up to this fact. In the meantime, while you are seeking to disagree with my thinking, keep in mind that we as the church will always be small in a world of Christendom that has gone wrong in reference to what is necessary to obey the gospel. We firmly believe that there is one baptism (immersion), and that one immersion is for remission of sins when one is crucified with Jesus and buried in the waters of baptism. This one teaching will keep us small in a world of religions that focus on miracles and whatnot in order to attract a generation of misguided religionists. Now then, think about building a one million dollar church building for a small group of fifty disciples who live in Santiago, Chile or Nairobi, Kenya.

But what should we be doing now? First, we must recognize that the church will build few urban church buildings in the future. Even in the American scenario where the church has stalemated in growth, there will be few buildings constructed. So keep in mind that those who previously built the buildings are themselves not building. Now if we continue to believe that these supporters will fork out millions of dollars to build buildings for a few disciples in Nairobi, Sao Paulo or San Juan, then your light has not yet flicked on.

What we have done in Cape Town, South Africa is

change. We have changed our thinking and our methodology. No church building has been built in Cape Town since 1991. But the church has far outgrown accessibility to the existing physical structures. Poor people have no cars. They cannot afford taxis and buses for families of five or six, or even less to be transported to a large assembly on the other side of town. Therefore, many disciples have taken Jesus back home to their communities and started meeting in their houses.

I see this as the future of successful urban missions throughout the world. If our "theology" (not biblical teaching) and methodology do not adapt, then we have doomed the church to death in large urban centers. Christianity is spreading rapidly throughout China. But it is not being evidenced to the public by the construction of church buildings on major street corners. In fact, I once read a *Time Magazine* article where the government went in and bulldozed a church building of a group who tried to do this. Christianity is growing in the millions across China from house to house. Any Western missionary who would go to China with the methodology of church buildings will not get past the bulldozers. If we cannot change our thinking from a building-oriented theology, then we will not be successful in evangelism in large urban centers throughout the world.

This is one reason why I believe the American church will not be able to adequately carry on with world evangelism. We must thank them for priming the pump. But now, the methodology for world evangelism must be accomplished by those who are trained in the real world of the Third World. And training evangelists for urban evangelism in the developing world will have to come from those who are house church trained. This is not an American culture. The religiosity of the American church is so steeped in church buildings that they will not be able to train missionaries in the culture of meeting from house to house. It takes a paradigm shift in thinking to be successful in house church evangelism, and that paradigm shift will not come out of the West. If I would be a prophet, I would speculate that world evangelism will next come out of China because the thinking concerning the assembly and edification of the disciples is in small groups from house to house.

Chapter 6

TRAINING LEADERSHIP

This is one area that is of vital importance to me, for I have been working with leadership training in mission areas since 1974. The reason I have is because the success of mission efforts depends on leadership training. In Third World environments, this is especially true because some of these environments do not stimulate the type of leadership qualities that are necessary to lead aggressively God's people into evangelizing an area, region or nation. Add to this the fact that new converts are often of the poor or the untrained workers in the economic structure. Trying to build leadership in any culture can be a challenge. Nevertheless, any long-term and successful mission outreach will concentrate on the adequate training of those who will lead the disciples, and thus, bring about stability and perpetual growth once the evangelist leaves.

In view of the preceding, however, there is an axiomatic truth about leadership. Every culture of the world has its own leaders. There is no such thing as a leaderless culture. The leadership that exists may not be what God would have for His flock. Nevertheless, the leadership is there. It only needs to be fine tuned according to the word of God.

The challenge of training leaders must be considered in the context of the phenomenal growth of the church in certain areas of the world, specifically on the African continent. The number of sub-Saharan Christians is growing significantly. The rate of growth is increasing every year. This presents a phenomenal challenge for new leadership. Practically speaking, new leaders must be trained for these new disciples in order that they survive. Many of the new churches that are started every year in mission areas do not live past infancy. Those that die, die because of a lack of leadership. In other words, the problem is not so much in the area of baptizing disciples, but in the fact that there are no leaders to nourish the infant believers on to maturity. They die before they get out of the cradle.

It is my opinion that a great deal of our efforts in leadership training must be directed to meet the need of a rapidly expanding global body. In meeting this need, we must also recognize that we are still emphasizing some traditional systems of leadership training that cannot meet the needs of a rapidly expanding church in rural settings as Africa where most of the disciples are located. And by traditional, I mean full-time residential systems of leadership training that cater more to the young and single. We must understand that the tradi-

tional system of resident leadership training will in no way meet the needs of a rapidly expanding church in a Third World environment. It has not met the need for mass leadership training in the past, and there is no indication that it will in the future.

Resident training is only one link in fulfilling the need of leadership training. It fills a need for training the young man who is ready and able to go through two to three years of training in a classroom, and then, get on with the work. There will always be a need for residential training programs. However this system of preacher training does not meet all needs of leadership training in a Third World context where finances are very limited. Some men do not feel called by God to preach the word until they are married and with children. With traditional systems of education these men have largely been ignored simply because they cannot quit their jobs in order to attend a resident program.

Whether or not we need to push for accredited residential schools is a matter of opinion. I do know that our graduates are in intellectual competition with denominational schools on an academic level. However, I have never been one to allow the denominational world to dictate to the church what she should or should not do. If we do, then we are often diverted from what the Scriptures consider to be our priorities. Keep in mind also that regardless of one's amount of diplomas and degrees, it is still a matter of how much one knows and teaches the Bible. Degrees do not convert people. The Bible does. And when it comes to growing the church, it is the Bible that produces faith and spiritual growth.

I would defend the concept of offering challenges to Bible students. Bible study is a lifetime adventure. If there is some honor given along the way, then we would give honor to whom honor is deserved. For this reason, we would give diplomas and degrees to students, knowing that when the highest degree has been earned, one continues to study. I believe one discredits his diploma in Bible study if he ceases his study after receiving an award. Nevertheless, if diplomas and degrees simply award one's level of study and application of the word of God, then they have their place in accomplishing the work of world evangelism. This is especially true if a degree in Bible will help a preacher secure a secular job for his support. There are still those government schools in Africa who will hire one who has a degree in Bible.

In 1997 I counted eighteen different resident schools of the church that were training full-time students in Africa. These were schools that were actually training men on a full-time basis, specifically for the purpose of preaching the gospel upon completion of their average two years of study. When all the enrollments of these schools were added together, I came up with a little over four hundred enrollees. One could only estimate the number of these who would actually graduate, and go on to play a leadership role in church establishment and edification. Several of those who were enrolled would not graduate, so there would be less than the four hundred who would actually make it past the requirements of the school and into the field of work.

You can see the problem of training through traditional residential schools. They are not meeting the need for training enough leadership for the church in an area where Christianity is geographical centered on expanding at an excellerated growth every year. The problem is that too many leaders need to be trained for the work. The need for leadership training is much larger than residential schools can handle. In the last few decades there has been a great change in leadership training in Africa. There are numerous systems of education that are now being implemented for training leaders. Our focus in the past was primarily on residential schools. But this has greatly changed in the last several years.

I do believe that if we focus only on resident systems of leadership training in a movement where churches are starved of leadership in rural settings, we will hinder the work, instead of spurring it on to greater growth. The reason for this takes no great reasoning. Resident schools in Third World environments simply cannot produce enough graduates. They take great financial resources to maintain, and the Western church can only support so many throughout the world. I believe the number of resident preacher training schools the Western church is going to support has reached the maximum. This is just an opinion, but I do know of many resident schools where the Western church is pulling out, not pushing forward.

The directors and staff of many present resident schools have realized that we are not meeting the need of training enough church leaders for the African church. As a result, they have added "mobile resident" programs to their present resident curriculum. What has happened is that through these extension programs they have taken the teachers out of a particular location where they traditionally called in the students for the classroom, and sent them to a classroom closer to the students. This is still a resident type program, but such is better meeting the needs of the rural leader. Because such programs have greatly enhanced the enrollments in these schools, we have learned that there are more students out there who want to study than can be supported to study in a full-time school at one specific location.

Then there is what I call **full distance training**

schools. An example of this type of program was the International Bible Institute in Cape Town. These programs have no residential student body. At the end of 1997 there was an active student body in this school of well over 1,700 students. About ninety percent of these students were in Africa. These students went through a thirty-five course curriculum that took the average student about five years to complete. Students were sent courses through the mail and required to complete certain requirements and final tests over each course. When students completed the entire curriculum, they had studied through over four thousand pages of materials. Most of those who graduate every year simply continued on with other courses because they were actively ministering to local churches for which they needed materials to preach and teach.

There are several advantages of full extension schools. One of the greatest advantages of this type of school is that students receive a tremendous amount of materials. The schools are also economical to operate. Money is channeled into materials instead of brick and mortar or housing for residential students. No large staff is needed to carry out the operation of the school. The credibility of distance training schools is in the material, not in the teachers. Once the material is written, the school can be sent anywhere in the world.

One of the primary advantages of full distance training schools is that they force the school to produce written material for the students. In training preachers in a classroom setting, handwritten classroom notes have limited value out in the actual field of labor. In residential schools in Africa and Latin American, I have found that many of these schools do not have the capability to produce classroom outlines and textbooks, nor are they financially able to buy and use textbooks for courses in the schools. As a result, the student is often limited to his own note keeping in a classroom situation where the only one who has prepared notes is the teacher. When the student graduates, he leaves the school only with his handwritten notes. A person can preach and teach through edited and printed materials. However, if he has to work through his own notes when on the field, he will struggle.

Another advantage of the full distance training programs is that they are feeding material continually to a church leader who is continually working in local ministry. We have found through the Institute that students are actively preaching and teaching the materials they are sent from the Institute. Several thousand people are being taught every week through the active student body. Through distance training, therefore, the Institute is not only training an enrollee, it is training the membership of many local churches. The longer the student is enrolled, the longer the direct impact the Institute has on the local disciples for which the student ministers.

So what do Third World churches need in reference to leadership training schools? The answer lies in the economics and the logistical situation of the student. Economically, the Third World church will not in the foreseeable future be able to fully support Western style full-time residential schools. At least this is true in the church, for none of our schools to my knowledge have done so to this date. Most of the present residential schools have been on foreign support for many years. They are still not financially liquid, and it does not look like they will be in the near future. The foreign supporting church has decreased their support of those schools that have been on the financial strings of foreign support for twenty to forty years. As a result, some of these schools are in financial straights. But we must be reassurred that local disciples will eventually sort through these struggles as they faithfully seek to train their own leaders.

The fact is that Third World economic environments cannot fully support full-time residential schools. The facts speak this truth regardless of what our opinion might be. Totally indigenous resident Bible schools have a challenging future. Maybe there will continue be such in the future, but the reality of having local schools that are fully supported locally is going to be a continued challenge in Developing World economies.

I do not believe that the answer to leadership training is in the Western system of residential training. I believe Americans would do well to learn from the British on this point. Because of a British Empire that was spread throughout the world in times of old, the concept of distance training became a common practice in all educational levels of the Empire. The South Africans capitalized on this point when they realized that taking students to the school would not reach the needs of most of the people, and thus, was born the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria. Today, this institution has over 125,000 students throughout the world who can go to the Doctor of Philosophy level through distance studies. I believe they have established a system that is a viable answer to the problem we are facing in leadership training in mission areas. They have proved a system that would greatly enhance our understanding of leadership training.

The UNISA system is not complex. Students can take five or six courses a year which is about all one can handle throughout a school year. The textbooks with study manuals are sent to the students wherever they are in the world. The students pay for the courses. For

the number of students, the course tuition completely pays for the school. At the end of the year, students must go to a specified testing center within the country where the student lives. UNISA has designated testing centers in most countries. The students are then given a test that is monitored. They are tested over the courses that they have studied on their own for the entire year. These tests are returned to the school for grading. If a final test is failed, the student can retake the test the first of the next year.

It is a marvelous system. And it works. It is one that allows the student to remain in his or her area where he or she lives. One can keep his job while studying through the courses. There are other aspects to the system of minor detail. The point is that UNISA has developed a system that is meeting the needs of tens of thousands of students throughout the world.

The strength of the system of UNISA is in the textbooks and study manuals of the curriculum. Much time has been put into writing these materials. Because of the quality of the studies and materials, thousands of people throughout the world are taking courses through UNISA. Once the student goes through these materials, he or she has a tremendous research library for continued studies. This is the great advantage of distance training schools. The extension aspect of the system forces the school to develop quality materials for study and research. This material is the lifetime library of the student.

There is a difference between programmed distance training material and the textbook/study manual system that is used by UNISA. Programmed extension materials are a self-contained workbook or book that is written in blocks of material with the purpose of taking a student through concepts and contexts. Questions usually follow each block of material and section tests usually cover several blocks of material. A final test is then given over all the material.

The disadvantage of programmed materials is that the material concentrates more on the questions than providing a student with a great amount of material for future preaching and teaching. The questions rehearse the student over material that he has read. How the questions direct the student is the key to the writing of the material. What one ends up with at the end of the day, however, is a workbook of questions, not a research book that could be effectively used for teaching and preaching.

Programmed material is not easy material to write. Few people can produce effective programmed materials. Because of the nature of good programmed materials, there is sometimes no good organized material from which to compose a good sermon or Bible class outline. This system also makes it difficult to be diverse in adding new courses. It is difficult to rewrite programmed materials once the initial course has been produced. If a course is to be rewritten, one usually has to rewrite the entire book, instead of simply revising a study manual.

On the other hand, the textbook/study manual/final exam system offers another possibly that has greater advantages in a distance training curriculum for Bible students. The textbook can be written by anyone. Almost any good doctrinally sound book can be used by those who operate the school. And when considering the range of books that have been written, the range is vast. Some brethren have written some fantastic materials that need to be used in mission efforts throughout the world. In using the textbook/study manual/final exam system, it is the task of the teacher to write the study manual in order to adapt the material to the students of the area. Through the study manual, words and concepts of the textbook can be defined and simplified. Each mission area can culturally apply through the study manual concepts that are stated in the textbook. In this way, almost any textbook can be made applicable to almost any cultural setting. Thus educators only have to produce a good study manual without having to research and write textbooks for their region, or even write programmed courses that would be applicable only to their cultural region.

In most of its courses, the Cape Institute followed the textbook/study manual/final exam system. In this way a great library were built in the homes of many church leaders throughout the world. Study manuals took students through a systematic study of the textbooks. The study manuals were the teachers of the school. But long after graduation, the student had a vast library in the textbooks for continual research and teaching. You might say that the purpose of such distance training schools was to familiarize a student with a vast library of materials through the use of study manuals. In this way these schools can use textbooks by a host of authors and teach them through the study manuals.

In the area of leadership training, I firmly believe that distance training is the system by which church leaders should be trained. Distance training schools can be operated at a fraction of the cost of residential schools. They can thus be indigenous, needing little partnership support from outside to print materials. In fact, if several distance training schools in different nations can work together, they can produce their own materials and share them. In 2000 the Cape Town Institute began a

feasibility study of doing just this. Four locations were chosen to use the materials that were produced in Cape Town. The four schools began using the curriculum of the Cape Institute. However, the schools were totally independent, and thus, used the courses according to the system of leadership training they chose for their area. By working in partnership in this way, the courses could be produced in great quantity in Cape Town, but used by everyone in the network. In this way, every partnered institute had access to courses which otherwise they would not have been able to produce.

In 2007 many more locally operated institutes came into the International Association of Bible Institutes (IABI). This association provided an umbrella accreditation for those who used the *Biblical Research Library Curriculum* (*BRLC*) in their local leadership training. The IABI produces the curriculum that can be accessed by local Bible training schools throughout the world. Thousands of leaders had access to a common curriculum through the many established local Bible institutes. The advantage of this was that all these locally operated institutes were working together in order to produce the *BRLC* which was available to everyone accredited with the IABI. It is a great system and one that is bringing quality materials and studies to local church leaders.

A note should be made here to emphasize the paradigm shift that needed to be made from traditional accreditation systems to the IABI system of accreditation. Traditional residential schools set up their own accreditation systems that were based on the concept of residential education. Requirements as buildings, libraries and qualified instructors were part of the standards by which a particular school acquired accreditation with a particular association of schools. However, when distance training entered into the educational world, traditional standards of accreditation did not apply. This was particularly true in reference to instructors and building requirements. In a distance training educational system, the material is the instructor. Students never personally face instruction in a building. Therefore, the standard of education in a distance training school is focused on the course material, not on instructors or a building for classrooms. For this reason, the IABI, and similar accrediting associations that focus on distance training, have shifted the paradigm in the field of accreditation. The quality of IABI accredited schools is not in ivy league buildings, Ph.D qualified instructors, or libraries, but in the quality of the material the student has been guided through in his studies and left with upon graduation. It is this material that will take the student through his ministry throughout his life. When training evangelists for the work of the ministry, this is the goal in theological education.

My point is that if we are going to train the vast number of leaders that need to be trained in a tremendously expanding church in the world, we must change some thinking. Systems of distance training are a major option to train the vast number of leaders who are out there and seeking training. They cannot leave their jobs. They do not have the money to pay tuition that is needed to make a resident school indigenous. Their only option is to receive courses in the mail or to be trained by distance training in regionally operated schools, or through the Internet.

My experience with present leadership training in missions is that change from residential to distance training, or even the addition of distance training programs to present residential structures, will be difficult in coming. Most Bible educators who make the decisions concerning educational institutions have been brought up in a culture that sees residential training as the only means of education. For this reason if these leaders will continue to bring their cultural heritage into mission areas where such a system has limited impact. Add to this the fact that there are a number of resident schools now in operation that are the dependent medium for the support of many people. Changing a system that has been in practice for several years will be difficult.

But there are some great variations to resident training happening as a result of the tremendous need of getting the schooling to the location and level of the vast majority of students who need training. I saw an interesting example of the residential arrangement in Ethiopia. In the preacher training that was taking place there, students were brought in for four-month full-time sessions of training in intensive studies. Two four-month study blocks were offered each year. Students could take any four-month block of studies they wanted. The churches in the area where the four-month sessions took place, sponsored the students who attended. In this way, the school could be somewhat indigenous. The system was working when I visited Ethiopia in ‘97 and it looked like it would continue to be successful in the future.

A similar system as the Ethiopian model was carried out for several years in southern Malawi. During the dry season, which is several months out of the year in southern Malawi, church leaders would attend six-week sessions of training at the Namikango Mission because there was nothing to do on the farms. The students could bring in their food, and thus study full-time for several weeks before returning to the farm. In this way also, students were not taken away from their families for great periods of time. The schools could also be

self-supported within the Third World economic structure of the country.

One thing is certain from what I experienced on my '97 teaching trip. Everyone was struggling with the problem of leadership training. Every conceivable system was being tried. Those systems that catered to the real needs of the local environment were the most successful. They were reaching more leaders. The leaders that were involved in these programs were being fed materials they could put to use immediately in their active work with local churches. All of these programs centered around some type of system of taking the opportunity for education directly to the working leader who could not uproot and go to some school.

I believe the true need for leadership training in Third World situations does not find its solution in the metropolitan classroom, but in the village of the bush. This is where the majority of the disciples are located. This is where our training should be taking place. The rural church is not an urban church. It is by far still rural and our leadership training should take this into account if we are going to meet the leadership training needs of the church for the future.

Chapter 7

THE MINISTRY OF TEACHING

I think one of the best pieces of advice that was given to me by an African leader was that in areas where the church is established, missionaries need to be teachers, not supervisors. I believe this is good advice for any prospective missionary, especially those who are older in age and have a great deal of experience. We need evangelists who are skilled in the work of strengthening the churches through the teaching of God's word. When one tries to stay in the area of supervision, the local Christian often feels intimidated by the missionary's presence, especially if the missionary is older in age. Local leaders often do not grow into their full potential in the presence of those who take dominant roles of leadership in the local work.

American missionaries are often forward, vocal and opinionated. Their cultural characteristics make it difficult for them to work in decision-making processes with Third World leadership where the culture is less aggressive. This is not to say that it cannot be done. There are some great examples of where it is being done. It just takes a little more precision than what one would need in his own culture.

I believe the above advice should encourage missions in the area of Bible teaching among established disciples. Such would include producing a wide range of materials in the local vernacular. Special seminars and meetings could be taught throughout a region. In this way, the missionary can be a tremendous asset to the growth of the church in any particular region. By working in order to hold up the hands of others, one can fulfill a great ministry in church edification and evangelism.

In this context, I would like to add another point of advice that several brethren of the world church have related to me throughout the years. They appreciate brethren who come over from the States to teach seminars, however, they feel that their teaching does not always meet the needs of the local disciples. What I believe they are indirectly saying is that they want teachers who know their situation to teach them seminars in applying the word of God to their situation. Brethren who come from a Western religious environment have a hard time understanding the Third World mind, and thus, have difficulty communicating practical applications of Scripture to real life situations in a Third World context. Teaching is thus often a system of doctrinal studies that are already known.

What leaders need is the application of the word of God to one's personal spiritual life in a culture that places different demands on them than the Western culture places on the Western Christian. For this reason, I would encourage more long-term missionaries to teach more seminars. I appreciate the young missionaries who come into the field, but we need "lifers" who have been in a particular culture for twenty to thirty years doing the teaching of seminars. I would also urge that some of our local brethren who live in the culture to also stand up and teach the seminars. There are some great brethren who live in Third World environments who can do a better job in teaching seminars than any visiting teacher could do. They can teach and apply in a way that the foreigner will never be able to teach and apply.

I would also suggest that the body does not need the importation of divisive issues from one area to another. What may be an issue in opinions in one country does not need to be made an issue in Antigua, Zambia or Brazil. There are too many "two week" missionaries from one region floating about the world church teaching is-

sues that have divided the church. It takes no little reasoning to understand that this is not good and a practice about which I would urge brethren to be very cautious.

In reference to seminars, we should not underestimate the power of the seminar. I have found that the most effective seminars are at least three full days in length. If this seminar can be in an isolated location where there are no distractions from the local environment, great things can be accomplished. The advantage of such seminars is that the student is saturated with a specific teaching day after day. He has time to talk at night with fellow attendees about the subject of the day. The impact of the subject is thus drilled into the thinking processes of the student. This impact changes thinking and lives. When the student leaves the seminar, for the next several months the local church is impacted by what he learned in the seminar. I believe this is one of the best ways of changing the thinking and work of the church in any given area. I would thus encourage more experience evangelists to conduct seminars. Those who know the culture of any particular location should be the ones who are teaching the seminars.

And while we are on suggestions for seminars, I would also encourage visiting teachers to teach expository lessons. This is the system of teaching by using the Bible text as the outline of the lessons that are presented. Everyone who attends the seminar has a Bible. If one's Bible is the permanent outline that is taught in the seminar, then the attendee has a permanent outline to take home and preach. Any subject that should be taught to a group of evangelists must come from the Bible in the first place. If teachers can help men with expository learning, then they will teach expository lessons when they go out to preach. In this way, everyone keeps their thinking in the word of God.

Before concluding this chapter, here is a thought concerning those who teach seminars, specifically those who come out of a Western culture. I have found that Western culture is a dominant culture, if not sometimes a little arrogant. It is competitive, individualistic and analytical. Now take one out of this culture on a two-week mission trip into a Third World context and you can imagine the relationship challenges between this Western resident and the typical humble personality that is greatly intimidated by the presence of such a personality. It is for this reason that Western visitors often come into the Third World environment with a behavior with which they are often unaware. They often view those to whom they go as "chauffeurs" to their needs and "bus boys" to carry them about here and there. This feeling is not only in their relationship with Third World residents, but also with the missionaries who work there. I have always thought it quite interesting that most American brethren view missionaries as inept theologians out of which little original thinking can originate. This prejudice sometimes leads American preachers to pay little attention to the thinking of missionaries, let alone a national resident of the Third World. Now if the American professional thinks this of the American missionary, you can only imagine their thinking concerning preachers who are not of the American religious or cultural scene. It is like a Third World resident being from Nazareth and traveling to Jerusalem among all the theologians.

But I would like to remind our Western counterparts that there are some great thinkers who actually do not live in America. They are great Bible students and very evangelistic. For many reasons, the Western church has ceased to grow, but the Third World church is growing tremendously. I would encourage the West, therefore, to look to those leaders in Third World environments for skills on how to get the Western church growing again.

I say the preceding not to discourage our Western brethren in their world travel to teach seminars and meetings throughout the world. I mean only to alert them to the fact that there are some challenges that Western teachers have that often work against them in their sincere efforts. When the Western teacher (or campaigner) leaves the Third World church on his way back home, the local brethren should not have to take a sigh of relief in order to get back to normality.

Chapter 8

A LANGUAGE BRIDGE

Small events often change history forever. When Spain sought to invade England in 1588, the Spanish Armada lost most its ships, and thus the small island nation of England survived and became a world empire. The English language became the world trade language. Today, the information highway, the Internet, is based on the English language. It is as if God had something to do with the sinking of the Spanish Armada in order to prepare the way for the spread of the gospel throughout the world today. As was Koine Greek in the

first century, so English is today. Any nation that would become a part of the global community must teach English to its citizenship.

When Kabila took over the nation of Zaire (now, The Democratic Republic of Congo) by means of a military struggle, he committed the people to learning English. When the nation of Namibia became an independent country, the government made English the official language. English was to be the language of instruction in every school. English was to be spoken on the school grounds. When the Ethiopian government set a policy to keep the people divided by encouraging local vernaculars to be the language of regions, the people were frustrated since Amharic and English had been widely spoken in the country. When I first visited Angola in 1996, I was surprised to see so many people in the cities who were seeking to learn some English. It was a country that had been cut off from the world by a war for over thirty years. English is an official language in many of the nations of Africa. China is teaching its population English. Japan and other nations throughout the world are doing the same. It is as if we have gone back 2300 years to the days of Alexander the Great who initiated the learning of the Greek language throughout the ancient world.

At least in the southern part of the continent, English is gaining predominance as the first language of many countries. It is already the trade language of the world. It is the language spoken in government, trade and by African travelers throughout the continent. It is by far the most international language that is spoken throughout the world. It is taught in almost every school system on the continent of Africa and in most countries throughout the world. English no longer belongs to America and England. It is the language of the world.

Regardless of all the efforts to make other languages international, English will prevail because the technological leaders of the world use English as their medium of communication. CNN is in English. *Time Magazine* is in English. International journals and books are in English. The Internet is English. The computer world is based on English. Machine manuals and travel documents are in English. The world knows this, and in order to maintain contact with the world, English must be taught and known by the world citizenship.

So here we are, standing with a tremendous opportunity before us. There are millions of people in the world who are in active programs to learn English. I would predict that those countries who never teach their population to know English will always be hindered in their economic growth. Or at least, the ones in the Third World who succeed will know English in order to deal with the developed world. It is at the point in many countries that a young lady cannot get a job as a secretary if she does not know English. The business with which she works is connected in business with an English speaking world.

So what does this mean for world evangelism. At least for leadership training in the church, it is significant. Knowing English is a tremendous advantage for leaders of the church. Knowing English is by no means a requirement or necessity in order to lead a church. But the church leader who knows English has a tremendous advantage in accumulating English materials and teaching such to local disciples. There is a whole library in English that will never be translated and printed into local languages. Knowing English opens up an entire world to the local leader, not only for personal reading and study, but also for education.

Almost everywhere I go in seminars throughout the world, brethren have asked if I could have a particular book translated into their local language. I have come to the point of saying that such will never happen. It is difficult to get funds to print even the English edition of books let along translations into various other languages. But even if there were funds for translation, few people have the time and language skills to produce a good book. In one region in Africa where the church has existed for forty years, two books have been translated into the local vernacular. I am sure this is true of most areas of Africa, for Africa is a continent of thousands of languages and dialects. We will never be able to translate and print any significant number of books into the local languages of cultures throughout the world.

We have always worked to produce materials in English since this is the world langauge. There are similar international press operations throughout the world who do the same. I have often been amused by some brethren who speak a particular local language other than English why we do not produce something in their own language. My simple answer for this is why does the brother who asks the question not organize the local churches to produce the material in the local language? International operations cannot fill the tremendous demand for millions in English when the local church in a specific area only wants thousands in a local language. Instead of depending on someone else to write or translate material, and then print it, local brethren must work together in order to produce literature in their own language.

It is not that a great deal of material must be produced in a particular local language. Only selected material on fundamental teachings and a few evangelistic tract titles need to be produced. But this responsibil-

ity has been so often left to the visiting evangelist that the local brethren have little vision concerning the production of literature in their world language.

If there is not the demand for the material in a particular local language, which demand should be determined by local brethren, then it is not financially expedient to produce such small amounts of literature to reach only a small population? When it comes to producing international publications, these works must focus on international needs. When producing materials for local needs, local brethren must learn to work together in order to produce the materials they need for their local outreach.

So what must we do? Church leaders who know English can study in English and preach in Tonga, or Twi, or Chichewa. The answer is that church leaders learn English. This opens the door for them to research in English, and then teach the church in the local vernacular.

My perception of the present African church is that a great leadership is arising. And interestingly enough, those leaders who are becoming great leaders among their own people know English. Even in those areas where English is not the spoken language, leaders who speak English are emerging. It would be interesting to know what percentage of the preachers in Africa actually know English. I would guess that the vast majority do, and thus, have a tremendous opportunity of receiving and using English materials in their leading of the local churches for which they teach in local vernaculars.

The rise of the English language also presents a tremendous opportunity for Bible correspondence course programs. I believe we have not yet touched the surface of the effectiveness of correspondence course programs throughout the world. There are thousands of individuals who are looking for study materials in English to supplement their school studies in English. What an opportunity for any church that is interested in conducting a Bible correspondence course program. I have even had schools ask for doctrinal Bible correspondence course materials to use in their Bible classes in public schools. It would be a key ministry of a church or churches to contact and supply public schools with Bible correspondence courses.

It has been difficult for developing world cultures to produce writers. There are reasons for this, but at the end of our complaints to have materials in our own language, local writers will have to come to the writer's table. Translating material from another language is fine. But where are the local students of the Bible who can inscribe their thoughts in their native language. I have always found it interesting that there are many who are eager to translate someone else's material, but they are not eager to study and write their own. Where are the literary students of the Bible in India or Africa? Must we always translate materials from the West?

It is my challenge to the Bible students of the developing world to arise to the occasion. Study the Bible. Write your own material, and then, find those who will help you print it. If you cannot find people to print several hundred copies, then print only ten copies. Have ten people read those copies, and then pass them on to another ten people. If someone wants a copy, then they can pay for the copy to be made. In this way you will accomplish your goal of writing and have others read your studies.

Chapter 9

ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN

I write this chapter on behalf of my Third World brethren who often have a difficult time understanding the Western missionary. In order to understand this enigma of the First World, I would encourage my Third World brethren to be patient with those who come from the West into their economic environment. The one who comes must be commended for seeking to do that which is very challenging, that is identify with a Third World context. It is very challenging for Western evangelists to walk in the shoes of those who are in a truly Third World economic environment. We cannot, therefore, accuse the First World missionary of not being sincere. On the contrary, his sincerity is exemplified in the fact that every effort is being made to identify with the Third World culture. And once we better understand the environment from which a First World disciple comes, we can better appreciate his sacrifices for leaving his environment. It is not, therefore, that we would be envious of what he may possess in our presence. We must appreciate who he is because of what our First World missionary gave up in order to be in our presence.

Western missionaries who have been in Third World environments for many years clearly understand what I will say in this chapter. Those missionaries who origi-

nated from and were born out a First World environment have a difficult problem with their identity with the Third World. In fact, you would have to say that they cannot fully identify with the Third World if they have been born out of a First World context. The two worlds are so far apart that it is difficult for First World residents to fully understand a Third World context.

As an example of the preceding, the homes of the two cultures are vastly different. The Western missionary wife works in an appliance store, the husband in an electronic office outlet, and the children sleep in a "Toys R Us" bedroom. When they go as missionaries into all the world, they load these environments into shipping containers and transport them off to the Third World where the same arrangement is installed in a mansion in the rich part of the big cities. They hire guards and buy the most fierce dogs, build a barricade around their environment, install bugler alarms, and a host of other precautions to guard their imported life-style. We then sit back in the cool atmosphere of air conditioning and read books on identification with foreign cultures. I suppose the residents of the host Third World country should be reading those books that will help them understand the enigma that has just moved in next door.

The dilemma of identification the Third World missionary was exemplified by the young African a particular missionary was encouraging to be a missionary himself to another African country. The young African brother responded, "But how can I ever afford a 4X4 Pajero to do the work?" The reply says a lot concerning the model we have established in missions in Third World contexts.

So here we are. The foreign evangelist has come out of a culture that is so distant from the Third World that there is no possible way for him to identify closely with his Third World brethren. His true identification with his Third World brethren who live in a completely different environment is only theoretical. It is usually something that is taught in a textbook in a First World classroom. Those textbooks were often written by men who went to Africa in the 1800's or early half of the 20th century. Those missionaries often came out of a Third World rural environment of America to a Third World environment of Africa. In those years there was not much of a change in living conditions. Their identification was easier. They simply moved from a wood hut in America to a grass hut in Africa. But the American economic and cultural environment of the present prospective missionary presents challenges that are vastly different. There is a great deal of difference between even small town America and the village of Africa.

Today, the Western missionary comes with his expensive equipment that is indicative of the culture out of which he was produced. He not only has an automobile, it is a 4X4. He has a computer, a dishwasher, an iron, a microwave, a refrigerator, and the list goes on. He has come with a host of gadgets into a non-gadget culture that has been caught in an economic time machine that ran down somewhere around the turn of the 19th century.

The Western missionary comes from a culture of models on how to do almost anything. He has grown up in an environment of opportunity, enterprise, schooling and degrees. He comes to a culture of illiteracy and no opportunity. He comes to a culture that has been trapped in pre-l900 economic and life-style, a culture of fatalism and no hope for any development in the future.

So the missionary is now in the new culture of the Third World. He seeks to identify with the local culture. He has memorized Paul's statement, "I have become all things to all men." However, in the new culture everyone knows that if the missionary needs something, he can go on a fund-raising trip to a land that seems to provide everything that he requests. When he becomes real sick, he can buy a plane ticket to a better hospital. When he gets tired, he can escape to a far away land. When something breaks, he can afford to buy a replacement. When he wants a book, he can buy it. You get my point. I would say that there can never be the real textbook identification of the Western missionary that is the product of the present American culture with the culture of the typical rural Third World dweller. I really doubt that he can ever say in a Third World context, "I have become all things to all men."

African missionaries know this. This is no new revelation. How to deal with the problem is another matter, and one with which many African missionaries struggle, knowing that there is no real solution. The missionary is stuck in a situation for which little mission training is given in the States to prepare the prospective Western missionary for Third World living. Much discussion is carried on in the area of cultural identification, but little deals specifically with recognizing the impossibility of the Western resident to identify with rural Third World environments. Western evangelists often go to the field assuming that they are Western and Africans are Africans, and there will always be a vast difference in economics, education and culture between the two. This assumption is right.

Now comes the challenge. How can the Western evangelist ever give a life-style example of Christian behavior to those in the Third World to which he has come? This is a challenge when it comes to commit-

ment and sacrifice. One could set an example of commitment, but it is easy to be committed when you have so much material security behind you. One would set a model of faith, but it is easy to have faith in God when their is a financial solution to most problems? One would set a model of trusting God, but it is easy to trust in God when helping brethren are available by the touch of an icon on a computer screen and an E-mail away. One could set an example of leaning on the counsel of your African brethren, but it is easier to telephone America.

The Third World resident knows he can never be as the Western missionary. He knows he will never have all the gadgets, or books, or plane tickets, or Pajero. The missionary has set a standard to which he can never rise. So what does the Western missionary do in such situations? Does he sell his 4X4, his computer, his library of books, move into a hut, deny the plane tickets, books, big house, forego the hospital, the medication, etc.? The African knows the American would never do this, nor does he believe he should do this. In fact, the African is so well-acquainted with the American that he would think there is something seriously wrong with the American if he tried to be as the African. So both the American and African know the dilemma. This does help the matter to some extent. However, it does not make the problem go away.

So where do we go from here? This situation will not change. I would suggest that there be more preparation for those who are moving into Third World environments in order that they be better equipped to deal with this dilemma. It is good to study the culture into which one goes. But we must also study why and how we deal with our First World culture in a Third World environment. I have observed that missionaries are going to maintain their First World standard of living. I have not seen any missionaries living in any huts. Therefore, how can the First World missionary maintain a First World standard of living in Third World mission efforts without making their world the model to which the national should aspire? How can the Western missionary work in a non-identifiable situation in which all Western missionaries are in when they live in Third World environments? How can the mission be more effective while maintaining a standard of living in a world where conditions are certainly substandard by Western measurements? This is the challenge of the Western missionary as he or she moves to the typical Third World country.

Unless the Western evangelist is aloof, this challenge will always be with him as he lives with brethren with whom he seeks to be on a common fellowship basis in a local Third World setting. He will never be on a man-to-man relationship, brother-to-brother relationship that would exist in his own First World culture. This does not happen between First World and Third World Christians. There are a great deal of gaps between the two cultures. This does not mean that the Western culture is better. It simply means the residents in both Third and First World cultures are on two different pages when it comes to standards of living.

So what is a Western missionary to do? He must first recognize the problem. Recognizing the problem is admitting that it is there. Dealing with the problem is something else. One must seek to be sensitive to those of a Third World culture, knowing that one's brother in the Third World will never have the privileges one has in the First World. Flaunting one's wealth or possessions is pride. Coveting one's things is just that, covetousness. Being insensitive to the poverty in which one lives is not Christian. I have found that every Western evangelist deals with this challenge in slightly different ways. Those evangelists who have been on the field for many years, do recognize the problem and try to deal with it in some way. However, most see this as just a challenge with which we must live, and then carry on. But in carrying on, there is that frustration one has because he is so far away from his Third World brother when it comes to economics.

In our world evangelism efforts it seems that Western missionaries often have some economic boundaries. The boundaries are established by the economic fringe that extends out from the business/industrial center of any particular country. There is some "First World" in every country of the world. This First World economic is usually in the major metropolitan cities of the countries. The Western evangelist finds himself comfortable in this environment, while making mission trips into what he calls the "interior." The interior is actually the Third World of the nation in which he is living. The boundary of his living is the city limits of the First World economy of the city in which he lives. I would assume that by far the majority of the Western evangelists of the church are living within the economic boundaries of the metropolitan areas of the nations in which they live. I know that I have lived in both. But to be fair to many mission outreaches, this is often necessary if the missionary is working in a supportive role with the church in the country. This is especially true if he is working in the area of radio broadcasting, literature production, or any other mass media effort to evangelize the nation.

Courageous are those First World evangelists who go beyond the economic boundaries and are living in

the Third World environments of the countries in which they reside. If you are a local Third World resident and there is such an evangelist who is truly living in your situation, then you have a real jewel in your presence.

Chapter 10

MONEY AND MISSIONS

A common "problem" that we often feel hinders Third World churches is the lack of finances to support evangelistic efforts that are necessary to grow. However, I personally believe there are some unfortunate assumptions in reference to this business/industrial concept of church growth. When discussing spiritual matters we must not assume that it takes money to cause church growth. If Africa and India are any evidence of growth without money, then we could say that the less the money, the more the growth. The church in both Africa and India are very poor. But at the same time, the greatest growth of the church that is going on in the world today is in Africa and India. The least amount of growth going on at this time is in the West where there is a lot of money. Now go figure. The point is that it does not take money to make the church grow. One may think it does, but our thinking may be that we want that Pajero.

Nevertheless, there is usually a great void in Third World church giving to support preachers. This is especially true in those areas where there has been a long missionary presence. As long as the missionary is present, there seems to be the feeling on the part of the local church that in some way the missionary will cover all needs for that which must be supported.

There could be many reasons for the lack of sacrifice on the part of Third World churches to support their own works. However, I say this in view of two very important facts. First, I do know that the Macedonia churches gave out of their deep poverty in order to help famine victims in Judea (2 Co 8:1-4). They went beyond measure to make this contribution. In fact, they begged Paul to take their contribution in order that they might have fellowship with all the saints (2 Co 8:4). The Philippian church at the very beginning of its establishment, sent support once and again to Paul, Silas and Timothy in Thessalonica (Ph 4:16). We would do well in mission efforts in the Third World to teach these responses of the early Christians to the common needs of the work of God (See At 2:44,45; 4:34,35). Regardless of where one is financially, a true disciple of Jesus will always seek to help others.

Secondly, I would also point out that there are numerous examples where Third World churches are supporting their own works. This occurs primarily among denominational religious groups. There are many examples where denominational religious movements in Africa have sacrificially given to promote their movements. There are numerous examples of these groups working sacrificially in order to preach the gospel to the lost. I once met an individual who constructed houses in Cape Town. He would build houses for about three months, and then he would take his savings and go preach meetings. After preaching several meetings, he would then get a contract to build more houses in order to preach more meetings. Such examples let us know that where there is the will there is a way.

I do not want to overlook those examples among us where churches are making sacrificial efforts to preach the gospel. There are some very good examples of churches in Africa and India who have arisen to the occasion to support mission works. These are indigenous churches that are supporting their own work and carrying out the work of God in their lives. I visited one such church that was sending out two missionaries the day I visited. The church was about 150 strong and very dedicated to evangelism. They had been initially started by a missionary. There are other examples where Third World churches have sent out evangelists, but generally speaking, these are exceptions to the rule. Evangelists generally cannot be sent out with full-time support simply because in Third World churches, everyone must use what money they have to survive. But evangelists are going forth, though the distance they go is not as extensive as the Western evangelist. Where the church is established, especially in rural settings, I can confidently affirm that African brethren are busy about their evangelism of their regions.

I see a general nature among most of our churches in Africa not to financially support the sending of evangelists. Part of the problem may be that many African churches have not been given examples of how they can actually conduct a supported mission effort. Too often we have confined our brethren to the concept that contribution means money, and only with money can mission work be done. In Third World situations, money is not there to do the type of mission work that is carried out by Western churches. Other systems of sup-

porting missions must be emphasized. The Philippians gave "things" in order to support Paul (Ph 4:18). African brethren in rural areas can feed preachers out of their gardens. They can send fruits and vegetables over to another village to feed an evangelist. Several churches are doing this. However, we must encourage Third World churches to support evangelists after their own abilities and means, not according to Western abilities and means. Missions simply cannot be carried out in the manner by which the West conducts its mission programs.

It is a matter of getting past the Western example. I would encourage Third World evangelists to look past the Western evangelist in order to determine how evangelism can be carried out in a local context. We appreciate the Western church priming the pump. But after the pump is primed, we must carrying on with what we have. Complaining about having no finances does not solve the problem. We must pray about the situation, and prayer is always answered when directed to the saving of souls. God opens doors that can be entered by evangelists, regardless of their financial abilities. The kingdom of God is not measured in dollars and cents. It's expansion is determined by doers of the word.

One encouraging sign in Africa concerning evangelism is the fact that Africans are planting churches every year by the hundreds. Though African churches are slow in supporting evangelists to go out as Western churches do, African evangelists are going out. They are taking an initiative to preach the gospel. Credit should be given to some great African evangelists, who against all odds and discouragement, have taken it upon themselves to get the job done. I believe the actions on the part of these brethren speak highly of their desire to preach the gospel.

I have observed that where the movement of the church is indigenous and without the presence of Western influence, the local church has a greater chance of rising to the occasion of supporting their own work. I suppose as long as the missionary is present, there is always the feeling that the missionary and his supporting churches will carry the load. But in those areas where there is no hope of foreign support, Third World churches usually arise to the occasion and do what is supposed to be done. At least, this is what is happening in India and Africa where the church is growing faster than in any other place of the world.

Chapter 11

CONFIDENT CHURCHES

As stated in the previous chapter, African churches can do mission work. Their efforts are not as grandiose as Western efforts, but they can expand as leaven in their regions with works that eventually spill over into other regions, and then others. Please keep this in mind in reference to what follows in this chapter.

In 1997 I took a Seminar Safari up through East Africa where I experienced many African churches who were doing a great work in reaching out in evangelism. I visited Ghana several times in the mid 1980's where I had the same experience. The churches of Ghana have accomplished a great deal on their own since the 80's and the explosion of growth that took place in the decades of the 80's and 90's. There have been similar indigenous efforts throughout Africa and India that have occurred separate from the influence of the Western church. In Ethiopia, Malawi and Nigeria specifically, successful efforts are happening as different African national churches accept the challenge of evangelizing Africa. In the West Indies and Latin America, however, the growth is slow. There was growth in both areas, but nothing like the growth of the church in India and Africa.

I did discover an interesting lesson on one of my journeys through Africa that not only myself but other missionaries noticed in the African church environment. In those areas where there had been long term contact with a Western missionary, the African brethren were often too dependent on the missionary or missionaries to initiate or subsidize evangelistic efforts. This was not necessarily any fault of the missionary. It was simply the "foreign aid mind" that had been developed in the African for the last two centuries. His dependency thinking simply clicked into gear when there was some foreign source present. Though the missionary practiced strict indigenous principles, the local brethren still would often not leap into action by claiming their region for themselves, and thus initiate church planting. It was simply felt that the Western missionary should initiate most of the church establishment. When the churches were established, they would maintain the churches. But to initiate church establishment was often challenging.

When the missionary did leave those areas where his presence had been felt for several years, the churches

would generally go down in membership. Some churches would fizzle out. However, those churches that stayed, usually started to grow again. They did grow, but their growth into maturity had to be without the presence of the Western missionary. They had to do it on their own.

Most foreign missionaries have experienced the preceding pattern of growth in most Third World environments. Because Africans were "taken care of" during the colonial years, and "hand fed" during the foreign aid years, there is a dependency thinking that I call the African foreign aid mind. Add to this the policy of many denominational mission groups who pour funds into hundreds of development projects and church projects to uplift their works. When the African sees the Western missionary, therefore, he sees one who seems to have an unlimited source of funds. The national worker thus thinks that the missionary is the source of all financial help.

I would not be too critical of Africa on this point. After all, when living in an area where there are few resources, I would do the same if walking in the shoes of my Third World brethren. In the African context, however, there is an added challenge to ridding one's culture of a "cuffed hand" thinking. Almost all of subSaharan African cultures were born out of a tribal social structure. In the tribalism system of culture, social function was based on the permission of the chief. If one wanted to build his hut in a certain location, the chief had to be consulted. If one wanted to plant his garden in a certain location, the chief had to be consulted. The chief possessed all the land, and thus permission had to be given by him if land was involved in any function of society. Permission from the chief to accomplish most things within his territory had to be received before one could act. This practice is still very alive throughout subSaharan Africa today.

Now add to the preceding the practice of the colonials when they arrived. In the colonial system, permission and supply also came from someone on top. Previously, the chief owned all the land, and then after the arrival of the colonials, the colonial owned all the land, and thus took the place of the chief in government. So when the colonials left the governments in the hands of the Africans, they actually stayed in the sense that they were the source of supply to the continent through foreign aid. Whenever a "national" government wants anything today, a delegation is sent from the African government to the former colonial power. So why would we blame the African for a "cuffed hand" culture? You are what your history dictates.

It is the colonial mind set with the horizontal handshake that is often subconsciously looking for another handout. We must understand that it was the colonial West that produced this mentality. It was not in the African before the arrival of the colonial powers. In pre-1900 days, the African handshake was vertical with a spear in the other. The colonial changed all this. Missionaries are now faced with the challenge of straightening out this thinking with Bible teaching on Christian responsibility.

In seminars I have taught much on tentmaking missions, that is, evangelists supporting themselves. I have taught much on 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, where Paul explained the principle that if a man will not work, neither let him eat. These and other concepts in the New Testament help Third World brethren understand that they must stand on their own. When this is understood, then indigenous mission efforts spring forth from churches that decide they will on their own evangelize their areas.

One of the problems with the Third World today is that the West is teaching it that Third World residents are poor. And to a great extent, this is true. But there have been so many efforts to relieve poverty that anyone who lives in the Third World now thinks he is poor if he does not possess a car, television or some other symbol of First World prosperity. The problem with a "poverty mentality," as opposed to true poverty, is that one forgets how to help others. He sees himself as a recipient, not a giver. He will freely receive, but rarely freely gives. When one becomes a disciple it is difficult to change this thinking. In fact, in the presence of Western influences many become "Christians" for the purpose of seeing what they can get.

I have always thought that it is interesting to see the difference between what the Bible considers poverty and what the First World defines it to be. In the Bible, the poor are defined as those who have no food to eat or shelter in which to live. That definition is still true today, regardless of our First World definitions. We must keep in mind that if one is convinced that he is poor, he will take little initiative to reach out to help others. We must always keep in mind that the widow of Jesus' day gave her last two coins for the temple tax. She did so in the presence of Jesus who was standing there seeing her make her contribution. Jesus did not tell anyone to give her two coins back.

Chapter 12

THE RISE OF LEADERSHIP

Western culture often produces a very dynamic and aggressive personality. Westerners are on time, meticulous in accounting, perfectionist in precision, counting time by money, in a hurry here and there, productive, productive, productive. With all this hype, the Western missionary has a difficult time identifying with Third World cultures that seem to be just this side of neutral.

In the African village, there is no clock, no demand to get the job done on time, no schedule, and time does not mean money since there is a great deal of time but very little money. However, this does not mean that the African village culture is devoid of leadership. In measuring leadership by Western standards, you can see why Western missionaries often judge Third World cultures as having no leadership. If we associated aggression with leadership, then some African cultures might be judged to have no leadership. If we judge leadership to be highly organized with timetables and schedules, then I suppose there is not much leadership in many Third World cultures. But is leadership to be judged by the leadership standards of the West? We must remember that there are other standards for leadership in other cultures. After all, the West did not exist in the first century. Nevertheless, it seems that the first century church had some pretty good leadership that took the disciples into all the world.

I have caught myself judging that there was no leadership when actually I was judging that there was no Western style of leadership. I needed to take a few steps back and down and look at the situation through Third World eyes. It is only then that one can see leadership in a non-Western context.

As in all cultures, leadership must be trained and fine tuned. Enhanced leadership makes things go better. This is true in all cultures. But to assume there is no leadership in a particular village or church because the inhabitants do not perform according to Western standards is to misjudge the situation. In my travels throughout Latin America, the West Indies and Africa I am greatly encouraged by some of the tremendous leadership that is characteristic of some very godly Christian men. Under some of the worst social and environmental conditions, these men are maintaining a godly example to which others cling for survival. These men do not always have "Dale Carnegie" leadership skills, but they know how to lead their people. They simply remain there when everything else is falling apart. That is the best leadership of all. Good leaders just stay faithful to God when Satan deals his heaviest blows.

Christians follow men and women who praise God during times of famine, war and pestilence. Herein is the godly leader. It is the one who maintains his faith when church members starve, bandits kill members, war ravages the region, and members die of disease. Herein is the leadership during the trials of which Peter spoke in 1 Peter 1:6,7. *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* Great leaders in the church are not necessarily those with organizational skills. Such is a Western standard of leadership. But in Third World environments great leaders are often those men who by their example of faithfulness lead the disciples through times of war, famine and pestilence. Because of their faith that is focused on Jesus, they lead the church in suffering through times of tribulation.

Many leaders know how to lead by organizing all the members into programs and schedules. But few know how to lead a church through famine, war, pestilence and political oppression.

I say all the preceding as a positive note for Third World leadership. As a negative, some African church leaders have a tendency of being very dominant with churches. Often, one church has one leader, and that leader functions in an often lording manner in relation to the members. In a culture of chiefs, dictators, power hungry politicians, church leaders often have a tendency to adopt the practice of their culture in order to lead the church.

This is a significant problem in a Third World context. Too often it is the dominant and educated who lead the poor and ignorant. This was the Liberian problem for a century and a half. After the American Civil War, freed slaves were given freedom to return to Africa. Liberia ("freedom") was established for this very purpose. However, the educated American slaves returned to Liberia and oppressed the local African villagers who already lived in Liberia. The villagers were poor, backward and uneducated, and thus, became the opportunity for dominant freed slaves to find a kingdom over which to reign. They thus lived in relation to

the local villagers as their slave owners in America had related to them in a master/slave relationship.

In order to train leaders who are not dominant, much has to be studied in the area of servanthood leadership. Anyone who would do mission work in a Third World context must deal with this subject in training leaders. It is a problem that prevails in many cultural environments throughout the world. At least this has been my experience in Latin America, the West Indies and Africa.

Africa offers some challenges in training leadership that may not be in other cultures of the world. In *African Missionary Pilot* I once wrote of my perceptions concerning the environment in which the rural African often lives. In this environment he struggles to offer leadership to disciples who are struggling with him in order to serve God.

> We too often take for granted the tame environments in which we live. Africa is a diverse continent. It is a land of struggle, despair and hardship. Nevertheless, such an environment often lays the foundation for a hope of better things in the afterlife to come. The African is often fatalistic about life. Nothing has worked out right for the past ten centuries. He wonders why we should hope for the future. If he had to hope concerning a better place in this physical world, he knows that he will be disappointed. If you lived in his environment, you could understand why he is so fatalistic about life. You would be, too.
>
> A tribal conflict breaks out. Innocent mothers, fathers and children die in the endless conflicts of power struggles of what should be outdated in civilized society. It seems that civilization always hangs by a thread in some African countries. Power and money hungry dictators live in an unreal world apart from the desperate from whom they have embezzled millions of dollars. Roads go unprepared, agricultural skills go unknown, and hospitals become halls of despair as pompous aristocrats lie at ease in palaces that have been purchased by "misdirected" foreign aid. This is Africa (TIA).
>
> Famine administers its relentless blow as the suffering stumble around in soil of clods that has long ago given up productivity. Farmers hope at the sight of a cloud, but sigh as another day goes by without any rain. TIA.
>
> Nevertheless, the relentless sufferings of existence of the inhabitants of the African environment have made Africans a resilient people. A humble, or maybe "humiliated" culture has been produced that is free of the self-seeking cycle of materialism. A communal life of interdependence has emerged as many rural people seek to depend on one another for survival. People lose faith in politics and politicians who have increased their subjects' hostile dilemma and have failed to deliver them from their wretched environment. People have learned to trust in one another, or at least, search for security in other places than government. This is rural Africa. (TIA.)
>
> Hope is heightened by the depths of despair. And in Africa hope runs high as residents search for the Hope of all hopes. As we lift the crucified Savior on a cross before the hearts of searching souls, hope is revived. Strength to endure a hostile environment revives the souls of those who thank God for the One who came. Surely, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things*." TIA.
>
> These "beautiful feet" remember that *"you sent aid once and again for my necessities"* (Ph 4:16). The hopeless are receiving hope because of those who have sent. Therefore, *"we seek the fruit that abounds to your account"* (Ph 4:17). If you are a sender, evangelists throughout Africa thank you on behalf of the destitute, on behalf of those in hopeless situations who now have hope. Praise God for your concern, for your sacrifices that are *"a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God"* (Ph 4:18).

One of the greatest blessings that has come to places like Africa is biblical literature for the education of the leaders of the church. When I lived in the West Indies I piloted an airplane with which we flew tons of literature to leaders throughout the islands. In Africa we mailed and shipped tons of literature to faithful men who were leading the church. For years we have been distributing literature that has had a tremendous impact on thousands of people. One evangelist from Livingstone, Zambia once wrote,

> *Allow me to comment that I am finding the courses of the Institute so very interesting and spiritually building. They have personally helped me in my area of teaching materials as a religious educational teacher in secondary schools. The courses have given me further training in my profession. I want to sincerely thank you for giving me this opportunity.*

One of the evangelists in Uganda once wrote,

> *I am writing to express my thanks to God and my gratitude to you and the staff of the Institute for properly handling some of the most controversial subjects of the Bible.*
>
> *I carefully followed your explanations using the Bible to prove every point you explain. It is really very interesting and wonderful for me to learn that the Sabbath was not set aside as a day of worship because it was hallowed and that there were many other sabbaths mentioned in the Old Testament which are not observed by sabbatar-*

ians today. Course 106 has greatly expanded my understanding of Jesus' present reign. For years I have misunderstood the comprehensive authority of Jesus.

The above mentioned courses have definitely challenged some of my old thinking and brought to light a more complete understanding of the above mentioned subjects. I hope and pray that these courses will be beneficial to many other students, especially to those who study them with an open mind and not in a spirit of controversy.

From Egypt, one of the International Bible Institute students once wrote,

I want to inform you that our heavenly Father is doing great things with us here in Cairo, Egypt concerning His wonderful word of life. I came to Cairo last year and started the work of preaching the gospel among Sudanese and Egyptians. I found that they are very responsive. I established a new congregation which has a membership of twenty-five people whom I baptized into Christ's body in this short period of time. Most of the members of this local congregation are university students.

I am looking forward to receiving other courses from you. As you know, I am preaching in the Arab's world where most people speak Arabic. Therefore, I would like permission from you to translate all the courses into the Arabic language.

It is difficult to explain the joy a lonely worker for the kingdom receives when he receives Bible material he can study. We have found that literature distribution offers isolated workers a link to the outside world. It offers them a companion in their struggles in the kingdom. We have been asked questions on about every biblical subject of which one can think. Elders have written for advise concerning problems in churches. Preachers have written when they have felt alone and isolated in their struggles of church planting. When we offered courses through distance training, tudents apologized for being late on courses because of sickness and death. Their houses have been burned by terrorists. Their children die of malaria and a host of other diseases. These men suffer through thieves and sickness in an environment which reminds them that their real home is beyond this world. Literature distribution often links the resident disciple with a world outside his own. He can find confidence in the fact that others have come to the same conclusions he has in his personal Bible studies.

We are not just sending out material. We are sending out packages of hope. Every parcel is a packet of peace of mind for one who works alone. We pray for them. They pray for us. Together we are fellow workers for Christ in an environment where leaders grasp for hope and peace of mind in a world of struggle. We ask that you not forget them, but that you continue to join with us to crush Satan at the foot of the cross. They stay in the battle because God has given them the victory. They have faith in the mission before them because of their faith in the Master behind them. They seek to bring all the world into Christ because they struggle to take Him into all the world. We must stand behind world evangelists who seek to take the gospel into all the world.

The success of our efforts to evangelize the world will depend on our skill to impart to faithful men that which we have learned. Leadership training is a generational task. Every generation of leaders must be taught. And every generation of leaders has the responsibility of training the next generation of leaders. This was the mandate that Paul passed on to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2. The problem with dominant leaders is that they fail to accomplish the mandate of 2 Timothy 2:2. Because they feel threatened by others who might arise and take their position, they suppress rising leadership. Autocratic leaders do not train leaders. They thus lead terminal churches that are doomed to go out of existence. On the other hand, servant leaders are always looking for other servants to help in the task of serving the saints. True leaders, therefore, are identified by their efforts to train faithful men who will be able to train others also.

I have always found that the true soldier of the cross is the individual who is out there in the village life, maintaining the sacrificial and committed life of bringing good news to the hopeless. We too often give glory to the preacher in the big city who is preaching for the large assembly of disciples. But this preachers life is easy. Those who live out in the highways and hedges of society where people are grasping for something in which to find hope, are the true warriors of the faith. These are those who are growing the church through the preaching of the gospel from village to village. These are those men who struggle with their wives and children to give everyone a chanve to hear the gospel. These are the ones who pray and cry with those in the community who have no medicine for their children. They simply have Jesus. Honor to them.

Chapter 13

REFUGEE MISSIONS

Here is one of those areas of missions we have just begun to realize is a tremendous potential for saving the lost. For example, Mozambiqeans were in southern Malawi as refugees for may years. Lendel Wilkes, and those of the Namikango Mission, did a great deal of work in those days with these refugees. When they returned to Mozambique, many converted refugees returned to Mozambique as Christians to firmly establish the church. The same has happened with refugees for Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola, Congo and any nation where civil war continued over many years. War is an opportunity for evangelism when we reach out to refugees.

The first refugees we read about in the New Testament were dedicated religious people who first came to Corinth, and then went to Ephesus in order to establish the church. Aquila and Priscilla were already in Corinth when Paul arrived in that city (At 18:1-3). They had been run out of Italy when Claudius chased all the Jews out of Rome. They were working as tentmakers in Corinth when Paul arrived. They later went with Paul over to Ephesus (At 18:18-20), where they stayed, while Paul left immediately for Jerusalem. Though they were refugees, they remained dedicated to God and were vital to the establishment of the church both in Corinth, as well as in Ephesus.

There are numerous examples as the above scattered throughout Africa. In Africa there are always refugees somewhere at some time. These people are dislocated. They are thrown around in life like rubbish in society. When such people gain refugee status, they are often given rights to work in the host country, or are given monetary funds to live as refugees in designated refugee camps. They are receptive to teaching and spiritual guidance, though one usually has to gain special permission to work in refugee camps.

This is one of those areas of opportunity for the gospel in Africa. It is one of those areas of evangelism where the people are usually cared for by international relief organizations, so the need is not so much in the area of physical needs, but in the area of spiritual needs. However, because the refugee is often on the move, there are challenges in this area to make the contact and settle the refugee into some type of function as a disciple in a specific area. Much depends on the type of refugee camp to which refugees are assigned. Some camps are agricultural camps, that is, refugees must grow their own food. Some camps are human trauma centers to which hordes of people have fled almost overnight to escape war. In these camps there are many physical needs that must be met immediately. It seems that every refugee situation in Africa is different. The type of situation or camp will demand a different approach.

Much of the opportunity of working among refugees is with the established African church in the host nation. However, there is much room here for evangelists who have a high sense of spirituality and humanitarianism and feel a special ministry for these situations. Doctors and nurses can be called into such camps to work with relief organizations. Churches can be started in tents. The Ethiopian, Malawian and Zambian brethren have done a great work in these areas. Here is where missionary training should be fine tuned to a speciality in order to encourage the national church to evangelize Africa by converting and training those who will eventually return to their homelands.

Chapter 14

THE MISUNDERSTOOD CONTINENT

I have found that most Western residents are both geographically and politically challenged in reference to Africa. If something tragic happens in Cairo, Egypt, they will cancel their trip to Johannesburg, South Africa. Americans often view Africa as a country, not realizing that it is a continent of fifty-four nations. I have had Bible correspondence course teachers in America write and ask that I follow up on their BCC student in Nigeria, thinking I could drive over to Nigeria from Cape Town on the weekend. When we were in the process of moving to Brazil, one American preacher said to me, “That’s great. On the weekends you can drive over to the Bible lands.” What can I say?

I must say something special about South Africa since I live in the land. Throughout my travels in Africa, there was one perception that everyone had about

South Africa that was common of all people, local or Western. That perception was that they had a wrong perception of South Africa. Here is South Africa on a continent where all Africans think everybody in Africa is as they are. In my travels throughout Africa, I found few people who really understood the cultural and economic makeup of South Africa. I believe people understand America and Europe better than they understand South Africa. It is not only Western residents who are challenged in understanding Africa as a whole, but most Africans do not understand South Africa on their own continent.

There are several areas of misunderstanding. One is in the area of politics. The rest of Africa is Third World. In such socio/economic environments, politics and politicians often control the countries with the African style of democracy, everything is controlled from the top. At least the economics of these countries follow the politicians and their particular and often peculiar policies. However, South Africa is a Second World country with a strong and growing industrial base. The industrial base, as in Europe and America, controls the politicians and politics. The politicians must follow the industry. The rest of Africa, therefore, thinks South Africa is led by the politicians. But this is not the case.

Another misconception is in the area of a colonial past. Most subSaharan African countries have had a long and strong colonial past. South Africa had little. Colonialism is not a common word used in reference to the past in South Africa. Colonial language is not used in reference to politics. If the word "colonial" is mentioned, one can be sure that the one who used the word in reference to South Africa does not know what he is saying. South Africa was a colonial possession for only a brief period of time in history, but that was over a century ago.

Another major difference is in the area of tribalism. One African brother asked me what tribe I worked with in South Africa. I could not answer the question. South Africans are South Africans first. This has been a strong reaction against their apartheid past. They are moving fast into the future in paying little attention to any tribal differences. They look at one another as Asians, Indians, coloureds and whites, with other groups also represented. Even these designations are passing out of use. But they do not see themselves as tribal. I found this difficult to explain to up Africa residents who understand what I say through a mind set of tribalism and colonialism.

To a great extent, South Africa is a small piece of Europe that unfortunately dangles at the bottom of a continent that does not understand it. It has been one of the most free countries of Africa. Even during the days of apartheid, there was more freedom among black South Africans than many of the communist/dictatorial countries to the north. But particularly today, freedom of press, freedom of expression, commercial radio broadcasting, and television are established cultural and legal rights that go unhindered. South Africa even has talk shows that blast this and that or whatever, including government. There are some excellent investigative reporters and media programs that dig up corruption wherever. Such a thing would be almost unheard of in many African countries. But when it comes to freedom, South African is years ahead of many of those countries who for years blasted it for its apartheid polices and sanctioned its economy. But now it is far ahead of those who blasted it for its apartheid practices in the past.

But all these freedoms make it difficult for Africans to understand South Africa. The strength and wealth of the economy make it impossible for the typical African to understand. South Africa has never been like any other African country. It never will be because no South African, black, white, brown, etc., ever wants South Africa to be like the typical African country to its north. All South Africa is working together hard in order that the country not be a nation with its hand held out for foreign aid. Both cultural reaction to apartheid and rejection of the course of many African countries has instilled within the typical South African citizen a desire never to go back and never to become like what they see in some countries to the north. At least for the foreseeable future, South Africa is on the right road. Ask again in fifty years if it has all worked out. I think it will.

Another interesting thing I have experienced in my African travels is that everyone wants to go to South Africa. There is enough knowledge up Africa about South Africa that people are curious about this country about which they have heard so many distorted stories. On any trip I make up Africa, people will ask how they can immigrate or get a job in South Africa. They want to go to school in South Africa. They want a job in South Africa. After a while, one fells a little guilty about living where everyone else wants to go. At least one thing is apparent from all the desires to go to South Africa, people throughout the continent have a high regard for the misunderstood nation at the bottom of the continent. South Africans have a lot for which to be proud. They are the envy of the continent.

When it comes to the subject of African politics, Western thinkers will never understand what seems to be a hopeless conglomeration of political inconsisten-

cies. And thus, to the Western mind, African politics is frustrating. Inconsistent. Hypocritical. Corrupt. It is just African. TIA. It can often be funny, but also brutal. If one is not cautious, he or she can become despondent about the African political theater if he views it through Western standards. It is good to remember the words of Elspeth Huxley, who stated the following in reference to African politics:

> Politics, that is, in the narrow sense of polemics revolving round the issues of the day; in the wider sense, all the major events of history are, I suppose, rooted in political decisions made by conquerors and kings, by priests and parliaments, even by philosophers and scribes. But chronicles of dead and decided issues, however compelling in their day, are, save to professional historians, as stale as old cabbage leaves twenty, thirty, forty, years on (*Nine Face of Kenya*).

So Africa goes. TIA. Any evangelist who would work in Africa must develop an immunity to the nonsense of African politics. If you do not, you will develop the same despondency as so many Africans who are caught up in this field. Our concern as people of God is with principles, not politics.

We must remember that we serve a King of kings who is working all things together for good. We must stumble around and over the foes of Third World political decisions and capers in order to function in unstable countries that seem to be bent on self destruction. Sometimes things go well and up. Sometimes they go bad and down. Whichever way they go should make no difference to our mental attitude, for we serve a King who is Lord of lords and above every name on this earth. Our attitude is not controlled by the environment in which we dwell.

I have been asked on many occasions if a Christian can be a politician in Africa. My truthful answer to this question must be no. The political environment of Africa is a strong negative power against the moral principles of the Bible. African politics is full of corruption. I was once listening to a radio interview in reference to African politics several years ago. One of the South African politicians was being interviewed. The politician was trying to do his best as a new politician to serve the people. But he said, "People do not understand. Almost every day I am asked to do special favors for people." Add some financial favors to the special requests and you can understand why it is difficult for politicians in Third World countries to remain honest. I suppose it is the same everywhere in the world. But in Africa, politicians cannot survive in a system that survives on corruption. One of our preachers in Ethiopia, who was the son of a very influential judge, was asked by the political establishment to become involved in politics. He was told, "You can make a lot of money as a politician." So can a Christian survive in an African political environment? Only those brethren who have not been there would think they could.

Chapter 15

A CONTINENT OF OPPORTUNITY

When discussions center around the receptivity of Africa and India, there are a host of stories. Some good, some not so good. One cannot say that all of Africa and India are receptive to the gospel. Africa is a diverse continent and India is a diverse nation. Africa is almost three times the size of America and India is over one billion people in population. The people of both Africa and India range in religion from one spectrum of hostility to Christianity to animistic people who have never heard of Christianity. Therefore, when one discusses the subject of the receptivity of the population, he or she must do some research. Nevertheless, when discussing the receptivity of central Africa in rural settings and rural India, there is usually a very receptive population for the harvest. There are some reasons for this.

Much of Africa, especially those past colonial countries, have developed a dependency attitude that is leftover from the colonial days which has been nurtured by the foreign aid days that continue. When a missionary comes to Africa, therefore, he or she becomes an immediate center of influence for resources, depending on whose side of the fence you are standing. Though this influence could be misused if the missionary had a desire to rule over people, the influence adds to the impact of the Western missionary in Africa. The influence is there, and can be directed toward right things. But it can also be a curse.

An American elder once asked me, "Does not the national church worker in Africa have greater influence than the Western missionary?" The answer to this question would probably be that the Western worker does have a greater influence in some areas because of who

he is. My reason for saying this would be based on the fact that the typical Western missionary is foreign, educated, zealous, respected, aggressive, and back up with a host of resources. Because he is such, the Western evangelist can be very productive in mission outreach throughout the world. This has nothing to do with intellect. It is that the Western missionary has usually been trained for many years if he has been on the field for many years. Because of his education and experience, he is a great asset to the work. His effect on any given point of evangelism, therefore, is of great value to the growth of the church.

But I say the preceding in view of the fact that in the long run, the local evangelist is a very powerful worker for the Lord because he knows the territory. He knows the language, the people and their culture. I would add to this that fact that the average Third World evangelist, because of the nature of the hostile environment in which he lives, is far tougher than his counter part from the West. He does not have to live in the nice urban centers in order to survive. He is out there on the front lines, fighting the battles for the Lord where the action is. Though the Western evangelist may have the high powered education and resources, the local Third World evangelist makes up for his lack of education and resources with pure dedication to work in the trenches where people need help.

Africa is a continent of people who are often as sheep without a shepherd. Every decade or two, many African countries go through a radical change, even to revolution and new constitutions. There is little stability in many regions of Africa. Or, we might say that stability is a static thing in Africa. Depending on how you look at it, this is one of the dynamics of the continent. But such makes the Africans' acceptance of the missionary very acute. In those areas where the church is being initially established, the missionary adds a great stabilizing factor for new converts. There is someone upon whom local disciples can have security. Governments come and go. Evangelists come and go, but they bring and leave a Shepherd who is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow. In this sense, the foreign evangelist brings an example of depending on the Good Shepherd.

However, once the foreign evangelist leaves, it is the local church leader who brings the stability. The saying is in reference to African women, "When you marry an African woman, you join yourself to a rock." I think that could be said about most African church leaders. They are rocks of stability upon whom young disciples can depend in times of great struggle. Because of the often hostile environment in which some African leaders are born and reared, they are a unique rock of stability for the church.

Some of the dependency of the African on the foreign evangelist can be explained in the fact that the foreign evangelists represents some stability in all aspects of life. In the hostile environments in which Africans often live, their is at least one source of stability. This is the Western missionary. In many rural mission efforts this dependence on the missionary can be a tremendous burden. The missionary too often becomes the center of reference for counseling, for ambulance services, for resources, for all those things for which the African seeks to deliver himself from in his hostile environment. If you truly love to serve tables, then set yourself up in a rural environment somewhere in rural Africa. Be sure to bring a large table.

There are a number of things I could carry on about that emphasizes the receptivity of Africa. Rural Africans are generally poor in comparison to Western standards, and the poor seem to always be more receptive than the self-sufficient. Africans are generally rural, and the rural generally have more time to think and talk about God than the activity oriented urbanite. Since Africa is greatly poor and rural, then it is very receptive. And it will be receptive for many yeas to come.

On the other hand, I would say something about urban Africa. It is my opinion that the typical African still cannot handle the multimillion populated urban city. His culture breaks down, and the tribal value system is not strong enough to cope with the stress and competition for survival that is necessary in city life. The African city, therefore, is often a scene of ghettos and crime, and thus, not as receptive as the rural setting. I experienced the same in the typical Latin American setting. Receptivity in large Latin and African cities is usually not what it is in the small rural towns and rural areas.

The rural areas of Africa are usually more traditional. Nevertheless, they are often very receptive in comparison to the one million plus urban centers. The rural areas of Africa will continue to be very receptive for years to come. It has been my experience throughout the world that the rural cultures are generally more receptive than large urban centers.

So what can one say about those big "Third World" cities with a million plus in population? Not much. It is hard to be positive about the metrovillage of Latin America and Africa. In Africa, they are so unAfrican. They are impersonal, but Africans by nature are relational. They are non-communal, but Africans were born out of a village community. They are competitive, but the African has always had things in common. They are centers that attack tradition, but Africans are very traditional. They do not promote cultural identification, but

Africans know their tribal heritage. So it goes. It is the metrovillage in contrast to the village, two Africas on one continent. More than half of all Africans now dwell in the metrovillage. So here we are on a divided continent, a continent of people in which over half the population now dwells in urban centers that are difficult to evangelize.

It takes no serious study to understand the lack of receptivity in the metrovillage in comparison to the rural village. I visited about twenty major city centers on my 22,000 mile Seminar Safari in 1997 up through East Africa. Each of these cities had a population of 250,000 or more. I visited nine centers of one million or more. Without exception, the church was relatively small and struggling in these cities, though much work had been done in them for many years. Some churches had been in the cities for two or three decades, and yet, growth had long reach a plateau. Many of the churches were sterile and small, holding their own in a city that was difficult to reach. There was little church planting going on in any of these cities at the end of the 1990's. After the missionaries left with their resources, church planting came to a halt. The building of church buildings ceased.

There were often large denominational single-celled churches in these cities. By "single-celled churches" I mean those churches that sprung up around a single personality. They were usually M & M churches, that is, churches that focused on "money" for the preacher and "miracles" for the adherents. However, these were often only single churches that were the result of a dynamic personality or colorful assembly centered around an entertainment session rather than worship. These churches were also sterile when it came to establishing other similar churches of their fellowship throughout the city. A church may have a thousand members, but this does not mean it is multiplying itself in planting other similar churches in the city. The problem with the single-celled churches was that they were unable to duplicate themselves beyond the single personality around whom they were centered.

I am not down on urban evangelism in Latin America or Africa or anywhere. I do believe that our failure to evangelize urban centers is the result of our Western concept of assembly. Unless Western missionaries change their methodology from large single assembly churches (all members assembling in the same place on Sunday morning) to multiple assembly churches (house churches throughout a city that composes the one city church), there will be no major change in church establishment in Third World urban centers. In order to do this, the Western missionary will have to sacrifice the traditional doctrine of church autonomy, which doctrine is strictly Western in origin and practice with no biblical foundation.

But there is another factor here. Many large urban centers have become very corrupt. Materialism works against spiritual dependency on God. People move to the city in order to advance the material side of life, not to become closer to God. Urban centers often break down cultural morals to the point that the cities become centers of crime. And God did call Lot out of Sodom and Gomorrah, for He had "given the cities over."

At least one principle is true. We will not evangelize most nations of the world by concentrating on the metrovillage. What I have found that is working in a phenomenal way in my travels through rural settings in the world are movements in church establish in villages and small towns. Towns of a few thousand that are population centers for rural areas are receptive. These towns have not yet lost their heart and they are in communion with the rural community they serve. Church planting in rural villages is going great. Evangelists are doing a phenomenal work in establishing masses of small groups from twenty-five to fifty throughout rural settings. There is no comparison between the receptivity of the rural village of Africa and the metrovillage. The church establishment that is now going on in Africa and India is a movement that has no end. This growth is in a rural setting, and seems to have no end in making these areas of the world the centers of Christianity.

Should we write off or neglect the metrovillage? Certainly not! There are truth seekers in these centers who are searching. Though discouraged, God did tell Paul to stay in Corinth (At 18:9,10). Since these centers are so large and we are so few, it is difficult to find those who are receptive among the masses of population. I do believe, however, that we need to change our methods of assembly. If we do not, we will not evangelize the metrovillage. One thing is true about how we have worked in the past in these centers and that is we have not worked too well. Unless we can change some things, as previously suggested, we will continue to have little results in the large urban centers of the world. We need a biblical definition of "church". In 2005 I published a book entitled *Authentic Church* that dealt specifically with this subject. The point of the book was that we cannot use Western methodologies to evangelize Third World urban centers. And, we cannot use Western exegetics of Scriptures to restore Christianity throughout the world. In order to evangelize the metrovillage, we must study the early beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. The answer is there.

Epilogue

The better I understand the overall nature of churches in Africa, the more certain characteristics concerning the regional character of church movements become apparent. Most missions have had over seventy-five years of mission experience in Africa. Churches have been established in different areas by different colors of religious orientation within the church. Almost every doctrinal shade of the Western church has had influence somewhere in missions in Africa. Instead of going into the issues of those who have established churches in Africa, I believe there are some apparent results from what has been established.

One characteristic concerning the nature of the growth of those churches that were established with a very legal position on the part of the missionary is that those churches have stopped growing. When the inherent judgmental nature of the legalism of those who started these movements was implanted with a spirit of doctrinal suspicion, the movement itself was given a terminal disease. When brethren in the churches became suspicious of one another over petty issues, a self-destruct switch was thrown and the movements went into stalemate, and subsequently, death. In one situation the church had been started in the early sixties. But today there are only about fifty assemblies of this movement, and those fifty assemblies have not grown for some time. In another example I encountered, over two hundred assemblies were started in an area, but this number of assemblies has been the same for the last decade and a half. The movement has stalemated. Those assemblies that were initially started with a legal oriented view of biblical interpretation, are assemblies that have long since stopped growing. Many are less in attendance than they were a decade ago.

When a legal oriented doctrinal system became the legacy of the church in any area, invariably the result was that the assemblies moved into a time of biting and devouring one another. The arguments in one area become so intense that a brother jumped up in a meeting and said to his opponents, "If I had a gun I would shoot you." Before we condemn this brother who behaved after the manner of the Pharisees who murdered Jesus on the cross, we must find the source of his religious behavior. I believe the source is in the legalistic religiosity that was implanted in the early establishment of the church in his area. An axiomatic truth in church establishment is that when legalistic behavior is established in the early converts, that legalism will eventually bear its fruit in the church biting and devouring itself in the years to come.

However, in those regions where the gospel of God's grace was thoroughly taught and freedom in Christ preached and practiced, there seems to be no end to the growth. Contrary to a spirit of legalism, these movements of the church seem to be vibrant and ongoing in evangelism. The fundamentals of the New Testament were initially and clearly taught, so the spirit of legalism was not bred into these movements from the very beginning. Brethren were taught to accept one another instead of being suspicious of one another. One thing that helped in these movements was the behavior of the missionaries. They proclaimed in their lives a spirit of love and freedom in Christ. That spirit was adopted by the early converts, and thus handed down to the children.

Someone could probably do a lot of research on this point and give you a more scholarly approach. I am just relaying to you what I have perceived in my experiences in Latin America, the West Indies and Africa. I say this because I was a good Pharisee in my younger days who planted my seeds of legalism, of which I have since repented. When I started witnessing the fruits of legalistic theologies, I began to question my approach to what God intended should be taken into all the world. He intended that the gospel of grace and truth go forth to every nation, not a legal outline of church doctrine. If you do not know what I mean, you are probably part of the problem. My observation has been that those movements that were given the spirit of saving the lost instead of saving the saved, are now growing. The others are dying. Any perspective missionary, therefore, should judge whether he will sow the needs of legalism or the spirit of freedom in Christ.

One reason why the spirit of freedom in Christ is so appealing to the African is that he has lived for centuries under the bondage of superstition and fear. He grew up in a culture of looking over his shoulder for some curse or violation of tradition. Denominationalism just brought a new set of traditions and religious codes. When the grace of God was presented, there was an appeal for deliverance from fear and intimidation. There was an appeal from the confines of denominational traditions and religious codes. The grace of God brought freedom to the captives. And the captives have been freed from the past in order to come into the perfect law of liberty in Christ.

There is another overwhelming opportunity that is playing itself out in the religious scene on the African continent. When the colonial governments began releasing African nations to their own constitutional de-

mocracies, something also changed in the religious environment of Africa. The colonial missionary societies were also rejected by the Africans as governing authorities. Subsequently, an African independent church movement began in the 1950's and 1960's. Africans wanted to do their own thing without asking permission from the missionaries. What started over half a century ago has now grown into a tremendous movement across Africa with the establishment of thousands upon thousands of African independent churches.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this ongoing movement. Though Bible teaching had been on the continent for two centuries before the beginning of the movement, there was a great deal of syncretism that took place with the African independent church movement in its initial birth and throughout its growth. Old African spirits were mixed with what was considered the work of the Spirit, and what resulted was a religion that was a mixture of spirits and the Spirit, though the Spirit had nothing to do with it. But after fifty years of this amalgamated religiosity, the adherents have become weary of all the frenzy religiosity and have started to settle down and study the Bible. Sobriety has entered the behavior of many, and thus an atmosphere for objective Bible study has now become more common.

We are continually contacted by African independent churches who want Bible study material. Many have exhausted themselves with colorful assemblies, but now realize that they must go to the word of God. And believe it or not, many of the Bible schools of these churches are using Bible-based curriculums to train their preachers. There is a great door opening as sincere men seek to study themselves to biblical maturity and authority. I see this as a new restoration that God is developing to take the gospel into all Africa. I think God is saying to the Israel of God, "Not all who are Israel are of Israel." Do you understand what I mean?

When churches that have functioned independently for so long are now looking for connectivity with others, it is not a time to remain in our own cocoon of sectarian denominationality. It is a time to reach out to those who want to be connected. And it is Jesus who will connect us, and it is His word that will weld us together.

Book 51

Our Faith – Our Salvation

God calls all men to faith in His incarnate Son on the cross. Throughout the centuries after the fall of man in the garden of Eden, God worked to bring reconciliation between Himself and man. He worked to fulfill the original purpose for which He created man, that is, that people of faith come into His eternal fellowship forever. In order that this plan be accomplished, God did His part in providing the road map into His presence through the cross. He has now handed everything over to man to respond to the map. It is now the responsibility of man to respond by obedient faith to the faithful work of God on the cross.

When studying any Bible subject there is a preliminary principle of biblical interpretation that must never be violated: **What the majority believes, or what the religious culture dictates, must never become the foundation upon which the biblical interpreter establishes his understanding of the Scriptures in reference to his religious beliefs and behavior**. If this principle is not observed, then the people are on their way to apostasy from God, if not already there.

The entire apostasy of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament is a testimony to the truth of the preceding important principle. This principle was alluded to in Paul's reference to the first apostasy of Israel when the Israelites came out of Egyptian captivity (1 Co 10:1-13). After over 400 years in Egyptian captivity, the generation of Israelites that first came out of captivity had been influenced by the religious beliefs of the Egyptian culture. This first generation had been freed from political bondage, but not from the bondage of Egyptian religiosity that had affected many Israelites. The evidence of this religious influence was revealed at the foot of Mount Sinai upon which the glory of God was revealed in their eyesight. They complained. They rebelled. They made a golden calf idol. And then, they were struck down by the Destroyer for their lack of focus on the one true and living God. Paul wrote of them, *"Nor let us complain as some of them complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer"* (1 Co 10:10). Paul admonishes us by saying, *"Now these things happened to them **as an example**, and they were **written for our admonition** ..."* (1 Co 10:11). Therefore, *"let him who thinks he stands"* against the influence of the religious culture in which he lives *"take heed lest he fall"* (1 Co 10:12). What everyone is believing, therefore, can never be the foundation upon which we approach our God through His word.

Bible study must always be founded upon the principle, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." And when anyone would speak for the Lord, *"let him speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Pt 4:11). This principle of faithfulness to the oracles of God cannot be overemphasized more than when one is studying what God would require of man for his own salvation. In order to be saved before God, we can never allow the religious world to dictate the conditions for our salvation. We can never allow traditional theology to determine our thinking on these matters. Our thinking must be guided solely by the word of the One before whom we will be judged (See Jn 12:48).

Since people of all religions seek to devise their own systems of salvation, it is imperative that the faithful disciple make every effort to approach the word of God with an objective humility that is not encumbered with the influences of either culture or the favorite banners of the misguided religious world in which he lives. Lest one be led astray as Israel, he must approach the subject of this discussion with great caution.

We have been mandated by the Spirit to *"test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 Jn 4:1). Since it is not inherent within ourselves to test the truthfulness of what another person teaches, our **only option to avoid apostasy is to resort to the word of God**. We can test the "spirits of religion" only with our obsession with a "thus saith the Lord." If we fail to do this, we are doomed to fall away by creating a religion after the traditions of our fathers or after our own misguided desires (See Mk 7:1-9). If we would be disciples of the Lord, therefore, we have no other option but to focus specifically on what God says to us through His word.

Many years ago we made a decision not to be disciples of the religious world. Our decision was not to be

disciples of the church. We would be disciples of Jesus alone. We thus refused to be disciples of a patterned structure of religiosity or theology that became the fashionable doctrine promoted by our fathers that had been passed down to us through our religious heritage. We staunchly opposed the religious heritages of any particular religious group that was not founded upon the word of God. Imbedded within many religious groups are an assortment of traditional teachings that have no biblical foundation, and yet, are bound on the consciences of men for the sake of preserving the group, not for the exaltation of the Son of God. But specifically, all teachings in the context of the salvation of men should be held suspect until we can find a "book, chapter and verse" that would support correct salvational conclusions. So today we seek to make no uncertain proclamation that our faith must never be imbedded with the doctrines and commandments of men (See Mk 7:1-9). We would be disciples solely of Jesus whom we follow through His word. Jesus said, *"**If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples**"* (Jn 8:31). Jesus could not have made it more clear that we must continue in His word in order to be His disciples. Religious heritages and traditions have no part in this discussion.

Chapter 1

RESCUING OUR FAITH OUT OF THEOLOGICAL JARGON

We never cease to be amazed at the ability of clerical religionists to create popular phrases and terminologies that manifest twisted ideas. Because we live in a world of biblical ignorance, it is absolutely imperative that anyone who would seek to restore themselves to God must be a diligent Bible student. If we would restore our nobility before God, then we must, as the Bereans, *"receive the word with all readiness of mind"* and search *"the Scriptures daily to see whether these things"* are so (At 17:11). If there is no desire to study the Bible, then there is no hope for the religionist who would seek to please God. One can be religious without the word of God. But one cannot be a child of God and disciple of Jesus while being ignorant of the word of God.

This affirmation does not assume that we know everything in the Bible. But it does assume that we know every fundamental teaching that refers to the salvation of men. God did not make salvational teachings ambiguous and difficult to understand. From a simple reading of the text of God's word one can clearly understand what is necessary to be saved.

But because we are surrounded with so many charismatic religious leaders who hold spellbound thousands of biblically ignorant adherents, there seems to be no hope for a modern-day revival of the word of God to the centrality of faith. This situation has reached its pinnacle in reference to what is necessary for one's salvation. In a religious culture wherein there is a dearth of knowledge of the word of God, we have been inundated with biblical ignorance through the smooth and fair speech of those who have little knowledge of the Bible, but assert themselves to be spokesmen for God.

Nevertheless, we must for a moment excuse ourselves from our fatalistic views of the misguided religious world in order to make every attempt to investigate the word of God. The religious masses may be destroyed because of their lack of knowledge of the word of God (Hs 4:6), but we would "with all readiness of mind search the Scriptures" in order to discover what is necessary for our own salvation (At 17:11). If we can for a moment lay aside our religious prejudices and open the pages of the Bible, let's take another look at the subject of faith and obedience in reference to one's relationship with God.

As we study through the subject of faith and obedience, we must be sure to note that there are two groups of people of faith in the New Testament who will be held accountable for their faith. The first group are the alien sinners. Those of this group are outside Christ and lost in a state of condemnation in sin. These were the Ephesians **before** their obedience to the gospel. Paul wrote that in their former life outside Christ they *"**were dead in trespasses and sins**"* (Ep 2:1). It was to alien sinners as these that statements as the following were made: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you ... will be saved"* (At 16:31). This is the group of alien sinners outside Christ who must act on their faith in Jesus in order to do all that God commands of them to be saved. To these unbelievers, therefore, the message is to believe on Jesus as the Son of God. Once belief is established, then the one who believes must do everything that is required by God in order to come into Christ.

The second group who will be held accountable for their faith are those who act on their faith in Jesus, and thus obeyed the gospel. These are those to whom it was written, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so*

also faith without works is dead" (Js 2:26). This is the group of those who have already acted on their faith to obey the gospel. Now they must continue to walk obediently in thanksgiving to the grace of God. They do this by working out their *"salvation with fear and trembling"* (Ph 2:12), for they will give account of their works before the Lord (2 Co 5:10).

It is imperative that when studying the subject of faith and salvation in the Bible that the context in which a particular statement is made must first be understood. It must be understood if statements concerning faith are made in reference to alien sinners or to Christians. Determining whether a statement concerning faith was made in the context of unbelievers or believers solves almost all problems in reference to discovering what is required of one to be saved.

A. What some men say.

The statements of warning in the Bible concerning apostasy cannot be overemphasized in the area of teachings concerning salvation. We must assume that in reference to this subject Satan will do his most excellent work. For this reason, we must be very cautious when studying what God would require of all men in order to be delivered from the bondage of sin. We must not doubt and rebel at the "foot of Mount Sinai" because of our present religious culture or past heritage. When studying matters that pertain to our salvation, it is a time to allow the Bible to "mean what it says, and say what it means." No interpretation is needed.

1. *A foundational principle:* When discussing salvation, we are discussing a relationship between mortal man and the One in whose presence we must dwell in order to enjoy the blessing of eternal existence (2 Th 1:9). This relationship depends on the responsible actions of ourselves, and the commands of God in whose presence we will maintain our eternality. It is at this point that some theologians become nervous. This nervousness is generated by how we understand certain words that are used in the Bible in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner. Some theologians almost cringe when words as "performance," "work," or "obedience" are used. They have no difficulty in applying these words to God in His "performance" or "work" to make available the opportunity of the cross after thousands of years of labor in order to preserve the seedline promise made to Adam and Eve. But when the same words are used in reference to man's responsibility to respond to the crucified Son, then there is almost a total abhorrence of any performance, work or obedience on the part of man to respond to God's Suffering Servant on the cross. It seems that we feel comfortable with allowing God to struggle to bring His Son to the cross, but somehow we excuse ourselves of all responsibility to respond obediently. We find this most amusing, especially in view of what the Scriptures say in reference to our responsibility to respond to the love offering of God at Calvary. In fact, it seems quite ridiculous to believe that God had to do all the work and we need do nothing, except the work of a simple "sinner's prayer." Sometimes erroneous teachings can be revealed through the application of common sense.

2. *A biblical principle:* James spoke of a fundamental behavioral relationship of the Christian in reference to his continued salvation in Christ. It is a principle of faith and works that permeates the Scriptures. It involves our relationship with God from the very beginning of our realization of the crucified Savior and will continue to the time of our rest in death as a faithful servant (Rv 14:13). This principle was introduced by James with the Spirit-inspired words, *"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 first thing to notice concerning James' statement in James 2:14 is that it is a question. When the Holy Spirit asks a question as this, He knew that we would know the answer. And our answer would be, "Of course not." It is obvious that faith alone cannot typify the behavior of the Spirit-driven disciple of Christ. The Christian cannot be saved without works. The Spirit helps with our answer to James' question by teaching, *"****Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead****"* (Js 2:17). And herein is revealed the foundational principle upon which our relationship with God must be established from the very beginning. This principle must be maintained from the very beginning of our relationship with God to the time when our body is made dead by the departure of our spirit (Js 2:26).

After elaborating on the inseparable union of faith and works in the life of the Christian, as illustrated by the faith of Abraham, James summarized, *"You see that faith was working with his works, and* ***by works was faith made perfect****"* (Js 2:22). This is a defining principle. **Acceptable faith before God is always made perfect by response**. James' conclusion is obvious. *"****You see*** *then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only"* (Js 1:24). We must be careful not to reverse the word order of this statement. It **does not** say, "You see then that a man is justified by **faith** and not by **works** only." The sentence begins with "you see." The meaning here is certainly more than "you understand." One cannot "understand" justification apart from an em-

pirical demonstration of faith. **We can see the demonstration of works, but we cannot see faith**. Therefore, when we see the works, we can understand that one is justified by a working faith. Justification is manifested to all to see because everyone can see the demonstration of our works. They cannot see faith if it is not demonstrated. We must keep this fundamental truth in mind when we approach any teaching concerning faith in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner. In order to witness that the alien sinner has been justified, something must be seen. One can proclaim his own faith in Christ, but until his faith is manifested through action it is not an acceptable faith. It is a dead faith until it comes alive through obedience.

It is amazing that most of the religious world today cannot see (understand) this point. When faith is discussed in reference to the initial encounter of the alien sinner with God, obedience is totally repudiated by many religionists who believe that there is no demonstration of faith necessary on the part of man in reference to his salvation. But James reminds us that we cannot violate or ignore the connectivity of faith and works/obedience in any context of our relationship with God, starting from the very moment that we believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. He concludes, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also **faith without works is dead**"* (Js 2:26). This same principle begins when one first encounters Jesus. It continues to the time when one eventually experiences the separation of body and spirit. If "faith-without-works-is-dead" is a truth in reference to the Christian life, then the same principle holds true in reference to the beginning of the Christian life. A faith that is not demonstrated by the alien sinner is dead until it is demonstrated by obedience.

The principle that permeates the Scriptures in reference to man's relationship with God is always faith and action. Whether we use the words "performance," "works," "obedience," or any action word, the fact is that acceptable faith before God must always involve some outward response on the part of man. Our personal inward feelings and commitment must always be demonstrated before man and God.

Now the novice student of the Bible often becomes confused here when he reads passages as Galatians 2:16. *"... knowing that a man is **not justified by works** of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ... **for by works of law no flesh will be justified**."* Those who do not rightly divide the word of God, trip over this statement by applying it to the faith of the alien sinner. The "works" in Galatians 2:16 are in a completely different context than the faith/obedience required of the alien sinner for his salvation. **Paul is discussing the life of the Christian, not the initial response of the alien sinner to the gospel**. He is discussing legal meritorious obedience to law that a Christian might seek to perform in order to earn his justification before God. Paul's argument is that it is impossible for the Christian to keep law perfectly in order to be saved, for all have sinned (Rm 3:9,10,23). For this reason, the Christian can never be justified by works of law simply because no one can keep law perfectly.

Here is a point not to be misunderstood. There is a vast difference between **meritorious works of law on the part of the believer** and **obedience to law on the part of the unbeliever**. If one confuses the two, then he will fail to understand the alien sinner's responsibility to be obedient to that which God requires of one to be saved. Meritorious works of law are the efforts of the Christian who would supposedly justify himself before God. But obedience to law refers to God's requirements on the part of the alien sinner in order to come into a saving covenant relationship with God.

The alien sinner cannot be justified before God without obedience to God's law. But the Christian does not maintain his justification before God by meritorious works of law. Therefore, we must be careful not to twist the Scriptures to the destruction of the alien sinner by misapplying the Scriptures. Doing such would be doing what some did about whom Peter wrote. These are those who twist scriptures that apply to the Christian. They are those who are untaught and unstable, and thus the word of God they *"distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures"* (2 Pt 3:16).

3. *"Only" strips faith.* We must keep in mind that when one uses the word "only" with faith, then he has reduced faith to a simple inactive mental assent of the mind. He has said that no response on the part of the individual is necessary to the word of God. "Only" reduces faith to only a mental awareness of God and Christ. Whether used in reference to the alien sinner or the Christian, "only" means that one's life can remain totally inert as long as one mentally believes in the right things. We are certain that no one really wants to maintain this belief, for it would infer that we could live wickedly as long as we mentally believe in Jesus. It would infer that the alien sinner could continue in a behavioral pattern of sin as long as he mentally confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.

B. What some are saying.

In the present religious environment there is probably no teaching that permeates all "Christian" groups more than the belief that "salvation is by faith only." More Scriptures are distorted and twisted concerning

this teaching than most teachings of the Bible. "Faith only salvation" is a teaching of such commonality among religious groups that it many times unites the religious world. And herein is the danger. If any teaching in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner is accepted by almost all religious groups, **then this is what we would expect from Satan who seeks to deceive the masses**. We certainly would not assume that Satan would work to unite the religious world around a common doctrine in reference to the salvation of man. If a religious world commonly accepts a doctrine that refers to the salvation of the alien sinner, then obviously we should step back for a moment and take a closer look at the doctrine. We should do this simply because Satan does not work to unite Christendom over a doctrine by which lost men are saved. It is his work to lead men away from doing that which is necessary to be saved, not to unite the religious world around a doctrine in reference to the salvation of all men. For this reason, commonly accepted teachings in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner should always be suspect until there is a "book, chapter and verse" in the word of God to prove such to be correct.

"Faith only salvation" is a belief that is so embedded within the ranks of religious theology that disagreement with such brings on one harsh condemnation of being a legalist. But we must keep in mind the foundational principle with which we began this discussion. **What the majority believes, or what the religious culture dictates, must never become the foundation upon which the biblical interpreter establishes his understanding of the Scriptures, or his religious beliefs and behavior**.

The intensity by which the "faith only salvation" doctrine is accepted is revealed by the "authorities" of almost all religious groups that would seek to fall under the umbrella of Christendom. In the Episcopal "Articles of Religion" in the *Book of Common Prayer,"* it is stated that man is "accounted righteous before God, **only** for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ **by faith**." In Hiscox's *A New Directory of the Baptist Church*, Hiscox wrote that justification and pardon from sins is "**solely through faith**" (pp. 551,552; see also *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, p 62). Some have stated that "**no effort however commendable** ... can in any way justify the sinner" (*Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, 1957). In the Methodist's *Articles of Religion* it is stated that "**justification by faith only** is a most wholesome doctrine" (Art. IX; see also the Presbyterian Westminster Confession, Ch. XI,11; the Lutheran "Augsburg Confession," Art. IV). In order to establish a salvational relationship with God, it is thus commonly believed among most religious groups that salvation is "**solely through faith** in the Redeemer's blood" (See J. M. Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual*, 1966).

Chapter 2

FALSE STARTS AND ERRONEOUS CONCLUSIONS

In discussions concerning faith and salvation, it is always good to review the existing inconsistences of thinking concerning these subjects, as well as the apostasy that led to what we experience in Christendom today. Christendom today is burdened with some distortions of the Scriptures concerning faith and salvation that confuse people. Because we are in the midst of so much confusion in this critical area of theology, we are forced to be critical in reference to existing beliefs that we feel are sustained by a twisting of several key scriptures. We must also point out some inconsistencies in the "faith only" theology that are often overlooked by those who sustain the belief that the alien sinner need do absolutely nothing in reference to his salvation. He can simply sit in a chair and mentally perceive that he is saved without any expression or obedience of faith whatsoever.

A. Imbedded "works":

In order to promote the "faith only" teaching, various "formula statements" and salvational terminologies have been invented by all sorts of religionists. For example, the "sinner's prayer" has been promoted by some in order for the alien sinner to announce Jesus as a "personal Savior," or to make a verbal declaration of one's own salvation. But the concept of a "sinner's prayer" and the terminology "personal Savior," are found nowhere in the entire Bible. These theological linguistic terminologies often reflect the "faith only" doctrine that has so captivated the religious world. But when a term or phrase that is not in the Bible is used to reflect a particular belief, then we caution ourselves. It is not that the using of such terminologies is unblblical. The problem is that they can often reflect unbiblical concepts.

Our task as Bible students is to always "search the Scriptures" in order to determine if these terminologies reflect correct biblical truths (See At 17:11).

The irony of the "faith only" theology is that there is a contradiction within the theology itself in reference to works of faith. Adherents to the theology affirm that some confession of faith must be made by the alien sinner, whether it is a "sinner's prayer," a statement to "receive Jesus" as one's personal Savior, or simply an expression or declaration from the individual who seeks to be saved that he believes in Jesus. **But are not such expressions or confessions works within themselves**? For example, if one must proclaim some form of a "sinner's prayer," then is not this prayer a work of faith? The same people who demand some outward work or confession of faith by the alien sinner in reference to the alien sinner's salvation, even a tearful eye or outward cry, vehemently state that baptism should not be a condition for salvation since such is supposedly a "work." Sometimes, when we do not sit down and seriously consider our thinking, we will carry on with such theological inconsistencies.

B. A reflection on history:

A reflection on church history might answer some of the problems in reference to the development of the "faith only" theology. Instead of baptism being the reflection of the faith of the alien sinner, and subsequently necessary in order to wash away sins, after the first century there was a gradual separation made between baptism and salvation. As men began to emphasize special instructions before baptism in order to guarantee that one was a true disciple of Jesus, the connection between baptism and salvation began to fade. By the third century, this trend became so extreme that some groups required almost three years of instruction before they would baptize anyone. The result of the separation of salvation and baptism was that baptism became a ritualized sacrament. It became a sacrament of "the church" that was surrounded with special statements, the anointing of oil, and an assortment of other ritualistic ceremonies. The fact that baptism had anything to do with salvation was totally lost.

Baptism eventually became a sacrament that was totally disconnected from salvation. It thus became a legal ordinance of "the church." It was believed that as a legal ordinance, baptism had nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins. By the fourth century, the apostasy had progressed to the point that if one sinned after baptism, these sins were not forgiven. Because of this belief, many delayed their baptism until late in life, lest one sin after his baptism and be condemned for unforgiven sins. "Deathbed" baptism became common.

Throughout the centuries, corrupted theologies surrounding baptism lingered in religion. In the middle ages when there was a protest against the concept of baptism that was practiced by the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformation Movement leaders had to do something with the teaching since baptism was mentioned so many times in the New Testament. As a result of the Reformation of the middle ages, different groups came up with different doctrines surrounding the subject of baptism. Since baptism had already been separated from salvation, the evolution of where to place baptism in the life of the one who sought to come to Christ varied from one protestant reformer to another. Some said that one is saved by faith alone, but is baptized into the church. Therefore, one is saved outside his membership of the church.

Those who followed after the teaching of individual predestination taught that one's confession of faith was a signal that he was individually predestined. Baptism was thus only an outward manifestation of God's predestination of the individual. The profession of one's faith was simply an announcement to others that he was one of the individually predestined. But if one is already saved by being individually predestined, then why would there be any need that one make some confession of faith? It would seem to be quite ridiculous to demand the obedient condition of a confession of faith when one is already individually predestined to eternal life.

In the digression from the original purpose of baptism in reference to the washing away of sins, religionists have come up with another theology that would supposedly place one in a saving relationship with God without being baptized. This was the theology of the truly "faith only" teaching that was developed by early Reformation leaders as Luther, Wesley and a host of others. Salvation was believed to be based **solely** on one's work of declaring his own salvation. This theology has followed the Pentecost church movement that started in the latter part of the 1800s. Today it is particularly prevalent in the independent church movement that had its beginning roots in the last of the 1900s.

In modern times, the "sinner's prayer" was first introduced by D. L. Moody. In training the evangelists that he sent out, Moody taught his trainees a "model prayer" that could be easily repeated by respondents at crusades in order that they declare their own salvation. The concept of the "sinner's prayer" gained popularity in the 1950s when Billy Graham, and organizations as the Campus Crusades, incorporated its use in their evangelistic outreaches. The "sinner's prayer" became a

common work of declaring one's salvation that was convenient, especially when used in radio and television evangelistic broadcasting. Listeners were often asked to simply place their hands on a radio or television, and then repeat a formulated prayer after the radio/television speaker. The listener was then proclaimed saved.

C. Obedience to the King:

The terminology "personal Savior" was introduced and popularized by Charles Fuller when he used the phrase repeatedly in his radio sermons between 1937 and 1968. Use of the "sinner's prayer" was meant to bring Jesus into one's life as a "personal Savior." But when one considers the concept of the "personal Savior" in Jesus, such thinking can sometimes be dethroning of who Jesus really is. Paul wrote, *"Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh,* ***yet now we know Him thus no more****"* (2 Co 5:16). The epistles move our understanding of Jesus beyond our knowledge of Him through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We now know Jesus after His ascension to the right hand of God to reign as King of kings. The thought of having Jesus as our "personal friend" must include our recognition of Jesus as *"the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords"* (1 Tm 6:15). *"We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens"* (Hb 8:1). The apostles knew Jesus as a personal friend on earth, but after the ascension they knew Him as the reigning God over all things before whom all humanity will stand in judgment (At 17:30,31; 2 Co 5:10).

Jesus is our Mighty God and Everlasting Father who is now reigning over all things (See Is 9:6). **He is our King, Priest, Potentate, Mighty God and Everlasting Father of all**. He is now such *"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ..."* (Ph 2:10). We cannot claim Him for ourselves alone. Can He be our "personal" Lord? Can He be our "personal" King? Our relationship with Him is a relationship with His kingship, headship and control over all things (Ep 1:21,22). If we would claim Him as our "personal Savior," we must be careful in our thinking that we do not minimize His work as our King, Lord and High Priest.

We have a personal relationship with Jesus only as a part of His corporate body, the church. Because the church is the bride of Christ, all those who are "baptized into His body" have a joint covenant relationship with Jesus (1 Co 12:13). One can never have a relationship with Jesus unless he is a member of the body of Jesus. We may struggle with one another's use of the word "personal," but one thing is true in developing a biblical definition of the word. We must as Paul first turn away from recognizing Jesus "according to the flesh," and start recognizing Him as the blessed and only Potentate, the Lord of lords and King of kings. If one continues to use the word "personal" after throwing himself before the Lord of lords and King of kings, then we would assume that the word "personal" is appropriate. But we must keep in mind that our personal friend 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*** *....* ***These will be punished with everlasting destruction*** *away from the presence of the Lord ..."* (2 Th 1:7-9). We can claim Jesus as our friend, but He is a friend who will eventually banish from the presence of God those who do not obey Him.

Individual members of the body are friends who have all things in common. **But kings as friends demand obedience**. The problem with some is that they want a friend who makes no demands. Add to this the fact that people often rebel against a King who has laid down the law, and subsequently, demands obedience in order to be saved from the wrath to come. If we would be a friend of Jesus, then we should start searching to see what this friend demands of us in order to reap the salvation that He provides. In this search, we must always keep in mind that our "personal" Savior said to all, *"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 is our friend who laid down His life for us. But He said, *"You are My friends,* ***if you do whatever I command you****"* (Jn 15:14). He is a sacrificial friend. He is now our reigning God before whom we throw ourselves down prostrate before His throne (Ph 2:8-11). Abraham was called the friend of God because he did what God commanded (Js 2:23). His faith moved Him to obey his Friend. If we would have Jesus as our friend, then we must do what He commands His friends to do.

Any theology that minimizes the present gospel reign of King Jesus, marginalizes our motivation to be obedience subjects. It is for this reason that the theology of the supposed one-thousand year reign of Jesus on this earth when He comes again discourages total submission to Him as king in this present time. If one believes that there is any second chance of obedience, he too minimizes the motivation to submit to the present reign of Jesus. We must all understand that though it may seem that Jesus is not now King of kings and Lord of lords, we must not be led to believe that He does not now have authority over the lives of every person on earth.

Chapter 3

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

In our zeal to encourage obedience to the will of God, we must not assume that our salvation is a matter of "obedience only." The Bible teaches that the foundation upon which we base all obedience is faith. This makes faith absolutely necessary for one's salvation, though Bible faith assumes obedience.

Faith does not make law obsolete, either for the alien sinner or the child of God. On the contrary, it is faith that motivates obedience to law. This is the meaning of what Paul wrote. *"Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary,* ***we establish law****"* (Rm 3:31). Therefore, the law of God is not established in one's life without faith. But at the same time, faith is not evident in one's life without obedience to law. We are saved by faith, therefore, as long as the faith of the sinner moves him to obey the law of God in reference to what is required for his salvation.

When discussing the matter of "Bible faith," we must understand that there is an inseparable link between faith and obedience that permeates the Holy Scriptures. When the word "faith" is used in any context wherein one is acceptable to God, we must always assume that obedience is in the action of the word "faith." **There is no acceptable faith that is void of obedience, for through faith obedience to the will of God is established in our lives**. When we read those passages that emphasize faith, we must always understand that there is a response on the part of the one who has faith. Faith alone as a simple mental recognition of Jesus as the Son of God never stands alone as "faith only" when used in any salvational context of the Scriptures. This is true both in the faith of the disciple of Jesus, as well as the faith of the alien sinner.

A. Faith is necessary to please God.

Is faith necessary in order to be a child of God? The Hebrew writer answered this question two thousand years ago. *"****But without faith it is impossible to please Him****, for he who comes to God must believe that He is ..."* (Hb 11:6). Jesus added that *"he who believes has everlasting life"* (Jn 6:47), but *"he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mk 16:16). So the conclusion would be, *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. And he who does not believe the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"* (Jn 3:36). The believer *"will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life"* (Jn 5:24). Once one has come into the life that Jesus offers, He will walk by faith (2 Co 5:7; see Jn 3:14-16; 20:30,31; At 15:9; Rm 1:16,17; 3:28; Gl 3:23,24, Ep 3:8).

The preceding thought is brought out clearly in what Jesus said in Mark 16:16. *"He who* ***believes*** *and is* ***baptized*** *will be* ***saved****. But he who* ***does not believe*** *will be* ***condemned****."* At least two conditions are here given for salvation: belief and baptism. These two conditions are inseparably connected in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner. In the last phrase of what Jesus said, this point is emphasized. *"But he who does not believe will be condemned."* There is no need to discuss the response of baptism without belief. Since belief is manifested through baptism, then condemnation is manifested through a lack of belief that leads one to be baptized for remission of sins (See At 2:38; 22:16). There is no need to discuss baptism when one does not have the faith that would move him to be obedient to the law of baptism. Baptism is not established in one's life if he does not believe. The result of the "faith alone" theology is that people continue in a state of condemnation because their "faith" does not move them to do that which God says one must do in order to wash away one's sins.

Look at it from the view of how Paul states that true faith establishes God's law in our lives (Rm 3:31). We can take the liberty of inserting the word "baptism" in the text of Romans 3:31 in order to understand what Jesus said in Mark 16:16. In reference to any law of God, Paul meant, *"Do we make void* **baptism** *through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish* **baptism***."* Paul's statement of Romans 3:31 was directed to Christians, but the same principle would apply to the alien sinner who would come to the law of God. Faith establishes the law of God in one's life. It does not lead one to ignore what God would have one do in order to be saved according to the law of God.

When one goes on a journey through the Scriptures, there is no question that faith is demanded in order to be pleasing to God, for it is through faith that God's will is established in our lives. We can better understand Paul and Silas' statement to the Philippian jailor if we keep faith in the context of what is necessary to validate it as a faith that is pleasing to God. The jailor asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* (At 16:30). Paul and Silas responded, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved"* (At 16:31). In

reference to the salvation of his entire household, the jailor was instructed to lead in his belief in the Lord Jesus. Paul and Silas knew that his belief would move him and his household to do all that was required to comply with the law of God. As a result of his belief, the jailor would be moved to do all that was necessary to lead his family to be saved. As all those who walk by faith, the jailor had to act on his belief on the Lord Jesus Christ. He had to act in order to be delivered from a state of condemnation.

This thought was emphasized by what John wrote in John 1:12,13. *"But as many as **received Him**, to them He gave **the right** to become the children of God, even to those who **believe** in His name"* (vs 12). Those who received Jesus, believed in Him. **But this only gave them the right to become the children of God**. Believing and receiving did not make one a child of God. It only gives one the right to become a child. Keep in mind that John was writing the book of John as **an historical document** concerning the ministry of Jesus and the reception of Jesus by those **who after His ascension were born of the water and the Spirit** (Jn 3:3-5). Those who believed and received Him *"were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but **of God**"* (Jn 1:13). When one believes, receives Jesus, and is born of the water and Spirit, then this salvational work is not of man, but of God, for it is God who determines what one must do in order to become one of His children. Being born of the water and Spirit is from God, not man. And thus, when one is born again, His birth is not the invention of man, but the result of a revelation from God that one must be born again.

B. Faith moves us into action.

The principle that James set forth in James 2:14-26 is critical in understanding the definition of the faith that is necessary to please God. It is a faith that responds in obedience to the will of God. The principle applies to both the alien sinner and the Christian. In his letter to the Roman disciples, Paul referred to an "obedience of faith" (See Rm 1:5; 16:26). This is the faith that is *"working through love"* (Gl 5:6). It is the faith that moves one to *"obedience from the heart"* to do the will of God (Rm 6:17,18). And thus, it is the faith that is *"made perfect by works"* (Js 2:22). Our response to the will of God becomes a *"work of faith"* (2 Th 1:3; see 2 Th 1:11). In this way, the law of God is established in our lives (Rm 3:31).

Before the Israelites attacked the city of Jericho, God promised that He had already given them the city (Ja 6:2,3). Before they made one step in obedience to take the city, it had been given into their hands. God made the promise, but they had to act on the promise. Hebrews 11:30 says of the occasion, *"**By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days**."* Though the Israelites knew that the city had been given into their hands before they started their obedient march around the city, they still had to make the march. If they had disobeyed God by not marching around the city, then the city would not have been given into their hands. Their faith in the promise of God, moved them to march.

We have the promise of salvation in Christ. However, we must "march through the waters of baptism" in order to receive the promise. If we do not "march," then our belief in the promise of God is unproductive in reference to our desire to receive the promise.

We are now beginning to understand the nature of the "saving faith" about which we read so much in the Bible. **We can be told the result of our faith before our obedience, but without our obedience, the promised result can never be realized**. This was exactly what Paul and Silas were saying to the Philippian jailor. The result of the jailor's faith would be his salvation. However, between his faith and his salvation there had to be obedience to something that would bring about the desired end. Israel was promised their conquest of Jericho, but that promise could be realized only through obedient faith. It was by their faith, therefore, that they responded to march around the city according to the will of God.

That faith which is pleasing to God is inseparably connected to obedience. It is defined by obedience. Salvational faith is never separated from a response on the part of man to obey the will of God. The principle of obedient faith is defined by James. *"But someone may say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and **I will show you my faith by my works**"* (Js 2:18). God wants to see our faith. The only way He can see our faith is by our works. This definition of faith is maintained throughout the Bible. It is a principle of faith that is so defined that any who would question it are not seeing the whole picture of biblically-defined faith. It is for this reason that we seriously consider this definition of faith that is clearly illustrated in some key scriptures.

1. *Hebrews 3:18,19:* In reference to the disobedient Israelites who came out of Egyptian captivity, the Hebrew writer wrote of them, *"And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His rest, but to those who were **disobedient**?"* (Hb 3:18). This verse states that some Israelites were not able to enter into the rest

of the promised land because of their "disobedience." The Hebrew writer repeated the same thought in Hebrews 4:6, but in different words. In Hebrews 3:18 he stated that the disobedient Israelites could not enter *"because of **disobedience**."* But in verse 19 of Hebrews 3 it states, *"So we see that they could not enter in because of **unbelief**."* There can be only one defining conclusion to the parallel use of the words "disobedience" and "unbelief." The Israelites' unbelief was manifested in their disobedience. They had received the promise of the land. However, because of their lack of faith in God they did not obey. When we seek to define belief in the Bible that is pleasing to God, we must understand that belief and obedience have parallel meanings, as disobedience and unbelief.

2. *Hebrew 11:* Hebrews 11 is the dictionary of Bible faith. Reading through this chapter is thrilling in the sense that great men and women of God acted on their faith in order to *"please Him"* (Hb 11:6). In their lives they gave testimony to the fact that *"faith is the substance of things hoped for, **the evidence of things not seen**"* (Hb 11:1). It is evidence of things not seen because we can see the obedient behavior of those who believed in the things that cannot be seen. In using Hebrews 11 as our dictionary to define that faith which is pleasing to God, notice below the obedience of God's people that resulted from their faith:

*"By faith Abel **offered** . . .* (vs 4).
*"By faith Enoch . . . **had this testimony, that he pleased God**"* (vs 5).
*"By faith Noah . . . **prepared** an ark. . ."* (vs 7).
*"By faith Abraham . . . **obeyed** . . ."* (vs 8).
*"Through faith even Sarah . . . **bore** a child . . ."* (vs 11).
*"By faith Abraham . . . **offered** up Isaac"* (vs 17).
*"By faith Moses . . . **refused** to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*" (vs 24).

These great people of God acted on their faith in the promises of God. We can see their faith through their obedience. They all, as Sarah, acted on their faith because they *"judged Him faithful who had promised"* (Hb 11:11). **When God makes promises, He expects those who have faith in Him to obey that which is necessary in order to receive the promises**. This definition of faith must be understood throughout the Bible when discussing faith that is pleasing to God.

There is no such thing as an inactive faith that is pleasing to God. James called inactive faith a dead faith (Js 2:26). One may have faith that God exists, but this does not mean that such a faith is pleasing to God. James commended some for at least their faith in God, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well"* (Js 2:19). But James wanted to remind these unresponsive readers, *"The demons also believe and tremble"* (Js 2:19). At least the demons respond by trembling. Any lack of response of one's faith is a mockery of the word of God. Those with an unresponsive faith must answer the question that James asked, *"But are you willing to know, O foolish man, **that faith without works is dead**?"* (Js 2:20). Those who would arrogantly declare their own salvation without responding to the will of God to fulfill all righteousness must answer this question. Would one be so presumptuous as to declare his or her own salvation without responding in obedience to the gospel of Jesus through baptism? We must not forget the principle that both the Hebrew writer and James have established, that unresponsive faith is dead, and thus, not pleasing to God.

3. *John 6:47:* John 6:47 furthers our definition of responsive faith that is acceptable to God. Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has everlasting life."* Paul made a similar statement to the Philippian jailor. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved"* (At 16:31). It is here where one of the most common failures of correct Bible interpretation occurs. In reference to our discussion of the inseparable connection between baptism and salvation, this error of interpretation has led to a misunderstanding of more key scriptures on faith than any other misapplication of biblical interpretation. The misinterpretation here is over a very common grammatical structure of communication that we use every day.

What both Jesus and Paul used in the grammatical structure of John 6:47 and Acts 16:31 was a **synecdoche**. **A part was used for the whole**. In their statements they used the word "believe" as the part that stood for the whole of what was necessary to receive eternal life. When Jesus said that one must believe in order to have eternal life, he was including in the word "believe" **all that God required of the alien sinner in order to have eternal life**. However, He said nothing about repentance in His statement. But in Luke 13:3 He said, *"But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."* Even in this statement He used the word "repent" as a synecdoche. He did not mention belief, as He did in John 6:47. Does repentance exclude belief, or does belief exclude repentance?

Some Bible interpreters have difficulty here because they fail to see the whole context of Scripture concerning what God would have one do in response to the gospel. Use of a word as a synecdoche means that the word "believe" in reference to eternal life includes repentance. Likewise, the word "repent" includes belief. The part, "believe" or "repent," is used for the whole, or every-

thing that is necessary to bring about the desired end, that is, our salvation and eternal life.

When Peter stood up before the Jews in Acts 3 he said, *"Repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out ..."* (At 3:19). But in this statement he never said anything about belief ... or baptism. One might respond by arguing that we would assume that in the word "repent" he meant that they should believe on Jesus. Right! Now we get the point. When a grammatical synecdoche is used, **one must always assume that all that is required to obtain the final stated objective is included in the use of only one word in a particular text**. In every text where either eternal life, remission of sins, or salvation is mentioned, the New Testament writer did not have to mention every required act of obedience that was necessary to obtain the desired result of that which was promised by God. One word is sufficient when we understand that we must discover in the Bible all that God requires of us to be saved.

Understanding the principle of the synecdoche is vital to our understanding of what God requires of us as a result of our faith. If our faith does not move us to do all that is necessary to be saved, then either one of two things is true. Either we have an "ignorant" faith, that is, our lack of knowledge of all that God would require of us to obey Him leads us to be disobedient. Or second, we do have a knowledge of all that God requires of us to obey Him, but because of our rebellious spirit we seek to trust alone in our inactive faith. In either case we must remind ourselves of what James reminded his readers, *"The demons also believe and tremble."* Would we seek a faith that is greater than the faith of demons?

4. *John 3:36:* Jesus' statement in this verse summarizes the focus of this chapter. *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. And he who does not believe the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* Now connect this statement to a review of Hebrews 3:18,19. Those Israelites who were not allowed to enter into the land of promise were not allowed to enter because they were **disobedient**. They were disobedient because of their **unbelief**. When Jesus said that the one who believes has everlasting life, He meant that the one who is obedient has everlasting life. If one does not truly believe, then he will not obey. **It would be correct to state that Bible belief is obedience, and obedience is the expression of acceptable faith**. This is exactly what Jesus said in John 6:29. *"This is the **work** of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He has sent."* This is the connection that Paul made in Romans 10:16 in his quotation of Isaiah 53:1. *"However, they have not all **obeyed** the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has **believed** our report?'"*

Millions today claim to believe in Jesus, but they have not obeyed the gospel. This is a most frightening thought. There are countless preachers standing up throughout the land proclaiming to those who are ignorant of the Bible that they should only believe in Jesus and they will be saved. But they leave out everything that God would require of one to wash away sins (See At 2:38; 22:16). We live in a world where a "demon's faith" is preached that only brings on the trembling of a "sinner's prayer," but nothing else. Eloquent and powerful preachers move people to tremble in sin, but they say nothing of what God requires of the alien sinner to take care of his problem of sin. Proclaimers are preaching the promises of God, but they are failing to tell the people how to march to victory over sin. Such misleading prognosticators are merchants of theological mischief. They take people to the cross of repentance and leave them there without assisting them to fulfill all righteousness for the remission of their sins. They ignore the cleansing waters of being buried with Jesus in order to be raised to walk in newness of life (See Rm 6:3-6). These are not the *"feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things"* (Rm 10:15). They are those who leave the city of Satan unconquered because they fail to tell the people to march. They preach a part of what is required to receive eternal life and leave out the whole. They have preached a percentage of the righteousness of God, and thus failed to preach all His righteousness.

Chapter 4

A THEOLOGY OF ELIMINATION

Any theology that is developed by emphasizing one requirement for salvation to the exclusion or minimization of other requirements becomes a theology of elimination. Those who would promote the teaching that baptism is the sole requirement for salvation have often minimized other requirements as faith and repentance. Those who would emphasize a repentant experience at a moment of emotional outpouring over a command to "repent and be baptized" have also marginalized, if not rejected what is necessary to wash away one's sins. We have also found that those who overemphasize baptism fail to emphasize that one's faith should first move one

to be a disciple, and then, as Jesus said, disciples must obey the gospel in baptism (Mt 28:19,20). If there is no commitment to discipleship, then baptism often becomes a simple legal action of works. If one assumes his salvation only by faith, then baptism again becomes a legal ceremony. Sometimes the action of baptism is emphasized so much that its purpose in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus has long been forgotten. When discovering what God would have the alien sinner do in order to be saved, we must never emphasize a part of what is required by God to the exclusion of all other essential requirements for salvation. For this reason, the word "only" can never be used in reference to any part that is required for salvation. In reference to salvation, we either take all of the requirements, or we take our chances with only one part.

The religious world does not lack in the number of voices who proclaim a "faith only" condition for the salvation of the alien sinner. However, the common acceptance of a salvational teaching among most religionists makes us suspicious. It makes us suspicious because it is Satan's work to deceive as many people as possible in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner. He seeks to deceive as many people as possible not to do that which is necessary for salvation. He simply does not want the lost to obey the gospel. Therefore, he seeks to hold the alien sinner up short of being buried with Jesus in obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins (At 2:38). This is the work of Satan. And looking at his scheme from a purely logical point of view, he has performed a brilliant deed. His greatest deception is to encourage the multitudes to follow the multitudes.

For all the preceding reasons, therefore, everyone must take a fresh look at all that is necessary to bring one into a covenant relationship with God. We must come to the word of God with the attitude that whatever is stated in Scripture concerning what is necessary for our salvation we must believe and obey. No requirement for our salvation must be minimized or rejected. We would seek to do all that God asks of us in order that we become and remain His children. And in order to remain His children, we would not minimize or eliminate any command that must be obeyed in order to be pleasing to our Father.

A. Accepting the whole:

As soon as one says that salvation is by "faith only," he has eliminated any other necessity, or obedience connected with one's salvation. This poses a problem since in the New Testament many different conditions are mentioned in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner. As illustrated in the preceding statements, Jesus said, *"But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Lk 13:3; see At 3:19; 17:30; 2 Co 7:10; 2 Pt 3:9). But if salvation is by "faith only," then we have eliminated the necessity of repentance about which Jesus made a requirement for salvation. Paul wrote that *"with the mouth confession is made to salvation"* (Rm 10:10; compare Mt 10:32; At 8:37). But if salvation is by "faith only," then there is no need to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. Peter wrote, *"The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us ..."* (1 Pt 3:21; see Mk 16:16; At 22:16). But if salvation is by "faith only," then there is no need for immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6). Again, as soon as one uses the word "only" in connection to any requirement for the salvation of the alien sinner, he has eliminated every other requirement. He has made the Bible contradict itself in reference to what God would require of one in order to be saved. Because the word "only" is connected to faith in reference to one's salvation, many people are confused concerning what God would require for a saved relationship with Him.

Add to the preceding the concept of the faithful Christian life. John 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 us from all sin"* (1 Jn 1:7). In reference to the life of the disciple, there is no such thing as "faith only." In his address to Christians, James made this perfectly clear when he wrote, *"... faith without works is dead"* (Js 2:26). For this reason the early evangelists exhorted the first disciples *"to continue in the faith"* (At 14:22). Their exhortation was not to simply keep believing in Jesus, but to continue obediently to follow the word of Jesus. Jesus is the author of the salvation of all those who obey Him (Hb 5:9). Therefore, we must *"continue in His goodness"* by being obedient to His word (Rm 11:22; see Cl 1:23; Hb 1:11; 3:12,13; 13:1). The point is that if the beginning of our salvation is by "faith only," and we continue to claim a relationship with Jesus by "faith only," then we have eliminated faithful obedience to the word of God.

Faithful Bible students discover all that God would require of them to have a faithful Christian walk with Jesus. They do not stop at one passage of scripture, and then claim that all that is required for salvation is found in that one favorite passage. We must challenge ourselves with the following question:

WHICH DOCTRINE IS CORRECT?
Salvation by faith only (Jn 6:47).
Salvation by repentance only (Lk 13:3).
Salvation by confession only (Rm 10:10).
Salvation by baptism only (1 Pt 3:21).

The conclusion is that salvation is not by any one particular requirement, but by a collective response of the whole. In any particular scripture a part may be mentioned for the whole. (Remember the synecdoche?) Since all the above listed scriptures teach something that refers to the alien sinner's salvation, then **it is imperative to conclude that everything that is mentioned in reference to our salvation is necessary for one's salvation**. This is what is called "rightly dividing the word of God" in order to apply everything the Bible says in reference to one's relationship with God (2 Tm 2:15). We do not want to divide out of the context of the Scriptures any one Bible requirement for salvation that we may feel is the only thing that is necessary for salvation. We seek to accept all that God stated in the entirety of His word. Therefore, faith, repentance, confession and baptism are all necessary for the salvation of the alien sinner.

If any one of the preceding points constitutes salvation in and of itself, then one can be saved without the others. If one is saved by "repentance only," then he can be saved without faith, confession and baptism. If one is saved by "baptism only," then he can be saved without faith, repentance and confession. The one who would seek to follow the direction of God will study the entirety of the word of God in order to discover everything that God would require of one in order to be saved and live a faithful Christian life.

B. Response to all that God has given:

A very important point is made in 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****."* This is an evangelistic passage that refers to the response of the alien sinner to the preaching of the gospel of grace.

It is the desire of the obedient to respond with thanksgiving to all that God requires for one's salvation by His grace. As the manifestation of the grace of God on the cross, Jesus calls on all men to obey the good news of the cross in order to walk in newness of life. It is appreciation for God's gift of grace on the cross that causes obedient thanksgiving on the part of the alien sinner.

Now consider this thought in view of the impact that Hebrews 5:8,9 should have on us. The message of this statement is overwhelming. It should shock those who think that they can bring the grace of God into their lives with a cheap faith.

> *Though He was a Son,* ***He learned obedience*** *by the things that He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation* ***to all those who obey Him****.*

Think about this statement and reason from the Son of God to yourself. If we are somewhat arrogant with our faith, it would be difficult to understand the impact of this verse. Though Jesus was the Son of God, He "learned obedience." He learned obedience through the necessity to manifest His faith through suffering on the cross (Gl 2:16). He was thus made perfect through His obedience by going to the cross for us. Therefore, He was given the right to be the "author" of eternal salvation. But this eternal salvation is reserved for those who follow after His example of obedience. Now would we deceive ourselves into thinking that we can have eternal life without the obedience of which the Son of God is the author? We need to think about this for a moment. In order to be saved, would we entertain a belief that the alien sinner can get by with a cheap inactive faith in the One who paid such an incredible price of obedience on the cross? We need to keep in mind that we will all give account of our obedience before the Son who learned obedience through the suffering of the cross (2 Co 5:10).

Paul wrote, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men"* (Ti 2:11). If the loving grace of God on the cross does not cause an obedient response in the life of the alien sinner, then one is ungrateful. And no one can be saved with an ungrateful faith. The fallacy that is embedded in the "faith only" doctrine is that it allows an individual to believe that he or she is saved **without any thankful response to the grace of God on the cross**. True thanksgiving means that God calls for more than water from tears. He calls for the tearful to be born of the Spirit and the water with the One who went to the cross for our sins. God requires more than believing in what one must do. God requires a faith response to the One who through faith took Himself to the cross. One does not believe himself into salvation, but believes unto obedience of the gospel that brings salvation. We must remember that the faith of the alien sinner only gives him the right to become a son of God (Jn 1:12). It is the gospel that saves, not our faith. Therefore, one must connect with the gospel that saves through faith. This connection is made by being immersed with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6). A "saving faith" is thus defined by a faith that moves one to do that which one must do in order to be saved.

Chapter 5

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Any theology that discourages an obedient respond to the grace of God that was manifested on the cross, must immediately be suspect. An obedient response to God is a matter of respect. It is a matter of respecting the word of God. Our respect for God is manifested in our obedience to what He tells us to do. And unless we do what He says, then there is no respect for God or His word. The fear of the Lord that is mentioned in the Bible is defined as an obedient respect to what God tells us to do.

A. The fear of the Lord:

The phrase "fear of the Lord" saturates the Old Testament. Some unfortunately misunderstand the meaning of this phrase by minimizing its meaning to an emotional "terror" of the Lord. The meaning of "terror" is certainly within the meaning of the phrase, but the context in which the phrase is used refers to the obedience of the people out of their respect for God and His commands. In the context of its use, this respect means that the people obeyed the Lord. 1 Samuel 11:7 states, *"And the fear of the Lord fell on the people,* ***and they came*** *...."* The Israelites obediently *"****struck all the cities*** *around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord came on them"* (2 Ch 14:14). *"Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you.* ***Take heed and do it*** *..."* (2 Ch 19:7). *"Thus* ***you will do*** *in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and wholeheartedly"* (2 Ch 19:9).

The fear of the Lord is respect and obedience for what the Lord instructs. If one does not respect the word of the Lord, then he will devise some other system of salvation than that which is given by the Lord. He will declare his own salvation in order to escape his responsibility to do all the will of the Lord. **If one would declare his own salvation with little or no regard for what the word of God teaches concerning salvation, then there is no fear of the Lord in him**. There is no fear of the Lord in him because he has so little respect for what the Lord says in His word concerning all that one should do for his own salvation. Those who are ignorant of the word of God, therefore, validate their salvation on the foundation of their own emotional experience rather than what God declares in His word. Those who do not fear the Lord have little regard for the word of the Lord, and thus, they will devise other systems of salvation than what is taught in the word of God. One manifests his fear of the Lord by studying and obeying the word of the Lord. **There is absolutely no other way to validate one's fear of the Lord**.

It is for the above reason that salvation can never be based solely on the emotional experiences of man. Experiential religion is validated by the emotions of the adherents. The experientialist contends that if he has emotionally experienced something, then it must be right. The validation of his faith thus stands on himself, not on a pronouncement from the word of God. But if his reasoning is correct, then there need be no reference to what the Bible says concerning the salvation of the alien sinner. The experientialist has deceived himself into believing that he can declare his own salvation apart from the fear of the Lord, which fear refers to one's emotional response to what the Bible says one must do in order to be saved. This is the danger of the charismatic preacher who can bring people to tears and fear, declare the salvation of the people, and then go on his way without ever reading a passage from the word of God as to when God says one is saved. He thinks he has brought people to the "fear of the Lord." But no one can bring one to the fear of the Lord without proclaiming what the Lord says in His word.

B. The fear of the Lord is manifested in obedience.

As Bible believers, there should be no need for a discussion over any system of salvation that requires **no** obedience to the commandments of God. If someone devises a doctrine concerning salvation that is void of obedience to the commandments of God, then we can be assured that such a doctrine is a doctrine of demons. But this is exactly what the doctrine of "self-declared salvation" by faith only is all about. This teaching has removed obedience by the direction of the word of God. It is an experiential doctrine that has led its adherents to scoff at any obedient response to the word of God for salvation on the part of the alien sinner. It has thus removed the fear of the Lord from the hearts of men.

Nevertheless, the fact is that **one must obey God in order to be saved**. If this statement is erroneous, then there need be no respect for anything the Bible says one must do in order to be saved. The alien sinner can experientially declare his own salvation, and then go on his way without being washed of sins. He can ignore God's declaration that one must obey the gospel by being bap-

tized into Christ (Gl 3:26,27). But we would reject such a theology. We reject such because of our respect for the word of God, which word requires that the alien sinner must do something to manifest his fear of the Lord.

The following words of Jesus are strikingly appropriate in this discussion: *"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). The inconsistency of some is revealed by their quotation of this statement of Jesus. They will proclaim faith only in Jesus in order to be saved, and yet, they will quote this passage that says one must **obey** the "will of My Father" in order to be saved. If salvation is experiential by faith only, then one does not have to obey the will of the Father in reference to anything He might require to wash away the sins of the sinner.

Jesus said in another context, *"And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and* ***do not do the things that I say****?"* (Lk 6:46). Would one dare come to Jesus and say, "I believe on You and accept You as my personal Savior, **but I will not do the things You say**." This is what many are telling alien sinners who are trying to come to Jesus in order to be saved from their sins.

In the first century, those who feared the Lord, obeyed the word of God in reference to their salvation. Peter spoke of disciples who had purified their souls *"in* ***obeying*** *the truth"* (1 Pt 1:22). These are those of whom Jesus is the author of their salvation. Jesus *"became the author of eternal salvation* ***to all those who obey Him****"* (Hb 5:9). If one has not obeyed Jesus, then Jesus is not his "author." If one has obeyed the good news of His death, burial and resurrection, then this person seeks Jesus as his guide throughout his life (See 2 Th 1:7,8). In view of all the statements made in Scripture concerning what one must do in obedience to the will of God, any teaching that would negate or neglect obedience in reference to receiving Jesus as one's Savior must be questioned.

C. Works of obedience versus works of merit.

Many confuse obedience to the **commands of God** and **meritorious law keeping** in order to merit salvation. Several passages are used out of context that reveal that some do not understand the difference between these two concepts. For example, Paul wrote, *"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). Some have used the concept of this passage to refute the teaching that the alien sinner must be obedient to the will of God in order to be saved. Those who promote such a teaching forget the context in which Paul made this statement. **This statement was made to Christians**, not to alien sinners.

In the context of Ephesians 2 Paul was explaining that Christians are not saved by meritorious works of law, nor by good works by which one might supposedly atone for his sins. Since the Christian cannot keep law perfectly in order to save himself, then he cannot be saved by perfect law keeping or meritorious good works to atone for sins (See Rm 3:9,10,23). Therefore, the Christian is not saved by works lest he have an occasion to boast, not only before other Christians, but also before God. Paul added that if we are saved by grace, *"then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace"* (Rm 11:6).

There is an inconsistent theology taught here by some of those who teach that there is no obedience to law in reference to the salvation of the alien sinner. Some will use passages as Ephesians 2:8,9 and Galatians 2:16 in order to teach that the sinner is "saved by faith alone," and not by any works of law. But at the same time, they will teach that the Christian is saved by his good works that supposedly atone for one's sins. They eagerly argue that there is no meritorious work in reference to the salvation of the lost, but at the same time believe that the Christian's sins find atonement in good works. Interesting inconsistency, isn't it?

As in the context of Ephesians 2:8,9, Galatians 2:16 is also a statement by Paul that is made in reference to the Christian walk, not the salvation of the alien sinner. To Christians, Paul wrote *"****that a man is not justified by works of law****, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ...* ***for by works of law no flesh will be justified****."* In this statement to the Galatians Paul stated the same principle that he revealed in Ephesians 2:8,9. No Christian can be saved by perfect keeping of law, nor can a Christian atone for his sins with meritorious works. But keep in mind that in the statements to the Ephesians and the Galatians Paul was addressing his thoughts on meritorious law-keeping and meritorious works to Christians, not to alien sinners who are outside Christ. These are not scriptures that should be quoted before the alien sinner in reference to his salvation. If we do use these scriptures in reference to what God would require of alien sinners, then we will "shut out of the kingdom" those who would be baptized into Christ in order to become sons of God (See Gl 3:26-29).

We must keep in mind that Christians must work in response to the grace of God. Immediately following the statements in Ephesians concerning the impossibility of the Christian to work for his salvation, Paul makes the following statement in Ephesians 2:10: *"For we are His* ***workmanship****,* ***created in Christ Jesus for good***

***works**, which God prepared before that we should walk in them."* Now did Paul contradict himself by what he said in verses 8 & 9 and verse 10? We think not. In the context of Ephesians 2 Paul is writing to Christians, to those who had already obeyed the gospel in order to be saved. Though one is not saved by meritorious works of law or good works, he is saved in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing *"good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith"* (Gl 6:10).

The commentary of the statements of Ephesians 2:10 is Philippians 2:12. *"Therefore, my **beloved**, **as you have always obeyed**, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**."* These people to whom Paul was writing were Christians ("beloved"). As Christians they were always doing good works in obedience to the will of God. We must remember that they were already saved. As the saved, they were to work out the salvation they already had. This is the meaning of the Ephesians 2:10 passage. We are created in Christ Jesus **for** good works. We are not created in Christ Jesus **by** good works.

Christians do not meritoriously work in order to guarantee their salvation. However, they work out their salvation because they are thankful for their salvation that they have in Christ. In his instructions to the Corinthians, Paul used his own life as an example. *"But by the grace of God I am what I am. 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). Paul's abundant work as a disciple was his work of obedience, not works to merit salvation. He, as all disciples of Jesus, work in appreciation for what they have received through the grace of God. They work in thanksgiving of the cross (2 Co 4:15). Such is the "obedience of faith" that characterizes the children of God (Rm 1:15; 16:26).

The alien sinner becomes a new creature when he works in obedience to the law of Christ to be baptized into Christ (Gl 3:26,27). *"In Christ he is a new creature"* (2 Co 5:17). As a new creation in Christ, he seeks to work in thanksgiving of his salvation (2 Co 4:15). His faith goes to work in response to grace. It is as Paul wrote to the Galatians, *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, **but faith working through love**"* (Gl 5:6). Again, this statement was written to those who had already been created in Christ Jesus through their obedience to the gospel. They were disciples who were obedient by being *"baptized into Christ"* (Gl 3:27). Our salvation in Christ is by faith in the grace of God, but it is a faith that is working through love. It is as James wrote, *"You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only"* (Js 2:24). It is an obedient faith that brings one into Christ. Once in Christ, it is an obedient response to the grace by which we have been saved that makes our faith profitable unto salvation (See Rv 14:13).

Chapter 6

LOST IN BELIEF

The fact that obedience through perfect keeping of law does not save the Christian does not excuse the alien sinner from his responsibility to obey the commandments of God concerning what is necessary for him to do in order to be saved. In rightly dividing the word of God we must not confuse ourselves by using passages of scripture that deal with the salvation of Christians to refer to the lost state of the alien sinner. Doing such has brought great confusion into the world of theology in reference to the salvation of those outside Christ. Too many theologians have committed this error of interpretation, and thus, they have failed to recognize that there are responsibilities on the part of the sinner for him to manifest his "fear of the Lord" in obedience to the gospel. The faith that one has in the Lord that begins before being baptized into Christ must move him to obey the gospel by immersion into Christ. The baptized believer must then continue in a labor of love, working out his salvation that he has in Christ. In order to begin one's lifetime of obedience, there must be an initial manifestation of obedience.

In the first century, there were many who "believed," but their belief was not manifested by obedience to what Jesus said. Many maintained an unresponsive faith in the presence of the One in whom they were to believe. If such happened during the personal ministry of Jesus, then we would expect the same today. We would expect people to believe in Jesus, but at the same time be rebellious to the word of God. If you believe that this unfortunate situation cannot exist today, then take a closer look at the following examples:

A. Jews lost in belief.

In John 8, John recorded an interesting event during the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was at the time in the pres-

ence of some who to some extent believed in Him. In verse 31 He challenged these "believers." *"Then Jesus said to* ***those Jews who believed in Him****, '****If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples****.'"* The mark of true discipleship is obedience to the word of Jesus (See Jn 12:48). Obedience to the word of Jesus is the signal to everyone that one is a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, in order to begin one's discipleship of Jesus **he must obey the word of Jesus**. If there is no obedience, then there is no discipleship.

Now in the context of Jesus' exchange with some Jews in John 8, there were those in His presence who believed, but they did not want to obey the word of Jesus. So in verse 44 Jesus said to them, *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do."* These Jews whom Jesus addressed "believed in Him" (Jn 8:31). However, their belief did not move them to obey the word of Jesus. They were thus of the faith of their father the devil, and it was his will that they desired to obey.

If one believes, but his belief does not move him to obey Jesus, **then he is still under the influence of the devil**. Jesus stated, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved"* (Mk 16:16). By the Holy Spirit Peter said, *"Repent and be baptized ..."* (At 2:38). The Spirit through Ananias said, *"Arise and be baptized ..."* (At 22:16). Would we dare believe, but refuse to obey the simple command to be baptized? If we do not obey, can we declare our own salvation without obedience to the command to be baptized? Obeying God to be baptized is not a work of merit. It is a work of obedience whereby we are manifesting that we seek to be an obedient disciple of Jesus.

B. Rulers lost in belief.

During the ministry of Jesus there were also many rulers who believed on Jesus. However, they remained in their state of condemnation because they would not confess who He claimed to be. John wrote to them, *"Nevertheless,* ***among the chief rulers also many believed in Him****. But because of the Pharisees* ***they did not confess Him*** *lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"* (Jn 12:42,43).

These rulers had faith. However, their faith was not strong enough to move them to confess that Jesus was the Son of God. Their love for the glory of man was stronger than their faith in Jesus. Would we consider these men saved by faith only? Did they have a saving faith? In answer to these questions, Matthew 10:32,33 gives the answer. *"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****."* The rulers were guilty of being condemned in their faith. Their faith without obedience left them spiritually dead in their faith. It is for this reason that we would question any teaching that assumes one's salvation is by faith alone. Faith alone does not manifest one's willingness to obey God. Faith alone can leave us in a state of condemnation.

C. Kings lost in belief.

In conjunction with the unresponsive faith of the Jewish rulers, there is also the case of King Agrippa who remained "lost in belief." Paul asked Agrippa, *"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?"* (At 26:27). Agrippa did not have to answer this question because Paul knew that he believed the prophets concerning the coming of the Messiah. So Paul gave Agrippa's answer for him. *"I know that you believe"* (At 26:27). Agrippa knew that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Acts 26:28 is an interesting statement of Agrippa that was recorded by Luke. *"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time you almost persuade me to become a Christian.'"* Agrippa remained spiritually dead in his faith because it did not move him to do that which would make him a Christian. He remained spiritually dead in his faith because he was not moved to obedience.

D. Demons lost in belief.

We would be correct in believing that all demons are lost. But consider the fact that demons have faith. Of their faith, James wrote, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well.* ***The demons also believe and tremble****"* (Js 2:19). At least these demons had enough faith to tremble. They were not completely dead in their faith. They had more faith than most people who claim to be Christians. The demons tremble, but many people have so little faith that they do not tremble at the possibility of losing their souls. They trust in their inactive faith, which faith will be pronounced dead upon the coming of our Lord.

So again we ask the question, "Can one be lost in belief?" The answer is that some Jewish rulers were lost in belief. Agrippa was lost in belief. Demons are lost in belief. **The fact that one can be lost in belief should caution us about teaching any doctrine that faith only will save the alien sinner**. In every case

where one was lost in belief, the belief did not spark obedience to confess Jesus as the Christ. This "confessing of Jesus" was not simply a verbal proclamation, but a living sacrifice on the part of the one who believed. Bible faith is manifested by obedience to become a child of God, as well as to remain His child in His care.

Chapter 7

FAILURE TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

This will not be a comfortable chapter for many evangelists to read. The following discussion will stir a great deal of guilt in the hearts of those who are sincerely trying to do their best to please God. To these we would say that you have done the best you could with what you knew. God's grace will cover our past erroneous teaching as we all study together and learn more of His will. We believe in a God of mercy, a God who knows that we continually grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). What is important is to continue to grow in this knowledge, trusting that God has a lot of mercy and grace for our incomplete knowledge of His word that we have taught in the past.

Regardless of the past, however, we must take another look at the responsibility of the evangelist who seeks to preach the good news of Jesus. We have studied the responsibility of the audience that they must move beyond a simple belief in Jesus. As previously proved, the biblical definition of faith is obedience to the will of God. In reference to the alien sinner, saving faith moves one to respond to the will of God in obedience to the gospel. In reference to the Christian, saving faith moves one to work in thanksgiving for the grace of God. In both situations faith must always be understood to manifest obedience to the will of God.

The responsibility to fulfill all righteousness in reference to the will of God begins at the point of baptism. At the beginning of His ministry, *"Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him"* (Mt 3:13). But because John knew who Jesus was, he initially had some objections. As a direct revelation from God, John was already baptizing people in the wilderness (Mt 3:6). He was baptizing in Aenon because there was much water there (Jn 3:23). So when Jesus came to him, John did not try to prevent Him from being baptized. He just thought that he was not spiritually suitable to baptize the Messiah. But notice carefully what Jesus said to John. *"Permit it at this time, for thus it is appropriate for **us** to fulfill all righteousness"* (Mt 3:15). Notice Jesus' use of the plural pronoun "us." In the "fulfilling of all righteousness," **baptism is not just about the one being baptized**. In this case, the baptism was not just about Jesus being baptized. **The "us" included John**. God had commissioned John to baptize for the remission of sins (Mk 1:4). Baptism was part of the righteousness of God that was revealed to John. Therefore, in obedience to God, it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized. But as part of the work of being an evangelist of the good news of Jesus, John too had to participate in the "righteousness" of God by baptizing Jesus. **When one is baptized, both the one who is baptized and the one baptizing are together fulfilling all righteousness**. Evangelists who are not baptizing those to whom they preach the gospel, therefore, **are not fulfilling all righteousness**. Their message is falling short of **all** righteousness.

We must keep in mind that Jesus used the word "all" in reference to fulfilling the righteousness of God. The use of this word means that no one part of the "all" can be emphasized to the exclusion of any other part that completes all the righteousness of God. The "all" would include faith, but it would not exclude other requirements to complete the righteousness of God. Faith is not exclusive. Faith would not exclude baptism, **for it was baptism that resulted in the fulfillment of all righteousness in the baptism of Jesus**. Therefore, unless one is baptized, all the righteousness of God has not been fulfilled in his coming to Christ.

An example of this truth is seen in the case of the eunuch from Ethiopia. In Acts 8 Philip was instructed by an angel to go to a desert and connect with an Ethiopian who was returning to his homeland in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian was a eunuch under Candace, the queen. As a religious person, he was reading from Isaiah 53 concerning a prophecy of the Messiah. Now notice what is stated in Acts 8:35. *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this scripture **he preached Jesus to him**."* All that is stated in this context is that Philip preached Jesus to him. In the following verses we discover at least one very important subject that is included in the "preaching of Jesus."

We have no idea how long Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch. But as they went on their way they came to some water. Now consider what the eunuch initiated. *"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). Nothing was said in the text about Philip teaching the eunuch about baptism. The initiative to be baptized came from the eunuch. Therefore, **we would correctly conclude that in preaching Jesus, one as an evangelist, must speak of baptism**. Philip fulfilled all righteousness by carrying out his responsibility to speak of baptism when he preached Jesus. When the two came to some water, both Philip and the eunuch worked together to fulfill all righteousness by the baptism of the eunuch.

How many preachers today think they are preaching Jesus but actually are not fulfilling all righteousness by failing to teach the people that they must be baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? If one does not teach on baptism, **then he is not preaching the full message of Jesus**. If one does not assist people in being baptized, **then he is not an evangelist who is fulfilling all righteousness**.

How many preachers are there who have finally realized that they left out of their message any reference to baptism? They have preached for years, but never mentioned baptism to the point that their audiences would respond as the eunuch, *"See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized"*? We have found a host of preachers who have actually been the ones who have hindered the people from being baptized. When the members of their churches have studied the Bible to the point of realizing that one must be baptized, some preachers have said to the people that they are already saved by faith only. They then often refuse to baptize the people. These preachers have shut out of the kingdom the members of their churches. It is truly a sad situation when those who are supposed to increase the borders of the kingdom are those who supposedly preach Jesus.

We are sure there are many preachers out there who are filled with regret because they forgot to fulfill all the righteousness of God by telling the people that they needed to obey Jesus in baptism for the remission of their sins in order to fulfill all righteousness.

We can know that the kingdom of darkness hangs heavy over the people when those who supposedly preach Jesus among the people are actually not fulfilling all righteousness by failing to preach all the word of God about Jesus. These are truly dark days in Christendom. They are dark because of those whom we trust to show us the way are stopping short of preaching the complete message of the gospel. Many of the preachers among the people can never say what Paul said to the Ephesians. *"... **I kept nothing back that was profitable**, and teaching you publicly and from house to house"* (At 20:20). He reminded the Ephesians of something that most preachers today cannot say. *"Therefore, I testify to you this day that **I am innocent of the blood of all men**. **For I have not shunned to declare to you all the counsel of God"*** (Ep 20:26,27). How many preachers can confidently say this to those to whom they have preached the word of God?

There are few repentant evangelists among the people as Peter who had previously denied Jesus during the final hours before the cross. But after the resurrection he boldly stood up before those to whom he had previously denied Jesus, 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).

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter boldly preached Jesus to the people. *"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). Now notice the believing response of the people. *"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, **what will we do**?'"* (At 2:37). How would you answer this question if you believed in a "faith only" doctrine? Would you hinder the people from entering the kingdom by failing to preach the whole counsel of God? If you do not respond to this question of the people as Peter did, then you have shut up the kingdom of God to people who believe on Jesus. You have not truly preached Jesus to them. You have not fulfilled all the righteousness of God.

Peter's preaching of Jesus moved the people on the day of Pentecost to be cut to the heart because of their sins. Now the people wanted to know what to do. They were certainly mournful over crucifying Jesus. Some mourned and possibly others cried. They believed because they responded by knowing they had to do something to rectify their rebellion against Jesus. Some preachers today would have simply cried out to the people, "Accept Jesus as your personal Savior. Repeat the 'sinner's prayer' after me.'" But in this case, Peter did not tell the people to "believe on Jesus." **They already believed**. However, their belief did not relieve them of their sin against the Christ they had crucified and was now reigning as Lord (At 2:36). Their belief did not save them from their sin. Peter did not tell them to say some "sinner's prayer" in response to their grief. He did not shut them out of the kingdom by refusing to tell them to be baptized for the remission of their sins.

In verse 38 Peter assumed his responsibility to fulfill all righteousness as an evangelist by responding to the people, *"**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* If Peter had

never told them to be baptized, he and the other apostles on that day would not have fulfilled all righteousness by baptizing about 3,000 people (At 2:41). The people would never have received the gift of the Holy Spirit upon their baptism.

Another example might help. Remember Paul and Silas praying and singing the gospel in prison in Philippi (At 16:25)? After the earthquake the jailor rushed before the presence of the two evangelists *"trembling with fear"* (At 16:29). He believed! He believed to the point of trembling with fear. But did trembling with fear save him? It did not according to what he asked of the two evangelists. *"Sirs, **what must I do to be saved**?"* (At 16:30). It was as if he were saying, "I believe, but what must I do to be saved?" The two evangelists simply responded, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved"* (At 16:31). Now did trembling, fear **and belief** save him? Take another look at the text. Verse 32 states, *"And they **spoke to him the word of the Lord**, and to all who were in his house."* What does speaking *"to him **the word of the Lord**"* include? The two evangelists certainly spoke to him about the Lord Jesus. At least this is all that is stated in the text. But when something started to happen in the jailors' life in answer to his plea, *"what must I do to be saved?"*, verse 33 states, *"And **immediately he was baptized**, he and all his household."* Speaking the "word of the Lord," therefore, includes speaking about baptism, **for where did the jailor get the idea that he had to be baptized**? As in the "preaching of Jesus" by Philip, and in "speaking the word of the Lord" by Paul and Silas, **speaking about baptism is included**. So the obvious conclusion is that if an evangelist does not speak to the people about baptism for the remissions of sins, **then he has not preached Jesus, neither has he spoken the word of the Lord to the people**. He has been negligent in carrying out his responsibilities as an evangelist for Jesus.

And now we have a problem of guilt. When a preacher realizes that he has spent a lifetime preaching faith only salvation without fulfilling his responsibility of informing his audiences about baptism in obedience to the gospel, he often realizes that he has actually not preached Jesus to the people. He failed in his preaching to mention baptism in water for remission of sins in order that he join with people in fulfilling all righteousness. He has failed to fulfill his part as an evangelist to baptize those to whom he has preached. He has failed to preach Jesus and the whole counsel of the Lord. Guilt often sets in when one realizes that he has left many of his past audiences just short of being washed of sins in the waters of baptism. Because of this guilt, most preachers will not turn from their "faith only" message simply because they remember the masses of people to whom they preached, but never mentioned how he could join with them in fulfilling all the righteousness of God in baptism. The result is that their failure leads them to often vehemently argue against any teaching that would infer baptism as important for the remission of sins in order that one come into a covenant relationship with God. Their preaching of a "faith only" salvation has long separated salvation from the washing of sins in the waters of baptism. They thus continue to preach an "incomplete" righteousness by subtracting from the word of God (Please read Rv 22:18,19 with emphasis on the phrase "take away.")

It is our goal to call for a restoration in preaching. This restoration includes first the preaching of the whole counsel of God in order that representatives of Jesus throughout the world fulfill all righteousness by preaching a complete message of Jesus. It is our prayer that disciples of Jesus will lead alien sinners to believe in Jesus, and then participate with them in fulfilling all righteousness by assisting them to wash away their sins in the cleansing waters of baptism.

Book 51

His Grace – Our Faith

From the beginning with the creation of Adam to the final coming of Jesus, there has always been grace and law from God, and faith in response to God. Grace does not eliminate law, neither does law nullify grace. If man would walk with God, he must walk according to law (God's instructions). Since we cannot walk perfectly, then we must have faith in the grace of God. The subject of grace is no more complex than that.

The problem with the subject of grace develops out of our desire to do our own thing, which means in our religious behavior, we want to construct our own means of religious behavior by which we would please God and save ourselves. The Jews were masters at this practice. Because they honored the law of God, they established a host of other laws surrounding God's law in order to guarantee that the law of God was obeyed. By the time Jesus arrived, their religiosity had become so absurd that they rejected the law of God in order to keep their self-imposed rules and regulations.

The Holy Spirit was redundant to keep this legal religiosity of man-made statues out of the fellowship of God's people. Galatians was the first document written to blast the practice of binding where God had not bound. The Spirit came back with Romans a few years later in order to give a detailed document to explain the relationship between grace and law. And now we have submitted our own document, not to add to the Spirit's simple explanation, but to discuss what we consider to be the core of Christianity. We will make no apologies about approaching the subject from different directions. The subject of grace is so rewarding that we cannot say too much about this indescribable work of God in loving us.

The revelation of God's grace separates Christianity from all religions of the world. While the adherents of man-made religions seek favor from their gods through meritorious conduct, the Christian enjoys, through faith, a God who has offered His grace to all who would seek to come into His presence for eternity. God offers His grace, but His offer must be accepted by those who yearn for His presence. He asks that we accept His offer for eternal dwelling through a faith that responds to His work of grace on the cross of His Son. This act of grace makes Christianity unique from all religions of the world.

Our reaction to meritorious systems of man's religions has often distorted our own understanding of our salvation by grace through faith. Reaction to meritorious religiosity has led many to misunderstand something that is actually not that difficult to understand. But because of our desires to live according to our own religious dictates, we are often tempted to practice and preach "another gospel" that is contrary to the grace that was revealed at the cross through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God.

It is not difficult to understand the simplicity of our salvation by the grace of God. From the creation of man to the culmination of humanity at the final coming of Jesus, God's offer of salvation from mortality through grace has always been offered to fallen man. He stands as a just and fair Creator because He has always offered a way of escape from the confines of our mortality. Before the cross of Christ, those of faith waited in hope of the grace that would be revealed. After the cross, we are moved by revealed grace to offer up ourselves with the One who offered Himself for us.

Deliverance from our sin problem has always been by grace through faith. There is no other means by which mortal man can possibly be saved from the confines of his mortality. Because of our own fallibility, our only chance at eternal life is by the grace of God. Because there is no possible way to obey perfectly any system of law from God, or to meritoriously atone for one sin through good works, salvation will always be by God's grace. Subtract our obedient faith from the picture, and there can never be any reception of the free gift of grace. If we devise some theology of faith without obedience, then we eliminate any conditions that God places on

those who would accept His grace. It is through the obedience of faith that we have access into God's wonderful grace, wherein we stand and have confidence of our salvation. So through faith we thank *"God for His indescribable gift"* (2 Co 9:15).

Chapter 1

GRACE: THE MISUNDERSTOOD SIMPLICITY

Grace is the love of God who reached out to His creation through the cross. He reached out through the cross of His incarnate Son. If we delete the cross, there is no grace. If we ignore Jesus, there is no grace. Jesus Christ as the crucified Servant of God is the very illustration of God's grace toward man. In all the discussions throughout history concerning grace, men seem to have had great difficulty in understanding the revelation and demonstration of God's grace through the cross. But if we obediently respond with faith in the crucified and resurrected Son, then we are on our way to understanding the motivating power of grace and faith.

In his struggle against the sale of indulgences that was practiced by the Roman church, Martin Luther struggled to harmonize grace and works as they were revealed through Paul and James. He had such difficulty with any concept of obedience of faith in his reaction to the sale of indulgences, that he referred to the book of James as "an epistle of straw," for it promoted works. He obsessed over justification by faith alone to the point that he misunderstood Paul's writings on grace and sought to ignore the principle of obedient works taught by James. In his reaction to Roman Catholic priest selling the right to sin, Luther went to the extreme of teaching that faith elminated all works in reference to one's salvation.

Paul's emphasis on grace was certainly intended by the Holy Spirit. In his life before the waters of baptism in Damascus, Paul was breathing murderous threats against the church (At 9:1). But after his cleansing by the grace of God in the waters of baptism (At 22:16), who else would be the obvious choice to reveal the wonderful grace of God? If grace could save the chief of sinners, then it can save anyone. But in his teaching on grace, Paul did not become antinomian as many writers have, that is, he did not teach that grace covers the sin of the saint to the point that it does not make any difference what one believes or how he behaves. Paul always maintained an inseparable connection between grace and obedience. He always taught that obedience was a manifestation of faith, not a meritorious effort to justify one's self in response to the cross.

Augustine promoted one of the most interesting concepts of grace. He believed that all men were born totally depraved, and thus, unable to respond to God. He believed that it was not within the ability of any man to make a free-moral choice to respond to the call of God through His grace. Salvation, therefore, could only come as a result of God making individual choices as to who would be given unmerited grace and who would not. Augustine taught that one does not merit the ability to choose, but we do exercise the ability to work.

John Calvin promoted the teaching that the grace of God was limited only to those whom God had chosen for eternal life. It was limited only to those whom God unconditionally elected. Calvin believed that before the world was created, God individually elected those who would be saved for eternal dwelling. And since God has already elected those who will go to heaven, then His grace is limited only to these individuals. Calvin's teaching means that God's grace is not a part of the universal call of God to all men whom He wishes would come to repentance. In fact, Calvin's teaching nullifies the great commission and the preaching of the gospel to the world in order that all men approach God with a penitent heart. Those of this belief contend that it is only the responsibility of the evangelist to inform the individually elected in the world that they are already saved. Their gospel (good news) is only an announcement of salvation, not a call to repentance through the preaching of the cross.

Opposite to the teaching of Calvin is the doctrine of universalism. The universalist contends that grace is unconditionally appropriated to all men, and thus all men will be saved. Salvation, therefore, is by grace alone, apart from any conditions that God would require on the part of any individual.

Another unfortunate misunderstanding concerning this subject is how people have failed to define the word "gospel" in the context of its New Testament usage. We have studied through many documents where this word is erroneously used to refer to law. When a particular preacher would say, "We must obey the gospel," what he is actually saying is that we must obey the law of God. But this understanding is totally contrary to the gospel itself as it is defined in the New Testament. The fact that one would use the word "gospel," as it is used

in the New Testament, to mean law, **is a denial of the gospel itself**.

Immediately after Jesus returned from His fast in the wilderness, He *"came into Galilee, preaching the **gospel** of God"* (Mk 1:14). Does this mean He started preaching the law of God? Is the gospel just another system of law to be obeyed? We think not.

The word "gospel" was used by translators to translate the Greek word *euaggelion*. This word simply means "good news." But if the word "gospel" means law, then, as we will see in the remaining chapters, it would not be good news. Paul told Peter that because they could not be justified by law, they ran to Christ (Gl 2:16). Did they run from the Old Testament law to another system of law? In view of the early Jewish Christians' attempt to be delivered from law, and thus, sin and death, why would the Holy Spirit supposedly use a word that would refer to another system of law under which one would again be brought into bondage because it too could not be obeyed perfectly? In other words, in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 Paul revealed that Jesus was coming from heaven to destroy from the presence of God all those who have not obeyed the gospel. Did he mean that those who had not obeyed every point of law would lose their souls? Did he infer, therefore, that the gospel, if it is law, must be obeyed perfectly in order for one not to suffer destruction from the presence of the Lord?

When Jesus began His ministry, He stated the good news (gospel) that He had arrived and was going to the cross as an act of grace on the part of God. Little by little He taught the people about the cross of grace, though His first disciples did not understand the good news (gospel) of the cross until after the event. As Paul explained briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, the gospel was the revelation of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. **This was an act of grace on the part of God, not law**. This was the grace of God revealed at the cross. Obedience to the gospel does not refer to obedience to another system of law whereby one would seek to justify himself before God. Obedience to the gospel is joining with Jesus on the cross, in the tomb, and in His resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6). Our obedience to the gospel is a response to the grace of God that was revealed on the cross over two thousand years ago (Ti 2:11). That Jesus died there for our sins is the "truth of the gospel" (See Cl 1:5; Gl 2:5,14). So hereafter when we speak of "obedience to the gospel," we are not referring to obedience to another system of law, but to baptism in response to the grace of God revealed through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus

Somewhere between the extremes and misunderstandings concerning grace, there must be a simple understanding of God's grace that is so important and central to Christian faith. We would not for a moment believe that which is so important concerning our salvation would be so difficult to understand. Because some have developed their own theologies on grace out of a reaction to legal religiosity, we must caution ourselves in coming to the New Testament in study of this subject. We must guard our objectivity by allowing the word of God to speak for itself. We dare not call ourselves after the theology of any particular man. We must assume that understanding the grace of God is not difficult simply because God wants us to be assured of our salvation. Grace should bring comfort, not theological confusion. We must assume, therefore, that the Holy Spirit's teaching on the subject is so simple that even the novice student of the Bible can understand the truth of the matter.

Chapter 2

THE GRACE OF GOD

The Greek word for grace is *charis*. It is a word that is used in various ways in the New Testament. *"And the Child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the **grace** of God was upon Him"* (Lk 2:40). *"Now Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in **favor*** [charis] *with God and man"* (Lk 2:52). *"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the **grace*** [favor] *of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia"* (2 Co 8:1). *"And when I come, whomever you may approve by letters, these will I send to carry your **gift*** [charis] *to Jerusalem"* (1 Co 16:3). The word *charis* always carries with it the meaning of "favor," "unmerited favor," or "unmerited gift." In the context of our salvation, it is God's unmerited favor that He extends to us, which favor is accessed by our obedient faith.

The use of the word "grace" is defined in the actions of the Gentile Christians in Macedonia who sent their "grace" contribution to the Jewish famine victims of Judea. The Gentile brothers had every reason to resent the Jews. The Jews had historically been arrogant toward the "pagan" Gentiles. However, when both Jews and Gentiles came together in Christ, love prevailed and favor (grace) was poured out on the Jewish brothers in their time of need. This is grace. In our time of need,

God let love and grace prevail.

John wrote of grace as an historical event. *"For the* [Old Testament law] *was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (Jn 1:17). Though the grace of God has always existed, John's emphasis was on **the revelation of grace through the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross**. This is what Paul explained in Titus 2:11. *"For the grace of God that brings salvation* ***has appeared*** *to all men."* Grace is God's gift to man that appeared through Jesus Christ.

It was the event of the appearing of the grace of God that was prophesied by the prophets. *"Of this salvation* [by grace], Peter wrote, *"the prophets have inquired and searched diligently,* ***who prophesied of the grace that would come to you****, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify ..."* (1 Pt 1:10,11).

Grace refers to the lovingkindness of God toward man that was prophesied by the prophets and revealed through the event of the cross. It is God's unmerited gift that He extends to man in order to bring man into His fellowship. It is His steadfast love towards His creation. Under the Old Testament law grace was revealed in God's steadfast patience with His people in their rebellious walk away from Him. Though the greater portion of Israel went into apostasy, there was always the remnant of faith who remained committed to God. God's lovingkindness continued with this remnant of faithful people to the time when a personal revelation of grace was made known through Jesus. However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that the grace of God has not always existed from the beginning when the first free-moral individual was created. It was only revealed in the advent of Jesus on the cross, though God from the beginning of time has always worked with those of faith through grace.

Under the New Testament covenant, we speak of grace as an event in history. This was Paul's point in the statement of Titus 2:11. The cross was the revelation of the grace of God. It was the revelation of the favor that God has always had for those who walked by faith. It is thus *"the gift of God"* (Ep 2:8). It is as Paul explained in Romans 5:15: *"But the free gift is not as the offense. 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****."* Jesus was the event of God's grace toward man. He is God's free gift of grace for the salvation of all those of all history who came and would come to Him through obedient faith.

The necessity of God's grace was revealed because of the total inability of man to deliver himself from his own predicament of sin. Sin moved man so far away from God, that God had to come all the way from heaven to the cross in order to reconcile man unto Himself (See Ph 2:5-11). The event of God's grace on the cross is magnified by the impossibility of man to reconcile himself unto God through either law keeping or meritorious works. All have sinned (Rm 3:23). All have been unable to keep law perfectly, and thus all men are lawbreakers (1 Jn 3:4). We are lawbreakers to the point of being in bondage to our own sin (Rm 7:7-20). Before contacting the blood of the crucified Son, we were all sinners by nature, and thus lost in sin (Ep 2:1-3). But in a state of hopelessness in a world of sin, God intervened with the event of the cross (Ep 2:12).

The only possible way for man to be delivered from his state of sin was that God had to give freely the gift of grace through Jesus Christ. God came to man through Jesus in order that we might become the righteousness of God through grace. *"For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Co 5:21). Jesus was the revelation of the grace of God. Through Jesus, God opened the heavenly door in order that we might truly see the opportunity of entering the presence of God (See Rm 3:21-26; 5:12-21).

The glory of grace is that it was revealed through the event of the cross without our expectation, for we were all by nature the children of wrath, and thus, dead in our sins. *"But God demonstrates His love toward us,* ***in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us****"* (Rm 5:8). The event of the cross was a surprise to those who knew that they were lost in sin. Though the disciples were expecting an earthly king who would redeem them from foreign occupation (At 1:6), the purpose for which Jesus came was to redeem humanity from sin. The disciples' deliverance was not from earthly powers, but from the spiritual powers of darkness. When the resurrected Jesus talked with the two men on the road to Emmaus, *"their eyes were restrained so that they would not know Him"* (Lk 24:16). Without recognizing who Jesus was, they spoke with Him of *"things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people"* (Lk 24:19). But they said nothing concerning the salvational event of the cross. As the apostles, they too did not associate the event of the cross with the revelation of God's grace. They understood the cross redemption only when the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles and all the world that the cross event was the revelation of the grace of God.

At first the crucifixion of Jesus was only an historical event that crushed the hopes of the disciples in a king who would possibly deliver them from Roman

power (Lk 24:21). But when the Spirit revealed that the cross was the revelation of God's Suffering Servant for the salvation of all men, then the significance of the cross became more than a tragedy. It became the hope of the world.

Faith is the response of those who are mourning in their sin, though they rejoice over the grace event of the cross. Our faith is in the Redeemer on the cross, for we believe that His crucifixion was more than the martyrdom of a great religious leader. It was the revelation of God's gift to all men. Since we could not deliver ourselves from our bondage of sin, God sent the offering of His gift of grace. Faith is our response. Obedient faith brings the alien sinner into the realm of grace. *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have* ***access by faith into this grace*** *wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"* (Rm 5:1,2). It is for this reason that faith moves the alien sinner to do all that God would require in order to come into this realm of grace. This was why Paul asked the Christians in Rome, *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"* (Rm 6:3).

The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross was the advent of God's grace into this world. In order for one to reap the salvational blessings of the cross, we are crucified and baptized with Him into His death for the remission of our sins (At 2:38). Our advent into the realm of God's grace happens when we go to the cross and grave with Jesus in baptism, and then come forth to walk in newness of life with Him (Rm 6:3-6).

Chapter 3

EXAMPLES OF GRACE

Grace is always accessed by faith on the part of man, for God accepts no meritorious works for the atonement of sins. However, when we say "accessed" we mean an obedience of faith whereby men respond to that which God provides through His grace. This is the means by which men have always come into the favor of God. Throughout the entire Bible when the faith of the faithful is mentioned, it is always obedience of faith. A simple acknowledgment that God exists has never brought anyone into the favor of God. Only when men acted on their faith in obedience did they receive the blessings and promises of God.

A. Noah was saved by grace accessed by obedient faith.

In our efforts to define the nature of obedient faith by which we access God's grace, the text of Genesis 6:5-8 is a good commentary. After all, we are reminded in the New Testament that Noah acted on his faith. *"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).

In the historical context of Noah's day, God *"saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth"* (Gn 6:5). Because the population of the whole world was given over to sin, God said, *"I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth"* (Gn 6:7). But of all humanity, *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord"* (Gn 6:8). *"Noah was a just man and blameless in his time. And Noah walked with God"* (Gn 6:9).

Noah and his family were to be given the blessing of not suffering the impending destruction that God was bringing upon the earth and all humanity. The promise of Noah's deliverance from the imminent destruction was an offer of grace. The destruction was coming, but Noah could not have delivered himself without following the instructions of God in order to benefit from the grace offer. Because he feared God, through his obedience of faith he prepared the ark.

The historical event of the flood of Noah's day is the first example in the Bible that defines how God works through grace and faith. We can apply how God worked in the case of Noah and the flood with the situation of all men in sin. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23). Sin separates all men from God (Is 59:1,2). Therefore, in order for God to remain just (righteous) in view of the fact that all men have sinned, and are in danger of being eternally separated from Him, there must be a promise of escape from destruction. Because all men exist in a state of condemnation through sin, there must be a way of pardon from sin. Sin demands justice and judgment. In order for God to remain just in view of the fact that all sin, He offers mercy and grace. The condition for accepting God's grace is that man must respond through obedient faith. This is what Paul said in Romans 3:25,26. God set forth Christ *"to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith* ***in order to declare His righteousness*** [justice] *for the remission of sins in the past because of the*

forbearance of God, to declare at this time, I say, ***His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus****."* God is declared just because through His mercy He offers the grace of salvation to those who are willing "to build an ark" for their salvation.

God remained just in destroying sinful humanity in the flood because He offered Noah a way of escape through the command to build an ark. The wicked world persisted in sin, though Noah continued to preach repentance (1 Pt 3:20; 2 Pt 2:5). But by faith, Noah responded to God's warning by building the ark (Hb 11:7). God's offer was salvation through the ark which was built as a result of Noah's faith. Grace made the means of salvation from the flood possible. Faith responded by building. In order for Noah to believe and build, there first had to be the revelation of God's grace. And in the revelation, Noah had to be told how he and his family could access the grace (salvation) of God. Saving grace, therefore, must be based on the following conditions:

1. ***An announcement must be made.*** The impending action on the part of God must be announced to those to whom it will affect. In the case of Noah, God announced, *"The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them. And behold, I will destroy them with the earth"* (Gn 6:13).

2. ***Instructions must be given.*** Instructions must be given as to how one can access the grace of God. God said to Noah, *"Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood"* (Gn 6:14).

3. ***Obedient faith moves one to accept the offer of God.*** Obedient faith gave Noah the opportunity to access God's offer. *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord"* (Gn 6:8). However, Noah had to respond with faith to God's graceful offer in order to be delivered from the flood. *"By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not yet seen, moved with fear,* ***prepared an ark*** *for the saving of his house, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is* ***according to faith****"* (Hb 11:7). Noah's family would never have been saved from the flood if Noah had never acted on his faith. Faith alone would have left him without a prepared ark for the salvation of his family. **The offer of salvation from the flood was through grace, but the acceptance of the offer demanded that Noah obediently prepare the ark**.

4. ***Action must be taken.*** In order to access the grace of God, our faith must respond as Noah's faith. *"Thus Noah did according to all that God commanded him"* (Gn 6:22). This was Paul's "obedience of faith" of which he reminded the Roman Christians (Rm 1:5; 16:26). It is a faith that follows the instructions of God as to how one would access God's grace.

Acceptable faith is not meritorious. If Noah were working meritoriously in order to save his family, then he would have had to know that through his own abilities that there was a flood coming. He would have had to scheme his own method of deliverance, and thus, build the ark according to his own knowledge and skills. But in God's instructions, all this information was provided. **This was knowledge that could come only through revelation**. And with the revelation of the coming event, **Noah was also given knowledge as to how the ark was to be built**. If Noah had not obeyed through faith the instructions given by God, then he could never have saved himself and his family. When God gives instructions concerning how one must access His grace, then men have no choice concerning the instructions they must follow. Men cannot subtract, substitute or ignore God's instructions as to how they can access God's grace.

B. Israel was saved by grace accessed by obedient faith.

In Numbers 21:4-9, there is a case in the history of Israel that illustrates God's healing grace. However, the healing of Israel at the time was based on conditions.

The Israelites were in a moment of rebellion against the leadership of Moses. They complained, *"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, nor is there any water; and our soul loathes this miserable bread"* (Nm 21:5). As punishment of the people for their rebellion, *"The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people"* (Nm 21:6). The biting serpents brought the desired result. The people came to Moses and said, *"We have sinned ..."* (Nm 21:7). The Lord heard their pleas. He then commanded Moses to *"make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole"* (Nm 21:8). However, in order for the people to procure healing (grace) from God's offer, there was a condition. *"And it will come to pass that everyone who is bitten,* ***when he looks on it****, he will live"* (Nm 21:8). It was grace that provided the opportunity for healing. However, the condition was faith that moved them to look upon the brass serpent for healing.

God's grace provides the opportunity for forgiveness. His opportunity for healing must be communicated to the people. The people must have faith that what is provided by God will accomplish the desired forgiveness. And then, **the people must act on their faith to receive the blessing of the opportunity that has been provided by grace**.

Through faith we have access into the atonement of our sins. The offer of atonement comes as a result of grace. But there must be a responsive faith on the part of man that moves one to "look upon" what God offers through grace in order that we access the blessing that comes with grace. It is for this reason that the Hebrew writer stated, *"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). If the believer makes no effort to come, then there is no reward.

The grace that provided salvation from the flood of Noah's day was offered to Noah. The offer and acceptance is not unlike the grace that is offered by God today that we be delivered from the impending destruction of all humanity by fire. Those of Noah's generation *"were disobedient when the longsuffering of God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared ..."* (1 Pt 3:20). As God offered a way of escape to those of faith when the ark was being prepared, He does the same today. Through His grace He offers a way of escape from the coming destruction (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

Notice what Peter said in applying the situation of Noah's day to our's today: *"The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us ..."* (1 Pt 3:21). As the waters of the flood washed away a sinful generation in Noah's day, so the waters of baptism bring one into a realm of safety from the impending destruction that is coming (See 2 Th 1:7-9; 1 Pt 4:17). The comparison between the two cases is that Noah was saved by grace because of his obedient faith in response to God's instructions concerning the building of the ark. The rebellious Israelites who were bitten by snakes that brought death, were healed when they, by faith, looked upon the serpent of brass that was made by Moses. The alien sinner is saved through obedient faith when he obediently responds to God's instructions to be baptized for the remission of sins (At 2:38). Noah and the Israelites were saved by an obedient faith, just as alien sinners can be saved by obedient faith today. But because Noah was saved through an obedient faith that moved him to follow the instructions of God to build the ark does not mean that he was meritoriously saved through works. Likewise, the alien sinner today is not saved by meritorious works if he follows the instructions of God as to how one must access the grace of God. **Obediently doing what God tells us to do is not meritorious obedience**. If it were, then we could do nothing in following the Bible without it being meritorious in obedience.

In the cases of Noah and Moses, faith and grace are consistently carried out in five simple steps in order to bring man again into a reconciled relationship with God:

1. **God makes an offer to bless.** Through grace, God offers reconciliation and life.
2. **The offer is communicated to those whom God seeks to bless.** God communicates His offer to man through words of revelation.
3. **There must be faith that one will realize the effect of the offer.** Man must have faith in what God has freely offered, for without faith man will not respond to God's blessing.
4. **Men must respond with obedience.** Through obedience of faith man must comply with all that God would require of us to receive the free gift that comes through a grace offer.
5. **Obedience leads to reaping the benefits of the offered blessing.** Upon obedience to the conditions to receive the free gift of grace, man reaps the blessings of grace.

This is the way it has always been since the beginning of time, and this is the way it will always be until Jesus comes again. Any theology, therefore, that changes this simple plan as to how God works with man always distorts the purpose of the cross and brings into question the sufficiency of the grace of God.

Chapter 4

GRACE COMES WITH AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL

The fact that we are saved by grace through faith is not the question, but how we are saved is what must be determined. Grace through faith means there is a divine side (grace) and a human side (faith) to our salvation. What was required on the divine side (the cross) was revealed to man without any obligation on the part of God to save man. It was an act of grace. Though man was in sin (Rm 5:8), the grace of God was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11). The revelation of God's grace was not based on the meritorious righteousness of man that put God in debt to pay man with the cross. Grace was a free gift. Nevertheless, it was a free gift that demanded requirements on the part of those who wanted the benefits of grace before these benefits could be realized (our

salvation). The free gift was given on the condition that the receivers comply with the conditions that were necessary to benefit from the gift.

The case of the cleansing (healing) of Naaman of his leprosy in 2 Kings 5 clearly illustrates how God works through His grace that is offered to all men today. The case illustrates the offer of the gift, but also the conditions that are placed on those who would enjoy the rewards of the gift.

A. What grace offered Naaman.

Elisha said to Naaman, *"Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will come again to you and you will be clean"* (2 Kg 5:10). Naaman's reaction to the instructions for his cleansing was fury (2 Kg 5:11). He was furious because he did not agree with God's conditions for his healing. He possibly thought that there should be no conditions to receive the blessing of cleansing. He argued, *"Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God and strike his hand over the place and cure the leprosy"* (2 Kg 5:11). His pride moved him to reason that there should be no conditions for the free gift of healing. From what he said, Naaman wanted to establish his own conditions, which is the mistake many make in reference to God's offer of grace today. They want the blessing of the grace without the conditions for reception of the gift. Some even think they can call on the preacher to call on God for their spiritual healing. But God's grace is not appropriated in this manner.

In his fury, Naaman then turned to offering an alternative to dipping in the muddy Jordan River. *"Are not Abanah and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"* (2 Kg 5:12). Naaman's mistake was to think that his cleansing was in the power of the water. He thus tried to change the water and still receive the blessing. But his healing would be given by the grace of God, not by any powers in the water. And if it were to be received, then he had to follow the required instructions.

When God gives the instructions concerning the reception of His blessing, we do not have the right to change any of the conditions. God will allow no substitutions. If Naaman had been cleansed by dipping in the "better" waters of the Abanah and Pharpar, then we would assume that we too have the right to substitute the conditions upon which we can receive God's blessings. We would also assume that there is some power in the water, as long as it is water. But when Naaman dipped in the right water in the right way, according to the instructions of God, it was then he that knew that God means what He says and says what He means in reference to receiving His blessings.

B. Naaman was cleansed by grace through faith.

The cleansing of Naaman was strictly by the grace of God. There was no possible way for Naaman to cleanse himself from leprosy. It was not within his power to bless himself with healing. The actual cleansing, therefore, was by God's grace only. It was a free offer from God. However, his faith had to move him to do that which God required of him to receive the free gift of cleansing. His healing only came by the power of God, **who only can heal**. His healing did not annul the necessity that he had to follow all of God's instructions to access the gift. We must not forget this point.

No one would conclude that Naaman was healed by meritorious works when God told him to go dip seven times in the Jordan River. Neither would we say that he was healed by "faith and works." Rather, **he was healed by faith that worked to fulfill the instructions of God that were necessary in order for him to receive the blessing** (See Gl 5:6). He did not receive the blessing of cleansing until he followed all the instructions (2 Kg 5:14). So until he followed all the instructions, he did not receive the blessing of God's grace. When his faith eventually moved him to follow the instructions of God, then the free gift of cleansing was realized. He was healed "by grace through faith." His dipping seven times in the Jordan was the expression of his obedient faith in order that he be blessed with the grace of being healed.

C. Naaman's faith went to work.

Salvation is by grace through faith once faith goes to work in obedience to God's instructions. The free gift of our cleansing of sin by God's grace is not appropriated to our benefit until there is an expression of faith on our part. God's cleansing through grace is His work on our behalf for our salvation. However, in order for His work through grace to have effect in our salvation, it must be brought into effect in our lives through an expression of faith to follow His conditions. **Whatever condition God would give for the appropriation of grace to the salvation of the soul of the alien sinner must be followed in order for the work of God through grace to be applied**. Following God-required conditions is not meritorious obedience.

Now we must consider when Naaman's faith brought the healing of his leprosy. Naaman's faith in receiving the healing that would come from the grace of God first manifested itself when he heard that there was someone

in Samaria who could possibly heal him (2 Kg 5:5). When he heard of the possibility of healing , he took ten talents of silver, 6,000 pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothing, and headed for Samaria. He had faith that there was healing in Samaria, **but his faith alone did not heal him**. His faith did not "save" him from his leprosy until it was connected with what God required of him in obedience. **His faith only brought him to a knowledge of what would be required of him to receive the grace of healing. The power of the healing was not in his faith, but in the grace of God to heal**. Therefore, his faith would have accomplished nothing toward his healing if he had not obeyed all the instructions that were necessary for his healing. Until there was an "obedience of faith" (Rm 1:5; 16:26), there could be no grace appropriated to the healing of his leprosy.

Since our salvation is by grace through faith, our faith is of no consequence until it moves us to do all that God requires of us to receive the blessing of His grace. We cannot add to the conditions that God requires, neither can we subtract from them. Our faith must be expressed, demonstrated and manifested through our obedience to the conditions that God requires.

The above is the conclusion that we would derive from the teaching of James 2:14-26. James' argument is not in reference to salvation by meritorious works. No one can meritoriously work in order to be saved, for no good work will atone for any sin. And for sure, no one can work law perfectly in order to save himself. What James is discussing is that we cannot be saved by a faith that does not work. No unexpressed faith is acceptable to God. It is not acceptable **because unexpressed faith repudiates the instructions of God concerning what one must do in order to be saved**. Any conclusion in reference to our salvation by grace through faith that does not honor and obey the instructions of God as to how we must access His grace must be totally rejected.

James said, *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see that **faith was working with his works, and by works was faith made perfect**"* (Js 2:21,22). And Paul said, *"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something about which to boast, but not before God"* (Rm 4:2). Now did James and Paul contradict one another? Certainly not! The proposition of **Paul was that he was arguing against meritorious works of law, whereas James was arguing for obedient works that are an expression of faith**. Paul's argument against the Jews who sought to work meritoriously to save themselves would put God in debt to save. James' works of faith express our thanksgiving for our salvation (See 2 Co 4:15). **There is a difference between works that express faith and works that seek to merit salvation**. Because many have not recognized this difference, they have had great difficultly in understanding Paul's letter to the Romans and what James revealed in James 2.

In the context of Naaman's healing, when Naaman's faith moved him to do exactly what God told him to do, without any additions, substitutions or subtractions, then his healing by the grace of God was realized. The same principle applies to us today. God offers His grace, but until we comply with all instructions that He requires, we cannot access His saving grace. If He instructs us to "dip" in the waters of baptism, then that is exactly what we must do in order to be cleansed of our sin (See At 22:16).

Chapter 5

GRACE FREELY OFFERED AND CONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED

If one would seek a brief New Testament explanation of salvation by grace through faith, then the context of Ephesians 2 would be one of the most concise commentaries on the subject. In this context Paul truly gives the road map into the grace of God, and once there, what is required of the obedient to remain there. For a moment, therefore, we need to journey with the Ephesians from their "nature" in sin, before their obedience to the gospel, into the revealed saving grace of God in which they stood at the time Paul wrote.

A. Dead in trespasses and sins:

Paul begins his definition of grace by reviewing the state of the Ephesians before they were baptized into Christ. As alien sinners he reminded them, *"**You were dead in trespasses and sins**"* (vs 1). They were in a state of condemnation wherein they lived. He said, *"... in which **you** 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"* (vs 2). Notice the pronoun "you." They were personally responsible for their sinful walk. Their sin had nothing to do with the sin of Adam that some say was supposedly handed down to them as "original sin" from Adam. Neither were they born with a "sinful nature" wherein they were inclined to sin against their will. Paul

clearly writes that **they were individually responsible for their sinful walk of life**. They could not blame Adam. They could not blame God for giving them some "sinful nature." They could not even blame the devil for making them sin. They could only blame themselves. They were personally and individually dead in sin because they chose to behave sinfully. Unless one takes ownership of his own sinful behavior, he will not repent.

People need to stop blaming Adam for the fantasy of "original sin." We need to also stop blaming God for a supposed "sinful nature," and the Devil for supposedly making us sin. Some theologians have given sinners almost every escape for their sin, accept the sinner himself. Paul never let the Ephesians off the hook. They were personally responsible for their own culture of sin. And because they created their own culture of sin, they had to take ownership for their sin before they could responded to the grace of God who made the offer of deliverance from sin.

B. Life according to the world:

In their former life, the Ephesians individually chose to walk according to the desires of their father, the devil. Jesus explained the state of some when He said, *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father **you want to do**."* (Jn 8:44). They were of their father the devil because they *"behaved in times past in the lusts of your 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 Ephesians lived according to the sensual sins of gratifying the desires of the flesh, filling their minds with all wicked thoughts, following after a life-style of pride, envy, covetousness and lusts of the mind.

They were "by nature" in the habit of behaving after a lustful life-style. It was not that they were born with a sinful nature. The context of what Paul is saying is entirely against this conclusion. They had made a free-moral decision to live according to the lusts of the eyes, flesh and pride of life. The Greek word used here for "nature" refers to a life-style that has been formed after **the habit of doing something over a long period of time**. They were "dead in trespasses and sins" because they had adopted a life-style of living according to that which was contrary to the will of God. Their conscience was seared because they had no feelings of guilt that their sinful living was wrong. They were thus judged to be dead in trespasses and sins because there was no hope of eternal life in their past state of behavior.

The lost state of the Ephesians before their obedience to the gospel confirms the fact that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus **was not universal**, regardless of the knowledge of men about the sacrifice. By the time Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians in A.D. 61,62, the Ephesians had been delivered from their life of sin. But before the gospel came to them through the preaching of Paul, they were without hope. If Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross was unconditional, and thus universal, then they would not have been dead in their trespasses and sins before the coming of Paul and the preaching of the gospel. The biblical interpreter must therefore be careful about assuming that the redemption of the cross applied to all men regardless of their knowledge of God's grace and the conditions He requires to receive His grace.

C. The announcement and response to grace:

And now the glorious news. *"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 with Christ—by grace you have been saved"* (Ep 2:5). Paul's continued commentary of this outpouring of grace was stated in Romans 5:8. *"But God demonstrates His love toward us, **in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**."* It could be nothing else with grace. The outpouring of grace must be nothing short of an outpouring of mercy, regardless of the state of those to whom it is offered.

Grace was unconditionally offered, but it is not unconditionally appropriated, or applied to the saving of alien sinners. Please keep in mind that the Ephesians became Christians long after the outpouring of grace on the cross in A.D. 30. They were still in a state of condemnation at the time Paul, Aquila and Priscilla came to Ephesus in Acts 18. It was through the ministry of these and others who *"came and preached peace to you* [Ephesians] *who were far off and to those who were near"* (Ep 2:17). **The offer of grace was preached to the Ephesians while they were dead in trespasses and sins**. They responded. And subsequently, Paul could make the statement, *"... by grace you have been saved"* (Ep 2:5). They could be saved by grace only when they heard about the grace of God that was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11). Grace was appropriated in their lives only when they heard and obeyed the gospel (See At 19). Grace is thus neither universally appropriated, nor unconditionally received.

Please keep in mind that these to whom Paul was writing this letter were dead in sin after the cross and before the heard the gospel. They did not become alive until they heard and obeyed the gospel. Therefore, they had not been individually elected and predestined to

heaven before the creation of the world. **If they had been so elected and predestined, then why did Paul say that they were all dead in sin before they obeyed the gospel**?

D. Salvation by grace through faith:

"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rm 10:17). When the Ephesians heard the word of Christ (Ep 2:17), their faith in Him was aroused. The words of Jesus would be appropriate here. *"He who believes and is baptized, will be saved"* (Mk 16:16). The Ephesians were not unconditionally dead in their trespasses and sins. They voluntarily chose a sinful way of life. They adopted such as their culture. Therefore, they could not blame Adam for their sinful behavior as some have supposed. As they were voluntarily and personally accountable for their previous sinful nature, grace came to them voluntarily and personally. Each one who heard the preached word of Christ, voluntarily and individually responded to the conditions God required to receive the offered gift of His grace. As they voluntarily sinned after their lusts, they had to respond voluntarily to the preached grace of God. As they individually chose to lead a sinful life, they had to choose individually to respond to the grace of God. Their response to grace, therefore, had to be an obedience of their faith (See Rm 1:5; 16:26).

We must not misunderstand Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8,9. *"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."* The grace of God was offered while the Ephesians were in a state of condemnation in their trespasses and sins. It was God's free gift to offer to all men a way of escape from a sinful predicament from which man could not deliver himself. The gift, therefore, had to be free. But the reception of the gift came with conditions. Simply because the gift is free does not mean there are no conditions of reception. Titus 2:11 states, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."* The free gift appeared and was offered through preaching. But its application came with conditions on the part of man. If there were no conditions, then salvation would be universal. If the Ephesians were still dead in their trespasses and sins after the grace of God was revealed through Jesus on the cross, then grace was not universal. Reception and application of the effect of grace is on the condition of faith. It is salvation by grace "through faith."

Salvation by grace through faith is not of ourselves. In other words, no salvational schemes of men will work. If we could be saved through our own systems of salvation, then our salvation would be meritorious. But by works of law or tradition no one can be saved (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). When Peter said to the thousands on the day of Pentecost to *"save yourselves from this perverse generation"* (At 2:40), he did not mean that everyone should construct for himself some system of salvation. What he meant was that they must take the initiative to do what God commanded in order to access His grace. And what God instructed was, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* (At 2:38). And such did the Ephesians in their response to the gospel (See At 19:1-18).

E. Faithfulness through works of thanksgiving:

Paul wanted the Ephesians to know that their initial coming to Christ was not the result of any meritorious efforts on their part, lest they come to boasting with one another concerning their works. Their salvation was not by meritorious works, but through an obedient faith in response to the grace of God. Nevertheless, as Christians, their faith had to be perfected through a work of love in response to the grace by which they were saved. *"For we are His workmanship,* ***created in Christ Jesus for good works****, which God prepared before that we should walk in them"* (vs 10). Paul had told the Philippians, *"...* ***work out your own salvation with fear and trembling****"* (Ph 2:12). The Ephesians had been baptized into Christ (Gl 3:26,27). Now it was time that they perfect their faith through their works of faith. *"You see that faith was working with his* [Abraham] *works, and* ***by works was faith made perfect****"* (Js 2:22). We are God's "workmanship" when our faith is made perfect through obedience. When our faith works in response to the salvation that we have in Christ, then it is perfected. His grace causes works of thanksgiving. *"For all things are for your sakes* [all that God did to bring us into Christ]*, so that the grace that is reaching many people* ***may cause thanksgiving*** *to the glory of God"* (2 Co 4:15). It is an obedient faith in response to the revealed grace of God that brings one into Christ. This faith is perfected when the obedient work out their salvation in thanksgiving for the grace by which they are saved.

Chapter 6

THE GRACE THAT TEACHES

We will risk being redundant in this chapter. We will not apologize for the repetition in our discussion concerning matters of grace. The problem is people are not obsessed with grace. Some are afraid to talk too much about a subject that is so precious and indescribable. As the heart of Christianity, we must obsess over the grace that was revealed at the cross. In our obsession, we will draw people to that for which they also yearn (See 1 Pt 3:15). So we will be repetitious because of the tremendous misunderstanding that prevails in reference to Paul's statements in Ephesians 2, and similar passages, that state we are saved by grace through obedience of faith (Ep 2:8).

It is unfortunate that many do not see the similarity between a faith that is obedient to the conditions that God requires for one to initially receive the free gift of grace, and the works that perfect the faith of the Christian who walks in the new and living way. There is also a similarity between meritorious works whereby one might seek to earn his salvation and the same meritorious works that one might perform as a Christian in order to put God in debt. Such meritorious works are simply foolish efforts on the part of some who do not understand the principle that our recognition of God's grace toward us moves our faith into obedient action. **There is nothing meritorious about the alien sinner obeying the commands of God to be saved and the Christian working out his salvation with fear and trembling**. But because there is a misunderstanding among many concerning the difference between obedience of faith and meritorious obedience, it would be good here to begin with the alien sinner's condition in sin and his responsibility to respond to the offer of God's grace.

A. The spiritual condition of the alien sinner:

As alien sinners, the Ephesians were previously dead in their trespasses and sins (Ep 2:1). They were behaving according to the sinful culture of the world (Ep 2:2), and thus, they were children upon whom the wrath of God would eventually be revealed (Ep 2:3; 2 Th 1:6-9). However, through the preaching of Paul, the mercy and grace of God was revealed to them. They responded by being buried with Christ in baptism in order to be raised to walk in newness of life (Ep 2:4-6). In their obedience to the gospel they were saved by grace because of their responsive faith (Ep 2:8). God offered the saving grace. Through faith, they responded with obedience to the gospel in baptism.

B. Saving grace:

The Ephesians, as well as all men, are saved by the unearned or unmerited favor that God extends to all sinners. No one can devise his own system of salvation, nor can one keep any system of laws perfectly, for salvation before God must always be by grace. Anyone who would devise his own system of salvation, must devise a meritorious system. This is true simply because the system is from man, not God. Therefore, if God reveals "His system of salvation," then **it can never be meritorious**. **Obedience to the commandments of God is never meritorious**. If we assert that obedience to any command of God that is necessary for salvation is a meritorious work, **then we have denied obedience to the word of God**. We would thus be living under the condemnation of Revelation 22:18,19.

Salvation, therefore, is by grace and not by the keeping of law or developing one's own system of salvation. John wrote, *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (Jn 1:17). Keeping Old Testament laws could not bring salvation. Paul continues this thought by saying, *"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through law,* ***then Christ died in vain****"* (Gl 2:21). If one could be saved by keeping any law, whether from God or from man, then the cross was a useless effort on the part of Christ.

If one should seek to be justified by perfect law-keeping, then he lives under the curse of law. *"For as many as are of the* [meritorious] *works of law are under the curse, for it is written, '****Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them****'"* (Gl 3:10). The one who seeks to justify himself through law-keeping is cursed with death because the law he seeks to keep condemns him as a lawbreaker (See Rm 3:23; 6:23). Therefore, *"You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law.* ***You have fallen from grace****"* (Gl 5:4).

The alien sinner can never meritoriously earn his salvation by perfect keeping of law. The saved Christian can never maintain his salvation by perfect keeping of law. One's initial salvation results from an obedient faith to what God requires of one to be saved. The

Christian's faith continues working through love in order to maintain the salvation he enjoys in the grace of God.

C. Revealed grace:

The grace of God was initially revealed at the cross (Ti 2:11). It was revealed, not because God was indebted to save man (Rm 5:8), but because God so loved His creation (Jn 3:16). Grace was revealed because we had no hope without grace. The cross of grace was made the center of preaching that went out into all the world in the first century because the world then and now is lost in sin. Paul wrote to the Colossians, *"Even in all the world this gospel is bringing forth fruit, just as it does also in you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth"* (Cl 1:6).

Grace was first revealed by God on the cross. It was then preached by the early messengers of God. It was the destiny of Paul *"to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"* (At 20:24). After he had preached the grace of God to the Ephesians, it was to this grace that he commended them. *"And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace that is able to build you up ..."* (At 20:32). Christians, therefore, must be cautious not to be quickly removed from the grace of Christ (Gl 1:6), and not do despite to the Spirit of grace as some have (Rm 2:4; see 1 Th 5:20).

D. Faith and grace:

God's part in our salvation is grace. Man's part is faith. It is faith that links the salvation by grace to our souls that are laden with sin. For this reason, without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to God (Hb 11:6). Through Christ *"we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience of faith among all the nations ..."* (Rm 1:5; see 16:26). God's grace must be accepted through "obedience of faith" before it is appropriated, or applied, to our trespasses and sins. When faith obeys, then the grace of God is freely activated in our lives. Our obedience is not the invention of our own schemes, but is commanded by God. It is the command of God to believe and be baptized for remission of sins (Mk 16:16; At 2:38). If one does not have the "obedience of faith" of which Paul spoke, then he will not be baptized in order to wash away his sins (At 22:16). If the salvation of the alien sinner was by his own schemes, even his own faith, then there would be no need for God to remit sins through His grace. But one's faith must move him to obey. This is what Jesus meant when He said, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved ..."* (Mk 16:16). Faith must be linked with what God requires of us to be saved.

If salvation were strictly by faith alone, then there would be no need for grace, for the word "alone" would eliminate everything that is necessary for one's salvation. It is for this reason that those who teach a salvation by faith alone have some problems here. They ignore the work of God on the cross, and count the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross to have been in vain (Compare Gl 2:21). When we are dealing with our eternal relationship with God, there can never be any theology that would suggest that man's salvation is by faith alone, to the elimination of what God has done for us through the cross and what we do for Him in response to the cross.

Though Jesus was the Son of God, *"**He learned obedience** by the things that He suffered"* (Hb 5:8). Jesus set the example for all those who would come to Him. He was obedient to the Father by going to the cross for our sins. *"And having been made perfect, **He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him**"* (Hb 5:9). Jesus led the way in obedience. The only way we can become His disciple is through obedience to what He says. He said, *"You are My friends, if you **do** whatever I command you"* (Jn 15:14). Through obedience of faith we have access into the grace that was revealed through Him. We have access to the grace of God because the Christian has done what Jesus commanded, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved"* (Mk 16:16). When we follow the example of obedience by which our Savior went to the cross, then we will search for those things we must obey in order to follow His example. We can be assured that this is more than "faith alone." **The one who is truly seeking to be the disciple of Jesus is looking for commands of Jesus to obey**. He is not looking within himself in order to base his salvation of feelings or emotions of his own origin.

By works (obedience), faith is made perfect (Js 2:22). *"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Rm 10:17). Faith comes through the teaching of the word of Christ. The result of faith that results from the teaching of the word of Christ is obedience to Christ. Faith is thus made perfect in obedience to the words of Christ. This is why the disciples of Jesus live soberly, righteously and godly according to the word of Christ (See Ti 2:11,12).

E. Eternity and grace:

In Ephesians 2:7 Paul reminded the Ephesians that grace was not only for this present age. *"... so that **in the ages to come** He might show the exceeding riches of*

His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Grace is necessary for the salvation of man because God created man a free moral agent. The free moral ability of men to make choices often leads them to make bad choices. And because we cannot atone for our bad choices through meritorious law-keeping or good works, there is no possible way that we can be saved without the grace of God. Therefore, in our walk with Jesus, we must continually walk in the grace of God.

We must also walk in grace in the "ages to come." Paul wrote Ephesians 2:7 in this age. We assume, therefore, that in the ages to come after the passing of this age there will also be the need for the grace of God. This would mean that we will not lose our free-moral ability to make choices in the heavenly age to come. Whenever and wherever man is a free-moral being, the grace of God must exist in order for man to be in a saved relationship with God. This is logically necessary simply because no man can live perfectly in reference to law wherever there is law to direct our ways.

F. Teaching and grace:

Because we are under grace does not mean that we can choose or invent our own moral laws. In fact, Jude warned that there were "certain men" who *"turn the grace of our God into licentiousness ..."* (Jd 4). The Hebrew writer cautioned that Christians should be *"looking carefully lest any man falls short of the grace of God"* (Hb 12:15). We are "taught" by the grace of God to live morally correct and faithful to the truth. Some have unfortunately taught that grace is a license to immorality, that is, we have freedom to establish our own morals by which we conduct our lives. These were those about whom Jude wrote who turn the grace of God into licentious living.

Others have believed that grace is a license to doctrinal syncretism, that is, regardless of what we believe, we are saved by grace. Grace supposedly gives us the right to blend our moral codes with God's moral codes, and thus come up with a religiosity that has origins from both God and man. However, there are too many statements in the New Testament that teach we must contend earnestly for the faith that was once delivered to the saints (See Jd 3). Our moral behavior must first be based on the truth of God. For this reason Scripture was *"given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Tm 3:16). Elders are given specific instructions to hold *"fast the faithful word"* so that they *"may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict"* (Ti 1:9).

Grace does not give one the right to establish his own moral behavior, neither does it set aside the truth for any false teaching that is propagated by the religious world. Grace teaches us that we must walk a godly life according to the instructions of the word of God. Grace teaches us to direct our beliefs by the word of God. How it teaches us is not difficult to understand. It is based on one simple statement of Jesus that is echoed throughout the epistles. *"If you love Me you will keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15). We love God because He first loved us through the giving of His Son (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19). Grace came to us because God loved us. We love and obey Him because we are thankful (2 Co 4:15). Grace, therefore, teaches us to obey, to respond to the love of God. If we truly love Jesus, therefore, we will seek out His commandments in order to obey. Jesus did not say, "If you love Me you will believe My commandments." What He said is if we love Him we will **keep** His commandments. There is no love of Jesus unless there is keeping of His commandments. Now listen to this statement of John: ***"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments"*** (1 Jn 5:3).

Chapter 7

GRACE VERSUS LAW

At the beginning of his description of the ministry of Jesus, John wanted to make it clear that there was a change coming. Jesus' ministry was not to be a continuation of the religious *status quo*. He was not coming to reform the law, neither was He seeking to revive the Old Testament. He was coming to fulfill the law (See Mt 5:17,18). And the fulfillment of the Old Testament law meant that it would be nailed to the cross with every other religious legal system that men bound on themselves as a means of salvation. *"... wiping 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). Therefore, the revolution that was coming would involve not only a change in God's relationship with man through law, but a covenant relationship between God and man that was better than law (See Hb 7:20-22). It was a concept of reconciliation that was based on the initiative of God to ex-

tend favor to man regardless of the inabilities of man to live according to law. Jesus' revolution would be a change in how the people of God would be motivated into service. They would forever be ignited into service through grace, not law. What was coming, therefore, was the "grace revolution."

John introduced the revelation of the ministry of Jesus by saying, *"For the law was given through Moses, **but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**"* (Jn 1:17). Notice that the statement is in the past tense, thus revealing that at the time John wrote he was looking back to what Jesus had already accomplished through the cross and the revelation of grace and truth. As he looked back, he could clearly see the difference between the way it was under the Old Testament law and the way it was at the time he wrote. Grace, not law, had become the prime mover of the people of God. But the law changed from the Old Testament law to the New Testament of Jesus. We know the place of the Old Testament law in reference to the Christian. Paul covered this subject in Romans 15:4. *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning ...."* The Old Testament is a record of events to which Christians look for examples of obedience, not laws to be bound (1 Co 10:11). We are thus no longer under the law of animal sacrifices, but the final sacrifice of the Son of God. Paul writes, therefore, that we are not under the law, but under grace (Rm 6:14). But what exactly does he mean?

A. Defining law:

Webster's Dictionary defines the word "law" to mean: "All the rules of conduct established and endorsed by the authority, legislation ... of a group." In the ecclesiastical context of the word, it means "a divine commandment," or "all divine commandments collectively." In the Greek text, the word for law is *nomos*. The word means a command or dictate. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words* defines *nomos* to mean, "usage, custom, and then law, law as prescribed by custom, or by statute."

In the context of God's relationship with man, law would refer to commands or dictates given by God to man for the instruction of man to live according to His will. Through law God seeks to direct our behavior in order that all men cohabit with one another in an environment of peace. But when it comes to man's relationship with God, other things are to be considered, things that identify the impossibility of law to be given as a means by which any man can be saved. In fact, we will conclude that God never gave law to man as a means in and of itself to save man. Law condemns. It does not save. It is a recognition of condemnation, not a foundation for salvation.

B. The nature of law:

In reference to man's relationship with God, God's law brings a curse. It is the nature of law to curse, not bless. Paul explains this in Galatians 3:10 by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26. *"For as many as are of the works of law are under the curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue **in all things** written in the book of the law to do them.'"*

The emphasis of Paul's statement is on "all things" of the law. This is all the commands, statutes, and rites designated by law for man to obey. This was the nature of the law of Moses. It required strict obedience from which there was to be no deviation. However, any violation of any point of law brought the judgment of the law upon the sinner. Paul continued to bring this out in the context of Galatians 3:11. *"**But that no one is justified by law in the sight of God is evident** ...."*

Herein is the curse of law. **No man can possibly keep any system of law perfectly**. And because no one could keep the law of Moses perfectly, the law became a curse to those who sought to maintain a saved relationship with God through law alone. James was right. *"For whoever will keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, **he has become guilty of all**"* (Js 2:10). One sin against law makes one a sinner. It is the law that condemns because of just one sin. Therefore, law is a curse to those who would seek to keep it perfectly in order to be saved. God knows this, and thus, He did not give law in order that it be an exclusive means of salvation.

For the above reason Paul wrote that sin and death were in the world from Adam to Moses. *"For until law* [the law of Moses], *sin was in the world, but sin is not credited when there is no law."* (Rm 5:13). Paul explained, *"... for where there is no law, there is no transgression"* (Rm 4:15). Since sin exists when there is violation of law, then Paul concludes that there was law from Adam to Moses, though it was not the law of Moses (Compare Hb 1:1,2). From Adam to Moses there was law from God in the world because sin reigned (Compare Hb 1:1,2). It was even during this time that humanity became so wicked according to law, that except for eight souls, a whole world of wickedness was washed away in the flood of Noah's day (See Gn 6:5).

When the law of Moses came, it came only to the Jews: *"... to them were committed the oracles of God"* (Rm 3:2). The Gentiles continued under the "law of conscience" unto themselves until the coming of Christ. Paul explains this thought in Romans 2:14,15. *"For*

when the Gentiles who do not have law do by nature the things contained in [the Old Testament] *law, these having no law,* ***are a law to themselves; who show the work of law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness*** *....”*

Regardless of which system of law mankind was under before the coming of the grace that was revealed on the cross, all men were under the curse of law. Therefore, *“what the law could not do ...”* (Rm 8:3), God did through Jesus. But until the time when the grace of God was revealed through Jesus on the cross (Ti 2:11), all men were under the curse of law, not being able to keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God. Thus law was *“the handwriting of ordinances* ***that was against us****, which was contrary to us”* (Cl 2:14). Law demanded that we do the commandments, but our “doing” must be perfect. We had the command to do, but not the ability to perform flawlessly. Because the law was from God, we understood that *“the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”* (Rm 7:12). But regardless of how good it was, in our efforts to do good we could not fulfill the demands of law that it be kept perfectly without flaw. What was good from God, became a curse to man. What was holy, made us unholy. What was just and fair for God to give, brought judgment and condemnation. It is because of the inability of man to keep law perfectly that makes it impossible for law in and of itself to be a means of salvation.

We must not conclude that those who lived under the law of Moses, or the law unto their conscience, were all lost. It was that they were not saved through their obedience to any system of law. They, as we, were saved by grace and faith. We must remember that the classic statement of Habbakak 2:4 is an Old Testament verse. *“But the just will live by his faith”* (See Jn 3:36; Rm 1:17).

C. The coming of faith:

So now we understand the foundation of grace upon which the whole “law of liberty” is based. At the cross God looked back at the curse of the law under which His people lived before Christ. Here is the verse. *“For this reason He* [Christ] *is the mediator of the 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). Though the law of Moses was a curse, it was preparatory to bring men to the cross. *“The law was our headmaster to bring us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith”* (Gl 3:24). While using the law as a headmaster to bring Israel to faith in the redemption that was accomplished at the cross, Christ was *“an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness* ***for the remission of sin in the past because of the forbearance of God****”* (Rm 3:25). God was forbearing the sins of the faithful before the cross. He was forbearing because the atoning sacrifice of the cross was for all men under all law from Adam to the final coming of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Law made man aware of sin. It made man aware of the sinful wounds they inflicted upon one another for which there is no balm under law. It manifested bruises and cuts for which there was no healing. But Jesus came to mankind in order to bring a *“new and living way”* (Hb 10:20). It was the way of the cross. *“For by grace you are saved through faith,* ***and that not of yourselves****, it is the gift of God”* (Ep 2:8). What a relief! This is the relief that Paul expressed to Peter when he said, *“... knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we* [Jews] *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 so we cannot forget the comforting words of John. *“My little children, these things I write to you so that you do not sin. And if anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (1 Jn 2:1).

God’s part in our salvation is grace. Man’s part is faith. On God’s part our salvation is wholly the result of grace. This is true because **God accepts no meritorious works from man as atonement for sin**. Even when we do all that is necessary in obedience to God’s commands to be saved, our obedience in no way puts God in debt to save us. He sees our obedience as a signal of love, and because He is love, He accepts us through grace into His fellowship. On the part of man, salvation is wholly by obedience of faith, for man cannot offer any grace on his own behalf for his salvation. Neither can he offer any good works to atone for just one sin. Our faith, therefore, is in God because He promised to accept us into His fellowship through grace if we were obedient to His will.

D. Walking in grace:

John made it clear that *“if we walk in the light as He is in the light,* “the blood of Christ through the grace of God continues to cleanse us of sin (1 Jn 1:7). If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us (1 Jn 1:9). But in our walk in the grace of God, we must be careful not to abuse our gift of grace by walking contrary to the will of our Father.

God's grace did not come to us cheap, for it came at the cost of the crucifixion of the permanently incarnated Son of God. It is not cheap in our lives, for we struggle to walk in the light. *"What then will we say? Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound?* ***Certainly not! How will we who died to sin live any longer therein?"*** (Rm 6:1,2). The fact is that the child of God should never conceive of the idea of taking advantage of God's grace and continual cleansing of the blood of Christ. We should never conceive of the idea of behaving as *"ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness"* (Jd 4).

When one truly understands the wonderful gift of grace, he does not want to work against the will of God. When we understand the grace of God, we work for God more abundantly (1 Co 15:10). It is this grace that causes us to work in thanksgiving for all that God did for us (2 Co 4:15). God's unselfish gift to us moves us to give our lives unselfishly for others. **The beautiful thing about understanding the grace of God is that it generates work for God in our lives far beyond what any obedience to law could ever do**. The law of Moses was based on the concept of "do and you will live." But the grace that was revealed on Calvary cries out, "Because of grace we will do." In the realm of grace the Christian works because he is saved, not in order to be saved.

It is by grace that we are new creatures in Christ (2 Co 5:17). We are raised from the waters of baptism to walk "in newness of life" (Rm 6:4). It is a new and living way because we are living within the realm of God's grace. Under grace, we put away our efforts to trust in human accomplishments. Our salvation is not based on human attainment. It is based on faith that responds to the favor of God toward us through our Lord Jesus Christ. **The grateful always live more abundantly than the law-driven**.

Understanding Paul's description of grace enlightens James' statement, *"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). The blessing comes when men realize that they have been freed from the curse of perfect law-keeping and brought into a realm of grace wherein there is freedom, not only from sin, but also from the demands of law that it be kept perfectly in order to bring salvation.

Our relationship with God is not impersonal and legal. The child of God enjoys a wonderful liberty, having been set free from the bondage of law in order to walk by faith. It is this liberty from the curse of our inability to keep law perfectly that we cry out in thanksgiving to our Father, "Abba, Father." *"And because you are sons,"* Paul announced, *"God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father'"* (Gl 4:6; see Rm 6:15-17).

If Christianity were simply another system of law, then there would be no freedom from law. There would be no glorious grace. If Christianity were simply a law system of "do and live," then we would again have been brought into the bondage of the curse of law. We must never reduce the "law of liberty" to a system of meritorious legalism. Such was what the judaizing teachers were seeking to do with the true gospel of freedom that Paul preached to the Galatians. Paul reminded the Galatians, *"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"*** (Gl 1:8).

We must be careful about relegating Christianity to a system of legal codes. If we ritualize our worship as "acts" and "performances," or bind a system and number of prayers, or attendances at meetings, or so many Lord Suppers, we will be in danger of subjecting the law of liberty to a "legal gospel," and thus turn the grace of God into a meritorious system of justification. In doing such we would bring ourselves under the curse of law, and the condemnation that Paul stated, *"... let him be accursed."*

There is justification from sin only by grace. Justification can never be through works of law, simply because law condemns. Its purpose is to define sin. There can never be a system of trading a "good work for a sin." Therefore, justification by law is impossible because we can never do enough good works to atone for a single sin.

Paul wrote, *"For Moses describes the righteousness that is of law, 'The man who does those things will live by them'"* (Rm 10:5). Now God said to Israel, *"You will therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them"* (Lv 18:5). God was referring to perfect obedience to His statutes. But if one made just one mistake, then the law condemned him. Law could give life only if one kept it perfectly. But one is under a curse if he would be so arrogant as to attempt saving himself by perfect obedience to law. *"For as many as are of the works of law are under the curse, for it is written, '****Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them****'"*** (Gl 3:10).

With law comes the curse of not being able to comply with all the statutes of God. Those who would seek to be justified by perfect keeping of law are thus under the curse of law that calls for judgment of lawbreakers. Justification could have been possible exclusively un-

der the Old Testament law only if one could have kept it perfectly. This is also true of the law of Christ. However, one would be foolish to seek eternal salvation through perfect keeping of law. The attitude of the one who would be so presumptuous as to think he was a good "law keeper," would disqualify him from being a candidate for heaven.

Modern-day legalistic teachers will always magnify the works of man, and subsequently seek to boast because of their good works, or obedience to their system of law that they have orchestrated out of an outline of proof texts. They will magnify the works of man to be meritorious in earning the grace of God. The works of man are often magnified to the point that the grace of God becomes a subpoint in one's theology, if not altogether forgotten. Unfortunately, men too often exalt rituals over right living, while promoting orthodoxy to the exclusion of loving relationships. We often blind ourselves with our own glory to the point that we can no longer see the glory of the cross. We need a reality check in understanding that Christianity is not a religion of men. Neither is it a religion that is based on man-made rituals and ceremonies. Christianity is grace. Someone was right when he defined the attitude of the true disciple of Jesus:

I will not work my soul to save,
For that my Lord has done;
But I will work like any slave,
For love of God's dear son.

Chapter 8

A NEW COVENANT AND A NEW LAW

One of the common misunderstandings that surrounds the subject of grace is that there are no conditions to receive its blessing. Founded upon the erroneous concept that God individually predestined individuals before the creation of the world to either heaven or hell, an unfortunate theology was developed that has distorted God's offer of grace to all men. The cross is thus considered an inconsequential act on the part of God to fulfill His obligation to those He had already predestined.

This erroneous theology is that grace was given only to those who were individually elected for eternal dwelling, and thus grace has been unconditionally given only to the elect. And if grace was supposedly unconditionally given to the individually predestined, then there need be no law for the elect. Since the individually elected were predestined to heaven, then they could break no law that would send them into apostasy and condemnation. To those of this theological persuasion, Paul's statement, "we are not under law," means that there are no conditions to receive the grace of God. Grace was irresistibly given to the elect, and thus, no matter what "the chosen" may do in life, they are saved.

Not only does the preceding theology make God a respecter of persons, it stands contrary to the grace of God and makes a mockery of the atonement of the Son of God on the cross. If by the time of the cross grace had already been given to the elected few, then the cross would have been senseless. Why would the Son of God need to incarnate and suffer if the saved were already predestined for eternal glory?

But the grace of God revealed on the cross was not in vain, nor was it a simple public show that was performed by God. It was grace revealed, and grace that is to be accepted upon conditions that are obeyed by anyone who would respond. For grace to be grace, it could never have been appointed for a predestined few who did not need to respond to the cross. It could not have been free to all men if it could be accepted only by those who had already been predestined to glory.

Grace is God's favor that He extends to all His creation. And since He has extended it to all men, then all are called to respond in obedience to His will. This means that the free gift must be received according to the will of God. It was not cheap grace at the cross. And no man should think that he can receive it with a cheap faith.

This brings us to the subject of how one accepts the free gift of grace. What does God require of us in order to walk in the realm of His grace? In order to walk in the light of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7), there must be instructions. The Bible refers to these instructions as law. We are not afraid of the word "law," because we know that God did not give those under grace a meritorious system by which they must save themselves without His grace. Therefore, we define law through the eyes of grace, not through the ability of ourselves to presumptuously claim that we can save ourselves.

A. Prophecy of a new law:

Through Isaiah 2:2,3, God promised Israel that there

would be a new law coming, a law that would originate from Jerusalem.

> *And it will come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house will be established on top of the mountains, and will be exalted above the hills. And all nations will flow to it. And many people will go and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will* ***teach us His ways*** *and we will walk in His paths."* ***For out of Zion will go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem****.*

Isaiah's prophecy was about the coming of the Messiah. The coming of the Messiah would involve the establishment of the Lord's house (See 1 Tm 3:15). The establishment of the Lord's house would involve teaching, and in order for one to be taught, there had to be a standard, a law, that must be taught. Therefore, a law would go forth to be taught to the people.

Before His ascension, Jesus pointed the disciples' minds toward the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2,3. He said to them, *"... and that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Lk 24:47). When the preaching of remission of sins began (At 2:38), then the law was taught, which law went forth out of Jerusalem to all nations. With the preaching of the remission of sins that comes with the grace of God, comes also the instructions (law) by which men must live in order to walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). One is saved by grace, but must walk according to the will of God, for it is our faith that establishes the law of faith in our lives (Rm 3:27-33).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made statements as, *"Whoever hears these words of Mine and* ***does them*** *.... And everyone who hears these words of Mine and* ***does not do them*** *..."* (Mt 7:26). *"For whoever will* ***do the will of God****, he is My brother and My sister and mother"* (Mk 3:35). *"And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and* ***do not do the things that I say****?"* (Lk 6:46). The New Testament writers followed these statements by the following: *"... for not the hearers of law are just before God, but the* ***doers of law*** *will be justified"* (Rm 2:13). *"But be* ***doers of the word****, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (Js 1:22; see 1 Co 9:21).

The fact that we are under grace does not mean that we are not under any obligation to be obedient to the word of God. One of the greatest deceptions in the theologies of men today is the teaching that we are saved by grace alone without any instructions from God as to how we must behave as Christians. But this is not the conclusion that we draw from the preceding prophecy of Isaiah. Though the Christian walks in the grace of God, there are instructions from the Father. These are instructions to guard us from doing that which is against the will of our Father.

Peter said that we have *"been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides"* (1 Pt 1:23). This is the word of God that we believe and obey in order to be born again (See Jn 3:3-5). It is this same word that directs our lives as we obey it. This is the word by which we are saved, as James wrote, *"Receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save your souls"* (Js 1:21).

B. Prophecy of a new covenant:

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that God would establish with the houses of Judah and Israel.

> *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 days 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****.*

Through Jesus Christ, Christians are now under this new covenant relationship with God (See Mt 26:28; Hb 8:8-12). This covenant relationship with God is different than the covenant that God made with Israel when He brought them out of Egyptian captivity. Under the new covenant, **people are first taught the law of God**, and then they obey the law of God before they come into a covenant relationship with God.

The old covenant with Israel was different. God brought the people out of captivity, and then established a covenant with the nation on Mount Sinai. He gave them the law, **which law they had to be taught because they were already in a covenant relationship with God**. But under the new covenant, one already knows the conditions of the covenant when he is baptized into a covenant relationship with God. This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, *"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).

Israel was brought to God, and then taught the law. But under the new covenant, people are taught of the

grace of God that was revealed at the cross (Ti 2:11). They then voluntarily come to Jesus. But in order for one to come to Jesus, he must be taught not only that Jesus is the Son of God, but what is required of one to come into and live in a covenant relationship with God. One must be taught the word of Christ. *"If you continue in My word"* Jesus said, *"then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). Under the new covenant, there are commandments (laws) to be obeyed if one would continue as a disciple of Jesus. *"If you love Me you will keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15; see Jn 14:21,23; 15:10,14). Walking in the grace of God does not relieve one of the responsibility of walking in the commandments of the Lord (See 2 Pt 3:2; 1 Jn 2:3-5; 5:2,3; 2 Jn 6,9).

Chapter 9

CHRISTIANS UNDER LAW

Prophecy of the new covenant and law teaches that Christians are now under law, but not under law as a means to be justified before God, for they are justified through Jesus. Grace does not exclude law. On the contrary, the free gift of God's grace is the opportunity for all men to respond to law. And in responding through faith, we obey the will of God.

After Paul successfully argued the case that no one will be justified before God through meritorious keeping of law, he stated in Romans 3, *"Therefore, by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight,* ***for by law is the knowledge of sin****"* (Rm 3:20). However, take a closer look at the conclusion of Romans 3. Did Paul contradict himself when he concluded, *"Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary,* ***we establish law****"* (Rm 3:31)? It is not that God gave a way of escape from law when He freely offered grace that was accessed through obedient faith. Though there is a difference between the law of faith and a meritorious system of law whereby the Jews sought to justify themselves before God, there is still a law for the Christian that must be identified, explained, and finally, obeyed.

The legalist would argue that one is justified by law. But Paul argued, you are justified, therefore, keep law, knowing that your failures in keeping law do not undo your justification.

A. The law of the Spirit:

"For the ***law of the Spirit*** *of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death"* (Rm 8:2). Both Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied that a new law would come. And here it is. It is the "law of the Spirit" that is placed in contrast to the law of Moses, and the principle that law in and of itself brings spiritual death. Paul explains in verse 3. *"For what the law* [of Moses] *could not do in that it was weak through the flesh* [no one could keep it perfectly], *God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"* (Rm 8:3).

Law has always been "weak through the flesh." It is weak because it is impossible for anyone to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Outward ceremonial performances of the statutes of the law cannot reconcile one to God simply because our obedience to the statutes is flawed (Rm 3:23).

The Hebrew writer explained the problem with the law of the first covenant that was made with Israel. *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second.* ***For finding fault with them*** *..."* (Hb 8:7,8). The fault was not with the law or the covenant. The fault was "with them." The fault is never with the law of God, for the law of God is holy, just and good (Rm 7:12). The fault is with us.

The "law of the Spirit" freed us from our inadequate efforts to be justified by meritorious works of the flesh. Jesus came to condemn the sin that comes from our inabilities of the flesh. He has given us freedom in our minds by assuring us that we are saved by the grace of God, apart from law. Our confidence, therefore, is not in the performance of our flesh, but in His grace that covers our lack of performance in the flesh. Our faith is in God to declare us justified by His grace. We do not have to depend on perfect performance of the flesh. So Paul wrote, *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then* ***with the mind*** *I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin"* (Rm 7:25). Though Paul was obedient as much as possible to the will of God, he had no confidence in his works of law. His confidence through faith was in the grace of God. This was the "law of the Spirit." Since our faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17), then it is by our faith that we serve the law of God.

B. The law of Christ:

In Galatians 6:2 Paul wrote, *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill **the law of Christ**."* In the New Testament there is the "law of faith" (Rm 3:27), the "law of God" (Rm 7:25), the "law of the Spirit" (Rm 8:2), the "law of liberty" (Js 1:25) and the "royal law" (Js 2:8). All these statements refer to the same law. Therefore, when Paul speaks of "obedience of faith," his reference is to obedience to what God would require of Christians as conditions in their covenant relationship with Him. The works of law about which Paul spoke in Romans 4:2,4 and 9:11, however, refer to works of law about which one could boast, and thus, reference is to meritorious works of law, specifically meritorious efforts to keep the law of Moses. But when Paul referred to "obedience of faith" in reference to law (Rm 1:5; 16:26), he was speaking about obedience to the "law of faith," "law of the Spirit," "law of liberty" and "royal law." There is no room for boasting in reference to keeping this law since the Christian knows that it is impossible to keep law perfectly in order to be saved. *"For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace"* (Rm 6:14). The Christian is not under the necessity to keep law perfectly, but under the necessity to keep law.

Christians are not under a meritorious system of law that requires perfect obedience. They are under a law of freedom where they are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus that manifested the grace of God on the cross, which blood continues to work in the life of each Christian (Ti 2:11; 1 Jn 1:7). Christians, therefore, must be cautious about turning the law of Christ into a meritorious system of law. To do such would be reverting back to the system by which the Jews sought justification under the law of Moses.

Chapter 10

THE PURPOSE OF LAW

In 1 Corinthians 9:21 Paul wrote, *"To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without God's law but under **Christ's law**, so that I might win those who are without law."* Some have argued that the Christian is no longer under law because we are under grace. In fact, some have assumed that because we are supposedly not under law that we are under grace alone. But this thinking is contrary to the subject of obedience that saturates the New Testament. Jesus set forth the principle of obedience in the initial statements of His ministry. *"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 you love Me you will **keep My commandments**"* (Jn 14:15; see Rm 2:4-11; 2 Th 1:6-9; Hb 5:9; 1 Pt 4:17). Christians are under the "law of liberty" (Js 1:25). They will be judged by the law of liberty (Js 2:12).

Justification by grace through obedient faith does not mean that we are not under law. *"By the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight"* does not mean that there is no law of Christ in existence today (Rm 3:20). Though we are not under a system of law whereby we seek justification, we are under the law of faith because we are justified. Now *"do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, **we establish law**"* (Rm 3:31). We are not under a law whereby we seek justification through meritorious keeping of law, but under law whereby we receive direction in life as an expression of our faith. As the justified, we seek instructions from God whereby we can know that we are walking in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

A. Law for the justified:

The justified live under law, but the means by which they were justified was not by law. Neither is it by law that they continue to be justified. Paul said it clearly. *"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through law, then Christ died in vain"* (Gl 2:21). The righteous are not righteous through any system of law, but they are not righteous without law. **They do not nullify the grace of God by turning the law of Christ into a system of meritorious justification**.

Christians are under law (instruction) by which they have assurance that they are following the will of God. If there were no law of God in existence today, then Christians would never know for sure if they were pleasing God. Law brings comfort, freedom and assurance. It brings comfort in knowing that we are the disciples of Jesus by keeping His commandments. It brings freedom because we guard ourselves from creating laws after our own traditions. We are thus free from ourselves when we submit to the law of God.

1. *Moral law:* In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul defined unrighteousness as fornication, idolatry, covetous, and a host of other violations of God's moral laws. If Christians did not know that fornication was against the will

of God, then some would, as the Corinthians, justify fornication without feeling guilty about violating the will of God. Law, therefore, identifies moral sins.

A moral law is self-evident. It is a law of a self-evident standard of right and wrong by which a moral man can make a free choice. If one chooses that which is wrong, then he has violated his intellectual awareness (his conscience), and thus, has sinned. Paul wrote of this. *"For when the Gentiles who do not have law do by nature the things contained in law, these having no law, are a law to themselves; who show the work of law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else excusing one another"* (Rm 2:14,15).

God held the Gentiles accountable to their conscience. Their self-realization of right and wrong was the law unto themselves, though this law was not written as it was for the Jews who were given the written oracles of God (Rm 3:1,2). The Gentiles were to be held accountable to the God who was witnessed to them by the creation. *"... For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God* ***is manifest within them, for God has shown it to them****. 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 1:18-20).

The Gentiles who coexisted with Israel were without excuse because they knew about God. They witnessed His existence through the things that were made. Nevertheless, they gave up a knowledge of God and ran after their own moral unrighteousness. If there were no New Testament law of Christ today, there would still exist this moral law by which men would be judged.

2. ***Law of worship:*** *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and* ***in truth****"* (Jn 4:23). If there were no law in reference to worship of God, then we would have the right to worship God according to our own inventions. In our ignorance, we would surely establish our own systems of worship, falling under the condemnation that Jesus pronounced on the Pharisees. *"****In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men****"* (Mk 7:7). We would be as the Greeks who had no law of God concerning worship of the one true and living God, and thus, **we would worship in ignorance** (At 17:23). Therefore, there must be truth revealed by which we can be assured that we are worshiping God according to His will and not our own.

If there were no laws concerning true worship, then we would make laws for ourselves in reference to worship. We would make laws concerning places of worship, acts of worship, ceremonies of worship, and behavior of worship. The fact that this is true is evidenced by the numerous systems of worship that exist throughout the world today. What Paul wrote to the Colossians is certainly true today. *"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). If we were not restrained in our worship by the law of God, we would certainly create a worship that involved the indulgence of the flesh.

3. ***Law of ministry:*** *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction ..."* (Js 1:27). How would we have known this if it had not been revealed by the Holy Spirit? In Jesus' last statements concerning the judgment, He enjoined on His disciples that they feed the poor, clothe the naked, and give drink to the thirsty (Mt 25:31-40). But how would we have known this benevolent behavior if it were not spoken with authority by the One of whom we claim to be a disciple?

Instruction (law) is given in the New Testament in order to give direction for our behavior and relationships with one another. Through law we know what is right and wrong. God did not leave us to ourselves to invent our own laws of moral conduct.

To make a statement that Christians are not under any law of God is senseless and reckless. We have witnessed too many people who have conducted themselves according to their own moral standards—if indeed they had a consistent standard—and lived licentiously (See Jd 4). To take Paul's statement that we are not under law out of the context in which he made the statement will lead to all sorts of immoral and unethical living. God did not give man the ability to establish his own moral codes, or the measures and controls by which He would be worshiped. These things must be revealed by God to man. God gave law to man in order to prevent man's own self-destruction.

B. The purpose of law:

Law was never given for the purpose of bringing salvation to man. The fact that it was not is in the reality that God knew we could never keep any system of law perfectly in order to be declared righteous before Him. It is simply true what Paul said, *"****By the works of law no flesh will be justified****"* (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). If we can understand this one truth concerning law, then we can understand why there must be divine law for man

from Adam to the final coming of Jesus.

The fact that God has given law does not assume that He considers law the foundation for our salvation. The reason law cannot be considered the foundation for salvation is the fact that if our keeping of law—though we might keep it perfectly—**would mean that there was no need for grace**. *"Now to him who works, the reward is not credited according to grace,* ***but according to debt****"* (Rm 4:4). If law could save, then we would assume that God would save us by our keeping of law. We would thus need no grace, for by our obedience to law we would have put God in debt to save us. But the reward (salvation) can never be based on debt. If it were, then there is no need for grace. Christ would have died in vain. We could have accomplished our salvation on our own. So the fact that God has given law, does not negate grace. And since grace has been revealed, then we need to determine the purpose of law while we are under grace.

1. *With law comes the knowledge of sin.* *"... for by law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rm 3:21). If there were no law given by God, then we would not know what would be considered right or wrong. Paul wrote, *"****I would not have known sin except through law****, for I would not have known coveting except the law had said, 'You will not covet'"* (Rm 7:7). God's law, therefore, becomes a rule of awareness. Through law we know what is good and what is evil in the eyes of God. Law, therefore, keeps our minds focused on God in our relationships with one another.

2. *Law directs our relationships with other people.* Law not only sets the pattern for our conduct, but also the principles by which we must conduct our relationships with others. Paul corrected the Jewish Christians in Galatia who had withdrawn themselves from the Gentile Christians upon the arrival of some Jews from Jerusalem. He wrote of the incident, *"I saw that they* [the Galatian Jewish Christians] ***were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel*** *..."* (Gl 2:14). Their conduct was not reflective of the nature of the gospel of God's grace, for God showed no respect of persons when He offered Jesus upon the cross (See At 10:34,35). Because the gospel is for all people (Jn 3:16), then our behavior in obedience to the gospel must reflect to all people the nature of God. Through law we do not have the right to manifest respect of persons (See Js 2:8-12). Through law we know when we do the will of the Lord (Mt 7:21). Through law we know when we are obeying Jesus (Hb 5:9). In our relational behavior with one another we can know that we are fulfilling the law of Christ (Gl 6:1). If there were no law of Christ, therefore, then Christians would have no confidence in their behavior because they would not know if they were reflecting the will of Christ in their relationships with one another. But when we walk according to the commandment that we receive from God, then we can walk with confidence because we know we are obeying the will of God (See 2 Jn 4). We must remember 2 John 6. *"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****."* Remember 1 John 2:3? *"And by this we know that we know Him,* ***if we keep His commandments****."* In order for us not to be led astray in following after the doctrine of demons, God had to reveal to us His commandments in order that we might know that we are obeying Him (See 1 Tm 4:1-5).

3. *Law is the means by which the Spirit leads us.* *"The way of the truth"* was revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and prophets (2 Pt 3:2). The result of this revelation was freedom. *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* ***has freed you from the law of sin and death****"* (Rm 8:2). By the leading of the revealed truth of God, the Spirit directs our lives. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God"* (Rm 8:14).

The sons of God follow the law of God. It is by this following of the will of God that everyone can determine who the sons of God are. If we were left without law, no one would be able to determine who the sons of God truly are. It is for this reason that our sonship can never be determined experientially. People of all religious faiths have great emotional experiences. If we had to determine who the true sons of God were by the emotional experiences of people, then we would be left to total confusion. The confusion would be as great as the confusion of the emotionally misguided. We can thank the Holy Spirit, therefore, that He inspired instructions for the behavior of the sons of God. *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction,* ***for instruction in righteousness****,* ***so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work****"* (2 Tm 3:16,17). This is a very powerful statement. It is powerful in reference to the will God being revealed through the Holy Spirit in order that the sons of God be led correctly in their daily walk in the truth (See Gl 5:16-25).

The conclusion of any discussion on law in reference to the Christian, is Paul's statement of 1 Timothy 1:5-9:

Now the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith,

from which some, having swerved, have turned aside to meaningless discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor what they affirm. ***But we know that the law is good, if a man uses it lawfully****. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners ..* (See vss 5-11).

Chapter 11

WALKING WITH THE ROMANS THROUGH GRACE AND FAITH

There could have been no person more qualified to write for human posterity the two most precious books in the Bible on the subject of grace than the one, who at the time of his death, still confessed that he was the "chief of sinners" (See 1 Tm 1:12-17). Who else than Paul could the Holy Spirit have chosen to pen the inspiring words of both Romans and Galatians.

In Galatians the Spirit, through Paul, wrote against those who were seeking to make Christianity a system of legal performance by which men might attempt to justify themselves before God through law-keeping. Such was the religiosity of Paul while living the Jewish life of Saul. If Galatians was the first inspired New Testament letter written, then it was the Declaration of Independence of Christians from a futile system of justification through law-keeping.

In Romans, the Spirit went right to the point to identify the nature of Christianity by contrasting grace with the Jews' efforts to justify themselves through self-imposed law. If one gets the point of Romans, then God has gotten that person. Romans is the defining principle upon which Christianity is built, and thus, the principle that establishes the difference between Christianity and all man-made religions.

Man-made religion is based on man who contrives a system by which he would please the god he has created after his own imagination. His religion, therefore, is contrived. It is contrived after self-imposed behavioral rites and rituals he would perform in order to please his mind-conceived deity. And thus, his religion is man-made. The further away from the word of God that a religious person is, the more his religion is filled with his self-made religious performances (See Cl 2:23). Such is the problem with many today who have little knowledge of the word of God. They, as the Jews in reference to the Old Testament, have constructed their own system of religion, and yet, they seek to hover under the umbrella of Christianity.

But true Christianity it is different. The principle of Christianity is grace, and thus, if we thoroughly understand the revelation of grace through the suffering Son on the cross, then we know whom we have believed and is able to keep us until that great day when He is again revealed from heaven (See Rm 8: 28-39; 2 Tm 1:12). Christianity, therefore, is about Christ, not man.

We do not mean to present an extensive commentary on the letter to the Roman disciples. In this chapter we simply seek to focus on the theme of the message that Paul sought to reaffirm to all Christendom. It is important to focus on some thoughts of those key statements that Paul made in order to build his overall theme of salvation by grace through faith.

A. Romans 1:5; 16:26

"...through whom we have received grace and apostleship, for ***obedience of faith*** *among all the nations, for His name"* (1:5). *"... but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all nations for* ***the obedience of faith****"* (16:26)

It was as if the Holy Spirit knew there would be those who would misunderstand Paul's use of the word "faith" throughout this book. Thus in order to clarify what He wanted us to understand in His use of the word "faith," the book of Romans is started and concluded with the same definition of faith. When we talk about the faith that is pleasing to God it is "obedience of faith." It is not faith alone, neither obedience alone. It is not the dead faith that is unresponsive to the will of God. It is a faith that seeks to obey all that God would require, both of the alien sinner who is seeking redemption, and of the saint who is seeking to walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). It is not a meritorious obedience, but a faith that trusts in God's grace, not in one's performance of law. When the word "faith" is used by Paul in the context of Romans, think about one trusting in God for justification, not in one's performance of law in order to be justified. So when faith is mentioned by Paul, always assume that it is obedience of faith. It is a faith that moves one to do all that God would require to be saved.

The works about which James wrote is parallel to the obedience of faith that Paul here introduces in the

book of Romans (See Js 2:14-26). There is no conflict between Paul and James on this matter. Paul's reference to works in Romans are those **meritorious works of law** by which one would seek to justify himself before God, and about which one could also boast (See Rm 2:17). The **obedience of faith** that Paul here mentions and James clarifies, is faith that is perfected by obedience. Paul uses the phrase "obedience of faith" in contrast to the works that cancel faith, and thus nullifies grace. The works that perfect or complete faith in the context of James 2 are not the meritorious works of law that cancel faith and nullify grace about which Paul speaks. The works about which James wrote are the result of true faith.

The Bible interpreter who cannot distinguish between the meritorious works of law against which Paul writes in Romans, and the works of faith that James defends, will never understand Paul's theme of the book of Romans. Paul speaks of the obedience of faith. It is a faith that is perfected by action. It is a faith that goes to work in the alien sinner to seek out what God would require of one to be saved. It is a faith that exists and is recognized as pleasing to God only when it goes into action.

We could illustrate this active faith by what was prophesied of Jesus in Luke 2:11. The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, *"For to you a **Savior** is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord."* Was Jesus a "saving Savior" at the time of His birth? Certainly not! **He was a "saving Savior" only when He actually went to the cross and paid the price of an atoning sacrifice for our sins**. It was only then when He became our Savior and Redeemer from sin.

Can one have faith before it goes into action? Certainly! But it is a faith that is pleasing to God **only when it goes into action**. It is a saving faith only when it is "obedience of faith."

Now connect this thought with Hebrews 5:8,9. *"Though He was a Son, **He learned obedience** by the things that He suffered. And **having been made perfect**, He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him."* Jesus became the Savior only after He obediently suffered. **He was perfected as our Savior only after He obediently went to the cross**. And so it is with our faith. Our faith must be perfected by obedience. Before obedience, our faith is simply a mental recognition that God exists and His Son was revealed. But faith must go beyond our mental recognition. This is why Paul uses the phrase "obedience of faith" at the very beginning of his discussions concerning our access into God's grace. It is only when faith has been perfected through obedience does it have affect in reference to our salvation.

Salvation under grace is a system of faith. From the beginning of time, there has never been salvation outside this principle. The meritorious works of law, because of faith, always lead to sin and death. However, a faith that is not perfected by works cannot save, for in such a faith there is no response, no thanksgiving, no appreciation for the grace of God that appeared on the cross. **The faith that does save is active, visible, responsive and perfected by obedience**. But it is not meritorious obedience. For this reason, saving faith can never be a meritorious faith since our salvation is always by grace and not earned by works. Since it is obedience of faith that gives us access to the grace of God, then our faith is perfected by obedience to the will of God. This obedience does not make void the grace of God. It is the faith that gives us access to the grace of God.

Since this point can be easily misunderstood by those who are of the "faith only" or "grace only" persuasion, please allow us to repeat this in different words. One must be careful not to misunderstand Paul when he uses the phrase "obedience of faith." He did not mean "meritorious obedience of faith." If he had, then he would have cancelled grace. "Obedience of faith" is one's obedience to all that God would require of us to be saved. And because we seek His salvation through faith, we are willing to do all that He requires of us. If he had meant "meritorious obedience of faith," then we would no longer be under grace, but law, for we would seek to obey the statues of law in order to continue to be saved. Paul's "obedience of faith" is not meritorious faith by which the alien sinner, or the Christian, seeks to move God through debt. It is a faith that moves man to be obedient to all that God would require of one to initially obey what is required of one to be saved, and then, to obediently walk with Jesus according to the will of God. As the Christian lives within the realm of God's grace, his faith is perfected by his obedient walk in the new and living way.

B. Romans 2:28,29

> *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, **and not in the letter** ...."*

Paul's first defense and definition of grace is that grace is not defined or applied to anyone because of physical lineage or racial identification. Being a Jew gave no one an advantage into the realm of God's grace.

The true spiritual child of God ("Jew") is one who has dedicated himself ("circumcision") in the heart to walk by faith. Paul spoke of this in Colossians 2:11,12. *"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism ...."*

The Jews concluded that they were in a special salvational relationship with God because they were the chosen people. They concluded that they automatically stood in the grace of God because of their Jewish heritage. When Paul discusses subjects concerning grace and faith, therefore, at the beginning of his arguments he cancels out any advantage of being born of Jewish heritage. Salvation by grace through faith existed before the establishment of God's special covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. It continues today after the death of national Israel at the cross (See Rm 7:4). Salvation by grace through faith, therefore, has nothing to do with heritage.

C. Romans 3:28-30:

> *"Therefore, we conclude that* ***a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law****. Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since it is one God who will justify the circumcision by faith and uncircumcision through faith."*

If one trusts in God's grace to save him, regardless of his imperfect obedience, then he is declared righteous in his fallible obedience. For this reason, both Jews and Gentiles can be justified before God by faith regardless of their heritage or access to the Old Testament law.

When we discuss the matter of grace and faith, Paul continues to emphasize that it is a matter of heart, not heritage. In order to understand this point, Paul is saying to his fellow Jews that they must step away from their heritage, even the Old Testament law, in order to come to God as individuals, not as Jews.

So Paul reminded the Jews that they could not be justified by the system of law that was given to them on Mount Sinai through Moses. There is no justification by keeping of any system of law simply because no one can keep any system of law perfectly in order to demand justification. *"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rm 3:23). **The problem with any system of law is that there are no provisions for forgiveness**. Law demands justice according to the law. Through *"law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rm 3:20). And since no one can keep any system of law without failure, then *"by works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight"* (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). Because there can be no justification through works of law, then *"apart from the works of law" "God has set forth* [Christ] *to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith ..."* (Rm 3:28,25).

Since there could be no justification by a system of law, it was in the plan of God that forgiveness come through our faith. God thus offered that which we could not accomplish through dedicated efforts of keeping law. And that which He offered was an atoning sacrifice through Jesus Christ in order to justify the unjust. Our faith, therefore, is not in our works of a system of law in order to justify ourselves, but in the Son of God who worked on our behalf at the cross. We understand, therefore, that our salvation must be based on a system of faith, and not a system of law. But does this faith set aside law? *"On the contrary,"* Paul concluded. *"We establish law"* (Rm 3:31). Through faith in God to provide justification through the cross, we have affirmed God's total purpose for giving the law to Israel. The Jews had to understand that they could not save themselves through the Old Testament system of law, but through faith in God who would initiate and maintain their justification through the blood of Christ (See 1 Jn 1:7). By faith, therefore, we reaffirm the *"law of faith"* by which we maintain obedience of faith in our lives as we walk in the light of His word. The "law of works" demanded perfect obedience. The "law of faith" demands a perfect sacrifice at Calvary and a total dependence on the grace of God.

Works focuses on man, whereas faith focuses on the cross. Any system of salvation that turns man's focus to himself to be justified before God can never be true. It cannot because we are all sinners. When we speak of justification before our Creator, therefore, all focus must be on the One who grants eternal existence in His presence through grace.

D. Romans 4:4,5

> *"Now to him who works, the reward is not credited according to grace,* ***but according to debt****. But to him who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness ...."*

If we meritoriously work for Jesus, then we are trying to obligate God to pay us for our work. But if we trust in God to save us, regardless of our insufficient obedience, then we are credited righteous because of our faith.

All focus of our lives for our salvation must be on God, for it is He who grants that which we so earnestly

desire. It is not within the working power of man to grant himself eternal life. Our eternal life is based on the promise of God, and the promise is based on His grace.

One must keep in mind that when the word "works" is used in the context of discussions in Romans in reference to our quest for eternal justification, Paul's reference is to meritorious works, not works of obedience. And when we discuss meritorious works, we are actually identifying man's focus on himself. The Jews came with the argument that because they received and kept the Old Testament law, they were justified before God. Their focus was on themselves as Jews who had been gifted with the oracles of God (Rm 3:1,2). Paul's counter argument to this thinking was that **by meritorious works of any law no one can be justified before God, for such works of law focus on the performer, not the Giver of grace** (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). In the context of Romans 4, therefore, Paul is arguing against justification by meritorious works by saying that we are saved by obedience of faith in the One who alone initiated the covenants and made the promises concerning that which we so desire.

In the context of Romans 4 Paul reminded the Jewish audience of the fact that Abraham was accredited as righteous as a Gentile before he was circumcised (Rm 4:10). Because he walked by faith before circumcision, God chose him to be the father of all those who walk by faith. He was granted the privilege of a covenant marked with the sign of circumcision because he walked by faith. He did not receive the covenant of circumcision because he earned it through works. Through his obedience of faith, however, he was justified. *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works* [of obedience] ... *and by works was faith made perfect"* (Js 2:21,22).

Both Paul and James quote Genesis 15:6 in reference to the justification of Abraham. The harmony of the two writers is clear in the context in which each wrote. Paul focused on Abraham's faith that worked. James focused on Abraham's works that manifested his faith. Paul's reference to Abraham is in the context of stating that by works without faith one cannot be justified. James' reference to Abraham is that one cannot be saved by faith without works of obedience. The faith that always avails before God is the faith that is reflected through obedience. But the works that always fail before God are meritorious efforts to put God in debt to save us.

In Romans 4 Paul is specifically stating that the promise given and fulfilled through Abraham was in no way accomplished by any meritorious efforts on the part of Abraham. Because of grace, God established a covenant with Abraham, through which covenant all nations would eventually be blessed. The promised blessing would not and could not be worked out by Abraham. Abraham and Sarah tried to do this through Hagar, but God did not accept Hagar's child as the one through whom the promise would be fulfilled (See Gl. 4:21-31). Both the giving of the covenant and the promise to Abraham was God's work alone. Because Abraham trusted in the promises of God, he remained true to God through faith, and thus, he was credited righteous before God.

In Romans 3 & 4 Paul established Abraham as our father of faith. We could all agree, therefore, that in being justified by a faith that worked, Abraham was saved. But consider his justification by an obedient faith in view of what Paul stated in Romans 4:4. Did Abraham's work of faith, whereby he was justified according to James, **put God in debt to save Him**? Paul will bring this subject up again in Romans 11:6 where he said, *"And if by grace, then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace."* Was the promise fulfilled because of meritorious works on the part of Abraham, or by obedience of faith? It the fulfillment was because of meritorious works, then the fulfillment was a debt that God had to pay.

It is here that we must again make a distinction between works of obedience to what God commands, and meritorious works whereby we assert that we can put God in debt to save us. The works of Abraham had to be the former. As the father of our faith, Abraham did not through his obedient works of faith put God in debt to save him. His works, therefore, could never have been meritorious, for meritorious assumes that merit is earned, and thus, the one who grants the awards must pay upon the basis of one's merits. **But God can never be indebted to save man on the basis of man's performance**. We are only clods of dust in whom He has invested a spirit. Can this clod of dust back God into a corner and demand eternal life?

Now we must take this thought one step further. Was Abraham justified before God through his obedient faith alone? Think about this before you answer. If at the time he lived and obediently believed, was Abraham saved by his walk of faith alone? If so, **then why the cross**? Abraham was justified by obedient faith, but his obedient faith did not oligate God to offer redemption through the cross. The cross was in no way a payment of debt to those who were justified by obedient faith. In order that his readers not come to an erroneous conclusion in his discussions concerning Abraham's justification by faith, Paul stated clearly, *"But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while **we** were still sinners, Christ died for **us**"* (Rm 5:8). All mankind was under

sin when Jesus died on the cross, even Abraham. Abraham could be justified by faith, therefore, only in view of the cross that was yet to come.

Abraham was included in the plural pronoun "we" of Romans 5:8. "We," as all sinners, are all there, sold under sin and unable to free ourselves from the bondage of sin. No matter how many obedient works Abraham accomplished, he was still in the "we," and thus, under condemnation if there were no cross in the future. His obedient faith could never have put God in debt. If his obedience would have put God in debt, then the cross was not the result of grace. **Jesus' sacrifice was never a payment of debt for obedient works of faith**. Right in the middle of Paul's discussions concerning Abraham's justification by faith, he implanted a most vital statement. *"... 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 could declare Abraham justified because He knew that the cross was coming. It would be there, at the cross, and only there, that all the faith of the fathers would find salvation through the blood of Jesus. The Hebrew writer repeated the meaning of Romans 3:25. *"And for this reason He is the mediator of the new covenant,* ***so that by means of death for the redemption of the transgression committed under the first covenant****, those who have been called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."*

We must never conclude that we put God in debt through our obedience, even though our obedience is a response to the law of God. With our obedience comes the promise that God, through His grace, will eventually deliver us from the confines of this world. Clods will be transformed (1 Co 15:35-58). But the transformation will never come as an obligation to pay debt on the part of God. It will always be through His grace that He will keep His promise. But we must also never forget that it is a promise and our faith must be in the promise. So we anxiously read again Hebrews 6:13-20.

> *For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For indeed men swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all dispute. Therefore, God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of promise the unchangeableness of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 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. 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.*

E. Romans 4:14,15

> *"For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise has been nullified because the law works wrath, for where there is no law, there is no transgression."*

If one's religious heritage is a guarantee to receive the promise, then both faith in the grace of God and the promise itself are nullified. This is true because the law works condemnation through sin.

Meritorious law-keeping produces wrath because law reveals sin that must be punished. Transgression of the law demands justice. And because there is no mercy in law, then those who break the law are considered dead in sin. If there were no law, then there would be no sin. But since men cannot cohabit with one another without law, then law must be given. It cannot be invented by men, for men in their corrupt thinking would devise "Hitler laws" by which they would feel justified to exterminate one another. Law, therefore, must come from a Higher Power. It must come from God. But since law is from God, then God demands justice when law is broken. Therefore, if we had to rely solely on law in order to receive the promise, then we would not realize our desire. We must conclude, therefore, that law was never given by God as a condition upon which the promises of God were guaranteed to be received. If obedience to law were a condition for receiving the promises, then our sin against law would always hinder the fulfillment of the promises.

The fact that God now calls on all men to repent of laws broken (Lk 13:2; 2 Pt 3:9), manifests the truth that law now exists against which all men have sinned. So man is left with futility in reference to receiving the promise. It can never be received through law itself, and thus, must only come as an act of grace on the part of God. Paul's argument throughout Romans is to frustrate those who would strive meritoriously to justify themselves before their Creator, and then, think they can demand the promise. The truly honest person knows that there can be no justification through meritorious law keeping. He is thus driven by faith to the grace of God. He is driven from his own efforts to save himself to the One who only has the power to grant the promise through grace, regardless of law.

F. Romans 4:16

"Therefore, ***it is of faith that it might be by grace****, to the end that the promise might be guaranteed to all to see, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."*

Since salvation is by faith, then grace is granted to both Jew and Gentile. Since the promise of God is that all men be saved in Christ, then all who come to Christ through faith receive the promise of grace upon their obedience of faith. Therefore, Abraham is the father of all those who would come to God through faith.

Grace and law are in harmony with one another. Some have assumed that grace eliminates all law and works, and thus there is no harmony between grace and law. The tragic conclusion to this unfortunate reasoning is that it is believed that there can be absolutely no obedience on the part of the alien sinner in reference to his salvation. As a consequence, many alien sinners are left just outside the door that leads to a life-time of walking in God's grace. They are left there believing that their faith only has warranted them the right to declare their own salvation apart from obedience of faith.

But consider this. If faith and grace exclude obedience, then they exclude all faith. Jesus said, *"This is the work of God,* ***that you believe in Him whom He has sent****"* (Jn 6:29). If one believes, is he not also obeying? If believing is obeying, then the claim that grace excludes obedience also excludes faith. Any assertion that grace and faith exclude obedience eliminates faith. And thus the conclusion to the assertion is that salvation is by grace only apart from faith. And if this is true, then all men are saved; none will be lost.

If there is no obedience of faith, then one is left with one of two conclusions: either all will be saved, or God is made a respecter of persons in that He unconditionally chose certain individuals on whom He would shower His grace. But at the same time, He individually destined to eternal hell those who are not given His grace. Either conclusion is diabolical in the sense that God is conceived to be an unjust and fiendish god. He would be unjust to allow Hitler into eternal glory together with the persecuted Christian. He would be fiendish by predestining some to eternal hell apart from their own choices. Those who contend that we are saved by grace alone need to take another look at the conclusions of their theology.

It is the work of God that we believe. Faith is the highest form of work, for it involves the total commitment, the total life of the believer. Through faith one gives his entire life for the One who gave all for us on the cross. So are we saved by faith? Certainly! We are saved by faith if our faith involves the giving of our lives as a total sacrifice for God (See Rm 12:1,2).

Take another look at Titus 2:11,12. *"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*** *...."*

The grace of God **teaches us** the sacrificial life. If there is no law or obedience connected with grace, then grace is worthless in directing us to live sensibly, righteously and godly. Therefore, **all those who are saved by grace are taught by grace to live according to the will of God**. Paul instructed us to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Ph 2:12). We can do this through the grace of God that causes thanksgiving within our spirit. Paul explained. *"... for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure"* (Ph 2:13). Here is the personal commentary of Paul: *"****But by the grace of God I am what I am****. 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; see 2 Co 4:15). It cannot be more clear than that. God's grace "teaches" by being the empowering motive in our hearts to go to work for Him because of what He did for us.

Those who would extract obedience from grace have cut the heart out of Christianity. They have destroyed the true motivation for discipleship. They have revealed their ungrateful hearts and lazy attitudes. If God's grace does not move one unto obedience, then he has no right to claim that he is saved by grace apart from obedience in appreciation and thanksgiving for the cross. On the other hand, those who have realized the tremendous gift of grace on the cross, are always *"zealous of good works"* (Ti 2:14; see 2 Co 4:15). And because they have been moved by grace, their works will follow them right into eternal glory. It will be as revealed through John. *"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)

G. Romans 6:14

"For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace."

Sin does not reign in the life of the Christian, because the Christian is not under a system of faith by which he must keep law perfectly in order to maintain his justification before God. Though the Christian may sin, through the grace of God he is continually cleansed of sin in the blood of Jesus. The Christian is now under a

"system" of faith by which there is continual cleansing by the blood.

The Christian is not under a system of justification through meritorious law keeping. He is saved by the grace of God that is accessed through the obedience of faith (Rm 1:5; 16:26). Throughout Romans 6 Paul emphasizes that Christians must live righteously because they have in baptism obeyed the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). They are now walking in newness of life, and should have no reason to go back to unrighteousness by trying to be justified by a meritorious system of law. Since they are no longer under such a system that brought only death in sin, they should be encouraged to move on under grace.

This does not mean that the Christian will not sin. Since he has been raised from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life, he walks in the light. And *"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). When one comes forth from the waters of baptism, he is in Christ and not under the bondage of sin (Rm 6:6). Paul reminds the Roman Christians *"that our old man was crucified,"* therefore, *"consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rm 6:11). The conclusion would be: *"Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you should obey the lusts of the body"* (Rm 6:12). Sin does not have dominion over the disciple of Christ because he has been baptized into Christ, and thus, is in continual contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus. Since he is in Christ, the faithful disciple seeks to walk obediently in the light of God's word. The Christian's walk is by faith in the grace of God, not by faith in his own performance of law or meritorious deeds. As a result, the statement, *"sin will not have dominion over you,"* (Rm 6:14) is defined by the statement, *"we should no longer be bondservants to sin"* (Rm 6:6).

Paul clearly explains that sin would no longer have dominion over Christians. These to whom he was writing were those who had been baptized into Christ. They were no longer under a system of law whereby justification was sought through the perfect keeping of law. They were now under grace, and though they could not live without committing sins, the continual cleansing of the blood of Jesus in their lives kept them cleansed of sin (1 Jn 1:7). The obedience of their faith (Rm 1:5) kept them in the grace of God. If they sought to go back under a system of law keeping in order to seek justification, they would have come under the judgment of Galatians 5:4, *"You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law.* ***You have fallen from grace****."*

H. Romans 6:17,18

"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."*

Before coming to Jesus, we were bondservants of sin in our efforts to justify ourselves through our own ability to keep law. Our deliverance was a matter of the heart. When we submitted in our hearts to the teaching of the gospel of grace, we were freed from sin by being freed from the necessity of perfect performance of law. We were thus declared righteous before God through faith in His grace. His declaration of our righteousness now moves us in heart to be His bondservants (2 Co 4:15).

The obedience of faith by which Paul introduced and concluded Romans is here explained as obedience to a "form of teaching" that was delivered to all those who would walk by faith (See Rm 1:5; 16:26). This is the *"obedience to righteousness"* (Rm 6:16). There is no question that our salvation is by grace. But we must keep in mind that grace is that which is provided by God. Faith is our part. But our faith must be demonstrated in obedience to the "form of teaching" that comes from God (See Jn 12:48). Obedience is a required demonstration that we have faith in God's grace. Through the cross, God has offered the grace that saves. It is the responsibility of man to accept His grace through obedience of the gospel in order to walk in His righteousness (See Rm 6:3-6).

It is an unfortunate mistake to think that God offers the free gift of grace without any obligations on the part of man. When Paul said that our justification *"is of faith that it might be by grace,"* he meant that our obedience of faith is required to access the grace (Rm 4:16). Any lack of faith on the part of man will lead to our futility in accessing the grace of God. *"... 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). It is faith that moves us to seek the reward of grace. Without faith, there is no seeking of the reward. It was of this "seeking faith" that Paul proclaimed to those of Antioch of Pisidia, *" .. and by Him all who believe are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"* (At 13:39).

We cannot be saved by works of law simply because law proves that we are lawbreakers. We cannot atone for our failures in reference to law by good works devised by men as meritorious offerings for sin. But we

are saved by those conditions the Lord has prescribed that we follow in order to manifest our faith in His word. And in doing this, Jesus becomes *"**the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him**"* (Hb 5:9). Paul began his discussion of Romans by stating precisely how one begins his walk of faith in obedience to the good news of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (Rm 6:3-6).

I. Romans 7:4

> *"Therefore, my brethren, **you also became dead to the 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."*

Those who have been crucified with the body of Christ on the cross, are dead to the Old Testament law, as well as the necessity to keep law perfectly in order to warrant justification. Jesus was crucified in order to make all those who come to Him dead to meritorious obedience. In our obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-6), we were made dead to the bondage of law in order to be set free in our resurrection from the grave of immersion.

Because those who have obeyed the gospel are now under grace, they are no longer under the necessity of keeping law perfectly in order to justify themselves by works of law. The statement Paul makes here in Romans 7:4 is a continuation of the thought of Romans 6:14: *"... for you are not under law, but under grace."* The Christian came under grace at the time he was raised with Christ from the waters of baptism. The Old Testament law functioned to bring the Jews to the cross. But now that the law has been made inactive, Christians are dead to it as a binding law (Rm 7:1-4). *"Therefore, the law was our headmaster to bring us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster"* (Gl 3:24,25).

If one would bring forth fruit to God, he cannot go back under a meritorious system of law. When those Jews who were once under such a system joined with Christ through their obedience to the gospel in baptism, they were made dead to meritorious law systems. If a Christian would seek to turn the law of Christ into such a meritorious system, then he is severed from Christ (Gl 5:4). He cannot bring forth fruit to God because he has been cut off from Christ.

J. Romans 8:1

> *"There is now, therefore, **no condemnation to those who are in Christ** ...."*

The obedient believer has been baptized into Christ, wherein he is not in a state of condemnation that was brought on by his former failure to perform law perfectly. His walk in the light of God's grace keeps him cleansed of his inability to perform perfectly.

If one would choose to walk by law alone, then he walks under condemnation, for under law sin abounds. Law manifests sin. As a meritorious system of law, the Old Testament law was a law of sin and death in and of itself. There was no provision for forgiveness within the law. James explained the problem: *"For whoever will keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he has become guilty of all"* (Js 2:10). One sin makes one a lawbreaker, and thus, condemned by the law. But under the law of faith and grace, there is mercy that is manifested through grace. Christians do not walk in a state of condemnation because at the waters of baptism they have connected with the cleansing blood of Jesus (At 22:16). They continue to walk in the cleansing blood in their Christian life (1 Jn 1:7). They are thus not in a state of condemnation. This is exactly what Paul meant in Romans 8:2. *"For the law of the Spirit of life **in Christ Jesus** has freed you from the law of sin and death."* Because the Roman disciples had been baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3,4), they were set free from a system of law that pronounced and condemned all men to be sinners. And thus they were freed from the death that is demanded by law.

K. Romans 10:6-10; 11:5,6

> *"But the righteousness that is of faith thus speaks, 'Say not in your heart, "who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring up Christ from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart'—that is, the word of faith that we preach; that if you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and will believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart man **believes unto righteousness**, and with the mouth **confession is made to salvation**"* (Rm 10:6-10).
>
> *"Even so then, at this present time there is also **a remnant** according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace"* (Rm 11:5,6).

Notice carefully that in Romans 10:6-10 the statement is *"believe **unto** righteousness"* and *"confession is made **to** salvation."* In both statements it **does not** say "believe and confess **for** righteousness and salvation." Keep in mind that Paul wrote the statement of Romans 10:6-10 on the background of the argument that

he had already settled in Romans, that salvation is by grace through obedient faith. Therefore, he reveals in Romans 10 that one must **believe** in God as the provider of righteousness through His grace. We as individuals, and before we were baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3), **confessed** that we could be saved only by grace that was revealed through the sacrificial Son of God. Believing in saving grace and confessing our own inabilities at keeping law, but the ability of Jesus on the cross, brought us to the cross and the waters of baptism. It was there that salvation was realized when we contacted the saving blood of Jesus. Therefore, before the point of baptism, every response on our part was "unto." It was our obedience of faith that took us to the cross, grave and resurrection with Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). When we came out of the waters of baptism, therefore, it was then that we were saved.

The word "remnant" in Romans 11:5 is from the Old Testament. A remnant of Israel was delivered out of Babylonian captivity and returned to the land of promise. Paul metaphorically uses the word in this context to refer to the remnant of the Jews who have come out of the captivity of law in order to believe and confess unto salvation. By faith the sons of Abraham chose to be delivered from the futility of a meritorious system of law keeping (See Gl 2:16). It was not that they meritoriously submitted to another law. Their obedience of faith moved them to submit to all that God required of them to come into a new covenant relationship with Him (Jr 31:31-34). They were given access to this covenant of grace, and therefore, they responded by faith to what God required of them to covenant with Him.

In the contexts of Romans 10:6-10 and 11:5,6, Paul contrasts two possible means by which one would seek to be saved. (1) There is the possibility of salvation by perfect law keeping. (2) There is salvation by grace. There are only these two means by which the remnant could choose to be saved. Paul had already argued in Romans with the obvious conclusion that *"by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight"* (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). Therefore, the first option would not justify one of sin before God. Man is left only with the second option, justification by grace. The first option is salvation by meritorious works without the grace of God. The second option is salvation by imperfect obedience under the grace of God. Their only option was to believe unto the righteousness of God through grace, and confess their inability to save themselves, and thus depend on the ability of Christ on the cross.

Salvation has always been by grace from the beginning of time. Enoch was saved by grace through faith (Hb 11:5; see Gn 5:22). However, he obediently "walked with God" (Compare 2 Jn 4). Noah was saved by grace, but he built an ark in obedience to the will of God for the salvation of himself and his family (Gn 6:22). Abraham was saved by grace through his faith because he obeyed to offer up his Son. Only by the grace of God was he saved. The fact is that there is no salvation apart from the grace of God. Our access into this grace is through an obedient faith in God's promise to deliver us from sin.

Epilogue

Paul stated to some proud Corinthians who were comparing their works with his, *"Your boasting is not good"* (1 Co 5:6). In his second letter to the Corinthians he wrote, *"For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom,* ***but by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you****"* (2 Co 1:12). Some in Corinth evidently tried to validate themselves as "spiritual" leaders because of their faith. To such we would remind ourselves that our faith is not in faith itself. Faith in and of itself is no means of salvation. No matter how strongly one might believe, even to the point of dying for his faith, he can never reap salvation by faith in faith.

We are inundated by those who use their faith as a testimony that God is working in their lives. Bookshelves are stacked with testimonies of those who have used their faith in their faith as a validation that God was working in their lives. We are sometimes reminded of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 11:12,13: *"But what I do 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. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ."*

We have throughout this document referred to baptism into Christ by which one comes into the realm of God's grace. Some would consider such obedience to the gospel to be a meritorious work. We believe that such thinking has been sufficiently refuted in the fact that obedience to what God requires of men to do to be saved **is never a meritorious work. It is not legalistic to do what God commands us to do**.

But here is the point we would make. We have never heard of anyone who has boasted of his or her baptism. We have heard many boast of their faith, but no one boast-

ing of their obedience to the gospel as if there salvation was meritoriously acquired through their baptism. When Paul made the statement, *"Be not arrogant, but fear"* (Rm 11:20), he certainly did not mean such in reference to one's baptism in obedience to the gospel. He did not because baptism was in obedience to the gospel in order to be born again into Christ. One cannot boast of that which God requires of us to be saved. How can one boast of baptism when baptism comes from God, not man?

We would conclude, therefore, that our boast is in Christ, into whom we have come through obedience of the gospel. It may have been a struggle of faith to bring us to the point of obedience to the gospel, but our boast is not in our faith, but in the marvelous grace of God by which we are saved and sustained through the blood of Jesus. The conclusion of the matter is Paul's thanksgiving: *"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift"* (2 Co 9:15).

Book 51

The Living Sacrifice

The power of Christianity in the world is the committed lives of those who live out the word of Christ in their communities. Jesus said that His disciples would be known for their love, and love that is not manifested is no love at all. Love takes a great deal of commitment. Loving one's enemies seems to be against our natural spirit to dominate one another. But when one is committed to loving his neighbor as himself, then the true effect of Christianity is seen within this world of hate. Religions that are created after the desires of men, are identified by their character of manifesting the carnal nature of men. It is for this reason that Christianity bears the trademark of a God of love. We love because He first loved us. And because He loved us through His Son, Christianity is forever identified to be of heavenly origin. This is indeed the power of Christianity in a world of man-made religions.

Emerson wrote, "Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever accomplished without it." We would add that the enthusiasm of the greatly committed drove them to accomplish great things. That which inspires us to accomplish a desired goal, is enthusiasm coupled with commitment. It is our commitment to realize our dreams that move us to overcome all obstacles that would hinder our path to success. When we survey the word of God, and identify those great heroes of faith who overcame the impossible, we see in them a commitment to overcome regardless of their hardships.

> *For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. From weakness they were made strong, became valiant in war and turned to flight foreign armies* (Hb 11:32-34).

By the commitment of their faith, it was heroes as these who led others to conquer what seemed to be almost impossible obstacles in life.

And we can do the same for we have more recorded history than they upon which we can base our faith. They walked by a faith that was founded upon a few revelations from God. But we have a whole Bible of inspiring examples, a complete library upon which we can build our faith and commitment to serve our God. Because we have this great crowd of faithful witness surrounding us, we must do as the Hebrew writer challenged us. *"Therefore, 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****"* (Hb 12:1). We too can be confident that *"****if God is for us, who can be against us****?"* (Rm 8:31). We have the documents that reveal the grace of God on the cross. We can read, *"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****?"* (Rm 8:32). We believe this and are thus committed to Him who gave us all things. We can have confidence of being victorious over all obstacles that Satan will lay in our paths. *"But in all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"* (Rm 8:37).

Washington Irving said, "Great minds have purposes, others have wishes. Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune, but great minds rise above them." Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Co 2:16). And having that mind means that they are already a success. They have already been victorious. The abundant life is truly waiting for those individuals who have the courage and commitment, coupled with their faith in God, to be more than conquerors through Him who loved us. God is willing to draw out of us more than we believe we have to offer. Marcus Antonius said, "Look well into thyself, there is a source of strength which will always spring up if thou wilt always look there." There is light under our bushel. *"Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober"* (1 Th 5:6). God has a victory for everyone who commits himself to do His will. If you join the committed around you, you will be able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you can imagine (See Ep 3:20,21). And how can this

be? Just remember and say, *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (Ph 4:13). *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gl 2:20). If Jesus is in us, then we are victorious. *"And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith"* (1 Jn 5:4).

Chapter 1

PROPHECY OF THE COMMITTED SERVANT

On our journey to discover the wondrous prophetic account of redemption that is recorded throughout the pages of the Holy Writ, our hearts are overwhelmed by the loving commitment of God to bring our Lord Jesus to the cross of redemption. God was committed to offer His grace to a humanity that was lost in sin and found no comfort in this world. Our obsession with the "plan of salvation" throughout the Old Testament is justified and right. But one aspect of our studies that we often forget is the struggles the Father went through in order to get His Son to Calvary. He patiently struggled with the nation of Israel. He patiently struggled with unbelief and rebellion. But because He was committed to the plan, His struggles were finally realized in the words of the Son from the cross, "It is finished."

Our understanding of the commitment of God is revealed in the steadfastness of the Father and Son to bring into reality the redemption of the cross. A casual reading of the Old Testament reveals the determination of God to reconcile men again unto Himself for eternal dwelling. Enacting the plan and carrying it out was not easy. And because it was not easy, it exemplifies the love message of redemption that John recorded in John 3:16. In fact, in the final hours of accomplishing the redemptive plan, the incarnate Son of God cried out to the Father, *"Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done"* (Lk 22:42). And indeed, the Father's commitment to the redemption of man was accomplished through the commitment of Jesus to make the final sacrifice. Therefore, we must take another look at the Old Testament Scriptures in order to determine the intensity of the commitment that the Godhead maintained in order to bring the innocent sacrificial offering of the Son to the cross.

As the wonderful picture unveils itself in the Old Testament of the sacrificial Lamb to come in fulfillment of all prophecy, we often wonder how the first recipients of the words given to the early prophets were received. They spoke of a "suffering Servant" that was to come, a "bruised leader." The image that was revealed to them at the time certainly painted a picture of commitment that excited their curiosity. They were so overcome with the nature and character of this One to come that they *"inquired and searched diligently ... searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow"* (1 Pt 1:10,11).

A. The bruised leader:

Even the first prophecy of the coming Redeemer spoke of One who would be surrounded with enmity. *"And I will put enmity between you* [Satan] *and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel"* (Gn 3:15). We seek leaders who are stalwarts of strength, unassailed by the adversity that surrounds them. Who would ever seek a "bruised heel" leader? Nevertheless, this is the first picture we see in prophecy concerning the One who would lead in taking care of our sin problem.

We naturally seek those whose lives we would emulate in our own. We crave examples of strength and courage. Because we are so bruised as His people in a world that seems to have gone wrong, we would not naturally look for "bruised heel" leaders. And so ... maybe ... this was the way it should be. In this way our discipleship would be unquestioned. It would be sincere. Our fellowship would not be in those things that appeal to the carnal desires of those who seek after the things that encourage the pride of life. Our faith would be true and real, evidenced by the fact that the One we would follow was no mere man. And because our faith would be strong in One who would first be portrayed as bruised, through His strength we also would be able to crush the head of the adversary. And such was the hope given to some disciples who lived in a first century city that would soon become the heart of persecution against the disciples of the "bruised heel" leader. *"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly"* (Rm 16:20).

As we cautiously gaze through the Old Testament, we are driven to bow in response to the pictorial image that the early prophets gave of the One who would command such an overwhelming following in the world. The

fact is that we follow the One of whom the prophets spoke because He was more than a bruised martyr. He was more than a martyr, and because He was, our faith is not in His martyrdom, but in who He is and what He did through His sacrificial offering.

B. The suffering Servant:

The prophet of the Old Testament who probably wondered more concerning the revelation of the One who would come was the prophet Isaiah. God used this man as a very unique vessel through whom He would reveal to His people the One in whom they must place their hope. However, the picture of the One who was to come was not beautiful. It was not a picture of a knight in shining armor. It was a picture of One who would suffer the disdain and rejection of man. It was not One for whom men would lay down their lives in order to follow, if we were thinking from strictly a human point of view.

1. *His rejection:* If we were thinking worldly, Isaiah 53 would not be a good picture of a leader who would encourage a following. When we venture through this masterpiece of dictated revelation, we are sure Isaiah fell to his knees in amazement concerning what God had in mind for the future. His question, as ours if we had only this portion of revelation of the One coming, would surely have been, "Father, must we have hope in such a One who is so rejected by the world?" Of course the answer to his question would have been "Yes," since the One coming would be of such a nature that those who followed Him would be the true candidates to follow Him right into eternity.

So Isaiah begins to unveil the Divine dramatic picture of the "grieving servant" by asking, *"Who has believed our report?"* (vs 1). If this is the picture of the One coming, then certainly the very nature of His suffering would not encourage a following. It would not encourage us to follow Him if we were viewing Him through the eyes of the world. His beginnings in His youth would be as a *"tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground"* (vs 2). Nothing significant. He grew up in a social environment where He commanded no following. He was a common one born of the common class. Add to this the fact that He was not handsome or attractive. *"He has no form or comeliness. And when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him"* (vs 2). Who would ever want to follow an ugly leader? Certainly no women.

The coming One would not be a socialite. He would not please the carnal appetites of men. In fact, *"He is despised and rejected by men"* (vs 3). In contrast to our desire to follow those who inspire society with their social prowess, this One would incur the opposite response from society as a whole. This picture seems to be in total contrast to what we seek in our leaders. Since we want to be somewhat in society ourselves, we crave those who are such in order that we might be accepted and elevated to their social standing. Our carnal thirst for power drives us to seek those who have power and acceptance. But not so with the One in whom Israel was to have hope. This leader was to be and is all that is contrary to every book written on effective corporate leadership. He was One who dated every leadership seminar of the corporate world on how to be an effective and successful leader among men.

Add to the dim picture of the One to come the fact that He would be *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"* (vs 3). It is not our desire to commit ourselves to those who are rejected by society as a whole. We want leaders who ride into town on a white horse, commanding the following of the masses who would commit themselves to their leadership. But not this One who was to come in the history of Israel. We seek no one as a leader who would be the outcast of society.

The One coming would supposedly generate feelings of rejection. Therefore, *"we hid, as it were, our faces from Him"* (vs 3). Some would be embarrassed by His presence. They would be embarrassed to be in His presence. If we were driven by earthly desires to be somewhat among men we would not commit ourselves to such a leader who was so despised by society.

But *"He was despised and we did not esteem Him"* (vs 3). Those of the world did not esteem Him as a leader because He was despised by society as a whole. Our only conclusion would be that those who truly committed themselves to Him understood something about Him that was so needed by the committed. When we call on those to be leaders among us who are despised by those around us, then we begin to understand that there had to be something unique about this One about whom Isaiah was painting an inglorious portrait. Our discipleship to this One should thus generate at least curiosity in the minds of those who would naturally despise such a One as this (See 1 Pt 3:15). The joy of those who would commit all to Him who had committed all to them, was that His disciples were not seeking worldly fame. They were seeking spiritual gain.

2. *His mission:* Isaiah continued to clarify the picture of the coming One by changing his revelation to the ministry of the "despised and rejected" One. We are overwhelmed by what he reveals. The picture of the despised and rejected One is not pretty. It is dismal and

does not command that He would be one with whom we would seek to associate. It is a picture of one who is treated so disdainfully by society that we would turn away from Him in disgust. But because His mission was not for Himself, but for others ... for us, we stop to take another look in order to somehow comprehend what was His true mission to man.

He bore *"our griefs and carried our sorrows"* (vs 4). He was rejected by society because He was received by us who were suffering under the burden of a wicked world and our own sin. The "bruised leader" incurred the rejection of the worldly society for the sake of the rejected ones. In order to accomplish His destiny, He was not one to be protected by God from the injury of a world gone wrong. He was stricken and smitten because God sent Him into a world of degradation that wanted nothing to do with God or Him. If He were to be our leader, then Isaiah certainly wondered why God would allow Him to suffer so unmercifully on our behalf.

And so the Spirit continued to explain to Isaiah. *"But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities"* (vs 5). At this point in the Spirit's revelation to Isaiah, we would imagine that the heart of Isaiah started to throb in excitement, for he too suffered the frustration of sin and the rejection of a wicked society that had given itself over to idolatrous gods. He sought a closer relationship with the one true and living God in order to escape the burden of the society in which he lived.

We too seek a close relationship with our God. But we know that in the futility of our feeble efforts to be obedient to His law, we continue to mess up. We are all lawbreakers (Rm 3:23). We are dead in our imperfect performance of the will of our God. Add to this the fact that God would not receive any good works we presumptuously offered for the atonement of our own inabilities to perform perfectly according to His will. But this suffering Servant that Isaiah pictured was committed to be "wounded" and "bruised" for our imperfections. *"The chastisement of our peace was upon Him"* (vs 5).

He came for us to restore peace between us and our God, and yet, He had to endure the chastisement of the world in order to accomplish the redemption deed. *"And with His stripes we are healed"* (vs 5). At His time of chastisement, *"they kept on striking Him with their hands"* (Jn 19:3). Every strike He received was a blow for our sins. Yes, He was the willing suffering Servant who was committed to do for us that which we could not do for ourselves. We needed healing, but the healing came at the pain of every strike that was laid against His incarnate body. From His very mouth He proclaimed, *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends"* (Jn 15:13). He committed Himself to His friends. He committed Himself to death for His friends. And it was that commitment that drew out of His friends an amazing thing. It drew the same commitment with which He committed Himself to His friends. Because He died for His friends, His friends returned the love with the total sacrifice of their own lives. They too would die for Him. It was the magic of loving reciprocity.

Though those first followers fled "like sheep" at the time Isaiah's picture was finally played out, and they *"turned everyone to his own way,"* the rejected Servant continued committed to His mission to deal with the sin problem of the fleeing sheep. Only God does things as this because of His great love for us (Jn 3:16). When we did not want the offering of His Servant, God gave it anyway. *"But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rm 5:8).

And now we should be ashamed. God took care of the sin problem of His friends even though His friends felt they had no problem. *"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). Thank you, Jesus! How much greater can a friend be than when he gives us that which we so desperately need even when we do not expect it?

Yes, *"the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (vs 6). He was innocent of sin. He was falsely accused. He suffered the injustice of a twisted court and fell at the hands of a vehement mob. And yet, His mission was so necessary for us, so essential to bring His creation into the eternal presence of God. It was so necessary that He said nothing during all the suffering He had to endure in order to accomplish the deed of redemption and reconciliation (vs 7). Because God was not willing that any one of His creatures should perish, He accomplished the offering of "iniquity bearing" for everyone (2 Pt 3:9). The suffering Servant of God unselfishly served our sin problem. He willingly was stricken for us who would be His people (vs 8). His ministry was so awesomely sacrificial for us that He was willing to make *"His grave with the wicked"* (vs 9). We are overwhelmed with thanksgiving (See 2 Co 4:15). The One the world considered a failed leader, was actually the One who would lead us into the eternal presence of God. What more out of a leader does one want than that? The One who was made an *"offering for sin,"* was the One of whom we would not be ashamed in declaring His name to the world (See Rm 1:16).

3. *His conquest:* Isaiah concluded His picture of

the One who was coming to bring life to all Israel. Though at first we would repel from the social rejection of this bruised healer, God would be pleased with the suffering Servant's reconciliation of the sheep who had all gone astray. God *"will see the labor of His life and will be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous servant will justify many, for He will bear their iniquities"* (vs 11). The One the world would reject because He offered no carnal leadership, would be the One millions would receive because He would lead them into victory over sin. The One who would bear the cross of social rejection for our sins, would be the One who would draw millions to bear their crosses for Him. Our desire to be delivered from the bondage of our sin would compel us to deliver ourselves unto Him. Isaiah concluded rightly. *"Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the great and He will divide the plunder with the strong,* ***because He has poured out His life to death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"*** (vs 12).

Now to what extent will one sacrifice his own life for the crucified One when he truly recognizes the suffering that was needed for him as a transgressor? **The uncommitted have no understanding of what God's suffering Servant did at the cross**.

Chapter 2

THE MIND OF THE COMMITTED

The challenge of being a Christian is in following the One who was so committed to us. The sacrificial commitment of discipleship is following the One who set the bar high for sacrificial commitment. We are tempted to water down the level of commitment for which Jesus gave us an example. We try to excuse ourselves by saying that it is not possible to so commit one's life. Paul explained Jesus' commitment to us: *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who ... made Himself of no reputation ... being made in the likeness of men ... humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:5-8). We must admit that Jesus' commitment to us as His friends was extreme. But there it is. Even if He lowers the bar, we often have difficultly in committing to Him as He committed to us. Would we as His disciples be willing to take this journey of commitment with Him? Does "having the mind of Christ" call for too much?

Psalm 22 is David's picture of the sacrificial journey of Jesus right to the cross. In prophecy, the Spirit through David revealed that the burden of Jesus' committed journey would take Him to the point of crying out to His Father, *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping me and from the words of my groaning?"* (vs 1). In His agony on the cross, these are the words Jesus quoted (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). They were words of spiritual agony as He bore the destiny of His mission on a cross outside Jerusalem. In the suffering of the moment we would assume, as many other commentators, that His Father turned away from the ugliness of our sin that He bore there. At least, in crying out the quotation from Psalm 22 Jesus wanted everyone to rush to their Bibles and read Psalm 22.

Through Psalm 22 the Spirit revealed the life of the committed Servant. We would assume that the words of verses 7 & 8 were in reference to Jesus while on the cross. *"All those who see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip. They shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver him. Let Him deliver him, seeing he delighted in Him.'"* They mocked Him on the cross. *"You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."* (Mt 27:40). Even the religious leaders mocked, *"He saved others; Himself He cannot save"* (Mt 27:42).

Jesus draws us to the extremities of His conviction to fulfill His redemptive mission on behalf of us. *"They gaped on me with their mouths, as a raving and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It is melted within me"* (vss 13,14). In our commitment to follow Jesus with the cross we bear, it is often as it was with Him when He went there for us. *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You have brought me into the dust of death"* (vs 15). As the wicked who placed Jesus on the cross for us, we are sometimes placed in similar circumstances in our task to proclaim the suffering Savior of the cross. *"For dogs have surrounded me. The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet"* (vs 16). In his own flight from the murderous hand of King Saul, David was reduced to desperation. As an historical picture of the suffering Servant on the cross, David, as Jesus, suffered from the anguish of being rejected and pursued by the wicked.

In Psalm 22 David was inscribing prophecy of the

coming Servant who would commit Himself to relieve us of our sin problem. But we do not ignore David's life, that in times of great trial and flight from Saul, he too felt surrounded by the wicked. His life of suffering is the reality of the committed life. David continued, *"But You, or Lord, do not be far from me. O You my strength, hasten to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the Lion's mouth, for You have heard me from the horns of the oxen"* (vss 19-21). If one would commit himself to the One who committed Himself to the cross, then he will certainly be baptized into the agony of suffering that David endured because he was so committed to serving God.

David lived the committed life. The result of his commitment to the Lord was suffering, rejection, flight for his life. But in the agony of his flight from wickedness, he never lost his trust in the Lord. *"I will declare Your name to My brethren. In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him. All you the seed of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him all you seed of Israel"* (vss 22,23). Regardless of the consequences of our commitment to the Lord, we would be as David. We would be as the Son of God who did not shrink back from the agony of the cross. In the midst of great persecution, we will sing out the praises of God. We must never forget that the One to whom we have given our lives is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). David remembered, *"For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations"* (vs 28).

Chapter 3

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE OF THE COMMITTED LIFE

1 Peter 2:20,21 is the transitional passage that links the commitment of the suffering Servant of God who went to the cross with His call to us to be likewise committed.

> *For what credit is it, if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, this is commendable with God. For to this you were called,* ***because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps****.*

It could not have been stated better. Throughout His ministry Jesus called for commitment from His disciples. They were to be committed to Him as He was to them for bringing eternal redemption to them. Though they did not fully understand during His ministry with them the extent to which He committed Himself to them, after His ascension they understood to the point of giving their lives for Him. The "suffering" about which Peter wrote in the preceding text was more than the hours Jesus suffered on the cross. Peter had in mind the entirety of the humbled and incarnate God who was humiliated throughout His earthly ministry that led Him to the cross. At least Paul had this in mind when he wrote, *"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 .... He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"*** (Ph 2:5-8). Jesus was not simply a man walking the roads of Palestine with His friends, preaching a message of religious revolution. He was the humbled and incarnate God in the flesh of man walking the roads of Palestine. *"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"* (Jn 1:14). Jesus was committed to us to the point of giving up being as God in spirit in order to suffer in the flesh as a man to be tempted in all ways as a man (Hb 4:15).

We must confess that the extent of God coming so far to receive us who were so far away speaks of a loving commitment of God that is incomprehensible. He was committed to leaving His family in order to build a family. He went from the familiar to the foreign in order to bring back into His family an extended family of believers who were as committed as He was to adopt new sons into the fold of God. Paul's statement is precious: *"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). It doesn't get any better than that.

Now comes the hard part in reference to what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:20,21. Paul wrote, *"... and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellows heirs with Christ,* ***if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him"*** (Rm 8:17). Jesus' suffering was more than the cross. It had to be in order to be an example of lifetime suffering that His disciples would have to endure. The cross was the finality of His commitment of suffering for us. He now calls on all His disciples to likewise suffer for Him throughout their lives.

He totally gave Himself for us, and thus, He expects us to commit ourselves totally to Him. It is a fair exchange.

There are no surprises here for the disciples of Jesus. After all, Jesus foretold all His friends who would follow Him that there would be great opposition. *"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed"* (Jn 3:20). Paul reminded Timothy, *"Yes,* ***and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution****"* (2 Tm 3:12). Jesus said that if they hate the light of godly living, then they will hate the messengers of the light. So when Jesus said to His first disciples, *"You are the light of the world,"* He was essentially saying, "Look out" (Mt 5:14). Nevertheless, He encouraged the disciples, *"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 consequence of "light shining" for Jesus, however, is hate from the darkened world. But committed disciples know this. It is for this reason that James wrote, *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* (Js 1:2). The "various trials" we undergo for Jesus reminds us that we are living the godly life. If there were no "various trials," then one would should check his godliness. We live in an ungodly world that does not like godly living.

The hate the world dishes out to the disciples of Jesus reveals the commitment of the disciples. Jesus forewarned His disciples, *"The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its works are evil"* (Jn 7:7). Because of their commitment to Him, the disciples would live under the shadow of the hate that it unleashed on Jesus. *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you"* (Jn 15:18). If one chooses to be a committed disciple of Jesus, then he should seriously consider the cost of his discipleship, always keeping in mind the encouragement that Peter gave. *"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name"* (1 Pt 4:16).

Since it is a principle that the world will hate the committed disciple as it hated Jesus, then committed discipleship naturally incurs hate from 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). *"If they have persecuted Me,* ***they will also persecute you****"* (Jn 15:20). Jesus knew that all His disciples of all time would suffer the same fate of hate and persecution that He was committed to endure for the work of the cross. At the very beginning of His ministry, He encouraged them. *"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 reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you****"* (Mt 5:11,12; see Hb 11:32-40).

It is not persecution that brings us to question our life as a disciple of Jesus, but the lack of it.

Chapter 4

COMMITTED TO CROSS-BEARING

If one claims to be a committed disciple of Jesus, but really is not, Luke 14:25-35 is not a fun passage to read in the Bible. It is not because it often reveals that which we do not want to hear. It generates in us questions concerning our personal commitment to Jesus. If we consider ourselves to be a true disciple of Jesus, the statements of Jesus in this text often reveal that we are not really the best of disciples. In fact, it reveals that most people cannot be disciples of Jesus at all. And those who claim they are, discover that they are sometimes worthless salt, and thus, should be spewed out as lukewarm water. All those "nominal" disciples out there may actually not be disciples at all when screened through the sieve of Jesus' statements of Luke 14:25-35. You can be your own judge as we filter our lives through this most challenging statement of Jesus. The declaration of Jesus is easy to understand, but very difficult to live.

At the time, Jesus made the statements of Luke 14:25-35, it was a turning point in His ministry concerning His relationship with the multitudes. There were great multitudes who followed Him (vs 25). But now it was time to screen the masses by sending home the uncommitted. So as he walked along the way with the multitudes following, *"He turned and said to them ..."* (vs 25). You can imagine the picture. He simply turned around and said directly to the multitudes, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father ... mother ... wife ... children ... brothers ... sisters ... his own life,* ***he cannot be My disciple****"* (vs 26). *"And whoever does not bear his own cross ...* ***cannot be My disciple****"* (vs 27). *"Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has,* ***cannot be My disciple****"* (vs 33). These statements were startling. After He said them, we would assume that many in the multitudes were packing their bags and heading home.

These were stunning pronouncements of Jesus that fully reveal His definition of what it means to be committed to Him. We can only imagine the gaping mouths of the multitudes. We often wonder ourselves concerning the intensity of commitment that Jesus demands in order to be His disciple. Frankly, from what Jesus pronounced in this context concerning the demands of being His disciple, there are few who are willing to pay the cost of discipleship. And this is the point. Jesus is not looking for quantity, but quality.

Because of the direct call of Jesus to the committed life, some Bible readers have attempted to explain away the total commitment for which Jesus calls from those who would follow Him. But no futile efforts on our part to water down what He said will deter the penetrating meaning that surrounds the contexts of His statements. So with excruciating honesty and self-examination, we strenuously labor through His words. Of all the contexts of scriptures in the Bible, this context is probably the most revealing concerning what Jesus defines as true commitment to Him.

As we study through His statements we must somehow understand them from His point of view. Jesus was the eternal incarnate Son of God on earth. The earth He created would be only a speck of time in His existence. He came to take people back into eternity with Him. Therefore, whatever it would cost in sacrifices in order to go into eternal existence with Jesus was totally insignificant to sacrifice for eternity. Paul's statement in Romans 8:18 would be an appropriate introduction to the context of Luke 14. *"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."*

A. "Hating" one's own family.

*"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). These words get our attention! Maybe the words of Matthew are somewhat more pleasant, or at least possibly interpretive of what Jesus meant? *"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). We feel more comfortable with these words than the hyperbole of the word "hate" in the context of Luke 14:26. Nevertheless, if it would ever come to the point in one's life of choosing between Jesus and one's own father, Jesus said that He must be first. After all, one's own father, mother, sisters and brothers are not eternal. Jesus is. One's own relatives cannot deliver eternal life. Jesus can. And it is in His presence we seek to be for eternity. Those who would sacrifice eternity with Jesus for a temporary relationship with one's own family are not candidates for heaven. Our family can never be the most important thing in our lives. If one wants to remain in the world and be destroyed with the world, then hang on to family first, and Jesus second. But if one wants to dwell with Jesus for eternity, he better reverse the order.

If one puts Jesus first, then it may come to the point in one's life as a true disciple that God blesses one with a new family if the unbelieving family forsakes the committed disciple. Jesus said of His own earthly family, *"For whoever will do the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother"* (Mt 12:50). When making a decision concerning the commitment that one must make in reference to putting Jesus before an unbelieving family, we must never forget the promise that Jesus made.

> *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**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and **in the age to come eternal life*** (Mk 10:29,30).

That is a promise! Jesus was sending His disciples out into a cold world filled with sin and hate. *"Go your way,"* He cautioned them, *"Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves"* (Lk 10:3). He continued to warn in order to prepare them for the great commitment by which they must face the world, *"But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues"* (Mt 10:17). The life of the committed disciple not only results in being forsaken by those unbelieving family members who are close, but also brings on one the persecution of the world. We must never forget what Paul said to Timothy: *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer persecution**"* (2 Tm 3:12).

It is easy to be a Christian when we live in a fluff society wherein everyone is content with the *status quo*. It is easy to be a Christian when our Christianity is relegated to the ceremonies of churchianity, and showing up on Sunday morning to keep active one's membership at the local "church club" is all that is required. Some thrive sitting within the sound of chapel bells, but are not willing to go forth into the mire of humanity and snatch people from the gates of hell. Jesus knew that the love for Him that would be within the hearts of His disciples would drive them out of their religious com-

fort zones into all the world of the lost. And that world wherein the lost exists, is a world of persecution and hardship. He knew that in expressing their gratitude for the grace of God by which they were saved, they would be a grace-driven people (See 2 Co 4:15). They would be driven to live the crucified life as their Savior was crucified for them. Paul can only say to the driven, *"You therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"* (2 Tm 2:3).

B. Cross-bearing means crucifixion and death.

In the text of Luke 14 Jesus qualified true commitment to discipleship by stating, *"Whoever does not bear **his own cross** and come after me, **cannot be My disciple**"* (Lk 14:27). Many in the multitudes who heard these worlds surely cringed. The Romans had crucified thousands. In rebellions against the Roman Empire prior to the coming of Jesus, there were numerous occasions when Roman authorities put down such rebellions by crucifying Jews across Palestine. There were surely some in the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke these very words whose fathers, mothers, grandfathers or grandmothers had been crucified on crosses by the Roman army. Therefore, when Jesus used the word "cross," He meant more than enduring some hard speech or ridicule that one might suffer as His disciple. In the Bible classes of our comfortable society we have found that the discussions about cross-bearing usually never reach the depth of meaning to which Jesus intended in the context of the people to whom He spoke. Many in the multitudes were followers of Him as long as everything was comfortable and cozy. But if a cross was involved, they were going home.

To the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke this statement, the word "cross" meant death. If a disciple was not willing to die for Jesus, then Jesus' death for him on a cross would have little value. Because most people are not willing to carry out in their lives for Jesus that which Jesus carried for them, they cannot be disciples of Jesus. It is truly few who can repeat after Paul, *"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). That is the crucified life. The true cross-bearing disciple always remembers the promise of Jesus, *"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life"* (Rv 2:10). The committed do *"not love their lives to the death"* (Rv 12:11). Living without Jesus is not living at all. It is only a prolonged existence unto an eternal death that is coming. But dying with Jesus in this life is only a temporary moment of cross-bearing until the reality of an eternal existence with Jesus when He comes again.

C. Discipleship comes at a high price.

In turning to the multitudes on the occasion of Luke 14, Jesus challenged them with a question. *"For which one of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost ..."* (Lk 14:28). In their minds, surely no one in the multitudes would have missed the point. Lest one be mocked by the community, he would always consider the cost before beginning to build any structure. Therefore, Jesus was challenging them that if they were thinking about being His disciple, then they should first consider how much it is going to cost them in family relationships, houses and friends.

If there is no change in the life of the one who first becomes a disciple of Jesus, then he has missed the point. If one's life-style does not come down when he becomes a disciple, then he may have counted the cost of discipleship, but banked the capital. When the committed understand the cost of discipleship, all the money they spent on themselves to fulfill their selfish desires before they became disciples is given to the needs of others. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of this change in life-style. *"I have showed you all things, **that by laboring as this you must help the weak** and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive**'"* (At 20:35). Consider this: *"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 committed disciple has no problem with this question. But uncommitted disciples ... well ... there might be a problem. One may discover that he has no love of God in him, and thus, he is not a committed disciple of Jesus.

Jesus pointed out the matter of going up against a king without first considering one's own forces (Lk 14:31,32). We would view what Jesus said here in the context of the first two qualifications of the committed life. Therefore, we would understand that the one who would seek to encounter King Jesus without having forsaken family relationships, lands and houses, and after counting the cost of following Jesus as a disciple, should think twice about meeting King Jesus when He comes with His mighty angels in flaming fire (See 2 Th 1:7-9). One cannot be a disciple of Jesus if he is not willing to "get his commitment in order" to meet the King. If he is not living the committed life of a disciple, then he *"will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power"* (2 Th 1:9).

One of the most difficult conclusions to which the true disciple of Jesus must come is that **most people cannot be disciples of Jesus**. They cannot because they are not willing to make the commitments about which Jesus speaks in the context of Luke 14:25-35. Jesus made these statements to the multitudes, knowing that most of them would eventually turn away from Him. Nevertheless, He still made the statements. We must consider what the statements mean to our lives as His disciples. Our lives must reflect the crucified life of Jesus who lives in us. When others witness that we have been crucified with Christ, they will see in our lives what cross-bearing demands of the committed life. The disciple is committed to bearing his own cross because of what His Savior did on the cross for his redemption.

Chapter 5

THE FOCUS OF COMMITMENT

David figured it right in reference to his own life. *"**Commit your way to the Lord**. Trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass"* (Ps 37:5). To David, commitment meant giving one's self over to the direction of the Lord through His word. *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of the sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. **But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night**"* (Ps 1:1,2). We see a great many people today who propose that they are committed to Jesus, but care little for what Jesus said. They proclaim a great faith in Jesus, but no faith in the Bible. The Bible seems to be an appendage to their faith. They have thus deceived themselves into assuming they have a faith that is pleasing to God, but it is not a faith that is based on the word of God (See Rm 10:17). They have been sent delusions from God because they have no love of the truth (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

We must not forget that the millions of people who have no faith in the Bible at all have faith in a god they have created after their own image. The existence of faith in the minds of men does not necessitate any knowledge of the Bible. And herein is the curse that prevails throughout Christendom. We have millions who proclaim faith, **but it is often a faith coming from those who have no knowledge of the word of God**. And because theirs is an ignorant faith, it is a faith that is not pleasing to God (Hb 11:6).

According to any English dictionary the word "commitment" is defined as a promise or pledge. It is a promise or pledge to give one's self to a particular person or goal. The committed, therefore, give themselves in trust to someone or to the accomplishment of some thing. They bind themselves with goals or objectives to be led to accomplish something or to follow one to whom they have entrusted their faith. This is that for which Jesus called when He said to His disciples, *"If you love Me you will keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15). John defined this love in 1 John 5:3. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments."* The point in the two statements is absolutely clear. There is no commitment to Jesus, no real faith, unless there is commitment to do His will. **And the only way one can know the will of Jesus, is to know His word. People of faith who are ignorant of the word of Jesus are not people who are committed to Jesus**. They may be committed, but it is not to the Jesus we read about in His word. No person can commit himself to Jesus without first committing himself to the word of Jesus, for it is through His word and in obedience to His commandments, that we truly have confidence that we are His disciple. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples? *"You are My friends, **if you do whatever I command you**"* (Jn 15:14). The only way we can know what He commands is to study our Bibles.

A. Erroneous commitments:

We live in a religious world wherein there are some very committed and sacrificial people. We often hear the statement, "That person is a great Christian because of what he is doing for the Lord." But if the zealous person is not zealous for the commandments of the Lord, then certainly he has created a religiosity that is not based on the words of Jesus, but some meritorious system of identity. We must never forget what Jesus said in John 12:48. *"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**."* The words of Jesus are critical to determining discipleship, because it is in obedience to these words that determines our destiny.

Religious zeal is empty if it is not validated by the word of God. The person who is planted deeply in the word of God, upon which he meditates day and night, is like what David said, *"A tree planted by the rivers of*

water, that brings forth its fruit in its season ...” (Ps 1:3). It is this person who is nourished from the subterranean waters that are near the river. In dry weather he continues to thrive on the nurture of the word of God. The validation of his discipleship, therefore, is not in his good works or his emotions, but in the declaration of Jesus who claims him as His friend.

Religious zealots who do not treasure the word of God may outwardly give a pretense of righteousness, but inwardly their faith is in their faith and works. If we assure ourselves through our good works that we are right before God apart from His word, then we have deceived ourselves into believing that our faith is on solid ground. Giving one’s self to the Lord on the foundation of an outward performance of good works is very deceiving. It is deceiving because we feel good because of the good works, and not because our faith is based on the word of God. Consider the words of Paul 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****.”* How many people are doing a great deal of good works, but works that are in vain because they have not followed the simple instructions of the Lord in Galatians 3:27? *“For as many of you as were* ***baptized into Christ*** *have put on Christ”* (See Rm 6:3). We appreciate the good works of religious zealots, but if they are not “in the Lord” while doing their good works, then their works are in vain in reference to those works that follow one into heaven (See Rv 14:13). One must be baptized into the Lord in order to be able to take his works into heaven.

“Blessed are the dead who die ***in the Lord*** *...”* (Rv 14:13). Our peace of mind comes from knowing that we are in the Lord. It is not peace of mind that is based on our good works or emotional experiences, but on knowing that we are doing good works **in the Lord**. We are *“****created in Christ Jesus*** *for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them”* (Ep 2:10). We have no problem defining the good works. The problem that many seem to have is how we are *“created in Christ Jesus.”*

Giving one’s self wholeheartedly to doing good works is not a guarantee that one is committed to the Lord. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ep 2:10). But it is not by the good works that create us in Christ. Giving our lives to the Lord begins by giving ourselves in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6). And after being **baptized into the Lord**, it is then that we go to work in order to work out the salvation we have in the Lord (Ph 2:12,13).

The Macedonian disciples *“in a great trial of affliction ... abounded in the riches of their liberality”* in their contribution to the famine victims of Judea (2 Co 8:2). They were able to do this because *“they first gave themselves to the Lord”* (2 Co 8:5). When one first commits himself to the Lord, it is only then that he is blessed in his work for the Lord. He is blessed with the peace of mind that passes all understanding because he has first committed himself to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord in reference to coming into a covenant relationship with the Lord. His confidence is not in the performance of his religiosity, but in the commandments of the Lord whereby he was obedient to the teaching of the Lord. Here is the one about whom Peter wrote. *“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to Him in doing right, as to a faithful Creator”* (1 Pt 4:19).

If one would like to understand the extent to which he should be committed to the word of God, then consult David. Here is one who wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit the obsession we must have with the word of God. If we claim to be committed to God, then our commitment must be manifested in our study of His word. The climax of David’s commitment to the word of the Lord is **Psalm 119**. It is a psalm we would like to challenge everyone to periodically read, just to remind ourselves how central the word of God must be to our thinking and behavior.

B. Committed to Jesus, not theologians:

As a religious group, the Pharisees were committed to the law of Moses. They were committed to the law, while at the same time, they added their host of traditional beliefs to the law in order to legally protect the law of Moses. In doing so they became very religious in keeping the traditions of the fathers, but very faithless in respecting the word of God. Jesus judged their traditional religiosity, *“****For laying aside the commandment of God****, you hold the tradition of men ...”* (See Mk 7:1-9). They were committed to Moses, but in their zealous religiosity, they elevated their traditions above the law of Moses, *“teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mk 7:7). They were more committed to the traditions of the fathers than the word of God. Jesus thus judged their religiosity to be hypocritical. They were supposing to be committed to God, but they were more committed to their religion.

Then there were the Sadducees who were committed to the literality of the law of Moses, while forgetting the very spirit of the law. Their ignorance of the Scriptures led them to deny the resurrection of the dead (At 4:1,2). Though both the Pharisees and Sadducees were Jews of different religious sects during the time of Jesus,

they could not get along with one another because of the differences in their theology (See At 23:6-10). They were committed to their respective sects, which sects were a fabrication of various traditions and traditional interpretations that they had blended together with the word of God. In their lack of knowledge of what the word of God actually required, they were divided among themselves over their traditional religiosity. Regardless of their divisions, they were committed to their favorite religious sects.

This picture is not unlike what we see today in Christendom, a world divided into sects that are identified by those who adhere to favorite traditions and traditional beliefs. Each group champions their respective scholars, pitting one scholar against another in an endless debate that has sidetracked the adherents of each group from a central focus on Jesus. Commitment today in Christendom is more to one's favorite religious body. The subject of preaching is often focused on conversion to church, not Christ. And thus, the appeal of many evangelistic sermons we hear is that one be converted to a particular religious group that seeks to hover under the umbrella of Christendom by saying the name of Jesus over and over.

1. *Not committed to the arrogant wise:* Jesus prayed, *"I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because **You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent**, and have revealed them to babes"* (Mt 11:25). The theological aristocrats of Jesus' day (the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees) could not understand Jesus' message because they had long forgotten their commitment to the Source. They were self-deceived into thinking that their access to the Father was through their system of theology wherein they blended their traditions with the word of God. God knew this when He sent Jesus into the world. He thus thwarted the minds of the theologically wise of the world by their unwillingness to separate traditions from Bible in order to understand the prophecies concerning Jesus. Jesus pointed out their prejudiced interpretation of the Scriptures. *"You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life. It is these that testify of Me"* (Jn 5:39).

Paul interpreted the prophecy of Isaiah in reference to the work of God to confuse the twisted thinking of the wise. *"For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the clever'"* (1 Co 1:19; see Is 29:14). And again, *"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'"* (1 Co 3:19). Contrary to the philosophically and theologically wise of our history and time, it seems that it has been these who have found the simplicity of the word of God too hard to understand. These are *"those who are untaught and unstable,"* and thus, they *"distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures"* (2 Pt 3:16).

We would be cautious, therefore, in referring others to a favorite theologian. God did not write the Bible to theologians and philosophers. It was written to common folks as the Ephesian brethren, who, as Paul wrote, *"when you read **you can understand** my knowledge of the mystery of Christ"* (Ep 3:4). We would not, therefore, footnote our message with the popular theological jargon of the misguided religious world. Neither would we refer you to some pastor through whom you must sift your understanding of the Bible. God laid the Bible into our hands, and thus it is our responsibility to take it up and read for ourselves. If one is too intellectually lazy to do this, then surely he will reap the consequences of being misled by those into whose hands he has committed his thinking. If one is fearful of standing on his own understanding of the word of God without the crutch of a favorite preacher, then his faith is not totally in God and His word. When it comes to understanding the word of God, therefore, our total commitment is to the word of God. We must always assume that an alien sinner can pick up a copy of the New Testament in any far reaching village of the world, and without all the commentaries and comments of preachers, he can read and understand what God would require of him to be saved and live the godly life.

2. *Committed to Christ and His word:* Jesus taught by using many parables. He did so in order to screen out those who were puffed up in their own religiosity and theological commitments. He sought to reach the honest and open minded by sifting out those who had stopped their ears and hardened their hearts, most of whom were the religious leaders of His day. The disciples asked Jesus, *"Why do you speak to them in parables?"* (Mt 13:10). His was a simple answer. *"**Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given**"* (Mt 13:11).

The mysteries were not given to the hardened and arrogant because they were not receptive to who He was and what He had to say. They were not receptive simply because they had hardened their hearts against God by being committed to their traditional religions more than the commandments of God. In fact, they had rejected the word of God in order to hold to their traditions (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). It was these respected religious leaders who thought that they had theologically arrived, and thus, could not be taught by a common carpenter from Galilee.

But Jesus said of the honest and open minded, *"For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have more abundance"* (Mt 13:12). But of those who thought that they had an advantage on religion, He said, *"But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him"* (Mt 13:12). Here is Jesus' point: *"Therefore, I speak to them in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand"* (Mt 13:13). Isaiah had prophesied of the problem. ***"For the heart of this people has become calloused. Their ears are hard of hearing and they have closed their eyes"*** (Mt 13:15). Christians can become as this. The Hebrew writer wrote, *"About whom we have many things to say, and hard to explain,* ***seeing you have become dull of hearing****"* (Hb 5:11).

The religious leaders of Jesus' day rejected Him because they could not accept who He was and what He said. If He were just another Pharisee or Sadducee speaking the things that He did, then the religious leaders still would not have received Him. They would not because they did not receive one another when they spoke of earthly things. Jesus said to them, *"If I told you earthly things and you did not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"* (Jn 3:12). They would not understand Jesus because He was not of this world. But their minds were of this world. He said to the religious leaders, *"And no one has ascended to heaven except He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man"* (Jn 3:13). As God's messenger from heaven, they could not possibly understand Him because they could not understand the earthly things that came from themselves who were of this world. Since they were committed to protecting the identity of their particular religious sects, then it was impossible for them to understand correctly what Jesus brought to them from heaven. Not for a moment would we believe that this same scenario does not exist today among the religions of Christendom. People are so zealous to protect the identity of the heritage of their particular religious group that they fail to see the unity of the one universal body of Christ for which they should be contending (See Ep 4:3).

We hear of many religionists today who claim to be committed to Christ, but at the same time reject some of the most simple statements of the word of Christ. We must never forget that those who are true in their commitment to Christ, are those who accept any plain statement that is commanded by Christ. Without all the theological gymnastics that are written by those who are eager to defend their heritage, the true disciple of Jesus is committed to searching and accepting everything that God speaks to him through His word. It is with the mind of Christ that we would seek to receive all that our Redeemer has directed us to believe and obey. The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 are still relevant:

> *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God,* ***so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God****. Which things we also speak, not in the words that man's wisdom teaches, but what the Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual words.* ***But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him****. Neither can he know them,* ***because they are spiritually discerned****. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct?'* ***But we have the mind of Christ****."*

We must never forget that strong actions demand strong beliefs and commitments. Nowhere in the Bible is there a teaching that speaks of those with the mind of Christ who know nothing of the mind of Christ. There is no such thing as a personal commitment to Jesus without knowing who Jesus really is. A biblically ignorant commitment is an illusion of the deceived. It is imperative that those who would commit themselves to Christ should seek to know the word of Christ, for without a Bible-based commitment, one is only standing on the foundation of his own merits or emotions. If there is no love for the truth of God's word, God will allow Satan to have his way with those who refuse to study their Bibles (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

Chapter 6

COMMITTED PERSONALLY

David made an interesting statement in 2 Samuel 24:24. Israel had sinned nationally. He thus sought a place where he could make a burnt offering to the Lord for the sins of the people. Araunah offered a free threshing floor where David could make his offering. But unlike many today who want something for free in order to do the work of the Lord, David would have none of it. **He would make no offering that did not cost him**

anything. He stated to Anaunah, *"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****."*

When one offers himself personally to the Lord as a living sacrifice, he is not looking for a free ride. There is no such thing as bargain Christianity where others pay for one's own responsibilities as a sacrifice to God. No one Christian can make a sacrifice that covers the sacrifice that others must make for themselves. When it comes to spiritual growth, that which costs us little, benefits little toward our spiritual growth. We must keep in mind that the more we want to grow spiritually, the greater the sacrifices we must make in order to reach our desired spiritual growth. This means that if we accept the Christ of the cross in reference to our salvation, then we must accept the cross of the Christ. We must, as Paul, be crucified with Him (Gl 2:20).

We say all this because Jesus rejects lukewarm disciples, who, by their lukewarmness, bring shame upon His name. These are those to whom He would turn and say, *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,* ***I will spew you out of My mouth****"* (Rv 3:15,16). Does this statement offend us? If so, then we need to go to work in order to discover the type of personal commitment that Jesus demands of those who would seek to follow Him. And when it comes to complaining about what sacrifices we have to make for Him, we need to remember the sacrifice the Father gave in committing His only begotten Son to the death of the cross.

A. Be converted to Jesus:

Before His trials and crucifixion, Jesus knew that His disciples would scatter. He said personally to Peter, *"Satan has desired to have you so that he may sift you as wheat"* (Lk 22:31). Jesus told Peter that He had prayed for him, for He knew that he would deny Him. So Jesus said to Peter, *"And when you are* ***converted****, strengthen your brethren"* (Lk 22:32). Peter fell through His denials of Jesus. The road back to Jesus was **conversion**. The fallen disciple must go through the same emotional journey that they went through on their initial repentance as an alien sinner. The fallen must be converted again to following Jesus.

Peter was called by Jesus to be a world evangelist. At a time when his faith was greatly challenged, he lost sight of his Master and his own personal destiny. And so it is with many disciples today. Lukewarmness makes the church the mission field for evangelists who seek to stir it up to love and good works. Instead of being a force for missions, the lukewarm church becomes the mission field. We are not unfamiliar with Satan's game. He brings lukewarmness in among the disciples in order to hijack evangelists who should be preaching the good news to the lost. As a result, the evangelists have to spend their time with uncommitted disciples instead of the lost.

When Peter returned from his fall, Jesus wanted him to specifically look to the other disciples who had also forsaken Him in His darkest hour. Jesus wanted Peter to revive their calling to be a world force that would take the gospel to the world. He would do such only by focusing the minds of people on Jesus.

Every committed evangelist must look again at the example of Jesus when dealing with His followers. Please allow my interpretive insertions into the text of Luke 4:42-44.

> *Now when it was day, He departed* [from the church] *and went into a desert place. And the people* [the church] *sought Him, and came to Him. And they* [the church] *tried to keep Him from leaving them* [the church]. *Then He said to them* [the church], *"I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I was sent." And He preached in the synagogues* [of the unbelievers] *of Galilee.*

The church must recommit herself to the lost. In order to do this, the members must let their preachers go into all the world. When uncommitted churches, who are too lazy to minister the word of God to themselves, cling to a clergy they have hired to do their sacrifices for them, the world goes unevangelized. Satan is clever. If evangelists would recommit themselves to their destiny, they must be found preaching in the religious centers of Galilee in order that everyone have a chance to hear the good news of Jesus. **It is still true in reference to the work of evangelists that no man has a right to hear the gospel twice when there is one man who has never heard it once**.

B. Entrust a deposit of commitment to God.

Paul wrote, *"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 1:12). The Greek word Paul uses for "committed" is the noun *paratheke*. It is used only three times in the New Testament (See 1 Tm 6:20; 2 Tm 1:12,14). The verb form of the word, however, is used nineteen times. The verb form means "to entrust," "to commit," or "to deposit." With the noun

form of the word Paul was saying that he "entrusted" his personal commitment to God. He made a deposit of commitment that he knew God would keep and remember. What he had entrusted to God was something personal, something that he knew God would guard for the sake of Paul.

The commitment that Paul made to God was a lifetime of sacrifice. When Jesus had explained the cost of discipleship in the context of Luke 14:25-35, He reminded those who would dare be His disciples, *"... whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple"* (Lk 14:33). He spoke in hyperbole, knowing that if discipleship called on one to forsake everything, then the disciple should be prepared to do so. And Paul was prepared. To the Philippian disciples, Paul rehearsed all the pomp, power and purse that he forsook in order to accomplish the destiny that was personally given to him by Jesus (See Ph 3:1-6; also At 9:15). *"But what things were gain to me,* ***those things I have counted loss for Christ****. Indeed more, 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 rubbish so that I may gain Christ****"* (Ph 3:7,8) The Greek word for "rubbish" in the text is dung. It was the Holy Spirit using this word to remind us that nothing of this world (husbands, wives, children, lands, houses - Mt 10:37) is worth keeping if we forsake Jesus to the loss of our souls. Committed disciples count as dung any power, pomp or purse that would separate them from Jesus.

Commitment is the salt that makes the disciples of Jesus valuable in preserving their communities. We remember the conclusion of the Luke 14:25-35 context. Jesus said, *"Salt is good. 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). The uncommitted disciple is worthless for community preservation and will be spewed out by the Lord, that is, cast out from the presence of God (Mt 25:41).

Commitment to discipleship is a total surrender of all that a person has to offer to the total demands of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, according to the words of Paul, considered as dung anything that would hinder one from total surrender to Jesus. *"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). These are the words of a surrendered life. When we speak of commitment, therefore, we are defining to the fullest what conversion to Jesus is. If there is no total commitment to Jesus, then there is no conversion. There is no such thing as a lukewarm Christian. Think about this in view of the fact that Jesus will spew out all those who claim to be committed to Him, but actually are not.

Chapter 7

COMMITTED TO THE TRUTH

Our commitment is not made to a systematic theology or church, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this does not mean that we are not committed to the truth of God's word and His family. On the contrary, before one can claim any commitment to Jesus, he must first manifest a commitment to belief and obedience of what Jesus says. Because Jesus was *"declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead,"* we are driven to be guided in life by His word (Rm 1:4). We seek to follow the Son of God through obedience to the gospel and resurrection into eternal life with Him.

Any sincere commitment to Jesus is validated by a commitment to His word. The principle of this concept is what Jesus said at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. *"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 assumes he is committed to Jesus, but not to His word, then such a commitment leads one to be carried away after his own misguided religiosity. The problem where Christianity has gone into apostasy in many places of the world is that people have been convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, **but they have been left sterile in their faith by not being grounded in the word of God**. As a result, all sort of pagan religious practices have been blended with the truth. The ugly beast that has arisen is a doctrinal syncretism that has led to a religiosity that poses to be Christianity. It is a "Christianity" that is purported to be true because of the zealous commitment of the adherents. Such could not be further from the truth of God's word. The tragedy with this religiosity is that the misguided committed assume that all is well, when actually, their faith is in a delusion. Paul spoke of this.

"The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with ***all deceiving power and signs and wonders****, and with* ***all deception*** *of wickedness among those who perish, because* ***they do 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).

If one has no love of the truth, God will allow Satan to come with deceiving wonders and the error of wickedness. But those who would blend the truth of God's word with the lies of Satan, will not be saved. That is what the above passage states. So for this reason the disciples of Jesus must be obsessed with the word of God. They must study their Bibles daily lest they fall victim to the delusions of Satan.

Jesus said, *"I am the way,* ***the truth****, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me"* (Jn 14:6). Because there is no other way into eternal life except through Jesus (see At 4:12), Jesus was the message of the early disciples. The first thing Paul preached when he went into Corinth was Jesus Christ and His crucifixion for the sins of man (1 Co 1:23; see 15:1-4). But since Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, one cannot preach the crucified Jesus without preaching the truth that He taught. One cannot leave out the way of life that Jesus instructed His disciples to teach to all those whom they had immersed for remission of sins (Mt 28:20).

After Philip has joined with the Ethiopian eunuch on the eunuch's return to Ethiopia, he preached Jesus to him (At 8:35). As they neared some water, the eunuch said, *"See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized"* (At 8:36). Though the text says nothing about baptism when it reads that Philip preached Jesus, we must rightly conclude that obedience to Jesus in baptism was part of the subject of preaching Jesus since it was the eunuch who brought up baptism. This is parallel to Paul's preaching of Jesus and Him crucified in Corinth (1 Co 1:23; 15:1-4). Since Jesus said in His final hours on earth, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved,"* then certainly one can never claim to have fully preached Jesus without preaching what Jesus said one must do in order to be saved (See Mk 16:15).

What has become common among religious people concerning the "preaching of Jesus," is that many have moved into the realm of preaching church, not Christ. They are so committed to their particular religious group that the primary focus of their preaching is to promote their church. They forget that one is not saved by joining a particular church. As previously stated, when one obeys the gospel through baptism, **God adds that person to the family of His people** (At 2:47). Our subject of preaching, therefore, is not church, but Christ. Formulating church into a catechism of doctrine, and then making that doctrine the focus of our preaching, is surely denominational thinking at its best. Committing to the legalities of such a catechism detours our focus from Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We are detoured to an outlined catechism of church. Sometimes it is good to go through the preaching that is recorded in the book of Acts. The subject of every theme was Jesus, not church.

Jesus Christ is our Savior, not the church. The church is only the serendipity to our total commitment to Jesus. Church is the work of God who brings forth fruit from the preaching of Jesus Christ. Our total commitment to Jesus is only manifested through our obedience to the good news of His death, burial and resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6). Upon our obedience to the gospel, God adds us to His family (At 2:47). We are thus validated as members of His body, the church, only when we have manifested our obedience to His word.

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tm 2:5). This man Christ Jesus must be the total focus of our preaching, for it is only through Him that we access the eternal life that is in the presence of God (At 4:12). Jesus is not one of many options. **He is the only option into the presence of God**. This one truth alone should always make Jesus the primary focus of our preaching. *"There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy"* (Js 4:12). If we would not be cast away from the presence of God when this lawgiver comes again (2 Th 1:6-9), then it is best that the world know who He is and what laws He has given.

*"****Grace and truth*** *came through Jesus Christ"* (Jn 1:17). Jesus was the grace of God that was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11). All those who assume some allegiance to Christ under the umbrella of Christendom would accept this. But the statement of John 1:17 says, *"and truth."* We cannot be committed to the person of Jesus without accepting the truth that came with Him. This truth is the final validation of all that is real and correct in this world. It is the final foundation upon which all men must base their faith (Rm 10:17). Unless one truly believes in a transcendent God who revealed His grace through His Son, and then, with this revelation gave the obedient a way of truth whereby they have the opportunity to obey the Son, then there is no salvation. The faith without truth that some people have is only the illusion of a belief that is based only on the will of an individual to believe.

"And you will know the truth, ***and the truth will***

make you free" (Jn 8:32). The truth is the redemptive work of God through Jesus to set men free from the bondage of ignorance. It is only this truth that will deliver men from sin and their own misguided religiosity. This is the truth of the gospel that sets men free from their own guilt. It is this truth of the gospel that continues with the disciples in order to be the foundation of their security in Christ (Gl 2:5,14). It is this truth that delivers us from our own deceptions and brings meaning to life. It gives us hope in a hopeless world. It is an anchor to our very souls. It is as the Hebrew writer stated, "*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).

Since one cannot ignore truth in the world in which we live, without suffering consequences, neither can one ignore the truth that comes with Jesus without suffering spiritual destruction from the presence of God. It does make a difference what one believes. Since it is truth that sets us free, then there is no freedom in error. So for this reason the disciples of Jesus must thoroughly commit themselves to the word of God.

Chapter 8

COMMITTED TO BIBLE STUDY

We have always been suspicious of those churches that have no adult Bible classes. Likewise, we have been suspicious of those preachers who stand up and say, "God gave me a word," when they have given no time to the study of the word of God. These religious charlatans have spiritually starved the people who are growing tired of such clerical quackery. If those who presume to lead the people refuse to be led by their study of the Bible, then usually one of three things is the problem with these presumed teachers who are "*never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (2 Tm 3:7).

A. Protecting one's heritage.

This point refers to traditional churches. These are those churches who are often afraid to offer the opportunity of the adherents to have open Bible study lest they discover something that is biblically contrary to their heritage as a unique denomination.

If we would guard ourselves from developing a party spirit, and thus dividing ourselves from other truth seekers, we must continue to study the Bible for ourselves. We must never become so arrogant as to assume that we have arrived at all the truth. We are not gods, and thus only God can know all that can be known. We are men who love the truth. We thus continue to study our Bibles. The fact that we continue to study our Bibles is evidence that we do not know all that has been revealed to us by God. Churches that do not have open Bible study are churches that validate their existence either by their heritage, or by the misguided experiences of those who would lead them astray.

B. Lack of love for God's word.

Some have no love of the Bible, and thus, they seem to be content to carry on religiously without ever checking their beliefs. The only way to escape the trap of falling victim to ourselves is that we must continually search the Scriptures. We must be as the Bereans. "***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). The only guard against apostasy is a total commitment to the word of God. In fact, if there is a supposed commitment to Christ without a commitment to His word, then the commitment is based on something other than Christ. Commitment that is not based on the word of God is superficial. It is a delusion that will allow one to continue in error. Because true disciples of Jesus are afraid of this, they continue to be diligent students of the Bible. They continue as Paul instructed Timothy: "*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). Those churches that do not offer opportunities for open Bible study have either never read this statement, or they have read it and made a choice to ignore it. If the latter is the case, then it is time to look for another church of people. We would never be a part of a group that is fearful of having adult Bible studies where every member has a right to share his thinking.

We need to be very clear on this point. There are a great number of church groups throughout the world who have little love for the Bible. They come together for exhilarating assemblies and cry out, "Lord, Lord" ("Jesus, Jesus"), but there is little love for the word of God among the preachers and members of these churches. You ask, How do you know this? The answer

is simple. Everyone knows that David was a man after God's own heart. So why would this statement be made of David? Read again **Psalm 119** and you will have the answer. **Every verse in Psalm 119 makes some reference to the word of God**.

The word of God was something on which David meditated day and night (Ps 1:2; 119:14,16,35). **So if one would have the heart of God, his heart must be saturated daily with the word of God**. Those churches that come together without emphasis on Bible study, **do not** have the heart of God. Regardless of how much the attendees desperately cry out "Lord, Lord," there is no heart of God in these churches simply because the adherents are not driven to and guided by the word of God. They are not noble-minded people as the Bereans because they are not committed to searching the Scriptures every day (At 17:11). And if they cannot be committed to the Scriptures at least on Sunday, then we know that they are only "Lord, Lord" churches without the heart of God because they do not do what Jesus says. *"Not everyone 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). And in order to do the will of the Father, one must study the will of the Father. If a church is not continually studying the will of the Father (the Bible), we know that that church is not a church of Christ. It is a man-made church built around a personality that has great, dynamic speech, but no love of the word of God. If one is a member of a church group that does not continually study the Bible as a group, then he needs to look for a group that does.

C. Experiential validation of faith.

The faith of some is experientially based, and thus, the word of God has little place in their religion. It seems that the religious world has been inundated with the imaginations of those who have been carried away with their exaggerated testimonies of personal experiences. In such experiential religions, there is little room for Bible study since the adherents validate their faith by feelings instead of the truth of God's word. **But we must keep in mind that feelings and emotions do not signal spiritual truth**. Neither do such personal experiences validate our faith. If they did, then there are a host of non-Christian religions throughout the world from which one might choose, for they all have experiential testimonies. Simply because one can become emotionally excited does not mean that such a person is spiritual. If one uses his experiences to validate his faith, then his faith is not validated by the word of Christ. If he assumes that what is truth is first felt, then he has rejected the statement of Paul in Romans 10:17. *"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."* The one who has first validated his faith by his objective obedience to the commandments of Christ has a right to witness concerning the work of God in His life. But it is not the reverse. Nowhere in the Bible are experiences used to prove one's salvation, or that one is believing the truth.

Chapter 9

COMMITTED TO ONE ANOTHER AND THE LOST WORLD

Love should characterize the fellowship of the body of the Lord of love. The church is a loving fellowship of people because it is the response of the love of God for the world. *"But God* ***demonstrates His love*** *toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rm 5:8). This very act is the identity of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church was born out of love in order to love (1 Jn 4:19). It was born out of the loving commitment of God to bring His creation into eternal dwelling. It is only natural, therefore, that those who have responded to the love of God that was manifested on the cross would love one another and the world of the lost among whom they live. If there is no commitment to love, then the church has lost its identity (See Jn 13:34,35). It is no longer the church of the God of love who was committed to redeem us from the bondage of sin.

A. Committed to one another because He is committed to us.

When Peter wrote to his readers to *"love the brotherhood,"* he was enjoining on them a commitment to one another. He had explained, *"Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in sincere love of the brethren,* ***love one another fervently from a pure heart****"* (1 Pt 1:22). Paul had earlier commended the Thessalonian disciples for their love of the brethren. *"And may the Lord cause you to increase and* ***abound in love for one another****, and toward all, even as we do toward you"* (1 Th 3:12).

Jesus loves His body, the church. Paul used Jesus' love for His people to illustrate how husbands should love and commit themselves to their wives. *"Husbands, love*

your wives, ***just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it****."* (Ep 5:25). Because Christ committed Himself to the church, so should the members of the body commitment themselves to one another in love.

In 1 John 3, John, the apostle of love, was very definitive in reference to explaining the nature of the love that Christians should have for one another. He introduced his descriptive narrative by reminding his readers, *"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God"* (1 Jn 3:1). The readers were certainly reminded of the extremity of God's love for them through the cross. *"For God so loved"* at the cross (Jn 3:16), that Christians respond with love. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19). It is this response of love that identifies the true children of God. *"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God,* ***nor the one who does not love his brother****"* (1 Jn 3:10). The message of the new commandment that was given by Jesus from the beginning was *"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). We know that we are truly His disciples, and thus have passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life, by our love for one another (1 Jn 3:14).

We can determine how to love from the context of 1 John 3. *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.* ***And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren****"* (1 Jn 3:16). If we are committed to our brethren, then we will be willing to lay down our lives in order to serve them. This means that we do not allow one another to suffer poverty from unforeseen circumstances (1 Jn 3:17). It means helping a brother to work when there is work to be done (2 Th 3:7-10).

True love, or true commitment to one another, can never be in word only. *"Let us not love in word or in tongue,* ***but in deed and in truth****"* (1 Jn 3:18). If we love in deed, then we have confidence before God (1 Jn 3:21). If we fail to love in committing ourselves to the needs of our brethren, then we feel guilt. Our guilt condemns us by our knowledge that we have not done that which is good when an opportunity presented itself. Remember James 4:17: *"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."* It is the commandment of the Lord that *"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). Our love for the brotherhood commits us to do good to the household of faith. It is in this way that the true disciples of Jesus are manifested to the world (Jn 13:34,35).

B. Committed to the lost because He committed to our lostness.

It should be that we need say nothing in reference to this point if those who call themselves disciples of Jesus felt what Paul said in Romans 1:14. *"I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.* ***So as much as in me is****, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome."* Would you call this commitment to world evangelism? And would you not agree that this should be the intensity of the commitment that all of us should have in reference to taking ownership of an unevangelized world?

Paul was a driven man. He could not make it through his letter to the Romans on the revealed grace of God until he emotionally exploded with the words, *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they* [the Jews] *might be saved"* (Rm 10:1). He thus pled with the Roman disciples, *"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). In view of all that God had done for them through His grace, it was only reasonable that they present the totality of their lives in service to the commission of the One who gave all for them.

Grace moved the early Christians out of lethargy and into the mission field of the lost. They could not forget what God had done for them. *"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 had reached those in Rome. The result was that these disciples should present themselves as a living sacrifice. Grace reached those in Jerusalem and Judea. *"Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (At 8:4). No Christian who truly understands what God did for him in the grace that was revealed on the cross can sit still. He must tell others of the indescribable gift of God's love toward all men through the cross.

The answer to motivating Christians to be evangelistic is to instill in them a true understanding of God's grace. If one is not moved by this greatest love story enacted in history, then he is the one who will be spewed out for being lukewarm (Rv 3:15,16). He is the one who has a dead faith (Js 2:14-26). This is the one who has no gratitude for what God had done for him.

And we wonder to what extremity one can be moved by the grace of God. In the middle of God's book on grace to the church are these words of one who truly understood how far God had to come to get him from the bondage of the sin in which he lived. *"I say the*

truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience also bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, ***that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh****"* (Rm 9:1-3). Paul was intensely committed to sowing the seed because he was excited to be about the need of giving all men an opportunity to escape the impending destruction that is coming. God's grace in him would not allow him to remain idle (See 1 Co 15:10).

When one realizes the unending existence of eternity, the beauty of heaven, the horribleness of hell, and the extent to which God worked to bring us into Christ, he is moved. He is moved to give others a piece of the salvational pie that we have in Christ. He feels, *"For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel"* (1 Co 9:16). If one is committed to Christ, then he will be committed to the mission of Christ to preach the good news of the cross and resurrection to the world. Therefore, *"go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mk 16:15). *"Going, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..."* (Mt 28:19).

Epilogue

In the midst of the imminent destruction of Israel and the final termination of the majority of the northern ten tribes, God embedded a promise in Isaiah 10. *"****The remnant will return****, even the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel are as the sand of the sea,* ***yet a remnant of them will return****"* (Is 10:21,22). In Romans 9:27,28 Paul quoted this passage in reference to the remnant of Israel that would accept Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. The physical remnant of Israel did return after the Babylonian captivity. But the spiritual remnant, who were sons of Abraham by faith, were delivered out of the descendants of the physical remnant. It took more than being committed to the God of Israel to return from the captivity of sin. In Paul's application of Isaiah 10, it took a commitment to bear one's own cross because the Messiah went to the cross for them. It truly takes a committed person to respond to what God demands to wash away our sins. It takes a truly committed person to be faithful unto death.

The fact that Jesus used the metaphor that His people would be the salt of the earth explains what He expects of His disciples. Salt has value for that which it is intended. If it loses its value by simply becoming a rock with no saltiness, then its intended purpose is gone. And if its intended purpose is gone, then it is no longer salt. It is just a useless rock.

If one who poses to be a Christian, but has lost his intended purpose, then he is no longer a Christian. We are thus determined to be "Christian" if we function within the purposes of what Jesus expected His disciples to be in their relationship with one another and the world. Otherwise, one is simply a spectator, sitting along with other spectators in assemblies whose light has long since gone out. The lampstand of Christian influence of those who are to be the light and preservation of the world has long been removed.

Commitment to God started with a lone messenger in a Palestinian wilderness who ate grasshoppers and wore camel skin clothes. We wonder why God started it this way until we learn from the voice of the one crying in the wilderness that God has no use for pompous preachers and religionists who pose to be spiritual leaders of the people (See Mt 3:7-12). God seeks for those who are willing to step away from the fine cuisine in Jerusalem in order to enjoy a plate full of grasshoppers. He looks for those who are willing to be fashioned in camel's hair instead of Gucci. He wants those who are willing to turn in their silk-skinned suits for a ragged and rough garment that is suitable for the environment of wilderness preaching. And since the One about whom the "grasshopper preacher" spoke would have not even a fox hole in which to sleep (Mt 8:20), he called the rich to forsake all they had, if that was necessary, in order to follow Him (Mk 2:14). Therefore, do not speak despairingly about the sacrificial commitment of our friend Jesus who calls on us to make the same sacrifices He made in order to bring us into His realm of existence. If God would willingly camp under trees throughout Palestine in order to bring a message of hope to the people, then the least we can do is the same in order to preach the gospel to the world.

Book 54

World Evangelism

Every disciple of Jesus should consider himself a John the Baptist to his generation. We are *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness"* (Mt 3:3). We cry out, *"**Save yourselves from this perverse generation**"* (At 2:40). We, as Peter, proclaim, *"There is salvation in no other, for **there is no other name*** [than Jesus] *under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (At 4:12). We cry out that the world is lost in sin, and thus we announce that our Creator has provided a solution for all sin in the world. We can say the same as the angel who announced the gospel for the first time on earth to some shepherds in a field, *"**I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be to all the people**"* (Lk 2:10). This is the great news of the incarnational birth of the Son of God: *"For to you a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord"* (Lk 2:11).

We live in a generation where the ministry of preaching is too often held up in the confines of four brick walls. We often carry on preaching weekly to the saved and "singing to the choir." While being held up by a an audience that covets our preaching for themselves, a world of unbelievers goes without a messenger to cry out that *"a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord."*

When churches move away from Jesus, the members move away from an offensive voice to the lost. We back off to be a defensive body of those who look after ourselves. Being shut up in the confines of those who are familiar with one another, we become defensive in our efforts to preserve our religiosity through the performance of rites and rituals of a heritage that is far removed from the evangelistic spirit that drove the early disciples into all the world. We turn to "feel good" sermons that offends no one. We thus settle the disciples further into a narcissistic religiosity, thinking that we are the primary focus of the Bible and the preacher.

It is time to broadcast among ourselves a restoration to preach the gospel to the world. It is time to arise from the dead and shine the gospel to the world (See Ep 5:14). We thus call for a restoration, a restoration to the nature of the gospel itself, that it is good news that of necessity must be broadcast to every living soul *"that a Savior is born"* into this world.

We need to be reminded that the church is not a fort. We are not sentinels whose responsibility it is to simply maintain the walls of a religious institution. When we do such, the religious institution often becomes the subject of our message and not the gospel. We must remember that the church is God's dynamic army of spiritual soldiers who should be continually challenged to leave the barracks in order to engage the enemy. We must remind ourselves that as the church that the unbelievers are not coming to settle comfortably in our pews before pulpits from which come messages that are sterile of the gospel. "Church-house Christianity" will never evangelize the world.

Some assemblies often become dead zones wherein fruitless spectators have gathered to be reassured of their faith by the preacher and the observance of designated rites and rituals. We perform our ceremonies in order to reconfirm that we are "in the right ark." Through the sound of smooth and fair speech, we as contented spectators are often soothed into thinking that we are headed for eternal glory in another "sanctuary" of heaven. As inert monoliths we often become dead men walking in search of something that will keep us motivated to show up next Sunday morning.

We must remember that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth of the gospel (1 Tm 3:15). The church—that's us—is God's medium through which He seeks to proclaim the truth of the gospel to the world. The army of believers assemble together in order to celebrate the gospel in the Lord's Supper. But after the celebration, it is time to go forth into the field with the gospel message that we celebrated with bread and fruit of the vine.

The world is the field! And it is into this field that the army of disciples have been sent to preach the gospel! If there is no proclamation of the truth of the gospel going forth from the church, then the church has lost the meaning of the metaphor "pillar."

We would follow Jesus. On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus *"departed and went into a desert place"* (Lk 4:42). When the people found out where He was, they came to Him. They then did what many churches seek to do with their preachers today, that is, **they steal them away from the lost**. *"**And the people sought Him**, and came to Him. **And they tried to keep Him from leaving them**"* (Lk 4:42). Does this sound familiar? Few churches who sign the paycheck of their

preacher seek to send their preacher to other cities where the gospel is yet to be preached.

The ministry of Jesus was identified by His coming into this world and going forth to the people. He reminded the people, *"I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also,* ***because for this purpose I was sent****"* (Lk 4:43). Jesus would not allow Himself to be kidnapped by those who loved Him, and thus be detoured from His mission as the Son of God to preach the good news of the kingdom to other people.

Paul imitated this gospel mission of Jesus. In the middle of a context where he exhorted the Corinthians, *"You will not muzzle the ox while he is threshing"* (1 Co 9:9), he gave this inspiring testimony: *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a bondservant to all, so that I might gain the more"* (1 Co 9:19).

Paul was free from the burden of being supported by the disciples. He worked with his hands as a tentmaker in order to support himself (At 20:34,35). He wanted to remain free from the confinement of a pay check in order that he *"might gain the more"* through the preaching of the gospel. Pay checks often bring one into the bondage of the contributors, but tentmaking sets one free to go into all the world as his heart moves him.

We have always thought that it was ironic that those who were truly motivated by the gospel to preach the gospel to the world had to go from one supposedly group of gospel-obedient disciples to another in order to convince the supposed supporters of the gospel to send them into all the world to preach the gospel.

Have we digressed from the mind of Christ to the point that we must be reminded of the work of an evangelist in order to set evangelists free in order to go into all the world to preach the gospel? It is only natural that the church would covet the evangelists, turning them from being evangelists with the message of the gospel to the lost to being pastors of the flock at home. But Jesus did not fall for this detour in His purpose or mission. The last verse of Luke 4 historically reads, *"And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee"* (Lk 4:44).

Jesus would not be turned from His destiny. He came *"****to seek and to save that which was lost****"* (Lk 19:10). When we lose sight of this mission to the lost, we have forgotten our purpose. We have allowed others to keep us from going into all the world to preach the gospel to the lost. We are no longer disciples of the One who came to seek and to save those who are lost.

When we see how far Jesus came in His search for us, and save us from sin (Ph 2:5-11), then we begin to understand His purpose in calling disciples to come unto Him in order to do the same. The gospel of His incarnation is the power that draws us to believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of the living God (See Jn 20:30,31). His disciples, therefore, are His continued spiritual incarnation in the world to take the message of the gospel to the lost throughout the world. As He came into our world, so through living incarnationally we take the gospel of His coming into all the world (See Ph 2:5-11). Those who are not living incarnationally will never understand those, who as Paul, seek to live incarnationally in order to preach the gospel to the world (See Ph 3:7,8).

If this world is to be won for Jesus, then it is as someone said, "Responsibility must be taught ... enthusiasm must be caught ... recruits must be sought." If we would be a true incarnational disciple of Jesus, then we can never say, "I'm gonna teach the gospel to somebody, someday." "Gonna" is not in the dictionary. "Somebody" is not in the phone book. "Someday" is not on any calendar.

We need disciples who know how to get excited about sowing the seed of the kingdom because they are excited about the need to take the gospel to all the world. We need convictions that lead to conversions. Evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. A Christian is a beggar who has found the Bread of Life. Personal evangelism gets "personal" when we find famished souls who are without bread. Personal evangelism is the work of a disciple who has found the Bread of Life, and thus, is telling others who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness where to find this Bread.

Too many Christians are like the boy who observed a blind man coming down a pathway. The blind man stumbled over rocks and limbs, and the boy stood by and did nothing. Finally, the blind man stumbled into a ditch, injuring himself grievously. A man rushed up and said to the boy, "Why did you not help the blind man?" The boy responded, "He wasn't my responsibility." Reminds us of what Cain said in response to God asking him where Abel was. *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* (Gn 4:9). Yes we are!

As disciples of Jesus, we must never forget that **every lost person is a mission field and every disciple is a missionary**. We are responsible for this world neighborhood of lost souls. We are our brother's keeper. It is as a poet once wrote:

Is there anything else that is better worth,
As along life's way we plod,
Than to find some wandering soul of earth,
And bring him home to God?

I would rather find a soul that is lost,
And bring him home again,

Than to sing what all earth's acres cost,
Or all the wealth of men.

Wouldn't I be glad when the day is done,
In breathing my last breath,
To know some word of mine had won,
And saved a soul from death.

Once after a dynamic preacher delivered a soul-searching sermon, a young man came up to the preacher immediately after the lesson was over and asked, "What can I do to evangelize the world?" The preacher responded, "Is your best friend a Christian?" When we light a candle in a room or switch on a light, we expect the darkness around us to go away immediately. The less the gospel light is preached in this world, the darker the world will become. This "little gospel light" of ours may seem insignificant, but if we all turn it on at the same time, the world will be a brighter place in which to live.

Therefore, Jesus needs our immediate help. He needs it now, for tomorrow will never do. Another poet wrote,

Christ has no hands but our hands,
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet,
To lead men in His way.
He has no tongue but our tongue,
To tell men how He died.
He has no help but our help,
To bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible,
The careless world will read;
We are the sinner's gospel,
We are the scoffer's creed.

We are the Lord's last message,
Given in deed and word;
What if the type is crooked?
What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy,
With other work than His?
What if our feet are walking,
Where sin's allurement is?

What if our tongues are speaking,
Of things that lips should spurn?
Would we be glad to meet Him?
Would we welcome His return?

Chapter 1

ISRAEL'S LOST RESPONSIBILITIES

It was not only because the land of Palestine flowed with milk and honey that God gave the Israelites the promised land. The location of Palestine was strategic to world evangelism, that is, to the preaching of the one true and living God of heaven to the constant flow of world traders who passed through the land. God planted the nation of Israel at the crossroads of world trade in the ancient world. It was a tremendous opportunity.

One of the "travel laws" of the Sinai law referred to one who was traveling through another's field (See Dt 24:19-22). The traveler could pick and eat grapes until he was full (Dt 23:24). He could pick with his hand and partake of the standing corn (Dt 23:25). However, he could not put a sickle to a crop. This was an interesting law when one considered the strategic location of Palestine. We are sure that the Israelites at the time did not understand fully the worldwide implications of this law of neighborly sharing.

A good look at a map of the area reveals the tremendous opportunity that Israel had in teaching the world about the one true and living God. On the west of Palestine is the Mediterranean Sea. On the east is the Arabian Desert. Land trade between the countries to the north and south of Palestine had to pass through Palestine. We recall the story of Joseph when *"some Midianite traders passed by"* through Palestine on their way to Egypt (Gn 37:28). When these traders passed through Palestine, the incident of Joseph being sold to them happened over four hundred years before Israel possessed the land. Centuries before there were traders passing through Palestine before Abraham and Sarah arrived and settled in the land. Palestine, therefore, was a strategic land through which much of the ancient world depended for trade between nations.

Now we can only imagine the opportunity that God laid at the doorstep of Israel when He gave them this very strategic trading route of the ancient world. Those who sought to trade with the port cities of the Mediter-

ranean could bring their goods to the seaports of Tyre and Sidon, the two port cities that fell within the boundaries of Palestine. From Tyre and Sidon merchandise could be shipped to all the Mediterranean port cities.

So from north to south, east to west, Palestine was the focal point of trade in the ancient world. Solomon capitalized on this opportunity, making Israel a very wealthy nation during his reign by "charging customs" of those who passed through the land. After Israel dwelt only a few years in the land they surely began to realize that God had given them some very strategic real estate.

Now consider the tremendous responsibility that Israel had in reference to influencing the world for good. The farming Israelites had the opportunity to change a polytheistic world to believe in the one true and living God. But instead of taking ownership of the opportunity to teach passing traders the good news of the God of heaven, they adopted the gods of the nations around them for the sake of business. Solomon began this fall into material prosperity when he signed contracts—he married foreign women—for the sake of money.

From the time of Solomon, Israel started her fall from God. She subsequently forsook her responsibility to seize the opportunity of her strategic location in order to change the world for the better. We often wonder what the world would be like today if Israel had not forsaken the tremendous opportunity that God gave her by giving Israel the hub of the ancient world of trade. As God became frustrated because they forsook Him, we too are frustrated with their apostasy. We could be living in an entirely different world today if only the Israelites would have remained true to God and His covenant with them.

God had revealed His presence to them, and yet, they forsook Him for gods who were carved by the hands of men. They had all the miracles, the crossing of the Red Sea and the Mount Sinai experiences to pass on to their children, but they did the same as we do today. They threw God away for that which is of this world. Israel could have changed the world. Instead, the world changed her. And because she allowed the world to change her, the world today is a different world religiously.

It cannot be said that in their beginning as a nation God did not forewarn them of this lost opportunity. When he signed off from his leadership of the nation, Moses prophesied in reference to their forsaking of the Lord God. He spoke of the time when they would forsake their covenant with God. Even the nations around them would question why the Israelites would eventually be taken from the land. Centuries before, the Lord said what Israel would do in her latter days of existence as a nation, *"Even all nations will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to His land? What caused the heart of this great anger?"* (Dt 29:24). And then the Lord revealed why they would be driven from the land of opportunity: *"Then men will say, '**Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers**, that He made with them when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt'"* (Dt 29:25). Even early in their settlement of the land, *"They forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth"* (Jg 2:13; see Jg 10:6).

There is an astonishing principle discovered in Israel's failure to assume her responsibility to reach the world with the opportunity that the Israelites were given with the land of milk and honey. **God took the land away from them when they failed to carry out their assigned responsibility of glorifying God through their blessing of the land**. When they failed to use the opportunity of the land for the glory of God throughout the world, their residence in the land no longer served its purpose.

> *Because they forsook the Lord their God who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have adopted other gods and have worshiped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought on them all this evil* (1 Kg 9:9).

If we forsake our responsibility to use that which we have been given for the glory of God, then God will take it away. God always moves beyond those who forget their responsibility to serve Him. He moves around those who are content in their "Baal religiosity." If we are content with a faith that does not move us into action, then God will raise up someone else to proclaim His message to the world. We must not forget the statement of 2 Chronicles 7:22:

> *Because they* [Israel] *forsook the Lord God of their fathers who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt and they laid hold of other gods* [religions] *and worshiped them and served them. Therefore He has brought all this calamity on them* (See Jr 22:9).

We must not forget the inherent in the nature of the gospel (good news) is the fact that the news must be proclaimed. If we do not proclaim the gospel, then we do not really understand the true nature of the gospel. When we speak of those who are evangelistic, we are speaking of those who truly understand the blessings that they have received from their obedience to the gospel. They cannot but proclaim to others that which they have heard and obeyed in order that others have what they have.

Chapter 2

THE RELUCTANT EVANGELIST

Israel had moved so far away from her responsibility to reach the nations, that she was rebellious about doing such even when the opportunity was staring her in the face. This feeling was harbored even among some of those who were considered prophets. It may be that before his calling Jonah was just an ordinary person of great patriotism in Israel, not one who was specifically considered to aid in Israel restoring her borders (2 Kg 14:14). Regardless of his prophetic status in Israel after Jeroboam II restored the borders of Israel, God used him to illustrate Israel's patriotic spirit that caused Jonah to withdraw himself as a citizen of Israel from any of Israel's neighbors.

Jonah illustrates the extent to which we can cocoon within ourselves by refusing to reach out to others with the message of the gospel. In fact, we have experienced some churches that have cocooned so deeply into their own shell that they question others about becoming a part of their "membership." Such people first make judgments concerning the physical appearance of possible members, and then they determine how long it will take for such prospects to become "full" members of their church.

The preceding is not something new in reference to the behavior of some Christians. This same social scenario developed in the first century, particularly when national Israel came nigh unto the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

In the middle 60s, the Holy Spirit revealed that some Jewish Christians initially judged others in reference to their physical appearance. The Spirit introduced His judgment of such Christians with the statement, *"My brethren, do not show favoritism and hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ"* (Js 2:1). Those to whom the Spirit referred had forgotten the incarnational behavior of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom they claimed to be disciples.

The Son of God left His existence in the spirit in order to incarnate into the flesh of man (See Jn 1,2,14; Ph 2:5-8). Therefore, there can never be an attitude of favoritism in the minds of those who seek to live incarnationally after the incarnate Son of God. We simply cannot have the faith of Jesus, and at the same time, harbor only feelings or behavior of favoritism.

But some of the readers to whom James wrote puffed themselves up, and thus showed respect of persons in reference to those who would be a part of their exclusive group. The Spirit judged,

> *For 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, and you show respect to the one who wears the fine clothing ... **have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts**?* (Js 2:2-4).

If we ever become as those to whom James wrote, it is almost guaranteed that our evangelistic outreach will be greatly curtailed. This is what happened in the circumstances that surrounded the commissioning of Jonah to the city of Nineveh.

A. Obeying the command to go:

Revealed in the case of Jonah is God's central plea from the time of creation to the consummation of all things at the final coming of Jesus: *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. But He is longsuffering toward you, **not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance**"* (2 Pt 3:9). So because God did not want the Ninevites to perish, He sent a preacher with a mandate to repent. He said to Jonah, *"Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it"* (Jh 1:2). But it was hard for Jonah to believe that *"God so loved"* the Ninevites as He loved Israel (See Jn 3:16). Jonah was prejudiced, and thus worked against the evangelistic command of God.

God calls on His people to go to those who need to hear His message of repentance in order that they save themselves from the perverse generation in which they are living (See At 2:40). He pleads with us today to go *"make disciples of all nations"* (Mt 28:19), and to *"preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mk 16:15). He calls on us to *"preach the word* [of the gospel]*"* (2 Tm 4:2). Jesus commanded His disciples, *"Go your way. Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves"* (Lk 10:3).

When among the wolves, Jesus continues to reassure us. Paul reassured Titus, that he must teach the message *"**confidently** so that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works"* (Ti 3:8). But as Jonah, we often shrink back from our responsibility of being a witness for God to the nations

around us. We thus "flee" because of our lack of faith, or prejudicial favoritism, to even go forth.

B. Fleeing from our responsibility:

After considering the command of God to go to the Gentiles, the Jewish Jonah ran in the opposite direction. *"Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord"* (Jh 1:3). So why would one who knew the one true and living God flee from an opportunity to preach good news to a nation of people who were willing to hear and repent? It is difficult to understand what was going through the mind of Jonah. But one thing we can assume is that **he fled because he knew the possibility that the people of Nineveh would repent at the message of God that he was to preach**.

After he went to Nineveh and preached, and subsequently the people did repent, he was frustrated. His ethnocentric racism had initially motivated him to flee from his responsibilities. But when he returned from his flight, he complained to God about their repentance.

> *Please O Lord,* ***was this not what I said when I was still in my country****? Therefore, I fled before to Tarshish. For 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 fled because he knew that God would forgive the Ninevites if they repented. We might speculate that Jonah presupposed that since the Ninevites were the enemy of Israel, their repentance would move God to spare them from oppressing Israel. But it did not, for God was going to use the Assyrians to remove the northern ten tribes of Israel from Palestine.

Jonah was somewhat correct in his shortsighted presumptions. God would eventually use the Ninevites to carry the northern ten tribes of Israel away into captivity. But Jonah's mission to Nineveh delayed the inevitable. If Nineveh repented—which they did—then it would later be during the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel that a spiritually prepared society would receive the Israelite captives.

Of course, God revealed none of this to Jonah at the time He commanded him to go preach a message of repentance to the Ninevites. God did not tell Jonah that He was preparing the way for His people to go into captivity years. Only God knew at the time that His people would arrive as captives in Nineveh in 722/21 B.C. This may have been about fifty years after Jonah went to Nineveh to preach God's message of repentance in order to prepare the way for the arrival of His people.

At the time when Jonah finally preached the message of God to the Ninevites, Jonah was angry when God forgave the Ninevites upon their repentance (Jh 4:1). He did not want the Gentile Ninevites to step foot in his "church house." He was frustrated with their repentance because he coveted Israel's special relationship with God.

Jonah's reaction reminds us of our rejection of others when they do things differently than us, and yet seek to do the will of God according to what they know. When others are not cloned according to our religious culture, we seek to reject them by not responding to their repentance with grace and mercy. We sometimes feel that if others do not come over to us in their repentance in order to do things our way, then they are not truly repentant.

Another problem that Jonah had was that he could not understand God's grace and mercy toward the Gentile Ninevites. In order to illustrate Jonah's spiritual problem on this matter, God caused a gourd to grow and give Jonah a brief moment of shade from the heat of the sun (Jh 4:6-11). But then God caused a worm to smite the gourd so that it died. Again, Jonah complained.

Jonah became so sun-beaten with the east wind, that he fainted. He felt sorry for himself, and complained, *"It is better for me to die than to live"* (Jh 4:8). Jonah complained to God about the death of the gourd. He complained about a dead gourd. At the same time, he could not rejoice over a repentant nation. With such an attitude, he set himself up for a stern rebuke from God. So God rebuked Jonah

> *You had pity on the gourd for which you had not labored, neither did you make it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.* ***And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also many animals****?* (Jh 4:10,11).

God is not willing that any of His creatures perish (2 Pt 3:9). And if He is not willing that any of His creatures perish, then in order to be a people after God's heart, neither should we. No Christian can be so presumptuous as to claim to be a Christian if he is willing to sit idly by and see God's creatures remain in a state of condemnation and destined for certain destruction (See 2 Th 1:6-9). If Christians do not take ownership of their responsibility to evangelize God's creation, then they will, as Jonah, end up in the belly of an empty "church hall," having forsaken their mission to the world.

We have throughout the years heard almost every excuse that can be made by those who want to flee from their responsibility of going to Nineveh. Some have been

as Jonah by saying, "We must build up our own home base first." Others have said, "It is more important to reach those who are of our community, and thus, all our resources must be directed toward our community." If the early church had thought this way, then we would still be in Jerusalem and the gospel would never have been preached to the world. This was certainly the initial behavior of Jonah. If he could only have stayed in Palestine, then everything would have been fine.

If our vision cannot take us beyond a driving radius of home, then it is a vision that is too limited. If our evangelists cannot move beyond father, or mother, or brothers and sisters, then they are too immobile. If our arms of love and mercy cannot reach around the world, then they are too short. If our ethnocentric pride will not allow us to embrace those of other cultures, then we are not of the spirit of Jesus who came and identified with us in our earthly existence.

There is a little Jonah in everyone of us. We must not forget that it is Satan's work to bring to the surface our Jonah inclinations in order to keep the gospel from being preached to the world.

C. Taking ownership of our responsibility:

In the belly of the big fish, Jonah cried out to the Lord.

> *When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord. And my prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple.* ***Those who revere useless idols forsake their faithfulness****. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed.* ***Salvation is from the Lord*** (Jh 2:7-9).

When we finally understand that salvation is only from the Lord, then that knowledge should move us into action. When Jonah finally came to his spiritual senses he did what was right. After being vomited up on dry land, God again directed him, *"Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you"* (Jh 3:2).

So Jonah relinquished to the will of God. The result was, *"****So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord****"* (Jh 3:3). Jonah's response was similar to Philip's when God revealed to Philip that there was a lost person reading his Bible in the desert. *"So he arose and went"* (At 8:27). Admittedly, Jonah did not know the gospel, but Philip did. This may be more of a rebuke to us than our judgment of Jonah. Jonah went forth with a message without knowing the gospel, while Philip, after knowing the gospel, went forth immediately. We often behave as Jonah, though we know the gospel. We are thus without excuse.

So if we do not go forth with our knowledge of the gospel, then what does this say of us? If we are content to remain in the belly of churchianity at the bottom of the sea, we will never be faithful in taking the gospel to Nineveh. Jonah was cocooned in the religion of his own people, and thus, he had a difficult time getting to the people who needed God's message. If we stay cocooned in religion, we at least have discovered that we are stuck in religion and not in gospel living. Anyone who is truly living the gospel is evangelistically oriented. In fact, our evangelistic outreach identifies us as gospel-obedient disciples of Jesus. If we are not evangelistic in some way, then we know we are not a disciple of the One who came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10).

Chapter 3

THE WILLING EVANGELIST

The more traditionally religious a group becomes, the less the members of the group are motivated by the gospel to be evangelistic in preaching the gospel. The reason for this is that those who are steeped in religion have a difficult time separating their religious traditions by which they identify their religion. Those who are religious without only traces of the gospel are simply confident that their ceremonial religiosity will appease the god whom they have created after their own imagination.

The more stringent the religionist becomes in his religious performances, the more he becomes defensive in reference to his particular religious group. He becomes defensive in preaching his church or religion, and not the gospel. He does so because he firmly believes that his religion is the means by which one establishes a covenant relationship with God. One can always identify when he is stuck in religion when the subject of his preaching to the lost is focused primarily on the church, and not the gospel. He makes the gospel only the conclusion to his sermon on the church.

But the religionist is misguided. He is as the scribes and Pharisees who were evangelistic to preach the religion of Judaism. When one was converted to Judaism as a proselyte, he became a twofold son of hell. Jesus

said of the efforts of the scribes and Pharisees, *"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).

Jesus' condemnation of the leaders of the Jews' religion teaches that one cannot be saved in sin by that which is a deceptive solution for sin, that is, religious self-sanctification. Self-invented religious rites and rituals simply supplant the gospel, and thus save no one through a religious system of self-sanctification.

The religionist will preach church. The disciple of Jesus will preach gospel, understanding that the church—the people who respond to the gospel—is the serendipity of the preaching of the gospel. Paul said that if the religionists preaches gospel, plus his religious rites and rituals that identify his particular religious group, **then he is preaching another gospel** (See Gl 1:6-9). He is doing what some Christian Jews did, that is, bring people from the freedom of the gospel back into the bondage of "another gospel" (religion). This was that about which Paul wrote the exhortation to gospel-obedient Christians in Galatia: "*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).

The people of Nineveh were certainly religious. The response to Jonah's simple message of repentance proved this point. Centuries later, Jesus spoke of the affect that the message of Jonah had on the Ninevites. He spoke the following in reference to His rebuke of the Jewish religionists of His generation:

> *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)

Because so many today are in the bondage of religion, God calls on His people to preach the freedom of the gospel.

This was also the religious environment during the days of Isaiah. In Israel's apostasy to religion that was created after the desires of men, the people called evil good and good evil (Is 5:20). They were *"wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight"* (Is 5:21). They justified *"the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him"* (Is 5:23). The people hated good and loved evil (Mc 3:2). They built Zion with blood and iniquity (Mc 35:10). They were as Paul identified them 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."*

It was a time in the history of Israel for great social digression and oppression of the poor in the name of a religiosity that justified that which was contrary to the Sinai law. When good men fail to take a stand for that which is right, evil will prevail. Religion always prevails when the gospel of freedom is not preached by those who are free.

God's call of Isaiah 6:8 was seated in the context of great need. God called out, *"Whom will I send and who will go for us?"* Because God is not willing that any perish in the bondage of religion, He continually offers this call to those today who have a heart for the people. When those who have a heart for the people hear the call of God to go to the people with a message of freedom, there should be only one response from those who are called. It is the same response that Isaiah gave: *"****Here am I. Send me****."*

Isaiah was one who was willing to work and give, to be spent and to be sent. He would rather burn out in service to the Lord, than rust out in idleness. People as Isaiah have faith in God's call to go, because they have faith in the One who calls.

We live in a world wherein those who are in bondage call out for help. God calls on those who are free to stand up to preach the freedom of the gospel. He is looking for those who will respond to His call, "Here am I. Send me!"

Are there those among God's people today who will respond in the same manner as Isaiah in order to be messengers to go out and preach the gospel to the world? We will find those who are excited about sowing the seed of hope when we find those who are concerned about those who are hopelessly in the bondage of both sin and religion. Religion is simply a symptom of those who realize that they are in sin, but are seeking some self-justifying system to deliver themselves from sin. The honest religionists, therefore, will always admit the futility of self-righteous attempts to be justified before God simply because he knows that he cannot keep perfectly his religious rites and rituals.

We must never forget that there are only three ways people can live: (1) People can live like pagans, or those who have no faith or religion at all. (2) People can live religiously after religions of rites and rituals that they have created after either their own attempts to justify themselves or the traditions of their fathers (See Mk 7:1-9). (3) Or, people can live according to the gospel.

It is only through our living according to the gospel that there is salvation. Paul reaffirmed this with the Colossians. He wrote, *"If you then were raised with Christ* [from obedience to the gospel in baptism], *... set your mind on things above"* (Cl 3:1,2). Gospel living is

the only way into heaven. Jesus is the only way into the eternal presence of God through the grace (gospel) of His salvation. Once we understand that religion will not take people to where they want to go, then we should be moved to preach the gospel that frees people from the bondage of religion in order to take them into the glory of God.

Chapter 4

OPEN DOORS

There is the old story of two shoe salesmen who went to a large village in a developing country to see what could be done to sell shoes in the village for the parent company in the modernized capital.

One salesman wrote back to the parent company, "No one here in the village wears shoes. The situation is hopeless, for there is no opportunity for selling shoes in this village."

The other optimistic salesman wrote back to the parent company, "No one here wears shoes. The opportunity to sell shoes is limitless."

Francis Bacon wisely wrote, "A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds." Unfortunately, many an opportunity to enter open doors is lost while blinded men bewail the fact that there are no open doors. While some sit comfortably in the chair of idleness, open doors often close in their faces. We see no open doors because we are not looking. And we are often not looking because we are content with where we are.

One thing we have realized about those who are seeking to be disciples of Jesus is that they are never satisfied with two things in their lives. First, they are never satisfied with their prayer life, and second, they are never satisfied with their evangelistic life. If one is satisfied in these areas of Christian growth and gospel living, then he has grown out of Christ. His discipleship has grown either lukewarm or cold. This is exactly what happened among the disciples in Laodicea. Jesus said to them, *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot"* (Rv 3:15). If one does not grow in reaching up and reaching out, he is out of reach with the impact of the gospel in his life.

A. Look out for open doors.

The apostle Paul was sensitive to open doors. He wrote to the Corinthians, *"Now when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ,* ***and a door was opened to me by the Lord****"* (2 Co 2:12). It is the Lord who opens doors. If we do not pass through them, then we are not following His leadership into opportunity.

The Spirit leads us by opening doors of opportunity for us to preach the gospel. If we cannot see those open doors, then the problem of the Spirit leading us is not with the Spirit, but with our lack of perception of seeing the open doors before us. We can be sure that the Spirit does not lead us into self-righteousness blindness. He leads in order to cross our paths with those who are seeking the righteousness of God. If we follow the open doors He provides, then we will be led to the saving of souls.

We must think on this point for a moment. If our focus is mostly on our own business—on what we want to do—then our thinking is probably not on discovering opportunities to share the gospel with others. In other words, the less open doors we perceive in our lives for the sharing of the gospel, then we know that we are focused more on our own business than the business of Jesus to have the gospel preached to the world.

Paul's total focus was on finding opportunities to preach the gospel. He seized the opportunity to enter an open door in Troas. His preceding statement of 2 Corinthians 2:12 was made on his second visit to Troas on a trip from Ephesus to Macedonia. When we read Acts 20:7, we discover that the open door led to the establishment of disciples in the city of Troas who met regularly for the love feast and Lord's Supper. Paul seized the opportunity of an open door, and thus souls were saved.

When Paul arrived in Corinth on his second missionary journey, Luke wrote that he **found** two disciples named Aquila and Priscilla (At 18:1,2). When he at one time arrived in the city of Ephesus, he **found** about twelve disciples who had been baptized only into John's baptism (At 19:1-7). Paul was a "finder" of those who were open to Jesus. Because he was always searching, he always found those who were open to the gospel. The following is a statement that reveals something about people that searching disciples must never forget in reference to those who will obey the gospel if only they have the chance to hear:

> *Then when the Gentiles* [of Antioch] *heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.* ***And as many as were disposed unto eternal life believed*** (At 13:48).

We must remember, however, that it is the work of Satan to war against our discovery of those who are "disposed unto eternal life." On his journey to the Corinthian disciples, Paul wrote first to the Corinthians from Ephesus: *"But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.* ***For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries"*** (1 Co 16:8,9).

We must keep in mind that opportunities for evangelism are not cancelled out by adversaries. On the contrary, for the disciples of Jesus the adversaries are often the indication that there is an open door to preach the gospel. We must not expect that Satan will sit by idly and allow an open door for the gospel to remain open. It is his business to close the door, or at least discourage us from entering the door.

We know that it is the work of Satan to discourage us from entering open doors. Therefore, when a door seems to be hard to enter because of the work of Satan, then it must be reaffirmed that it is an opportunity for the salvation of souls. The more difficult it is to enter some open doors, the more we perceive that Satan is at work. We know this because of what Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy. *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus* ***will suffer persecution****"* (2 Tm 3:12). For this reason, therefore, *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* (Js 1:2).

The "persecution" and "trials" are often God's signal to alert us to the fact that something good for Him is happening. Therefore, before we turn away from an open door, or become discouraged because of persecution or trials, we should take another look at the situation. We must reconsider the situation for we may be turning away from a great open door for the salvation of many souls.

Paul and Barnabas suffered a great deal during their first missionary journey. Their trials became so severe that John Mark turned back from the work (At 15:36-38). On the journey, *"the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and embittered their minds against"* Paul and Barnabas (At 14:2). There was an attempt in Iconium to stone both Paul and Barnabas (At 14:5). In fact, the opposition by the Jews was so strong against Paul and Barnabas that they eventually stoned Paul in Lystra (At 14:19). This first missionary journey was accomplished with great persecution and hardships on the part of the evangelists. Nevertheless, the determination of both Paul and Barnabas to fulfill their destiny helped them to overcome any opposition that was set in their way by Satan (See At 13:1-3).

We must take another look at the optimistic character of the two evangelists when they returned to Antioch of Syria and the disciples who initially sent them forth.

> *Now when they had come and gathered the church together,* ***they reported all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*** (At 14:27).

We must never allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that hard times and persecution are an indication of a closed door. On the contrary, we must always assume that hard times and persecution are an indication that a door is wide open for Jesus. Because we know how Satan works, we know that opposition is an opportunity for the preaching of the gospel. We would expect nothing less from Satan than to try to close doors.

B. Jesus opens doors.

We must never forget what Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia:

> *I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an* ***open door*** *and* ***no one can shut it****, for you have a* ***little strength and have kept My word*** *and have not denied My name* (Rv 3:8).

The first thing to remember from this statement is that the door remains open and **no one can shut it**. When Jesus opens doors for the gospel, no one can shut them. If there is opposition, then we have to use our ingenuity as to how we will enter the open door.

The second thing to notice in Jesus' statement to the disciples in Philadelphia is that with "little strength" they were promised that no one would shut the open door before them. It would not be shut because they had maintained their faith in the word of the gospel of the Lord. If they had given up the gospel of the Lord, then surely the door would have been slammed in their faces. Their candlestick would have been removed.

It is imperative, therefore, that in order for an open door to stay open, we must continue to believe in the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1,2). Those who are not living the gospel will shine no light for Jesus. And when leaders presume to be a light to the world through their lack of faith in the gospel, they are blind guides who cannot see open doors. We must remember the following statement from Jesus in reference to those who have moved away from the gospel: *"They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch"* (Mt 15:14).

C. Situations produce open doors.

In A.D. 61,62 Paul was in a Roman prison. If we

keep in mind that Paul seized every opportunity to look for an open door in order to preach the gospel, then we can understand what he wrote to the Colossian Christians in Colossians 4:3: *"Also continue praying for us* ***so that God may open to us a door for the word*** [of the gospel], *to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains."*

Under circumstances in which Paul labored, most people would be bewailing their predicament. But not Paul. He was "open-door minded." In every situation he saw the possibility of an open door for the preaching of the gospel. When men are focused on the things of this world, they are not "open-door minded." Their concern about worldly things has crowded out their concern for the lost souls in the world (See Mt 6:24).

Too often we are too mindful of this world. We are of the nature of those about whom James wrote. These world-minded travelers say, *"Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year. And we will buy and sell and make profit"* (Js 4:13). Some travel into all the world in order to make profit. And then there are those disciples of Jesus who travel into all the world in order to profit souls for Jesus. The secret to world evangelism is to travel as Paul. As a tentmaker, he traveled in order to preach. He did not travel in order to make profit in his business corporation to market tents (See At 20:33-35).

In the final years of his ministry, Paul traveled to Rome on the tab of the Roman government—he went as a prisoner of Rome. And while in Rome, he *"dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all who came to him,* ***preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ*** *..."* (At 28:30,31). Paul used his confinement in house arrest as an opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome. During the same imprisonment, he wrote to the Christians in Philippi, *"All the saints* [in Rome] *greet you,* ***especially those of Caesar's household****"* (Ph 4:22).

Jesus once gave a parable of a traveler who was accosted on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk 10:25-37). The priest and Levite who passed by the beaten man saw him as a problem. However, the Samaritan saw the beaten man as an opportunity to serve. After the unfortunate traveler had recovered in the hotel, we wonder what his attitude was toward the Samaritan and what the Samaritan believed. We would correctly assume that a door was opened in his heart to receive whatever the Samaritan had to say.

Peter 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****"* (1 Pt 3:15). Sometimes we can create our own open doors by doing that which is right and good to all men (See Gl 6:10).

God does close doors. He closed the door of the ark once the opportunity had been given to the world population to hear the hundred years of preaching by righteous Noah (Gn 6:3). He closed the door on the five unprepared virgins who did not take seriously the coming of the bridegroom (Mt 25:1-13). In view of the fact that doors do close, we must move out and seize the opportunity while the doors are opened. *"Behold, now is the acceptable time.* ***Behold, now is the day of salvation****"* (2 Co 6:2).

Jesus offers His invitation at the door of every man's heart. *"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). **The only way Jesus can stand at the door of any man's heart and knock is through those whose responsibility it is to preach the good news of Jesus**. If we are not preaching the good news, then Jesus is not standing at the door of some lost soul and knocking in order to enter. Our indifference to preach the gospel, therefore, sometimes keeps more doors closed than any hardships that Satan may put in our way. **We must consider the fact that Satan uses us to close doors**. We should ask ourselves how many doors we have closed because of our lack of concern for lost souls.

Chapter 5

THE ONLY DOOR

In the context of John 10:6-14 Jesus metaphorically portrays Himself as *"the door of the sheep"* (Jn 10:7). He was speaking to every person on earth when He said, *"I am the door.* ***If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved****, and will go in and out and find pasture"* (Jn 10:9). We judge this to be an emphatic statement. **It is emphatic because there are no other doors into salvation than what God offers through Jesus**. Therefore, if anyone would be saved, he must enter through the door of Jesus. **There is no other way**.

In the teachings of His earthly ministry, Jesus established the generic principles upon which all specif-

ics would later be defined through the inspired teaching of the Holy Spirit. In reference to Jesus being the only door to salvation, there would later come specifics as to how one would enter through the door of Jesus. But at the time of Jesus' ministry, the primary specific that was announced by Jesus was that all men must believe that He was the Christ and Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31).

We must not assume that this door is broad and generic simply because Jesus did not give the specifics as to how one would enter through Him. He alerted us to the fact that specifics were coming 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). After the earthly ministry of Jesus, it became the tasks of the apostles to reveal what was necessary for salvation beyond a simple "Lord, Lord" faith.

Entrance through the door of Jesus, therefore, is confined only to those who are willing to go beyond simple faith and do *"the will of My Father who is in heaven."* One cannot enter on the foundation of his own spirituality, or simple confession that Jesus is Lord. He cannot enter on the genuineness of his religiosity. Religion will get one nowhere in reference to entrance into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus. It will not simply because religion is a system of self-sanctification whereby one seeks to establish his own conditions for entrance. One simply cannot construct a legal religious code by which he would demand entrance. Because entrance is based solely on the "will of My Father," the entrance is narrow. For this reason, Jesus reminded His audience,

> ***Enter in through the narrow gate**, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. Because **small is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there are who find it*** (Mt 7:13,14).

Our task is to preach the narrow way that leads to life. And that narrow gate is through obedience to the gospel. We would be deceitful workers if we were so presumptuous as to make broad the narrow way.

Many are trying to broaden the way by trying to get through on their own terms. This is the heart of religion. Since religion is a system of attempted self-sanctification through meritorious law-keeping, those who would seek to enter into Jesus on their own religious terms are deceived. Unfortunately, at the final judgment there will be many who are surprised. Conditions for entering in through the narrow gate will be a surprise to those who have invented their own systems of religion in order to step through the pearly gates.

Peter revealed the narrow door when he stood up on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 and cried out, *"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 salvation for which the people cried out on that day was through Jesus only. He was the narrow the way. The narrow way was clarified when Peter revealed, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* (At 2:38).

Jesus had forewarned those who would seek to be His disciples concerning this "water entrance" into salvation. *"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 nothing difficult about understanding this statement. One must be born of the water and Spirit through baptism into the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. Those who would broaden the way through "faith only" religion, proclaim that a simple faith alone will bring one into Jesus. But that is not what either Jesus or Peter stated. So in the following statement, Paul questioned those who would assume that they are in Christ solely on the foundation of their faith: *"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 is the door to salvation. We must enter this door according to His directions. This is absolutely necessary because of what Peter revealed. *"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). Unless one is baptized into the name of Jesus in obedience to the gospel, there is no entrance into Christ. If one would refuse to be baptized into the name of Jesus, then we would conclude that he cannot be saved. This is the inferred meaning of what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:17 when he asked the following question:

> *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us* [the house of God], ***what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God**?*

Peter's statement is a question. And according to what we have just discovered in Peter's statements to those on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, the end of those who do not obey the gospel in baptism is their failure to enter into the sheepfold of Jesus.

One of the greatest misconceptions that is promoted today is revealed in the statement, "I am a born again Christian." This statement is erroneous according to the

preceding statements of Jesus and Peter. According to what Jesus and Peter said, **one becomes a Christian because he is born again from the waters of baptism**. One is a Christian because he has been "born again." He is not a Christian in order to be "born again."

Baptism for remission of sins in the name of Jesus is the narrow door through which we enter into the body of Christ. We are not first in the body, and then born again in obedience to the gospel through baptism. We are as Paul revealed, *"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). Because we have been baptized into Christ, we are "born again" sons of God. The passage does not say that we are sons of God, and then baptized. It says that we are sons of God because we have been baptized.

We must take this point one step closer to clarity. The name "Christian" means that one is "of Christ." Everyone understands this. Now we need to read the commentary of 1 Corinthians 1:12-14 very carefully.

The Corinthians were dividing over different personalities after whom they called themselves. Some said, "I am of Paul," others, "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," and then Paul adds, "I am of Christ." But notice carefully what Paul asked them. *"Was Paul **crucified for you**? Or were you **baptized in the name** of Paul?"* (1 Co 1:13). Therefore, to be "of Christ" (Christian), two things had to have happened: (1) Christ had to have been cruicified for the person who would be "of Christ," or Christian. (2) **The one who would be "of Christ" had to have been baptized into the name of Christ. One is a Christian when he has been baptized into the name of Christ**.

The reason we must remind ourselves of the preceding thoughts is because of one of the greatest deceptions that Satan is propagating throughout the religious world today. It is the belief that as long as one proclaims Jesus as "Lord, Lord," then he is saved, regardless of any specifics that the New Testament may give in reference to entering the sheepfold of Jesus.

The spirit of evangelism has been killed by a spirit of universalism. It is assumed that as long as one is not a Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or one of the other non-Christian religions, then he is fine. As long as one is meeting on Sunday and cries out "Jesus, Jesus," then he has validated his membership with the sheepfold, regardless of what the word of God might reveal to be defining marks to make the gate very narrow in order to enter into a saved relationship with God. Universalism is a denial of the necessity of obedience to the gospel.

We live in an age of universal salvation. It is a generation of ignorance of the gospel. It is a generation of religious leaders who are very charismatic and have the gift of smooth and fair speech. Religious centers throughout the world are filled with followers who give allegiance to their favorite speakers. Concert assemblies have given adherents a sense of "worship" that is focused on the attendees, rather than the Door to the sheepfold. We have been deceived into thinking that the more emotionally misbehaved the attendees become in assembly, the supposedly more spiritual they are. But this is a deception that is brought on by the self-delusion of religion.

Such thinking destroys our sense of evangelism. Many have concluded that misguided religious people do not need to be the focus of our evangelistic outreach. They conclude that if folks can be saved on the bases of their experiential emotionalism, then certainly God would allow such people into His fold regardless of their obedience to the gospel. We thus lead ourselves to believe that because some have refined the performances of their religion, then through the meritorious obedience of their religious rites and rituals they must certainly be accepted by God.

The spirit of universalism has sucked the life out of our evangelistic spirit because we have assumed that religion, apart from obedience to the gospel, will bring one into Christ. Since everyone is a "Christian," then we have relegated our missions only to those who do not know the name of Jesus. We have also concluded that if one simply claims that Jesus is his "personal savior," then that is as far as he must go in order to come into Christ. This is an unfortunate conclusion since the New Testament teaches that there is more to remission of sins than a simple faith. We must not forget that our mission is not simply to the "unchurched," it is to those who are churched in religion and not the gospel.

But because so many people are universalists in their theology, we now understand why so many have stopped reading their New Testaments. They are afraid that those they have assumed were Christians, are actually not such according to the definition of a Christian in the New Testament. We must conclude this chapter with what the Holy Spirit said in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 in reference to religion:

> *... 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* (See 1 Tm 4:1-3; 2 Tm 4:3,4).

Chapter 6

COMMAND FROM THE KING

Sometimes in the history of the church in different areas around the world we must start over again. We must go back to Jerusalem and sit in the upper room with the 120 disciples at the very beginning. This is necessary because restoration movements sometimes lose their momentum, or at least go astray. They zealously start out to restore the nature of the early church, but then circle around and join the crowd of religions from which they came. They "die on the vine" because they disconnect from Jesus who came to seek and to save those who are lost. We would pray that we do not go to the extent of falling away from our original call for restoration as did those about whom the Hebrew writer wrote in the following statement:

> ***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*** (Hb 6:4-6).

When we lose our focus on restoring the gospel of Jesus, it is difficult, if not impossible, to be restored again to the early zeal of the early Christians. It is difficult because a religion of complacency has been established within the movement to which the multitudes conform.

For example, when we move into a philosophy of "Christian universalism," we are gone forever as a witness to the one gospel for the salvation of a lost world. Our message becomes so vague among an assortment of diverse religions that it cannot be distinguished from those who have long lost their bearings in reference to the gospel. For this reason, it is often necessary sometimes in history for a remnant to pick up the leftovers of a dead or diverted movement and start over again. And in order to do this, we must go back to the last words uttered by our Founder during those last few days with His first disciples before the gospel ascension.

We have discovered that some earnest disciples have a sincere desire to be "pentecostal" in reference to restoring the early church. However, in their struggles to free themselves from the bondage of religion, they inadvertently established a **legal** restoration movement. In their battles with other religions, they seek to establish a legal identity of the church. This was what happened in the first century in reference to some in Galatia (See Gl 1:6-9). It will happen to us today.

Legal restorationists overlook the gospel of grace that freed us from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be saved. In doing so they established a legal identity of the church by which they would separate themselves from those who have also digressed into the legal rites and rituals of religion. By doing this, legal restorationists establish again that from which they fled. A legal restoration movement simply becomes another legal religion.

In a legal restoration, the gospel of freedom from law is forgotten in a maze of "laws" that are meant to identify the "true" church. In this way, evangelism becomes a legal obligation, rather than a motivation by the gospel of the heart of God that was revealed on the cross. Those of this movement may wake up one day and discover that they are following only "laws" of evangelism, and thus the joy of evangelism has vanished from their hearts. The gospel no longer moves them into action.

Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15,16 were not written as laws for a legal restoration that would inherently go wrong. On the contrary, Jesus' words of these verses were the initial spark of a **gospel restoration**. We thus look to the guiding principles that Jesus established in Matthew 28 and Mark 16 as the foundation upon which we would restore the zeal of reaching the lost today.

However, we do not view Jesus' imperatives in these verses as legal obligations by which one would self-justify oneself before God. If we did, then we would be responding to the great commission as law to be obeyed in an effort to justify ourselves through law-keeping. Therefore, we view Jesus' instructions in these verses as an identity of what gospel-driven men and women would do in response to the resurrected Son of God who said the words. For this reason, we must place Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16 in the historical context of the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and gospel reign of the Son of God.

A. The historical setting:

Jesus' great commission that He spoke to the disciples on the occasion of both Matthew 28 and Mark 16

finds its setting in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. For example, in the visionary message of Daniel in Daniel 7, the prophet was placed in a heavenly setting. He saw one *"like the Son of man"* who came with the clouds of heaven. *"And **He came to the Ancient of Days**. And they brought Him near before Him"* (Dn 7:13).

In this prophetic picture of Jesus being brought before God the Father (the Ancient of Days) by the angels after the ascension, He is being brought for His coronation.

> *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).

The ascension of Jesus took place in A.D. 30 (At 1:9-11). Many years later, John rehearsed the meaning of Daniel 7 and what took place in A.D. 30. John pictured the redeemed who sang a new song of the ascended and reigning Jesus. *"You* [Jesus] *are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood **out of every tribe and language and people and nation**"* (Rv 5:9).

During His personal ministry, Jesus sent His disciples on limited missions to the tribes of *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Mt 10:6). But the time would come when they would be commissioned far beyond Israel. What was coming was a worldwide mission. They would be sent on such a mission because of the prophecy of Daniel 7, that Jesus' sovereignty would extend to all tribes of the world.

B. The authority:

At the time Jesus made the statement of Matthew 28:18, all authority had been given to Him. Jesus said, *"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand"* (Jn 3:35). During His ministry, Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands (Jn 13:3). He knew that He had been given power over all flesh (Jn 17:2). *"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father"* (Mt 11:27). For this reason, Jesus *"taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes"* (Mt 7:29). He did so in order that we might *"know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"* (Mt 9:6). If He could forgive sins on earth, then certainly He could forgive sins as King of kings and Lord of lords in heaven.

When the disciples stood with Jesus on the occasion of the pronouncement of Matthew 28, they had to know that what He commissioned them to do came from One who had the authority to give such a universal directive.

Because all authority had been given to Jesus, He was validated to make a statement that affected the entire world of mankind from the time of the ascension until the time of His final coming. Jesus possessed in prospect at the time He made the statements of Matthew 28 that which would be validated by His gospel coronation at the right hand of the Father as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

Not only would Jesus' authority be worldwide, it would be galactic. Jesus is now head over all things. The Father *"put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be **head over all things** to the church"* (Ep 1:22; see Cl 1:16,17). Because Jesus now upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3), He commissions to a global mission all those who would be His disciples.

C. The commission:

In the Matthew 28:18 statement, the transitional word from the fact of "all authority" to what Jesus enjoined upon His disciples is the word "therefore." Jesus' right to give a worldwide commission was based on His worldwide authority.

Depending on one's translation, the word "go" or "going" is an aorist participle. The literal translation, therefore, should be "having gone," or "going." The tense of the participle is contingent upon the tense of the main verb, "disciple," which is aorist. Jesus knew that His disciples were going. He did not have to command them to go.

Jesus knew that any true disciple of His would be going forth with the sweet message of the gospel in their hearts. They would be going, and thus, **there needed to be no command to go**. His command was that they disciple others to Him as He discipled them to Himself. The power of His statement is not in a command to go, but in discipling those of every ethnic group who responded to the message of the gospel.

Jesus assumed that the disciples would go. True disciples disciple others as they are going forth with the message of the gospel. This is only natural for a gospel-obedient disciple of Jesus. If one is motivated by the gospel, then he needs no command to go into all the world. The gospel message he has on his heart is so powerful that he is driven to share the gospel with his neighbor.

For a gospel-driven disciple, there is no need to make a command to go. The command is covered in Mark 16:15. In the context of Matthew 28 Jesus knew

that His disciples could not help themselves but to tell others about the resurrected Christ that they experienced. They were so excited about what had transpired in their lives that they were eager to go and tell others. The gospel is inherently evangelistic in that it is good news that must be proclaimed to others.

In His discipling of these early disciples, Jesus had sent them out on many teaching journeys (See Mt 10:5,16). Because He had found them and sent them out, they understood the principle of finding others in order to send them out.

Going out to teach others is a natural life-style of gospel-obedient disciples. It is not something that must be commanded. It is something that is lived as a disciple of Jesus. One can never understand discipleship unless he is going about preaching the gospel of the One of whom he claims to be a disciple.

We are now beginning to understand the inherent nature of world evangelism. It is not something we do, **but something we are**. Since we are disciples of Jesus, discipling others to Jesus is our life-style. Since we have obeyed the gospel, then it is only natural to tell others about the gospel that we have obeyed. Therefore, evangelism is not a program. It is not a unique ministry assigned to professionals. **Evangelism is the inherent nature of one who is a disciple of Jesus**. It is the natural process of following and being like Jesus. If one is not discipling others to Jesus, then certainly he is not a disciple of Jesus.

D. The method:

The *King James Version* used the word "teach" in Matthew 28:19. This would not be a complete definition of discipleship, but certainly discipleship involves teaching. In the imperative mood, Jesus commanded that His disciples "make disciples." The word "disciple" in the verb form is also found in Acts 14:21 where we see Paul and Barnabas doing exactly what Jesus commanded that we do. *"And when they* [Paul and Barnabas] *had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many* [discipled], *they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch."* Paul and Barnabas were doing what Jesus had done with Joseph of Arimathea, *"who himself was also discipled to Jesus"* (Mt 27:57).

We know when one is a disciple of Jesus because he disciples people to Jesus. Disciples disciple. If they do not, then they are not disciples of Jesus. In his commentary on Matthew, H. Leo Boles stated it correctly:

> 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.

E. The objective:

It is the nature of the members of the body of Christ to go into all the world because they are gospel-obedient people. Since the first disciples arose out of a distinctive ethnic group, the Jews, Jesus directed the thinking of these early Jews to think about every ethnic group of the world to which they must go. They had to think culturally "outside the box" of their ethnic heritage. The phrase "all nations," is actually the Greek phrase *ta ethne*. Every ethnic group of the world was to be the focus of the discipling of the disciples of Jesus.

Christianity is never to be ethnically confined or defined. The gospel is not culturally linked. If we would link Christianity to a particular ethnic group, then we have turned it into a religion. One of the first points that identify a religion as such is that it is culturally linked. In other words, the religion cannot exist without the cultural traits that identify the culture in which it was born.

The prophecy of Daniel 7, and the proclamation of Revelation 5, speak of Jesus having sovereign reign over **every nation of the world**, and thus to Him people would come from every ethnic group of the world. When the gospel is *"preached to every creature that is under heaven,"* then people of every ethnic group come to Jesus (Cl 1:23). The tribes of the Kyak, the Murut, the Dusun and the Bajau, for example, will come to Jesus if the gospel goes to these ethnic groups. The challenge is, therefore, who will go to the Masak in Kisar, or the Masakin Tiwal of the proud Nuba people of Sudan? Who will go to the Abigar tribesmen of Ehtiopia? Who will go to the Ilubabor, the Anuaks and the seventy linguistic tribal groups of Ethiopia? Who will go to the 147 different linguistic groups of Angola? When Jesus used the word "*ta ethne*" to define the target of our evangelistic efforts, He meant that His disciples are responsible for taking the gospel to each of these tribal groups of our world.

One of the deceptions that has plagued us is that we have believed that the world is evangelized because we have entered the geographical/political nations of the world. But this is not what Jesus was commissioning in Matthew 28:19. We need to erase national borders from

our maps in order to see the individual ethnic groups that are scattered throughout the world. There are thousands. Jesus commissioned that every one of them must have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel.

Unfortunately, those who are asleep with indifference, locked in a cocoon of legalistic religiosity, or deceived into thinking that just being a good person will get one to heaven, will never feel the need to take the gospel to the world. The world will never be evangelized by a narcissistic church that is consumed with itself. Those who are content with being a parallel generation within their own culture will find it very difficult to engage those of other ethnic cultures. The problem with a generation that is raised on entitlement can never say what Paul said in the following testimony:

> ***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 rubbish so that I may gain Christ*** (Ph 3:8).

A generation that is consumed with materialistic entitlement will often choke on the responsibility to evangelize the world as sacrificial disciples of Jesus. They will do so because they are not willing, as Paul, to live the incarnational life of Jesus. They will speak Jesus. But when it comes to walking the incarnational life of Jesus, they will lead themselves to believe that they have a right to their fine way of life. We will find few disciples of an entitled generation in the jungles of Africa and South America. Therefore, the search for those who "count all things loss" for Christ will be difficult. But when those few are found, it will be these incarnational servants who will preach the gospel to the world.

F. The relationship with God:

Jesus explained how we can know that we are truly discipled to Him. Those of all ethnic groups who believe are to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **If one does not obey the gospel in baptism, then he or she has not been discipled to Jesus**, for it is the responsibility of a disciple who goes forth with the gospel to baptize those he has discipled. How can one who has not obeyed the gospel claim to be making disciples for the One who commissioned all disciples to baptize?

All people who live by Christian principles are not Christians, but all those who have been baptized *"**into** the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* are Christians. The word "into" in the text is from the Greek word *eis*, meaning to come into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word can be translated unto, as "unto an allegiance with" as Paul used the word in 1 Corinthians 10:2: *"And they were all baptized **into*** (unto) *Moses in the cloud and in the sea."* Paul also used the word in the same manner in Galatians 3:27: *"For as many of you as were baptized **into*** (unto) *Christ have put on Christ."* One has not put on Christ, nor has he come unto any relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, until he has obeyed the gospel in baptism.

In 1 Corinthians 1:13 Paul used a different word in connection with the response of baptism. *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized **in** the name of Paul?"* This is the Greek word *en*. The meaning is to be baptized under the authority of or an allegiance to Christ. According to Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1:12,13, one is not "of Christ" unless he is baptized. He is not "of Christ" unless allegiance has been made to Christ through obedience to the gospel.

When the disciples of Jesus go forth, they do not go forth to preach baptism, but the gospel (1 Co 1:17). When we preach Jesus and the good news of His incarnational and sacrificial death for our sins, people respond. They respond to God's instructions on how to take care of their sin problem. This takes place in the cleansing waters of baptism (See At 2:38; 22:16).

When Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch, the eunuch responded by requesting that he be baptized. We learn at least one thing from the encounter of Philip with the eunuch. Unless one preaches enough about Jesus that moves the recipient of the gospel message respond, *"Here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?,"* then we know that we have not preached enough about Jesus (At 8:36). It is the gospel that moves one to inquire what they must do to be saved. If one must be asked to obey the gospel, then the whole gospel was not preached.

If we believe that faith in Jesus alone is sufficient to bring one into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we have stopped short of the complete message of Jesus' commission to preach the gospel. If we believe that crying out "Lord, Lord" is sufficient to clothe one with Christ, then one has stopped short of being baptized into the name of Jesus in order to put on Christ.

For those who know their Bibles and the instructions of the great commission of Jesus, it is different. It is different in the sense that they know that Satan has deceived the world of Christendom by leading people to believe that one has a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit without being born again of the water

and the Spirit. Unfortunately, too many have been deceived into thinking that they have put on Christ without having themselves put in the water. They ask Jesus to "come into their heart" without themselves going into the water.

We understand that one must obey the gospel in order to be saved (See 2 Th 1:7-9). And the fact that Christians know this motivates them to disciple all nations. It also motivates them to continue to instruct those who obey the gospel, and thus, the circle of spiritual life continues on to others. It has been this way since Jesus first commissioned His first disciples and it will continue as such until He comes again.

G. Gospel living:

Discipleship includes Bible study because the disciple of Jesus seeks to know as much about the incarnate Son of God as he or she can. We live in a world of experiential religiosity, that is, a world where people often validate their faith through their emotional experiences. But the deception of this system of validation is that it is based on our experiences and emotions, not on the sanctifying gospel of the cross. When we believe that we must have some emotional experience in order to validate our faith, then our emotional experiences become a self-sanctifying system of religion.

When experiences reign over the word of God, then the word of God has no directive power in the life of the religious, for the religionist is following his or her emotional experiences above the word of God. Jesus knew this would come in the lives of many, and thus, He mandated His disciples to continue to teach those they baptized. This means that we must be teachers of the word of God, as well as preachers of the gospel. Disciples who have been baptized must continue to be taught all those things that Jesus has taught us. This assumes that teachers of the gospel must continue to be students of the word of God. One who is not a student of the word of God too often disciples one to a religion, not to Christ.

The educational aroma of Matthew 28 was revealed also in Paul's statement of 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****."* This is the function of the disciple in reference to his or her continued mission to preach the gospel to the world. The gospel-driven life of the one who proclaims the gospel is characterized by study and sharing with others what he or she has learned.

We have discovered that those who are born out of a knowledge of what the word of God teaches, are continual students of the word of God. This was the message of the words of Peter when he stated, *"having been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides"* (1 Pt 1:23).

Those who have studied the word of God, and subsequently responded to its teachings by obedience to the gospel, will continue to study more about the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. On the other hand, those who have validated their relationship with God through an emotional experience will usually not focus on study of the Bible. There are few Bible students among experiential religionists.

From the beginning of the faith of the experiential religionists, their supposed relationship with Christ is based on their personal experiences, not on what they have learned from a study of the Bible. And because they validate their relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the foundation of their experiences, they are never motivated by the word of God to learn more. They become spiritually stagnate because they do not source that which produces spiritual growth. Peter identified where there is spiritual growth: *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18).

We have thus discovered that experiential religionists have little regard for the word of God in their religion. It is for this reason that experiential church groups are not known for *"teaching them to observe all things"* (Mt 28:20). They are known only for trying to generate a weekly emotional experience in assemblies among the adherents in order to keep the adherents in attendance the following Sunday. These "Lord, Lord" churches are not seeking to do the will of the Father, and thus have not come to Christ through the road map of Matthew 28:18-20.

Realizing that the incarnate Son of God now has all authority as our King who is reigning in heaven should be enough motivation to go forth with the message of gospel. Rosseau 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." And how right he was. The mandate of Matthew 28 and Mark 16 are the pronouncement of God. At the conclusion of his literary masterpiece, C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* the following inspiring words concerning Jesus:

> 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.

So we would conclude with the words from an old Muslim who said to a missionary,

> 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 temple, become as dust from fasting and all this is useless. Where have you been all this time?

If it is as George Herbert wrote in *Jacula Prudentum*, "Hope is the poor man's bread." Since this is true, then where are all those who are willing to preach the Bread of Life to the world? We live in a world where all men have a hopeless end, but we as Christians have an endless hope to be offered to the world. What would we think should happen to a person who has all that the hopeless world needs, but is not motivated to share what he has?

Chapter 7

WE WOULD BE MILITANT

In today's radicalism in some religions around the world, the word "militant" has a lot of baggage. It conjures up in our minds all sorts of bad thoughts as terrorism, suicide bombers and senseless conflicts over who is going to control the money and be in power. But keep in mind that the Holy Spirit metaphorically used such words as "war" and "soldier" to define the Christian's engagement with the forces of evil in this world.

The dictionary defines "militant" to mean "fighting; engaging in war; serving as a soldier," being "of a combative or warlike character or disposition; ready and willing to fight." As disciples of Jesus we must never forget that we are to be militant in our spiritual conflict with the spiritual forces of Satan. We are engaged in a spiritual war with Satan and his army. It is a spiritually mortal conflict.

If one does not see a raging warfare going on in this present world, then he or she must take another look at 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

> ***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.***

Paul exhorted Timothy, *"**Fight the good fight of the faith**"* (1 Tm 6:12). And again, *"You therefore endure hardship **as a good soldier of Christ Jesus**"* (2 Tm 2:3).

> *Put on the whole armor of God **so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil**. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, and against the world forces of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places"* (Ep 6:11,12).

If one does not bristle up against Satan when reading these statements from the Holy Spirit, then something is wrong. These are statements from the Holy Spirit that define the life of one who is seeking to live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As militant disciples of Jesus who have been mandated by the King to go forth into all the world, we must determine what should characterize our lives as good soldiers who fight the good fight of the faith. Consider the following concepts and characteristics of our militant engagement with the forces of evil:

A. Militant faith from the Commander:

Our Lord Jesus is *"called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Is 9:6). He *"is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords"* (1 Tm 6:15). He is the One through whom the worlds were created (Cl 1:16). He is the One who now upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3). When speaking of being a soldier for King Jesus, we are talking about being a soldier for God. Some have personalized Jesus so much that they have made Him, as the Middle Age sculptors and artists, an effeminate and frail "little Jesus" who is weak and wimpy. **This is a corrupt picture of Jesus!**

We as disciples have a personal friendship with King Jesus, but this personal friendship is not equal. King Jesus is God reigning in heaven over all things (Hb 8:1). We are on earth as His soldiers who have

been commissioned to go forth with the good news of His cross that He offered for the world. We know that in the future He *"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"* (2 Th 1:7,8). This is what our "friend" will do when He comes again. Our friendship with Jesus is not as we would be friends with one another. It is better. We are friends with the King of the universe.

Because we know this, we are moved with awesome urgency to take the message of our King into the kingdom of His reign throughout the world. This was what motivated Paul and others in the first century: ***"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men"*** (2 Co 5:11). If we fail to persuade people in our generation that King Jesus reigns over all things, then it will be the uninformed of this generation who will stand with us in judgment to face our failure of not warning them about the coming vengeance of King Jesus. A poem by Dillard Thurman might be appropriate here.

There was a man I met today,
A stranger unto me;
Whose path in life thus crossed my way
This side of eternity.
Our greetings held a friendly tone:
We passed the time of day.
But after I was left alone
I asked, "What did we say?"

We'd talked of politics and sports,
Of weather, work and play,
Of news events of many sorts;
And then he'd gone his way.
I watched this chance acquaintance start,
Back on the path he'd trod:
Then realization pierced my heart –
I'd never mentioned God!

Not likely will our paths e'er cross
Again upon this earth;
Yet I had talked of worldly dross,
Ignoring things of worth!
When in God's judgment all men stand,
We two shall meet again –
Will this man's blood be on my hand
If he has died in sin?

B. Militant faith for King Jesus:

When Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life,"* He did not mean that there were other options into eternal glory. The only way into eternity is through Jesus. Peter was moved by this fact when he proclaimed to a crowd of unbelievers, *"**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).

If one believes that there are other options for salvation, then he has lost his motivation for being a militant soldier of the faith. If one believes that one can be saved in ignorance of the gospel, then why would one suffer so much in order to preach the gospel?

The true disciple of Jesus knows that Jesus is coming from heaven to take vengeance on those who do not know God (2 Th 1:7-9). But if one believes that we can be saved by being good people in ignorance of the one true and living God, then we will never be motivated by the militant spirit that drove the early disciples into all the world. Those early Christians firmly believed that one must obey the gospel to be saved (See Mk 16:16).

If it is true that Jesus is one of many options into eternal glory, then He is no option at all. If one can be saved by just being a good person, then the cross was a futile effort of suffering on the part of One who gave up being on an equality with God in order to identify with those for whom He suffered. In other words, if being a good person is sufficient to save one when Jesus comes again, then the gospel of the incarnation was senseless.

This is a point that we must not pass over lightly in our efforts to justify our evangelistic mediocrity. If goodness is the only requirement for salvation, then why did God go to so much effort with Israel for 1,500 years in order to preserve a segment of humanity through whom He would send His Son into the world? Why would we need a "Savior" if we can save ourselves on the merit of our own goodness? If goodness cancels sin, then why would we need a divine Savior?

If ignorance of the gospel gives one a right to enter the eternal presence of the one true and living God, then why would God even attempt to intervene in His creation through the incarnation? Surely, if there is a plan of salvation through either goodness or ignorance, then God would not be just to send anyone into the condemnation of hell. If ignorance of the gospel will lead one into eternal glory, then why would we even consider suffering for Jesus in order to preach the gospel?

We must ask ourselves if our theology of universalism has led us to be deists. Has our universalism produced a theology that everyone will make it into heaven regardless of one's beliefs? Did God create the world and man, and then leave His creation untouched? Did He leave us to our own religious devices? If there is any such thing in the Bible as a "plan of salvation," then goodness is not good enough, and ignorance on the part

of the unbeliever is not a "plan of salvation." If goodness is sufficient, then there need be no plan. If ignorance of the gospel will lead to eternal salvation, then ignorance of the gospel is a parallel plan of salvation.

Before we allow our evangelistic fire to go out completely, we should think on these things. If we were Satan, then what would we do to convince people to believe in order to fill every burning room of hell?

C. Militant faith for the gospel:

Militant soldiers of the faith know that there is only one gospel message. It is this gospel that *"is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes"* (Rm 1:16). The militant soldier believes that if one does not obey this gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, then one cannot be saved. **Jesus is coming to take vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel** (2 Th 1:7-9). So Peter asked, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us,* ***what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God****?"* (1 Pt 4:17). Paul gave us the answer to Peter's question. *"These will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power"* (2 Th 1:9).

Because the disciples of Jesus know this information about the end of times, they are motivated to go forth with urgency. They do so in order to offer an opportunity to all people that they may escape through obedience to the gospel the impending judgment to come.

Those who do not believe what the Holy Spirit said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, will not be evangelistic. Their unevangelistic spirit, therefore, is either evidence that they do not believe the Holy Spirit, or they believe the Holy Spirit, but are too indifferent to act on their knowledge that one must obey the gospel in order to be saved.

D. Militant faith to preach everywhere:

The militancy of the early church was revealed in the fact that the saints went everywhere preaching the gospel. *"Those who were scattered abroad* ***went everywhere preaching the word*** [of the gospel]*"* (At 8:4). They challenged philosophers, kings and priests. No one was exempt from their preaching of the gospel. *"And daily in the temple in every house,* ***they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ****"* (At 5:42).

Some today say we must always be positive in our message. Generally, this is true. But the militancy of the early disciples drove them to *"reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching"* (2 Tm 4:2). As a result, many rose up against the early disciples. In his "counter insurgency," Saul, the military Jew, breathed threats and *"murder against the disciples of the Lord"* (At 9:1). Nevertheless, because of the militancy of the early disciples, *"the word of God grew and multiplied"* (At 12:24). The early disciples believed their message so firmly that they would not let persecution and threats of murder detour them from their mission.

E. Militant faith for the one body:

The early disciples knew that Jesus was coming back for His bride, His body. If one were not a member of that body, then there was no possible way for him to escape the coming vengeance of the Head of the body, who *"is the Savior of the body"* (Ep 5:23). And if anyone would be saved, then he or she must be a part of His body.

The early disciples knew how to become a member of this body. *"For by one Spirit* ***we were all baptized into one body****"* (1 Co 12:13). It was not that the body saves, but that the Savior is coming to save the body. It is the Savior who saves. When we realize that there is no salvation outside the body of Christ, then we are driven to preach the message of the gospel in order that people be baptized into the body. When the gospel is received and obeyed, then God adds the obedient to the body (At 2:47).

F. Militant faith for the cross:

If one desires to know the spirit of a militant faith, then he should consider the life of Paul. Paul explained his militant life for Jesus 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 was the same person who said to some brethren who were fearful for his life when he sought to make a final visit to Jerusalem: *"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 is discipleship.

Saul transformed in his life from being the persecuting instrument of Satan against those who named Jesus as their Savior, to being Paul who was willing to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Becoming a disciple will cause this awesome transformation in the life of everyone who takes discipleship seriously.

We have found many people who want to study the subject of discipleship. But they often do not realize what they are asking. Discipleship means a cross, and in the first century, bearing a cross meant carrying one's own cross to his own death. So Jesus prepared those who would be His disciples. *"If anyone will come after Me,* ***let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me****"* (Lk 9:23). Paul knew how to bear the cross as a good soldier in the Lord's army. *"And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me,"* Jesus admonished, *"****cannot be My disciple****"* (Lk 14:27).

We have discovered that the more affluent the economic environment is in which disciples live, the less evangelistic they often become. When one is trapped in the luxuries of life, it is difficult to *"****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* ***rubbish*** *so that I may gain Christ"* (Ph 3:8).

If we want to know how serious Paul was about trashing all those things that would keep one away from total commitment to Jesus, then we need to do a study of the word "rubbish" that the Holy Spirit used in the preceding statement. The *King James Version* made the correct translation. If we do not consider the entrapment of the things of this world as "dung," then we need to take another look at living the incarnational life of the One we refer to as the Lord Jesus Christ. There are few warriors for Christ in white castles. We must not forget that it took the sacrificial John the Baptist to introduce into the world the One who formally existed as God in the spirit, but incarnationally came in the flesh of man for the salvation of the world (See Jn 1:1,2,14; Ph 2:5-11).

Chapter 8

WHY DID IT WORK?

We now ask why the early church was so militant, so successful in taking their generation for Christ? In fact, in A.D. 61,62 Paul wrote to the Colossian disciples and made the following incredible statement:

> *Continue in the faith grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard,* ***which was preached to every creature that is under heaven*** (Cl 1:23).

The church came into existence on the Pentecost of A.D. 30. Paul made the preceding statement about the preaching of the gospel *"to every creature that is under heaven"* only 31 or 32 years later. How did the early disciples do this? What moved them into such zealous evangelistic action?

We should introduce this subject by what Paul wrote to the Ephesians. *"See then that you walk carefully, not as fools but as wise,* ***making the most of the time because the days are evil****"* (Ep 5:15,16). We live in an evil world. Opposition to preaching the gospel is nothing new. Nevertheless, we have the answer to the evil of opposition. It is the gospel message of Jesus. So we take every advantage to speak to others about Jesus. We thus believe that every moment in our lives is an acceptable time to speak of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and final coming of Jesus. *"Behold, now is the acceptable time,"* wrote Paul. *"Behold, now is the day of salvation"* to everyone we may encounter every day (2 Co 6:2).

We are debtors who must make payment on our debt. We are in debt to the One who redeemed us from that which we could not redeem ourselves. Jesus paid our debt for us, and so we are indebted to Him. We are indebted in the sense that we are debtors to preach the "debt relief" of the gospel to others. Paul could not have stated it more clearly than in the words that he wrote to the Roman disciples: *"****I am a debtor*** *both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.* ***So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome****"* (Rm 1:14,15).

It was certainly with such motivation that the early disciples took the world for Christ. And we have that same motivation today. We go forth with the exhilarating feeling that we have been relieved of the debt of our sins by the atoning blood of the incarnate Son of God. We have been motivated by our "debt relief" in order to preach a message of debt from sin.

A. Motivated to glorify God.

The greatest incentive to be evangelistic is to bring glory to God. The psalmist wrote, *"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory for Your mercy and for the sake of Your truth"* (Ps 115:1). The Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of man, *"and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:8).

We no longer know Jesus according to His incarnate state. Paul wrote, *"Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh,* ***yet now we know Him thus no more****"* (2 Co 5:16). Our knowledge of Christ has moved beyond Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We now know Christ according to the gospel of His coronation at the right hand of God. It is there that *"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 ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,* ***to the glory of God the Father****"* (Ph 2:9-11).

The early disciples went forth to preach the crowned King Jesus in order that glory be given to God. In the following quotation, the Palmist David lived without any knowledge of the incarnation of the Son of God. He knew nothing of the crucifixion. He knew only that God would sit someone on his throne. But without all the knowledge of the gospel that we now have, the Holy Spirit still allowed him to write the following, possibly in prophecy of what would come about one thousand years later:

> *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your willing Spirit.* ***I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You****. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, God of my salvation, and* ***my tongue will sing aloud of Your righteousness****.* ***O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will show forth Your praise*** (Ps 51:12-15).

Because of all that God has done for us through Jesus, we cannot but speak those things we have received from Him. It is as Peter and John said to those who resisted their testimony of the gospel. *"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).

When one realizes the fullness of what God has done in his life, he cannot but walk in gratitude for the gospel of Jesus. Jesus said, *"Herein is My Father glorified,* ***that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples****"* (Jn 15:8). We show ourselves as disciples of Jesus when we walk according to His mission to this world, that is, to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). We glorify God when we bear fruit through the preaching of Jesus. When we live as the disciples of Jesus, fruit happens. And when fruit comes as a result of our evangelistic walk in thanksgiving for His payment of our debt, then the name of God is glorified.

B. Motivated by example and command.

The Son of God came into this world with an evangelistic purpose. *"****For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost****"* (Lk 19:10). David Livingstone said, "God had only one Son and he was a missionary." Jesus was a missionary from heaven to this world on our behalf (See Ph 2:5-11). He came to find us. Since we have been found, it is our task to find others for Him. The closer we get to Jesus, therefore, the closer we move toward His example of coming for us. Our going forth as His disciples, therefore, is only natural because we are His disciples. Because He found us, we seek and save the lost through the preaching of the gospel.

C. Motivated by the need.

We live in a world of almost eight billion people, the vast majority of whom are dead in their sins. We live among the walking dead. The world's population is growing by over one hundred million every year. This is one hundred million dead people in sin that must be reached with the gospel.

We were once among the dead. But we were found by Jesus. And just in case we become indifferent to the stench of the spiritually dead in our world, Paul writes to us today as he wrote to the Ephesians. *"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).

What glorious grace we have received! We have been delivered out of our deadness in order to seek the dead. It is His grace that compels us. It is as Paul wrote to some who had been touched by the grace of God: *"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).

It is this grace that brings glory to God because it causes us to walk in thanksgiving of what Jesus did for us. The more thankful we are for the grace of God, the more evangelistic we become in sharing the gospel with others. **The primary motivation of the early disciples was their tremendous appreciation for the grace of God**. We would correctly conclude that the less we appreciate the grace of God in saving us, the less evangelistic we will be in preaching grace to others. Or it might be that the more we take for granted that which was done for us through the cross, the less we are driven to take the gospel of the cross to others. We usually share only that for which we are truly thankful.

D. Motivated by opportunity.

Paul was sensitive to open doors. He changed his schedules in order to take advantage of opportunities to preach the grace of God. *"But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.* ***For a great and effective door has been opened to me****"* (1 Co 16:8,9).

Every disciple must be perceptive for opportunities to share the sweet grace of God by which we have been saved. To be perceptive for opportunities to share the gospel, one must *"grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18). We have found that the more one grows in his appreciation for his own salvation by the grace of God, the more he is eager to share the grace of God with others. And in order to grow in the grace of God, one must be filled with the knowledge of the gospel that is revealed in the word of God.

It is through God's word that we understand the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. When we learn how far He had to come from heaven in order to redeem us from sin, we will go any distance to find others for Him. Our knowledge of His incarnational sacrifice for us stirs our hearts to the needs of others who need Jesus.

E. Motivated by the zeal of Satan.

While living in Sao Paulo, Brazil, we once woke up in the morning and read the local newspaper. On the front page, we were horrified to read the report of some misguided members of a particular cult who had bound their little children and drowned them in the Atlantic Ocean in a religious ritual. The work of Satan among religious people is strong. The horror of his work drives us to preach the gospel that frees people from their own religious inventions. Because God first loved us through Jesus, we are driven to love others in order that Jesus deliver them from the bondage of Satan (1 Jn 4:19).

Paul exhorted, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God* ***so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil****"* (Ep 6:10,11). We are driven into battle against the wiles of the devil because of our love of souls.

The Basel Mission was started in the nineteenth century in Ghana. In the first nine years of the mission, eight of the ten missionaries who went to the mission died. For fear that the European supporters would discontinue the mission, the remaining two missionaries wrote back home with the words, "Send more missionaries. Though a thousand missionaries die, send more."

Many of the early missionaries that came to Africa packed their belongings in their coffins, knowing that the continent would soon take them with diseases. We once visited a cemetery in Kuruman, South Africa that was established by the Moffat missionary family in the early nineteenth century. Half of the graves were those of children.

Satan will do his best to discourage the saints of God. But with great zeal and hardship we must be determined to fight back. We must repeat after Paul, *"****For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of Our Lord Jesus****"* (At 21:13). *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus* ***will suffer persecution****"* (2 Tm 3:12).

Churches grow simply because members zealously make telling others about Jesus central to their lives. The more zealous a group of people are, the faster they will grow. Jesus gave *"Himself for us so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself* ***a special people who are zealous for good works****"* (Ti 2:14). This is the answer for church growth.

F. Motivated because of the results of failure.

Sometimes we need to sit back and consider the consequences of our possible failure to evangelize our own generation of this world. If we fail, then the following inheritance will be given to our children:

1. ***The gates of hell will be broken wide open.*** Jesus said, *"****Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction****, and there are many who enter through it"* (Mt 7:13). We must keep in mind that every person with whom we do not share the gospel will broaden the gates of hell.

2. ***We will leave our children a heritage of indifference toward the lost.*** We are zealous to leave our children a college education or a successful business. But when we leave them an unevangelized world we leave them an unbearable burden. Our fathers left us with this burden, and we often hand it on to the next generation. The problem with the lukewarmness of the disciples in Laodicea was that they passed their lukewarm behavior on to their children (Rv 3:15,16). Their candlestick was removed from Laodicea because their influence for Jesus left town when that generation of lukewarm Christians died.

3. ***God's people will not be seen as God's people.*** Singing "standing on the promises" when we are sittin' on the premises will never evangelize the world. We are often like two skeletons hanging in a closet. One turned and said to the other, "If we don't get any guts, we'll never get out of here."

Since we know the gospel, we do not have the privilege of sitting in comfort with an indifferent attitude toward an unevangelized world. Sitting tight without sending the light will never take Christ into all the world. If we are truly the disciples of Jesus, then we must be as His disciples of light throughout our communities and throughout the world.

G. Motivated because of our joy.

When Christians are excited about their lives as disciples of Jesus, then they get excited about sharing Jesus. Our excitement leads us to be convicted, and our conviction leads to more conversions.

Paul explained the character of the one who rejoices over his salvation. *"**For the love of Christ compels us**, because we judge that if one died for all, then all died"* (2 Co 5:14). Christ died for all because of His love for us. We are thus compelled to love in dying to ourselves for others (See 1 Jn 4:19).

In 2 Kings 7:1-9 an event happened in the history of Samaria that truly illustrates our situation as the saved disciples of Jesus. Benhadad of Syria besieged the city of Samaria. The siege continued until those trapped in the city were starving. But there were four lepers at the gate of the city. Because they were lepers, these were four men left untouched by the Syrians at the gate of Samaria. The lepers reasoned among themselves,

> *If we say, 'We will enter into the city,' then the famine is in the city and we will die there. And if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall to the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we will live. And if they kill us, we will but die* (2 Kg 7:4).

What the lepers did not know was that in the middle of the night God caused a great noise of chariots and horses to be heard by the Syrian army. The Syrians thought that the Israelites had hired the Hittites and Egyptians to fight against them. In their fear, they fled for their lives, leaving everything behind in the dark of the night.

Now when the four lepers came upon the camp of the Syrians, they eventually perceived that no one was around. They were elated about their discovery.

> *They went into one tent and ate and drank. And they carried from there silver and gold and clothing. Then they went and hid it. And they came again and entered into another tent and carried from there also* (2 Kg 7:8).

They had discovered good news. But in their joy of having received such great blessings In the bondage of their materialism, they began to think. They came to the realization that their materialism had diverted their minds away from those who were destitute in the city of Samaria. So they finally confessed to one another:

> *"**We do not well. This day is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace. If we tarry until the morning light, some mischief will come upon us, Now, therefore, come so that we may go and tell the king's household**"* (2 Kg 7:9).

Chapter 9

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITIES

In the farming of wheat there is a brief window of opportunity for harvesting the grain. The wheat cannot be harvested when it is too green for the grain will rot in the storage bin. If the grain is left unharvested too long in the field, it will dry and be essentially worthless. But when the farmer discovers that the grain is dry enough for harvesting, there is about a two week window when the fields must be harvested. It is then that the combines are fired up and the sickle is laid vigorously to the crop.

Jesus knew this, as well as His disciples. So when He made the following statement to His disciples, they knew exactly what He was saying: *"Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, **for they are white already for harvest!**"* (Jn 4:35). And indeed they were. *"When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son"* into the field of the world that was white unto harvest (Gl 4:4). In order that we apply ourselves as laborers to harvest the fields that are white unto harvest, we must do the following:

A. Make a commitment to see and feel the opportunity.

Those who are deeply involved in being a disciple of Jesus know the meaning of what Jesus requested in

Matthew 9:37,38. Those who are not involved, have little understanding of that for which He asked us to pray. Those who do not pray for laborers often do not realize that there millions of souls who are ripe for harvesting. But if one is a disciple of Jesus, and driven by the gospel, then he or she knows the meaning of Jesus' following request:

> ***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.***

This is God's harvest, not ours. The world was created for the specific purpose of harvesting souls for eternal dwelling in the presence of God. And when one is intensely involved in reaping the harvest in his generation, he is intense about his commitment to get the job done while the harvest is ready. We can see this earnest intensity in the following words of Paul:

> *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them* ***is that they might be saved****. For I testify to 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 10:1-3).

We live in a world wherein religionists have created their own righteousness after their own desires. The primary theology of religion is universalism, that is, everyone can be saved on the merit of their own terms. Since religion is primarily defined as a meritorious system of self-sanctification, then the religionist believes that he can get to where God wants him to be, but on his own terms. But this righteousness is not according to the complete sanctification that came through Jesus into this world and was accomplished on the cross. And because it is false righteousness to presume that we can save ourselves, Paul was intensely moved to teach the truth of the gospel of the cross. He was so intense, that he said the following words in Romans 9:1-3:

> *I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience also bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.* ***For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren****, my kinsmen* [Jews] *according to the flesh.*

How intense can a disciple become in order that the reaping of a ripe harvest be accomplished? The life of Paul is a living testimony.

When Paul came into Corinth, he was faced with great opposition. It was so great that he had decided to leave the city and move on to other fields. But God knew something that he did not. God knew that there were those in the city of Corinth, who, if they had the opportunity to hear the truth of the gospel, they would obey. Therefore, God came to Paul in a special vision in order to keep him in Corinth.

> *Then the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak. And do not hold your peace. For I am with you and no man will attack you to hurt you,* ***for I have many people in this city****"* (At 18:9,10).

When it seems that things are going bad, we must step back and understand that God has people in every city who need to hear the gospel. When these people hear, they will obey. We must remember that we are seed sowers and those who water. It is God who produces the fruit. But He cannot produce the fruit if we do not sow the seed.

B. Have faith that God is working through us.

At one time during Jesus' ministry, a desperate father brought his son who had a mute spirit to His disciples. The father said to Jesus, *"I spoke to Your disciples that they should cast him out* ***and they could not****"* (Mk 9:18). What Jesus then said surely cut the disciples to the heart, as well as us in our lack of belief in the power of the gospel. *"O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you?"* (Mk 9:19).

Those who think and work outside the work of God have a very difficult time walking by faith within the realm of God's work. At this time in their lives, the disciples were still outside, and thus, faithless as to what God could do through them. But in their near future this would change.

Jesus asked the pleading father to bring the son to Him. We can imagine the tears in the father's eyes as he said to Jesus, *"And often it* [the mute spirit] *has cast him into the fire and into the waters, to destroy him"* (Mk 9:22). But listen to the father's plea. *"If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us"* (MK 9:22). We must never forget Jesus' response to this heart-wrenching plea of the father. *"If you can?* ***All things are possible to him who believes****"* (Mk 9:23).

We sometimes cannot get the job done because we are struggling with our unbelief. But we forget what God promised: *"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****"* (Rm 8:32). Therefore,

*"**in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us**"* (Rm 8:37). *"**If God is for us, who can be against us**"* (Rm 8:31). We must have the confidence of Paul: *"**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me**"* (Ph 4:13).

We must never forget that *"it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure"* (Ph 2:13). Therefore, He *"is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us"* (Ep 3:20). Since God is working in us, then it is He who is working to evangelize the world through us. If we refuse to have Him working in our lives, then the problem is not with God, but with us. For this reason, we must not quench the Spirit of power that is working in us to do His will (1 Th 5:19).

When we have the convictions, therefore, we will have the conversions as the Spirit works through us to take the gospel to the world. And when we allow God to do His populating of heaven through us, then we get excited about sowing the seed of the kingdom because we are excited about the spiritual needs of lost men. When Jesus becomes everything to us, we will speak His name everywhere. We must make sure that we do not show up at the final judgment with no souls we have won for Christ.

C. Make the commitment to give all to Him who gave all to us.

We must pay our redemption forward. Jesus came and found us, and now we must go and find others for Him. In finding us, He paid our debt, and thus we are debtors to others. Paul said, *"I am a debtor"* (Rm 1:14). We are indebted to Jesus for redeeming us from the curse of our condemnation in sin. Therefore, His sacrifice for us reasonably requires a sacrifice from us. It is as Paul wrote, *"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).

When we survey the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, it is only reasonable to conclude that we sacrifice the entirety of our lives for Him.

Evangelism, therefore, is not something we do. It is something we are. It is not something we study in a class on discipleship. If we must enroll in a class on evangelism, then we never really understood discipleship before we were baptized. Jesus commanded His disciples to go and disciple all nations (Mt 28:19). But if we have to enroll in discipleship classes after baptism, then we got in the water before we understood that there was a cross to bear as a disciple.

We baptize disciples. We do not baptize and then disciple. Practicing the reverse order brings into the fellowship of the organic body all sorts of dysfunctional members. Many unevangelistic members never understood what being a disciple of Jesus meant before they went to the cross and grave with Jesus in baptism. If one learns of Luke 9:23 and similar statements in a discipleship class after baptism, then he was really not discipled before he was baptized.

We once heard an elder say to the assembly, "We need to pray for the personal evangelists among us." With such lack of understanding concerning the nature of discipleship among us, we need to look no further to discover why we fail to evangelize our communities. We have no professional evangelists among us because all of us are evangelistic. When we single out those to whom we have relinquished our responsibility to evangelize our communities, then our communities will never be evangelized, much less the world in which we live.

We as disciples of Jesus are all personal and we are all evangelistic. It is the nature of being a disciple of Jesus. If we feel that evangelism is the responsibility of someone else, then we will never take ownership of evangelism.

The preceding thoughts were in Jesus' statements of Matthew 10:16-26. In the middle of His exhortations concerning being His disciple, Jesus said, *"It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher"* (Mt 10:25). If we would be like our teacher, Jesus, then we too would say that it is our purpose to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). We too would go on a mission from our abode to any place where there are those who needed the saving power of the gospel (See Ph 2:5-11). We seek to be disciples of Jesus, and thus, we seek to emulate in our lives His life.

How we are evangelistic will vary from one disciple to another. However, how we work to touch the lives of others for Jesus will be according to how God has gifted us. But we must never come to the erroneous conclusion that God gifted us for ourselves.

There is no such thing as a narcissistic disciple. If we behave as such, then we will introvert within ourselves, seeking in our Christian life those things that please ourselves. We will create a religious way of life wherein we feel good about our exciting assemblies, comfortable in our pews, and satisfied with a good pronouncement from the pulpit. We will feel good while all the time the world is headed for a devil's hell. We will often open up our discipleship on Sunday morning with an "opening prayer," and then close it off after the "hour of worship" with a "closing prayer." We forget

that assemblies should be for exhausted disciples, not times when we try to validate our faith by exhausting ourselves in the assembly.

God gifted us, not for ourselves, but for others.

In 1269, Marco Polo reported that Kublai Khan, who at that time ruled over a great deal of present-day China, had requested one hundred missionaries to come to China. He wanted the missionaries to come and teach his people about Christ and the truths of the word of God. At the time of the request there was a struggle as to who was going to be the pope in Rome. It was not until two years later that the request of Kublai Khan was answered.

Pope Gregory X subsequently answered the plea for one hundred missionaries with two friars. These two emissaries of the Roman church got as far as the frigid Himalayan Mountains and turned back. We wonder what Marco Polo would write of this generation of the church if he were alive today. Has the call of Jesus for thousands been answered with only a few laborers who have turned back?

Chapter 10

HOW IT IS DONE

Evangelism is embedded in true discipleship. Our personal evangelistic outreach to others is dependent on how we feel a disciple of Jesus lives the gospel that we have obeyed. It is as Jesus said, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). And the word of Jesus is, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mk 16:15).

There is nothing difficult in connecting *"continue in My word"* and *"preach the gospel to every creature."* If one would be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, he must figure out how he is going to preach the gospel to every creature of the world. It is not a decision if one should, but how one should get the job done.

We determine what discipleship is by considering the example of Jesus. Jesus said, *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Lk 19:10). In His ministry, Jesus set the example of seeking and saving the lost. Now compare this with 1 Peter 2:21: *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you,* ***leaving you an example that you should follow His steps****."*

We follow the example of Jesus in suffering. By doing so we follow in His steps of suffering in reaching out to others. This is what John explained in 1 John 2:6: *"He who says he abides in Him* ***ought himself also to walk just as He walked****."* In other words, if we claim to be a disciple of Jesus, then we must walk as Jesus walked. We must take up our cross of suffering and walk with Him.

Both in teaching and example, the early disciples followed the example of Jesus. Starting on the first day of the existence of the baptized body, and extending through the example of Paul and the apostles, the disciples who *"were scattered abroad"* preached the word of the gospel everywhere (At 8:4). Paul thus exhorted, *"Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Co 11:1).

The early disciples throughout the world followed the example of the first Christians in Judea. To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, *"For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea that are in Christ"* (1 Th 2:14). Understanding what the Thessalonians did by imitating the evangelistic Judean disciples, who imitated Paul, who imitated Christ, explains how the early church was truly evangelistically oriented:

> ***And you became imitators of us and of the Lord****, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, 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 your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything*** (1 Th 1:6-8).

People often ask why the early church was so evangelistic. The answer is in that they were true disciples. Christ set the example. The early disciples in Jerusalem followed His example. This example was spread throughout the early world where it was imitated by other disciples, who also set the example for other disciples to follow.

If we would be as the early disciples, therefore, we must continue the example of their evangelistic zeal. There are no magic programs. There are no especially trained men and women whom we can pay to do the job for us. There is no need for training schools in evangelism. All that is involved is to understand what a true disciple of Jesus is. If one is less than evangelistic in his supposed discipleship, then he is not taking ownership

of his or her responsibilities as a disciple of Jesus.

Our task now is to determine how the early Christians behaved as disciples of Jesus. This is an exciting study for it starts right in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. As we journey with the early disciples, we discover in Acts 2 that there were at least seven things that caused the tremendous growth of the church. If we focus on these principles today, we will experience the same growth that was experienced in the first century.

A. Communicate the gospel.

*"**But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said ...**"* (At 2:14). And that started everything. *"Daily in the temple and in every house, **they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ**"* (At 5:42). The communication of the gospel continued endlessly and persistently. *"Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (At 8:4). The communication of the gospel was so central to the lives of the early disciples, that Luke turns from counting baptisms to the growth of the word of the Lord that produced the growth. *"The word of God grew and multiplied"* (At 12:24).

There is no secret about this most essential principle for the evangelization of the world. If people do not open their mouths for Jesus, Jesus will never be made known to the masses. It is as simple as what Luke recorded of Philip when he met the Ethiopian eunuch. *"Then Philip **opened his mouth**, and beginning at this scripture **he preached Jesus** to him"* (At 8:35).

B. Focus on receptivity.

*"**Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart**"* (At 2:37). On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter and the apostles preached Jesus to a receptive audience. Church growth comes when we find people as Sergius Paulus, a man who *"called for Barnabas and Saul and **desired to hear the word of God**"* (At 13:7). The early disciples focused on finding those who *"glorified the word of the Lord"* (At 13:48). But if there were those who would not listen, *"they shook off the dust of their feet against them"* and moved on (At 13:51). They moved on to those who *"were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily"* (At 17:11).

The early church grew rapidly because the disciples did not cast their pearls before the swine. They observed the principle that Jesus spoke. *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces"* (Mt 7:6). Good advice.

If one would be a productive disciple, then he or she must be able to determine if one is casting the pearl of the gospel before swine. No man has a right to hear the gospel twice when there is one man who has not heard it once. This is especially true in reference to one who resists the gospel. Those who preach the gospel must be able to wipe the dust from their feet when the gospel is resisted. They must be able to move on to those who have never had a chance to hear the gospel.

Satan is very wise. He will hold up disciples who cannot move on. Everyone must have a chance to hear the gospel. But when one determines that his audience is not receptive, **then he must move on**. If he does not, then he has allowed himself to be stolen away from one who will not be given the opportunity to hear the gospel. It is the same principle of life that Jesus illustrated in His life when some *"tried to keep Him from leaving them"* (Lk 4:42). These who sought to hold up Jesus had already heard. Jesus thus reminded them by saying, *"I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I was sent"* (Lk 4:43). Effective evangelism is still based on the principle, *"He who has ears, let him hear"* (Mt 13:9). And when there are listening ears out there, then that is where we must be.

C. Assisting the obedient.

*"**And those who received his word were baptized**"* (At 2:41). These were those who *"continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching"* (At 2:42). When Jesus is preached, and people are receptive, then obedience to the gospel follows. Obedience follows in the life of those who seek to follow the example of the obedience of Jesus.

> *Though He was a Son, **He learned obedience** by the things that He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became **the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him*** (Hb 5:8,9).

If people will not hear the word of the gospel, then they will not obey the gospel. When they will not hear, it is time to move on to those who will listen. We seek those who want to follow the example of the obedience of Jesus.

D. Teach the obedient.

*"**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship**"* (At 2:42). Those who responded on the day of Pentecost continued to be taught

by the apostles. Since the apostles knew that many of the 3,000 who obeyed the gospel would be returning to their homes in far away countries, it was necessary that they be grounded in the word of God before they departed from Jerusalem.

Church growth happens when there are those who willingly submit to the teaching of the word of God. A disciple is identified by his willingness to be instructed in the word of God. Paul exhorted the evangelist Timothy, *"These things command and teach"* (1 Tm 4:11). He instructed Timothy to teach other leaders. *"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).

A leader is identified by his willingness to teach others. These leaders must in turn be willing to be taught by others. Such is exactly what Jesus mandated among His disciples. After a disciple is baptized, Jesus commanded the apostles to teach them *"to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28:20). It is in this way that all disciples *"grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18).

E. Disciples must fellowship.

*"**And they continued steadfastly in ... fellowship in the breaking of bread ...**"* (At 2:42). Baptized disciples must seek out the fellowship of others who have also obeyed the gospel. This was the nature of the fellowship of the early disciples. *"Now all who believed were together and had all things in common"* (At 2:44). These early disciples were so bound together in their common obedience to the gospel that they sought out one another for fellowship. *"And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart"* (At 2:46). They continued in their love feasts with one another. As far as our New Testament record of these love feasts reveals, these feasts continued at least until the writing of both Jude and 2 Peter, which letters were written around A.D. 65,66 (See 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12).

The fellowship of the early disciples was more than meetings for talk and food. Acts 2 states that they *"had all things in common"* (At 2:44). Acts 4:32 explains,

> *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.*

Without going into great detail to explain the circumstances that existed on the Pentecost of A.D. 30, consider the fact that there were visiting Jews in Jerusalem who came great distances to this Pentecost and those that followed. The sojourners heard the gospel, and many subsequently obeyed by baptism into Christ (At 2:38).

These obedient disciples stayed on in Jerusalem in order to receive more instruction at the feet of the apostles (At 2:42). Once they had consumed their funds they had for the original journey to Jerusalem for Pentecost, they needed to return to their countries from which they had journeyed. They would return to the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire in order to preach what they heard and saw in Jerusalem (See Is 2:1-3).

What is interesting about this situation is the fact that the resident disciples in Jerusalem saw the return of these visiting Jews as an opportunity to evangelize the world. Therefore, in order to help keep the traveling disciples in town, the local disciples sold their possessions in order that the sojourning disciples might continue in their fellowship and the apostles' teaching.

F. Worship God in spirit and truth.

*"**Those who received his word were baptized ... and they continued steadfastly in ... fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers ... praising God**"* (At 2:41,42,47). The early disciples continued after the worship that Jesus explained: *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth"* (Jn 4:24). Since they had totally committed themselves to the Lord, they worshiped God in their service to Him (See Rm 12:1,2). They assembled for praise and planning of the work (Hb 10:24,25).

Worshipful disciples continue in their witness that Jesus is their Lord. The effectiveness of their testimony to others that they were the children of God was seen in the worshipful spirit by which they conducted themselves. Those who maintain a daily worshipful spirit are continually reminded in their outreach to others that they are working within the realm of God's work. Those who are not of a worshipful spirit will sometimes develop programs by which they will offer service, but the purpose of the program often becomes the survival of the program itself. Such programs often force that which should only be natural in the spirit of a worshipful disciple who has obeyed the gospel. In other words, those who have obeyed the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, will naturally live incarnationally (See Ph 2:5-8). And living incarnationally after our Lord means that we willingly make all sacrifices that are necessary in order to seek and to save the lost.

Disciples are evangelistic, not because they are fol-

lowing the schedule of some program. Disciples are evangelistic by nature because they walk in appreciation of the gospel that they have obeyed (2 Co 4:15). Because they responded to the gospel, they naturally live the gospel that is in their hearts. True worshipers of God, therefore, need no command to be evangelistic. They need no schedule or program to move them into action. They are simply evangelistic because of the One they have obeyed.

G. Disciples impacted communities.

The enemies of the early disciples accused, *"**These who have turned the world upside down have come here also**"* (At 17:6). And truly, the early Christians did turn the world upside down by their zeal to preach Jesus to the world. On the day of Pentecost when it all began, Luke initially recorded, *"And the same day there were **added to them about three thousand souls**"* (At 2:41). From there the growth continued. *"**But many of those who heard the word believed. And the number of the men was about five thousand**"* (At 4:4). *"And all the more men and women believed in the Lord and were **added to their number**"* (At 5:14). *"And daily in the temple and in every house, **they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ**"* (At 5:42). *"**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).

The early disciples went everywhere preaching the word of the gospel (At 8:4). Consequently, the number of disciples *"**were multiplied**"* (At 9:31). *"**Many believed on the Lord**"* (At 9:42). *"**The word of God grew and multiplied**"* (At 12:24). *"**So the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region**"* (At 13:49). God then *"opened the door of faith to the Gentiles,"* and thus the disciples took advantage of this great open door (At 14:27). Luke's climatic statement says it all: *"**So the word of God grew mightily and prevailed**"* (At 19:20).

In the religious world today there is an obsession with "miracles" as a means to grow a particular experiential religion. But when we compare this obsession with what Luke recorded concerning what caused the growth of the early church, there is a vast difference of emphasis. Luke witnessed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the church grew because the gospel was preached, not because the disciples overwhelmed the people with miracles every Sunday morning. Little emphasis is placed on the miraculous work of the Spirit in the early evangelism of the church. It was the preaching of the gospel that produced faith, not the miraculous work of the Spirit. The more the truth of the gospel was preached, the more there were those who believed. Their belief was in the preached message of Jesus, not the miracles that some witnessed.

Chapter 11

THE CURSE OF INDIFFERENCE

When the gospel is preached in its pure content, it will prevail over religion. The conquest of the truth of the gospel over the religious inventions of men will cause great growth in the body of Christ. The name of Jesus will be exalted among the nations and God will be glorified.

The gospel was not revealed during the centuries of the existence of national Israel. Nevertheless, the truth of God's word was. This truth was revealed to Israel through the fathers of families, and eventually through the Sinai law (Hb 1:1,2). But because the Israelites rejected the word of truth from God, and did wickedly in their first years in Palestine, the Lord delivered them into the hands of Jabin the king of Canaan (Jg 4:2). The Israelites suffered grievously for twenty years under the control of Jabin (Jg 4:3). But when Israel repentantly cried out to the Lord, Deborah, the prophetess, and Barak, led Israel to freedom from Jabin.

In the freedom call of Deborah and Barak to all Israel to join in the battle against Jabin, the people of Meroz refused to respond. While their fellow brethren went to war against the enemies of God and His people, the residents of Meroz remained in the comfort of their own homes. After the victory, however, God cursed them.

> *"Curse you Meroz," said the angel of the Lord. "Curse utterly its inhabitants, **because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty**"* (Jg 5:23).

The inhabitants of Meroz did absolutely nothing to aid in the deliverance of Israel from the wicked oppression of Jabin. They were indifferent and unconcerned.

On all Bible maps today there is usually no indication of the location of Meroz. If it is mentioned, there is usually a question mark beside the assigned location. No one today knows where it was located. It is gone forever. Will the same happen to some churches in any region today if the members fail to rise up and go to war against the mighty enemies of God? When the church in Ephesus lost her first love, the candlestick was removed (See Rv 2:4). The same can be said of thousands of churches throughout history that have lost their first love of the love of souls. When churches lose their evangelistic zeal for the lost, they will eventually be gone.

The Hebrew writer cautioned, *"Take care, brethren,* ***lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief****, in departing from the living God"* (Hb 3:12). If we fall through unbelief, we too will not be granted the right to enter into eternal existence as those in Israel who did not believe, and were subsequently not allowed to enter into the land of milk and honey. *"And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His rest, but to those who were* ***disobedient****? So we see that they could not enter in because of* ***unbelief****"* (Hb 3:18,19). Meroz was taken out of existence because of the inhabitants failure to respond to the need for deliverance from Jabin. Will God take out the church that does not respond to the deliverance of men from the bondage of sin?

The Hebrew Christians were on the verge of neglecting their great salvation. They were considering a turn to their old ways in Judaism. On the verge of apostasy, the Hebrew writer was not vague in his pronouncements concerning such an apostasy. As an example of what would happen to the apostate Jewish Christians, the Hebrew writer referred them to the history of apostate Israel:

> *For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience receive a just punishment,* ***how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation****?* (Hb 2:2,3).

Under the Sinai law, transgressions received an immediate and just judgment. The Hebrew writer sought to illustrate the seriousness of the "neglect" of the Jewish Christians to whom he was writing. In Jesus' parable of the talents, the "one-talent man" was called wicked and slothful because he neglected his responsibility in reference to the opportunity offered to him in his possession of one talent (Mt 25:26). If we neglect our responsibility to remain faithful to our call through the gospel, then we will suffer the removal of our candlestick.

The same principle of neglect is taught in the parable of the ten minas (Lk 19:11-27). The one who was given one mina, with the responsibility of increasing it for the master, did nothing. He neglected his gift and opportunity. When the nobleman came, the unprofitable servant was judged to be a "wicked bondservant" because he had neglected to increase that which had been entrusted to him (Lk 19:22). Would this fall under the principle about which James wrote? *"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin"* (Js 4:17).

When we understand our responsibility that has come to us as a gift of opportunity, and we do not take ownership of the opportunity, then we are in trouble. Timothy had such a gift given to him. Because of discouragement, he stopped preaching. It took an inspired letter from the Holy Spirit to get him going again. In the letter, the apostle charged, *"****Do not neglect the gift that is in you****"* (1 Tm 4:14). We do not know the specific gift to which Paul was referring in this statement. However we do know that at the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy, Timothy was neglecting it. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he exhorted again, *"I remind you that you* ***stir up the gift of God*** *that is in you"* (2 Tm 1:6).

To "stir up" means to rekindle the flame. When we are not engaged in the war against the wiles of the Devil, it is time to stir up our gift of evangelistic outreach. It is time to remember our former days when we were on fire for the Lord.

Gifts were given only for the purpose of reaching out to others. They were not given by God as self-satisfying opportunities to build up one's self. If we fail to rekindle the gift that is given to us for the sake of others, then because of indifference, laziness, fear, or any other obstacle that Satan has put in our way, we are neglecting our gift. As we rekindle a smoldering ember, sometimes our responsibility must be blown upon by the word of God in order to be ignited for Jesus.

In the parable of the talents an interesting statement was made in reference to the bondservant to whom was given one talent. This was the bondservant who said to the master upon the master's return, *"****I was afraid*** *and went and hid your talent in the earth. See, here you have what is yours"* (Mt 25:25).

The fear of the one-talent person led him to be inactive and indifferent over that which was entrusted to him. He was given the opportunity, but because of fear, he did not perform according to the will of the master. We are reminded of the following statement in Revelation 21:8: *"But* ***the cowardly*** *and unbelieving ... will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone"* Is this not what Jesus meant when He said of the one-talent bondservant? *"Cast the* ***unprofitable*** *bond-*

servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 25:30).

There will be a tragic end to those who are unprofitable in the evangelistic work of kingdom business. Regardless of what one's gift is in reference to the benefit of the work of Jesus on earth through us personally, if we are not profitable in His work, then we will eventually be cast into the outer darkness. And now we know the motivation of Paul when he revealed to the Corinthians, *"Therefore,* ***knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men****"* (2 Co 5:11). We should add, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hb 10:31).

We must not let our fear of anything detour us from assuming our responsibility to evangelize our communities. The only one we should fear is the One who has the authority to cast our souls into the outer darkness because we feared men more than we feared Him. *"But I will forewarn you whom you should fear.* ***Fear Him who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell****. Yes, I say to you,* ***fear Him****"* (Lk 12:5; see Mt 10:32).

In Jesus' judgment of the seven churches of Asia, six of the churches were commended for some good because of the circumstances in which they lived. But there was one church that received absolutely no praise. It was the church of Laodicea (Rv 3:14-22). This church was stricken with a deadly malady that would take it away forever. It was stricken with a spirit of lukewarmness because of their indifference to those of Laodicea. And because the members were not serious about their faith, Jesus pronounced condemnation upon them.

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

This very judgment could be spoken to a great number of people who pose to be true disciples of Jesus. We must remember that Jesus will spew out those who are lukewarm in reference to His kingdom business.

We may have buried our gift, neglecting the purpose for which it was given. We may have lost our first love as the Ephesians (Rv 2:4). Or, we may have become lukewarm as the Laodiceans (Rv 3:15). Nevertheless, it is never too late to rekindle the fire of evangelism that is to be in our bones. Paul exhorted, *"****Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light****"* (Ep 5:14). He exhorted the Corinthians, *"Awake to righteousness and do not sin"* (1 Co 15:34).

The simple reason to awake in order to assume our responsibility of evangelism is that *"some have no knowledge of God"* (1 Co 15:34). The only way they will receive a knowledge of God is through us. This is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote to the Ephesians that *"the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known* ***through the church****"* (Ep 3:10). Any church that fails to take ownership of this responsibility is not functioning according to the Christ-given mission of the church. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their laziness and indifference in these matters by saying, *"****I speak this to your shame****"* (1 Co 15:34). If we believe Paul would write the same exhortation concerning our lack of evangelistic spirit, then it is time for repentance.

Chapter 12

WRONG MAN'S JOB

It is interesting to note what Luke recorded concerning the results of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas upon their return to Antioch of Syria. Paul and Barnabas *"reported all that* ***God had done with them*** *and how* ***He had opened the door*** *of faith to the Gentiles"* (At 14:27). It is God who uses us and it is God who opens doors for us. It is our responsibility to be perceptive to the open doors that God opens for us individually.

We live in an era where evangelists are sent out to do the work of evangelizing the world. And rightly so, for how ...

> *... 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).

We send out the preacher to proclaim the good news. This is God's work through us in order to bring many residents into eternal dwelling. It is God working through us as senders in order that the evangelist can enter the doors that He is opening.

Now we often encounter some difficulty when it comes to reporting what God is doing among the nations for His glory. It is not our purpose in reporting on God's work to bring glory to the ones who are sent or the ones who are sending. Those who are sent often

make the mistake of being intimidated to take credit for what God has done. It is often similar to some in Corinth who took credit for other men's work.

We must consider God's work through ourselves in reference to Paul's obsession to preach the gospel. *"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about,* ***for necessity is laid upon me***. ***For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel****"* (1 Co 9:16). Paul was compelled to preach because of his debt that he owed for his own salvation (Rm 1:14). However, he would not boast in repaying his debt. The exhortation would be, *"He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord"* (2 Co 10:17). Paul would boast in what the Lord does for us, not in what we do for Him. Though the Corinthians were his boast in the Lord, **it was the Lord who produced the Christians in Corinth through the preaching of the gospel by Paul**. And above all, Paul would never boast in the labors of others who had preached the gospel. *"We are not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, of other men's labors"* (2 Co 10:15). He would not boast *"in another man's realm of accomplishment"* (2 Co 10:16). If he had done such, then he would have been stealing away some of God's glory.

Now listen specifically to what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:12:

> *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****.*

Sometimes the reports of evangelists digress to the unwise practices of some in Corinth. (1) We often take credit for God's work. (2) We often boast in our own accomplishments by bowing to the demands of supporters who seek a "baptism report." (3) The supporters often compare our reports with the work of other evangelists. (4) Evangelists often measure their own accomplishments by the accomplishments of others, feeling that they are either competing or guaranteeing their own support. (5) Sometimes, we are simply self-oriented and seeking glory for ourselves. In doing all such things, **we are not wise**. We are bowing down to the intimidation of those who sign our pay checks. And thus, we end up boasting about the wrong man's job.

We sometimes need to refocus on our job as disciples of Jesus. If our focus is correct, then our emphasis in preaching the gospel will be productive.

A. Our job is to plant.

Our focus is 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, specifically verses 6-9. In his message to the disciples throughout the province of Achaia who were dividing over personalities, Paul stated that he had planted the seed of the gospel in Corinth (1 Co 3:6). Luke recorded this planting in Acts 18:1-11. On his initial visit to the city of Corinth, *"Paul was compelled in the spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ"* (At 18:5). *"Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized"* (At 18:8). *"So he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them"* (At 18:11).

Paul was their father in the faith, *"for in Christ Jesus I* [Paul] *have brought you forth through the gospel"* (1 Co 4:15; see 15:1,2). In recounting his trip to Corinth, Paul reminded the disciples that he came from a great distance in order to preach the gospel to them (2 Co 10:14).

This is our job. We must go the distance for Jesus. If we are not willing to leave fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, lands and houses for Jesus, then we will not get the job done (See Lk 14:26; see Mt 10:37). It is our job to plant the seed of the gospel. As long as one is preaching the gospel to the lost, then he is doing his job (See Mt 28:19, Mk 16:15). This is exactly what the early church did as it went forth into all the world (At 8:4,12).

If Paul were like some notable religious leaders since the first century, we would have the "Paulite Church" today. We have Lutherans and Calvinists and Anglicans, and a host of others that are named either after some religious leader or peculiar teaching. We even have churches that are named after Jewish feasts days, that is, "Pentecostals." But we have not encountered a Paulistian church.

While some men have craved to have their disciples focus on them as the leaders, Paul would only say, *"Be imitators of me* ***even as I also am of Christ****"* (1 Co 11:1). One could not focus on Paul without focusing on Christ. And if one focused on the incarnation of the Son of God, then there would be no room to be puffed up in having people focus on anyone other than Christ. We are thus the people (church) of Christ (See Ph 2:5-8).

Paul knew how to keep the glory focused on Christ. He also knew how people like their heroes. They have a thirst to have a "king over them as the nations around them." Paul wrote, therefore, to keep the people focused on King Jesus as their only hero. He, as the rest of the apostles, clearly reminded the people that they were only servants through whom the seed of the kingdom of Christ was planted in the hearts of men. *"Who then is Paul and who is Apollos,* ***but servants by whom you believed****"* (1 Co 3:5). The fact that we have no Cephites or Paulites, or Apollosites today is evidence that these men did their jobs well by keeping the peoples' minds focused on Jesus Christ.

B. Our job is to water.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *"Apollos watered"* (1 Co 3:6). This too is our job. Men are God's instruments to water the seed of the kingdom that is planted by someone else. Apollos came along after Paul left Corinth (At 19:1). While in Corinth, Apollos used his gift of exhortation to build up the body of disciples. Luke wrote of Apollos' arrival and ministry in Corinth, *"He greatly helped those who had believed through grace"* (At 18:27).

Apollos may have been as the teacher who stood before the assembly of disciples and said, "We ain't what we oughta be, and we ain't what we're gonna be, but thanks be to the Lord that we ain't what we used to be."

It is our business to water the seed of the gospel in order that men and women live lives that are worthy of the gospel (See Ph 1:27). It is our job to use our gifts to edify the body of 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).

C. God's job is to bear the fruit.

When we do our job of planting and watering, then God takes it from there. Paul reminded the Corinthians, *"**God gave the increase**"* (1 Co 3:6). Therefore, we must remember this point: *"So then **neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters**, but God who gives the increase"* (1 Co 3:7).

Those who plant and water are the organic body of Christ at work (1 Co 3:8). But we must remember that *"**we are laborers together with God**"* (1 Co 3:9). God gave us the message. God is opening the doors. God is using our gifts to His glory. And when we report, **we can only report on what God is doing among the nations**.

We can take no glory in the fruit bearing business. We may plant and water, but years later the fruit may come forth. If we glory in the fruit, not only are we boasting in God's business, but we may be taking credit for another person's planting and watering that took place many years before we arrived on the scene. When we report on the fruit, therefore, we must be cautious that we are not taking credit for another man's labors, and thus be as the arrogant folks in Corinth who compared their works with one another, and then took credit for Paul's labors.

If we would be concerned about the results of our evangelistic outreach, then we must be concerned about our planting and watering. If we do our job, God has promised that His word will do its work and bring forth fruit. It is our business to *"go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in so that my house may be filled"* (Lk 14:23). Someone challenged all of us with the lyrics of the following song:

Some people want to live within
The sound of church or chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.

Within a yard of hell I went
To tell of life above,
And from the slums of sin I saw
Hearts now full of love.

Lives were changed and hope was given,
What wonders I could tell;
Will you not go with me, my friends,
Within a yard of hell?

Chapter 13

BEING FRUITFUL

Paul made an interesting statement when he wrote to the Roman disciples something that should make many of us stand up and take notice of our responsibilities, both toward the disciples, as well as toward the lost. He wrote,

> *I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you. But I was hindered until the present,* ***so that I might have some fruit among you also****, even as I have among the other Gentiles* (Rm 1:13).

Now in view of the above statement to the Roman disciples, it is good to read again what Jesus said to His disciples: *"Herein is My Father glorified,* ***that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples****"* (Jn 15:8). Regardless of how we would define the "fruit" about which both Paul and Jesus spoke, one thing is clear.

If one does not bear fruit, **then he is not a disciple of Jesus**. Our fruit bearing validates our discipleship.

Jesus warned and exhorted, *"I Am the true vine and My Father is the vinedresser.* ***Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away****. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit"* (Jn 15:1,2). Those who bear fruit, therefore, are connected to Jesus. But if one does not bear fruit, then God takes that unproductive branch away.

One is determined to be connected to Jesus by his fruit bearing. Jesus continued, *"Abide in Me and I in you.* ***As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me****"* (Jn 15:4). The signal that one is abiding in Jesus is by his fruit bearing. If there is no fruit, then there is no abiding in Jesus. *"He who abides in Me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without Me* ***you can do nothing****"* (Jn 15:5).

Our discipleship depends on whether we are bearing fruit. Those who seek to be disciples, seek to abide in Jesus in order that they bear fruit. And since they are abiding in Jesus, then they are bearing fruit. The signal that one is not abiding in Jesus is that he is not bearing fruit. By our fruit bearing, we bring glory to God. We prove that we are the disciples of Jesus.

In His personal message to the twelve disciples, Jesus made a qualifying condition for the disciples' prayers to be answered: *"I appointed you so you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain* ***so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you****"* (Jn 15:16). Unproductive disciples will certainly have unproductive prayers. No fruit, not answered prayer.

Fruit bearing can be accomplished personally, and indirectly through another person. We must personally be involved in fruit bearing in our own lives through spiritual growth and evangelism. In the context of this discussion, bringing forth fruit through the preaching of the gospel is paramount to being a disciple of Jesus. In fact, as stated in the preceding mandates of Jesus, one is not a disciple unless he is bearing fruit. We can personally bear fruit, but we can also bear fruit by supporting those who go forth to preach the gospel. This was revealed in the early discipleship of both the Philippian jailor and Lydia.

Paul had stayed in Philippi on his first visit only a few days (At 16:12). From Philippi, he, Timothy and Silas went on to Thessalonica (At 17:1). Luke stayed in Philippi. When Paul wrote to the disciples in Philippi many years later, he reminded them of their early desires to bear fruit in other areas through the support of Paul, Timothy and Silas.

> *Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia,* ***no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only*** (Ph 4:15).

We wonder why the jailor and Lydia, who were only a few days old as disciples, did what Paul wrote, *"For even in Thessalonica* ***you sent once and again for my needs****"* (Ph 4:16). The answer is simple. Paul reminded them of what he had taught them. *"****I desire the fruit that abounds to your account****"* (Ph 4:17). **The Philippians received the fruit of the converted souls in Thessalonica because they financially supported Paul, Timothy and Silas who preached the gospel to the Thessalonians**.

One is a disciple by personally bearing fruit in his own life. But one is also considered a disciple by bearing fruit through the support of those who go forth to preach the gospel in other areas. Paul asked, *"And how will they preach unless they are sent?"* (Rm 10:15). When Jesus said, *"Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men,"* He meant that we must fish local waters, as well as waters in foreign areas (Mt 4:19).

The apostle John commended Gaius for what he was doing in evangelizing the world through those he personally supported. There were evangelists at the time who were coming through town. Gaius supported these evangelists (missionaries) on their journey. In supporting these traveling evangelists, John reminded Gaius that he was doing something faithful in supporting these missionaries in their efforts to preach the gospel to the world (3 Jn 5). He commended Gaius, *"You will do well to support them on their journey"* (3 Jn 6). And then John added that local Christians as Gaius should support traveling evangelists because the evangelists (1) *"went forth for the sake of the Name"* of Jesus, (2) they took no contributions from the unbelievers, and (3) we should support them in order *"that we might be fellow workers for the truth"* of the gospel (3 Jn 7,8).

Gaius never forgot his responsibility to the world. Paul reminded the Colossians, *"Even in all the world* ***this gospel is bringing forth fruit****, just as it does also in you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth"* (Cl 1:6). If we deny the world the gospel by failing to support those who go into all the world, then we will have no fruit from the evangelists who go into all the world. As the gospel brought us forth as a disciple, it is only natural that a true disciple will seek to preach the gospel to others through those he supports to go forth and preach the good news. This is the marvelous truth the Philippian jailor and Lydia realized even when they were only a few days old as disciples. It is a

truth that was illustrated in the life of Gaius as he lived the gospel in his own life. Unfortunately, there are some who claim to be disciples of Jesus but have never understood this principle of gospel living. Someone well wrote,

You must save another's soul
If you would save your own,
The door of heaven is closed
To him who comes alone.

And therefore, we would add these inspiring words. ***"He who wins souls is wise"*** (Pv 11:30).

Epilogue

When we have no mission outreach to the lost, we have lost our purpose as a church of Christ. We are thus dead to the purpose for which the church exists in a world of sin.

The Ephesian and Sardis churches are the New Testament examples of this fact. The Ephesian disciples started off with a blast in Acts 19. But a little over thirty years later the members had lost their first love. The members of the Sardis church had a great reputation in their city for their good works. But they were dead. Because of where both churches were at the time the message of Revelation was written, they had incurred the negative judgment of Jesus in reference to their function as the universal body of Christ.

We have found that dead churches often do not realize that they are dead. The reason for this is that Satan generates too much religious behavior in the lives of those whom he wants to feel good while in a state of death. When the church goes down, he makes the members think that all is well in a sinking ship. Keep in mind that until Jesus showed up, the Ephesian disciples probably did not realize that they had lost their first love. Churches that have no mission outreach, but are involved in a great number of good works, usually do not realize that Satan has sent them off course. This seems to have been the situation with the Sardis Christians who felt good about themselves, but they were dead to the function for which Christ died.

- **Love lost:**

Notice the truth of this point in reference to what Jesus said to the Ephesian disciples over three decades after their beginning in Acts 19: *"I know your works and your labor and your patience, and how you cannot bear those who are evil"* (Rv 2:2). The complements continued in order to notify them that their "church" activity and involvement was by the time Revelation was written, was only self-deception. They had digressed into systematic religion from which they needed to repent: *"You have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary"* (Rv 2:3). That was their past. Their present was not so.

If we stopped here we might conclude that these disciples throughout the city of Ephesus were doing quite well. They felt secure in the deception of their church involvement. The members were an active group who were busy as bees doing this or that program in order to present a front that they were a church that was on fire for the Lord. But there was something tragically wrong. Something was so wrong that Jesus called on them to repent.

We might assume that the Ephesian disciples had involvement programs that focused on their own needs. There was probably even a committee that sat as judges who *"tested those who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars"* (Rv 2:2). They surely had a benevolent program, a Bible school department, a roster of those who were to be the participants in the Sunday morning performance. They possibly had a disaster relief program where members involved themselves in helping those who suffered from earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. But something was tragically wrong. Their first love was gone.

In their euphoria of activity, Jesus dropped in with a pronouncement that shock them to their inner soul. *"I have this against you,* ***that you have left your first love"*** (Rv 2:4). They had left their purpose for being disciples of the One who came into this world to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). They turned into a religious social club who catered to those needs that were not focused on eternal consequences.

The first love that originally led to their birth as a church and initial rapid growth in their beginning. But now it was gone. Their activity of how they loved one another was going great. But their loving function with one another to the exclusion of loving the lost, led to their need to repent.

- **The walking dead:**

The danger that always faces activity-oriented churches is what Jesus said of the church in Sardis: *"I know your works, that you have a name that you live,*

but you are dead" (Rv 3:1). The disciples in Sardis took pride in their notoriety. They certainly had a good reputation in the community of Sardis. But they were dead to the reason for which the church is to function in a lost world. They too, as the Ephesian Christians, had forgotten the purpose of the body of Christ.

Because the Ephesians had lost their purpose, they were called on to "***remember*** *from where you have* ***fallen****, and* ***repent***" (Ep 2:5). Though others spoke well of the disciples in Sardis, in reference to what they were to be as the church of Christ, they were dead. Churches that have lost their purpose to save the lost have simply forgotten the reason for their existence as the church of God in a world of lost sinners. If we lose our love for lost souls, and thus our purpose as the church, then we are dead!

We have found that when there is a group of disciples who have lost their purpose for being evangelistic disciples for Jesus, they will continue to assemble with one another. In fact, they will often obsess with one another in relational activities to the point that they forsake to establish relationships with the lost, or even consider everyone who believes in Jesus to be saved regardless of their obedience to the gospel. In their absentminded evangelistic outreach, the entire group carries on in a survival mode with exciting assemblies in order to convince themselves that they are still disciples of the One who came to seek and to save those who are lost. A few members may smell the stench of death, but they are so outnumbered that their voices are no longer heard.

When we lose our love for lost souls, and still seek to be religious, we will fall in love with ourselves. We will focus on ourselves in order to convince ourselves that we are all OK. Our Sunday assemblies will thus become experiential events wherein we seek to remind ourselves that we are still the right church. We will refer to our heritage as the authority for our continuation. We will convince ourselves that if we progress through a legal system of ceremonies every Sunday that are opened and closed with a prayer, then we have assured ourselves that we right. As long as we maintain the heritage of our fathers, then certainly, we assume, we cannot be wrong.

A local church that has been in existence for decades is composed of members who have a strong relationship with one another. The members often become protective of these relationships. They assume that the majority of their group of gray-headed members is not dead because they still show up on Sunday.

The church is indeed about relationships with one another. It is about taking care of one another until each one of us step into a grave. However, our obsession with our relationships sometimes turns the church into a clique that inherently is exclusive. In our exclusiveness we feel uncomfortable about sitting down with a lost soul. We even feel uncomfortable about sharing the gospel with our lost neighbors. And when we do, our mission is to convert the lost to our social religious club of relationships is gone.

We must never forget that obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins has priority over all relationships between ourselves. Top priority is that the sinner must establish a covenant relationship with God. Our relationships with one another are only the serendipity of our common obedience to the gospel. The disciples of Christ are to be known for their love of one another (Jn 13:34,35). But our love for one another is validated as true love when we reach out with love to bring the lost into the sheep fold of God.

- **Identity of the lost love:**

The following are very important realities of a dead church that has lost its first love: **When a group of disciples no longer generates a mission environment that naturally produces evangelists who go out with the message of the gospel, then the group has lost its first love**.

If the local church is no longer supporting missions, then the members have become introverted. In such situations, their local budget is usually reserved for the support of works that are only within driving distance. They focus on programs and buildings for themselves. They have lost the flavor of the gospel, and thus they no longer have a gospel environment among the members that naturally produces those who will go forth with the gospel. When we cease living in gratitude of the gospel, we cease sending the gospel to all the world.

We have found that introverted churches become quite narcissistic, that is, they focus on themselves in order to survive the spirit-stifling effects of their own death. Exciting assemblies of dead churches are like flowers at a funeral. Death is all around, but the beauty of the assembly and the smell of the music drowns out the reality of having died to our first love.

When a church starts focusing on making their assemblies a Hollywood production in order to keep the attendees coming back, then the reality of death has already set in. Death has set in because the attendees are focusing on what they can get out of the assembly, that is, what they can get out of one another. On the other hand, those who attend gospel assemblies cannot wait to get out and go into all the world.

When those of the religious world lose sight of the power of the gospel, they usually turn up the volume on the amplifiers. The attendees at the concert show up for themselves. They confuse mesmerized experientialism with gospel evangelism. The mission of the church, therefore, becomes a series of Sunday performances that are inward focused and experiential. Hollywood assemblies are often the result of a church that has lost its mission. The mission of the Sunday performers is often to inspire the attendees to return next Sunday.

Dead disciples become religious, and thus are not drawn together in assembly because of their gratitude for the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. They are drawn together primarily to get something for themselves or a leading spot in the Sunday morning performance. In the assembly, some churches seek to fill a vacuum in the inner soul of the attendees who have lost their aroma for Christ.

This is particularly revealed in those religious assemblies on Sunday where the attendees feel no need to celebrate the gospel through the Lord's Supper. There are those churches that have digressed to a legal celebration of the Supper. However, we are certain that the Lord respects even a legal communion with Him on a simple legal basis, rather than ignore the gospel of Jesus until "Easter Sunday." Those religious groups who have only "Easter Sundays" wherein the Supper is observed have forgotten the purpose for the assembly of the blood-bought saints. Satan has changed their focus for assembly from Jesus to themselves. They calibrate themselves, but have forgotten to celebrate through the Supper the reason why we come together. When Jesus said of the Supper, *"This do in remembrance of **M**e"* (Lk 22:19), they have changed the "**M**e" (Jesus) to "**m**e" (myself and I).

The reader might think that we are somewhat obsessed with the digression of the dead church into an assembly-oriented religion. But consider something that we recently read in reference to church growth studies in America. A survey was completed that focused on the decline of the "conservative" churches in America. The figures that were given were quite startling. Several church-growth studies have been conducted over the last three decades in America. But recent studies were quite revealing.

The particular writer who introduced us to the most current church-growth statistics informed us that the decline of the conservative church of America was the result of two problems. After calculating the diminishing numbers of both attendance and the number of church assemblies, the problem for the decline was focused on the following: (1) Declining churches that traditionally use no instruments in their assemblies are falling in numbers of both attendees and the number of local assemblies. (2) Declining churches are those who do not incorporate women into their Sunday assemblies.

What is surprising about the two reasons for the decline was that **nothing was mentioned about the decline in the evangelistic outreach of churches**. **The decline was focused on assembly performances and participation, not on missions**. This is the conclusion of church growth religionists who judge the body of Christ by the rules of what happens in the assembly. But is the church about what happens between an opening and closing prayer on Sunday morning?

- **"Connective disconnection":**

If we learn anything from the disciples in Ephesus and Sardis, it is the fact that dead churches—those who have lost their first love—organize to find purpose through their local programs of involvement that are focused on themselves. Or, as we have witnessed in these modern times, the production of Sunday morning experiences appeal to narcissistic attendees who are made to think that they are alive.

Christianity is not defined by assemblies, but by the gospel working in the hearts of those who seek to preach the grace of God to a lost world. It is not the purpose of the gospel to produce an exciting assembly, but to celebrate the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Satan would have us become concerned about theatrical performances on Sunday morning that appeal to ourselves, and thus distract us from the lost souls of men who are destined to hell. Instead of opportunities to come together for reproving, rebuking and exhortation *"with all longsuffering and teaching"* (2 Tm 4:2), we come together to ignore our loss of love for the lost by celebrating ourselves. When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell?

We see a worldwide rise of connective disconnection among those of this generation of the world. The rise of the celebration assembly that focuses exclusively on the narcissistic individual is evidence of this disconnectivity. In fact, the self-centered celebration of the Sunday assembly among churches may be the last effort of many churches to call their members together in assembly. Bringing this generation and the next generations together in assembly is a problem that will face the church of the future.

We live in an Internet world of "connective disconnectivity." Social online networks as Facebook, Whatsapp and whatever connect people with one another outside any personal encounter in a face-to-face

relationship. There is thus little need for a personal face-to-face relationship when our smartphones will satisfy our desire to have "electronic friends." In these days electronic connections have replaced personal connections. If we discover that one of our "electronic friends" disagrees with us on a particular point, we can simply "unfriend" the friend.

In the area of "Christianity," add to this the opportunity of individuals online to access video preachers from around the world who preach every sort of feel-good doctrine that is sterile of the gospel. Sermons that make us psychologically feel good in a harsh world have replaced expository lessons of the word of God in an assembly. The most downloaded sermons from the Internet are those that are presented by dynamic speakers who know little or nothing about "preaching the word," but a great deal in how to tickle ears in order to encourage the listener to download the next message (See 2 Tm 4:1,2).

The ease by which a preached lesson can be accessed through the Internet is quite phenomenal. Therefore, if someone concludes in their personal disconnectivity with others that they can access all the "spiritual" information that they need by streaming some "psychology preacher" on the other side of the world, then why would one take the initiative or trouble themselves with going to some "church assembly"? Why would one take the risk of showing up at an assembly where he or she might hear something that is negative from a preacher of the word of God? Why would an "Internet attendee" listen to a speaker with whom he or she may disagree on a particular point, but is not able to immediately post a negative "comment" on the speaker's timeline?

Our disconnection with one another has often evolved to the point that if an assembly does not incorporate the participation of as many as possible of those who attend, or offer the most exciting and dynamic speaker that is surrounded by a "worshipful experience," then it is not worth attending. If the "smartphone generation" would attend, they will simply gravitate to an assembly that offers the most fulfilling experience that they desire from an assembly event. If no such assembly can be found, then the Facebook generation would just as well stay at home and download a positive speech that is sterile of the word of God.

- **Search for Jesus, not assemblies:**

If one feels fulfilled in being the center of attention on his or her Facebook site, Youtube broadcast, or Podcast, then there is no longer any driving force to seek out a personal face-to-face relationship with someone at an assembly of peers.

If you doubt this, then the next time you encounter several young people together, notice how many of them are focusing on what is transpiring on their cellphones. Ask these slaves to their smartphones how often they check the number of "likes" or "views" of something that they have just posted. Even worse, if they come to an assembly, notice how many will not turn off their cellphones just in case some "important" message comes their way. We were even in a prayer group where one attendee refused to turn off his cellphone.

It is difficult to assemble narcissists together in an assembly that does not appeal to the narcissistic obsessions of each individual. It was in times of the past that the "pastor" wanted to be the center of attention when the saints came together. It is now, and will be in the future, that all the attendees, if they show up, will want to be the center of attention of the assembly.

At this time in history, the celebration assembly is often focused on those who have come "to get something out of the assembly." And if the attendees do not get what they want out of the assembly, they are on their way to the next assembly. They will go from one assembly to another until they get what they want. But in all their search, they have forgotten that they, as a part of any gathering of the saints, must be as Jesus. And Jesus came to give, not to get. It is the nature of any assembly of gospel-obedient slaves of Jesus to give. They give their voices in singing. They give their gratitude in the Supper. They give their ears to the teaching of the word of God. They give their money as their time in thanksgiving for all that God has given to them. If all this is reversed to receiving, then a narcissistic religion has been born.

We continually need a reality check on these matters. If we wake up and find ourselves to have lost our first love, or smell the stench of dead in the air, then it is time to realize that we have lost our way and need to repent. Dead churches that present themselves to be alive send forth no campaigners to mission areas. Dead churches support no mission efforts. Dead churches produce no evangelists who will go forth with the gospel. Therefore, if we are neither sending nor being sent, then we have lost our first love. We are dead to the purpose for which the Son of God was incarnate into the flesh of man for our salvation.

Dead churches usually have no idea that they are dead, simply because they present the ruse that they are alive. Death becomes so gradual in our excitement that it is not detected. The church in Sardis did not know that they were dead until Jesus showed up and wrote

their name in the obituary of Revelation. The church in Ephesus did not know that they had lost their first love until the One who came to seek and save the lost pronounced that their first love was gone.

Once we realize that our love for the lost is lost, we lose our drive to go into all the world and preach the gospel to those who are lost. If we surround ourselves with those who have likewise lost their purpose, then King Jesus offers only one recourse: REPENT! Resurrection is the only answer for death!

MY FRIEND

My friend, I stand in the judgment now,
And feel that you're to blame somehow.
On earth, I walked with you day by day,
And never did you point the way.

You knew the Lord in truth and glory,
But never did you tell me the story.
My knowledge then was very dim,
You could have led the way to Him.

Though we lived together on the earth,
You never told me of the second birth,
And now I stand here, condemned,
Because you failed to mention Him.

You taught me many things, that's true;
I called you "friend" and trusted you,
But now I learn, when it's too late —
You could have saved me from this fate.

We walked and talked by dawn and night,
And yet, you showed me not His light.
You let me live and love and die,
You knew I'd never live on high.

Yes, I called you "friend" in life,
And trusted you through joy and strife,
And yet on coming to the end —
I cannot call you now "my friend."

(unknown author)

Book 55

Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ

Have you ever wondered why the document of Acts is connected with the gospel record of Luke? Both documents were written by the same writer and directed to the same person. They were written by Luke and directed to Theophilus. We do not know exactly who Theophilus was. However, since his name had the word "god" in it, we could rightly assume that he was some important person. This is assumed because parents of lower classes did not give such names to their children.

The nature of both Luke and Acts are apologetic, that is, they are a defense to Theophilus on behalf of Paul who was on trial in Rome at the time Acts concludes. In the document of Luke, Luke records the cause of the body of Christ. In Acts he gives a record of the organic effect that Christ had on the lives of people as members of the body. Luke explains the source from which the body organically functioned in the early years of its existence. Acts, therefore, is a definition of the function of the organic body of Christ.

Theophilus had only these two books in order to understand the Christ, and thus understand how and why members of the body functioned as they did. He did not have the epistles. We would conclude, therefore, that we can understand Jesus and His body if only we had the documents of Luke and Acts.

The epistles were written to deal with dysfunctional beliefs and behavior of the body. Therefore, if we seek to understand the nature and function of the body, we must first look to Acts before we go to the epistles. The epistles reveal specifics, but Acts reveals function. Since there is one Head and one body, then we seek to understand first the function of the one body as it was directed by the one Head from heaven. We thus see Acts as the commentary as to how the early disciples functioned as the organic body. Once we understand the organic function of the body, then we understand why specific instructions were made in the epistles concerning corrections and directions by the Holy Spirit in reference to specific functions of the body.

The epistles were written in order to make course corrections as the body was influenced by the world in which the early members lived in the Roman Empire. We come to this conclusion because the first epistle to be written, possibly Galatians, was not written until after the body had been in existence for about twenty years. There was a great deal of time in the function of the body before there needed to be any corrections in dysfunction.

Because the body functioned for about twenty years before the first "course corrections" were written, we conclude that the epistles were written only when there were elements in the body, that, if left uncorrected, would eventually destroy the body. While the body existed under the "verbal Bibles" of the apostles and prophets, there was no problem. But when the body spread into regions of deep pagan religiosity, it did not have the foundation of the faith of the Jews in Palestine. With the conversion of many Gentiles came also the threat of invading beliefs that would lead to the destruction of the body. And thus, we have the epistles to keep our minds focused on Jesus and His word.

We could view the organic function of the disciples as a movie. The theme of the script was conceived and delivered to the apostles by Jesus (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). The theme produced a script that was recorded for our viewing by Luke in the book of Acts. The epistles are individual scenes as the Holy Spirit sought to direct the disciples into behaving according to the theme of the script. Luke was the film editor in writing Acts as he brought many of the actors together into one functional drama that was played out in the first century. We can thank the Holy Spirit for putting together the final masterpiece of a literary picture of how Jesus watches from heaven as the theme of His script was played out in the lives of His body on earth in its early years. When we understand that we have been baptized into the movie script, then we know that the Producer is watching from heaven, carefully directing our lives through His inspired Scripture in order to bring each member to the final conclusion of the movie. And we promise you, this is a movie that has a very happy ending.

Now before we begin, there is one point that we ask you to remember as you read through this material. Please keep in mind that it is not wrong for a group of Christians to work together as a group. In the planning, and implementation of their plans, individuals have the freedom to work together as an organized group. In their work together, they must always be inclusive of others to join their ministry. In fact, unless we are diligent to recruit others into out work, we will become exclusive. It is this exclusiveness that is not befitting of the universal organism of the body of Christ. It is this sectarian exclusiveness that we are addressing in the discussions of this book. In fact, the entire theme of this book is against the exclusiveness that often arises out of those groups that become large and exclusive. The universal organic body of Christ is the opposite to the function of those who would seek to be exclusive. The universal body functions in a manner that includes all members throughout the world.

Chapter 1

GETTING OUR BEARINGS STRAIGHT

The Holy Spirit metaphorically used the word "body" to refer to the collective of individuals who have put on Christ through obedience to the gospel (See Gl 3:26-29). He metaphorically used the word "members" to refer to those who compose the body (1 Co 12:12; Ep 5:30). A body functions in unison to protect itself as it grows and abides under the leadership of the Head. It is organic in function. For this reason, we use the word "organic" to refer to the function of the body of Christ that is composed of many members who are fitted together in Christ.

The body does not exist apart from its members, for its members are the one body. Therefore, when we speak of the organic function of the body, we are speaking of the function of the members with one another, for the members are connected with one another as parts of the body. The members are *"fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"* (Ep 2:19). They *"are members one of another"* (Ep 4:25). The interaction of the members with one another under the control of the Head, constitutes the organic function of the body of Christ in this world.

When we speak of the function of the body, we must begin with the head. And the head is Jesus (Cl 1:18). Jesus looks down from on high and sees the members of His body (His disciples). The members constitute the existence of His body, and thus, the spiritual incarnation of Himself to the world that He created (Cl 1:16). **We must always see the body through the eyes of Jesus**. There is no other way to correctly understand the nature and function of the body of Christ.

In Colossians 2, Paul wrote, *"But the body is **of Christ**"* (Cl 2:17). In other words, Christ is the origin of the body and spiritual source from which the body continues to exist. In order to understand the nature of the body, it is imperative to understand its origin. That origin is Jesus. We must understand Jesus Christ before we can have any clear understanding of His body.

Paul continued in Colossians 2 to speak of fleshly minds that do not hold *"fast to the head"* (Cl 2:18,19). When one becomes narcissistic (self-oriented), he does not seek the headship of Christ. He feels self-sufficient, and thus, arrogant in his own self-reliance. He has forgotten that from the head, Jesus, *"all the body, **being nourished and held together by the joints and ligaments**, grows with the increase **of God**"* (Cl 2:19). The problem comes when we change the focus of our interest from Christ to ourselves.

We often make the mistake of viewing the body through the behavior of the members. If we do this, we will invariably see a twisted and dysfunctional body. We will assume that the body is distorted because of the feeble abilities of fallible people who make up the body. This is particularly true if we seek to define the one body through the presence of independent groups that are separated from one another, and often, have no connectivity as the one universal body of Christ. Those who view the body from the viewpoint of lumps scattered here and there who are struggling on their own to survive, have a difficult time understanding the universality of the organic function of the body of Christ. They are unfortunately looking from the bottom up.

But if we view the body from the top down, we get a completely different perspective of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we view the body through the eyes of a perfect Head, then we can better understand the imperfections of the members as the body. We better understand the struggles of the Head to correct dysfunctional members. We see the body as one universal body, not a collective of independent groups who have

no dealings with one another. We see the body as a universal collective of members, not as a collective of autonomous bodies who supposedly compose the one body. **When we view the body through the eyes of Jesus, we see only one body**. When we see the people of God through our own eyes, we often see individual groups, instead of individual members who are the one body because they are all connected to the one Vine, Jesus Christ (Jn 15:1-8)

The body of Christ is not a collection of disjointed limbs, but **the universal collective of individual members throughout the world who function under the universal authority of the one Head**. Though imperfect in their behavior as members of the body, they are still connected to the Vine, from whom they receive their spiritual direction and connection as one body.

In the historical document of Acts, Luke reveals the heavenly view of this functioning body as it organically grew out of its early beginnings in Jerusalem in A.D. 30. As the newly born body stumbled out of Jerusalem into all the world, it fell over theological stones, and often, into the crevices of Jewish traditionalism. In its early agony under the guiding hand of the apostles' teaching, the body eventually struggled to her feet and became such a world influence that she actually turned the existing world at that time upside down (At 17:6).

Luke takes us on a panoramic view from heaven of these early years of the struggle. In order to do so, he wrote from a heavenly point of view in order to give Theophilus an understanding that the early disciples were not a political movement. They were the beautiful function of the spiritual incarnation of the Son of God continuing His mission through imperfect members who gave their entire lives to Him. We thus stand back from the document of Acts, stepping out of the confusion that often prevails among members who seek to gather into groups and disconnect from one another. We sit with Luke who wants us to view the organic function of the body from the throne of God in order that we catch a vision of how our Savior sees His body organically functioning, and how the Father sees its perfections through the blood of His Son.

If we view the body from the point of view of the heavenly Head, then we will understand the nature of how Luke inscribed the historical document of Acts. He rarely uses the universal collective definition of the *ekklesia* (church), which Jesus said He would establish (Mt 16:18,19). He focuses on the behavior of the members, "the disciples," as they moved about as functioning members of the body. We thus get the distinct message that when Luke is talking about the organic function of the body, he definitely is not talking about some organic union of independent groups who are seeking to be the one body by working out compromises to "work together." This is far from his definition of the organic body of Christ. Luke focuses on members, not groups. He drives home the function of members who sought in their lives to be the incarnate Jesus in their communities.

The primary word that Luke uses in reference to God's people is the word "disciple." This reference to the early believers is used at least thirty times in Luke, at least thirty times in Acts, and over 280 times in the New Testament. The reason for this is that the word "Christian" is a noun that is used as a collective term to refer to those who are the people of Christ as a whole. They were people who were called after Christ.

But when Luke sought to focus on the function of the organic body, then an action word needed to be used. And this is the word "disciple." One of our reasons for asserting Luke's purpose to define the function of the organic body is his use of this word. The disciples were the members of the body who were going about doing the work of the organic body. They were disciples of Christ, and thus, they behaved as Christ in their communities. They were doing exactly what Jesus commanded. *"Going, therefore, disciple all nations ..."* (Mt 28:19).

Luke never seeks to construct a legal outline to either identify or defend the existence of the disciples as "church." Their very behavior identified them as members of the body (See Jn 13:34,35). They are identified by what they did, for only those who were called by a Higher Power could accomplish what the early disciples did. And this is his argument to Theophilus. There is no other logical answer to the behavior of the early disciples than the fact that they behaved the way they did because they experienced something that was not of this world. This is the apologetic of Acts.

Contrary to so many today who misuse the book of Acts, Luke seeks to identify the incarnate Christ in the lives of His disciples in their early walk with Him. Once Acts is viewed as the spiritually incarnate Christ in the body of His members, then it becomes a beautiful dynamic document for the defense of the disciples of Jesus. Their behavior is evidence that they were "other world" born, and thus, could never have been the result of the ingenious theologies of the wisdom of men. If the document of Acts is twisted to conform to a legal outline to identify a structured and organized institution, then it loses its apologetic power, and subsequently, it becomes a simple outline of "church history" for amateur "theologi-kites" who seek to debate "applied inferences" and "approved examples."

We would challenge our readers to step back from

this masterpiece of literary apologetics and observe the behavior of those about whom it gives witness. If we can only sit beside Jesus in heaven for a moment, and become excited as He witnessed the early beginnings of His body, then we will see something wonderful. It will thrill our hearts.

The body of Christ is organic because of the nature of the members. In one statement of Jesus He defined the nature by which His body would be identified.

> *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).

Love is organic. There is no such thing as an unresponsive or non-expressive love. John added, "*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue,* ***but in deed and in truth***" (1 Jn 3:18). Because the identity of the disciples of Jesus is defined by love, they are defined as an organism of people who are "in love with one another." They so love one another because Jesus so loved them (1 Jn 4:19).

As we study through the New Testament, the foundation of love explains the relational interaction of the function of the members of the body. There is great emphasis in Scripture on the body members being "one another" related. Because they are in love with one another, the members seek to be together wherever and whenever possible. The theological tragedy of modern times is that we have digressed in our understanding of the organic function of the body to be a simple meeting of members on Sunday morning. The identity of the church has been relegated to the performance of certain ceremonies between an opening and closing prayer. We have become content with our ceremonial functions in our assemblies that leave no room for expressions of love during the same "hour of worship." We have forgotten that the organic church of Christ is not defined by meetings for ceremonial performances, but participatory function of the members with one another every day. Participatory love is the identity of the body of Christ. And without participatory expressions of love, assemblies become only hollow meetings of empty religionists who come together for themselves, and not as an encounter of loving people.

Chapter 2

LATE OBSERVERS OF THE FUNCTIONING BODY

One of the most exciting studies of all history is a study of people who firmly believed that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God. In the New Testament we find an inspired historical account of how such people behaved this belief. Particularly in the writings of Doctor Luke, we find this history as dedicated individuals were moved by the grace of God that was revealed on the cross (See 2 Co 4:15). The Holy Spirit moved Luke's hand to inscribe many examples of the early believers in their response to Jesus Christ. It is an exhilarating experience to survey through the book of Acts to discover how these early disciples responded in their time to what they believed. Their faith in Jesus, and the continued teaching of the apostles, kept them pointed in the right direction.

We have discovered over the years that many people in their study of the Spirit's record of the behavior of the early disciples have made a fatal error in understanding the history of the early believers. That fatal error of interpretation leads them to be quite inconsistent in their historical study and learning from the Spirit's historical documents concerning the function of the body of Christ. The error is to reason that everything the early disciples did in their response to the sonship and reign of Christ constitutes a divine command from God, and thus, should be imposed on believers today.

In other words, it is believed that the recorded response of individuals to the grace of God in the first century constitutes commands of God that were to be forever bound on the church. Such a belief is not only contrary to the freedom we have in Christ, but it also leads interpreters to hopeless inconsistences as to what examples of obedience should be obeyed. The practice also leads to judges rising up among the disciples who have taken upon themselves the responsibility to determine which examples are binding and which ones can be loosed.

An example of the behavior by the early disciples in and of itself does not constitute a command of God. If it did, then the example would not be an example. It would be a command. It is quite amusing that some of our greatest theologians among us make this fatal error in understanding what the Spirit wanted recorded simply for historical posterity. The Spirit's purpose in the historical record was to give a history of how the early disciples responded because of their faith in Jesus. If ev-

ery recorded example of their behavior must constitute an example of authority, then we are left with the dilemma of determining which examples are authoritative and which ones are not. History books of the Bible were not meant to be books on which we establish theology. To use as a catechism of doctrine the living examples of those about whom a history is recorded, would certainly lead us into confusion. **The Holy Spirit never meant that the behavior of any person or group of persons in the New Testament should be considered authority in determining doctrinal matters**. Matters of doctrine are made known by imperative command and declarative statements. The response of the individuals to such should not be viewed as the commands themselves.

The irony of the matter is that the same students who are quick to establish examples as commands in the New Testament fail to use the same principle of Bible study when approaching the historical records of the Old Testament. Consistency would demand that if examples of the function of the early disciples in the New Testament constitutes commands of authority from God, then this same principle of interpretation should be used in our understanding and application of the examples for the Jews under the Old Testament. Some of our zealous interpreters seem to be somewhat inconsistent here. They would not think for a moment that any examples of the Old Testament heroes of faith should be added to the Old Testament law. They know well Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees who did such (See Mk 7:1-9). In their zeal to guarantee the keeping of the law by the Jews, for example, the Pharisees added a host of "practiced examples" that were made as authoritative as the law of the Old Testament. They even went to the extreme of setting aside what the law required in order to keep their traditional practices (Mk 7:1-9).

The Pharisees did some of their best work in this area in reference to the keeping of the Sabbath rest. Throughout the centuries, the Sabbath restrictions became the example (traditions) of the fathers, and thus, the examples became law. The examples became binding as law to the point that Jesus condemned their hermeneutics in the words, *"All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition"* (Mk 7:9). He even judged them for missing the spiritual point of the purpose of the whole law. He said, *"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,* ***and have neglected the weightier matters of the law****, judgment, mercy and faith. These you should have done without neglecting the others"* (Mt 23:23).

So when we approach the inspired historical documents of the Bible, we must tread lightly in reference to binding examples, lest we fall victim to the same error as the scribes and Pharisees. Historical statements do not constitute divine commands. They are still historical statements even if they are statements of the history of how the early disciples carried out the commands of God in their own lives. Our focus in obedience is not primarily on the examples of **obedience**, but on the commands themselves.

The examples of behavior of the early organic body only give us options as to how we too can respond to the word of God. And unless we can find a command behind an example, it is still only an example. Even if we discover a command behind an example, the example in an historical document could possibly be only one way the early disciples carried out obedience to the command. There may be other ways and means by which the early disciples responded to the command, which examples are not recorded in the Spirit's historical documents.

Simply because the ways and means of obedience to a command by the early disciples may not be recorded does not validate their examples of obedience to be the only way a particular command of God can be carried out. We must remember that we are under the law of liberty (Js 1:25). We are free from what some may consider sin against law, when we actually have determined that a supposed "law" is only a tradition. We would guard ourselves, therefore, against judging others to be in error when actually they are only walking contrary to our traditions, not the law of God (See Rm 14).

It is a tragedy of biblical interpretation for those who seek to impose on the believers examples in the Spirit's historical documents that were only meant by the Spirit to be records of how the organic body of Jesus functioned to continue the work of Jesus on earth. By so restricting the freedom of the disciples today, they destroy the law of liberty by imposing on the consciences of the disciples those things the Spirit meant only to be examples of how the early disciples functioned as the organic body of Christ. In their Pharisaical zeal to be legally correct in all matters of "law," they, as the Pharisees, are quick to bind the traditions of the fathers (the early disciples) in order that their additions to the law be obeyed. But they have missed the point of what Jesus said in reference to focussing on mercy and faith. They have bound where God never intended to bind.

It is essential to make the preceding comments as an introduction to the subject of this book. As we study through the historical document of Acts concerning how the early disciples functioned in their walk as the organic body of Christ, we must caution ourselves. Simply because the early disciples responded in a certain manner to the will of God, does not mean that their ex-

ample of response constituted the law of God. We are studying history, and history can give us a great deal of information on how we can organically function as the disciples of Jesus today. At least, we can discover where we can walk in freedom under the law of freedom. And by doing such, we can guard ourselves from coming into the bondage of any individual or synod of individuals who would impose on us that which would endanger our freedom in Christ (See Gl 5:1).

Our task is to define the function of the organic body of Christ. We do not seek to go first to the epistles and assemble an outline of "proof texts," and then twist the historical texts of Acts around our outline. We must keep in mind that **Theophilus had in hand only the documents of Luke and Acts**. We thus conclude that the Holy Spirit assumed that we, as Theophilus, could understand the nature of the organic body if we had only these two documents. From these two documents we could reason why the early Christians behaved as they did. Once Theophilus understood the universal function of the organic body, he could then understand the specifics that would later come through the circulation of the epistles that were written to correct dysfunctions in belief and behavior.

We would take the same approach to understand the epistles. Once we understand the function of the organic body in Acts, then we can understand and apply the specifics of the epistles. Historically, we have reversed this order of biblical interpretation, and subsequently, we have come to some questionable conclusions in understanding the document of Acts. We must always keep in mind that the epistles were written at least twenty years after the beginning of the body in A.D. 30. The body functioned for over twenty years before any comprehensive instructions were written on belief and behavior in the epistles. And because the letters were written to specific individuals or groups of disciples in specific cities or regions, then we assume that for many decades after the writing of the New Testament documents most disciples did not have written directions to guide their beliefs and behavior. The early disciples only had access to the letters as the letters were copied and circulated. This process took several years.

Are we puzzled that much of the organic body functioned for such a long time without the instructions of Romans through Revelation? If we are, then maybe we should rethink what we think one should know in order to be a functioning member of the body. It seems that those fundamentals in reference to the gospel, and obedience thereof, and those fundamentals concerning the body, were all that the Ethiopian eunuch needed as he returned to Ethiopia without even a copy of the New Testament, not one letter of which was written at the time (See At 8:40). It may be that the nature of the body is more simple than we think.

Chapter 3

FOUNDATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORGANIC BODY

As in the study of any historical document, we must establish some foundational principles upon which we approach the recorded history of the New Testament. This is particularly true in reference to this study because we are not studying just any history book. We are studying the inspired record of the early church of our Lord. And in studying the Bible on this subject, we must not confuse examples with commands, which examples some would be quick to bind on the consciences of the disciples. Therefore, we must first establish some fundamental teachings and historical principles by which we would seek to understand the function of the disciples in their daily living, and thus define the universal organic nature of the body of Christ.

In our study of early church history, **we must look from the top down, not from the bottom up**. We have discovered that when people speak concerning the church, their tendency is always to look from the bottom up. They view the church from the perspective of imperfect people on earth, instead of through the eyes of Jesus from His throne in heaven. By looking at the body of Christ from the perspective of this world, we often develop a fractured concept of the family of God. We see a denominated people of independent groups, often being in conflict with one another, if not in competition with one another for members in particular regions of their assemblies. Viewing the body of Christ from the viewpoint of a small group of disciples assembling alone under a tree in Africa will invariably give one a warped understanding of the body.

Our understanding of the universal organic body must be that which is portrayed in the book of Acts, from the top down. Though Luke recorded the events that took place in the lives of the early disciples on earth, his point of view was from a heavenly perspective. Our focus, therefore, is first to be on Jesus, and then, we see

His body through Him.

Jesus said, *"**I am the way** ..."* (Jn 14:6). If Jesus is the way, then He is the only way, and thus, our focus must be on Him alone in order to find the way. Jesus again said, *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all men to Me**"* (Jn 12:32). Jesus draws people to Him because they are focused on Him. The church does not exist because people focus on the church, that is, on the people. This is backward thinking. The body exists because people focus on the Head in heaven. If one does not first focus on the body from the perspective of the Head in heaven, then he will have a twisted understanding of the body of Christ on earth. His understanding will be earthly, fractured, and defined after the behavior of imperfect lives.

Novice Christians often have an incomplete understanding of the body. This is revealed in the statement that some say, "The church is full of hypocrites." Such a statement reveals how some people misunderstand the church. But if we have a heavenly view of the church, we would say, "The church is composed of imperfect people who are all struggling to be like their Head in heaven." The church is composed of the imperfect who are struggling to be perfected by their perfect Head.

It is imperative that we focus on Jesus as we come to the New Testament in order to understand the functionality of His body. If we seek to understand the functionality of the body from the earth up, through the points and subpoints of legal outlines of church doctrine and imperfect behavior, then we will not only come to wrong conclusions concerning the body, but we will also have a distorted view of the reign of Jesus. Therefore, we must start in heaven, and then come down to earth to the members of the body. We start with understanding who is on the throne, and then understand those who submit to the King. This was what was prophesied in Daniel 7:13,14, and this is what Peter preached in Acts 2:36.

> *Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

A. One Head:

"Jesus is the head ..." (Cl 1:18). He is the perfect head over all things for the sake of His people (Ep 1:22). He is not the head over all things because of the church. He was the head over all things a week before the church existed. When the Holy Spirit used the metaphor "head" in reference to Jesus being the head of the body, He assumed that we could deduct the correct meaning of the metaphor. Bodies only have **one head**. And so it is with the body of Christ (Ep 4:4-6). If we try to establish a head of the body on earth, then the members will be confused. **Earthly heads always marginalize the headship of Jesus**. If we try to establish individual heads for individual bodies on earth, then people are totally confused. The members think they must first check with their local head of the church on earth (their pastor or pope), before they can believe anything or do anything in reference to the Head in heaven. As we study through the historical document of Acts, it is very important that we understand the concept of the one universal headship of Jesus over the body. The body simply cannot function if the loyalty of the people is split between the Head in heaven, and individual heads over little Catholic churches on earth.

B. One body:

Since there is only one Head, **then there is only one body**. And since there is only one body, **then that one body must be universal, not parceled out into local independent bodies**. It must be one body, not many. It must be one universal body that functions universally. Though there are many members, there is one body. Though there are many local assemblies of the parts (members) of the universal body, this does not detour our thinking to first think locally and earthly before we think heavenly and universally. Remember, we must think from the top down and not from the bottom up.

The universality of the body of Christ is clearly revealed in the inspired letters that were written to the members of this body in the first century. Though the members were in different locations throughout the world, we must determine how they maintained their oneness under the authority of the one head, Jesus Christ, and yet function freely as the universal body.

The universality of the one body is clearly revealed in the plural pronouns "we" and "us" that are commonly used by the inspired writers when they spoke of the body of Christ. Paul wrote from Rome to Ephesus, *"But speaking the truth in love, **we** may grown up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ"* (Ep 4:15). Paul wrote to the Ephesian members while he and other members were in Rome. When the Holy Spirit guided the hands of the early scribes of the New Testament documents, He focused on preserving the unity of the universal body in the bond of peace (Ep 4:3). **Though separated from one another by hundreds of kilometers, the Spirit guided Paul to use the plural pronoun "we" in order to emphasize the universal oneness of the body, regardless of where the members were located in reference to the writer**. Paul was in Rome, but the

Ephesian members were in the city of Ephesus. Nevertheless, it was still "we." And the "we" emphasizes the fact that the body is one and universal regardless of where the members live.

When we study the historical function of the organic body, the oneness of the body is striking. It is so obvious that we wonder why so many have missed the point. This one universal body is the foundation upon which we interpret the historical account of how the early members of the body functioned in their relationships with one another and their task to evangelize the world.

One of the great contexts of Scripture that emphasizes this universal organic function is 2 Corinthians 8. Paul wrote to the members of the body in Achaia concerning what the members of the body had done in the province of Macedonia in reference to the contribution for the saints who were suffering from a famine in Judea (2 Co 8:1-4). In this situation, the disciples in three different areas functioned together as one body. The parts of the body in Achaia had decided to join with the whole body in making a contribution for the parts of the body who were suffering in a famine in Judea (2 Co 8:10). Paul wrote to urge the Achaian parts to complete what they had promised, reminding them of what the Macedonian parts of the body had done (2 Co 8:11). Now notice what he wrote to the members of the one body in Achaia. *"For I do not mean that others* [other parts of the body in other places] *be relieved and you burdened; but* ***by an equality****, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their need* [the need of the parts of the body in Judea], *that their abundance also may be a supply for your need,* ***that there may be equality****"* (2 Co 8:13,14).

Though members of the one universal body resided in Judea, Achaia and Macedonia, they were all parts of the one body. And as parts of the one body, when one part suffered, the whole suffered (1 Co 12:26). When one part was in need, other parts supplied what was lacking in order that *"****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). In reference to famine, some parts of the body had sufficient food, while others did not. It was the responsibility of those parts who had abundant supplies to minister to those parts who lacked. In this way, the whole body spiritually grew up in Christ. This was what Paul defined in 2 Corinthians 8:13,14.

Ephesians 4:15,16 and 2 Corinthians 8:13,14 are verbal pictures of the one universal body caring for itself. The one universal body functions as one body in all matters of spiritual and physical nourishment. When one part of the body needed continued teaching in certain matters, teachers were sent to teach (Gl 2:1,2; 2 Co 8:16-18,23; 12:18). When prayers were needed for the suffering of one part of the body, other parts were asked to pray (Cl 4:3). When one part needed food, other parts sacrificed in order to supply. All this ministry of supply was to accomplish what Paul stated in reference to the one universal body of the first century (Ep 4:16). We are still that one body that is today functioning universally. And the one body is still supplying itself in order to cause growth.

Chapter 4

ORGANIC CONNECTIVITY

Large assembly churches have a tendency to be self-reliant, organized and programmed. Unfortunately, with the self-sufficiency of some large assembly churches they have a tendency to be exclusive. They exclude from their interest other assemblies, if not other members of the body that are not a part of their church. The lack of interests and cooperation between different assemblies is something that is simply inherent within large and well-organized groups.

Now consider being a part of a small group that meets in a house across town. The psyche of the group is entirely different. The small group seeks the fellowship of other Christians. They want to be included in the whole, not left to be ignored and alone. This helps us understand why the early Christians wanted to have all things in common. It helps us understand that no one is to be neglected. It is difficult for those who are cultured to large assembly churches to understand the yearning of those who of necessity must meet in small groups.

One of the most critical principles that is necessary to understand in order to interpret better the historical statements of the organic function of the body in the New Testament is the fact that the early disciples met in small groups in the homes of the members. This point is crucial in order to draw the best conclusion from several brief statements that pop up throughout the historical narratives concerning the function of the organic body. In the historical record, we may be given only a

brief statement of function or behavior of the body in a city. However, it is necessary to understand the house assembly function of the early disciples in order to truly understand what was going on in the background of the organic body.

Another reason to understand the house assembly function of the meeting of the disciples is that we often go to the context of various scriptures, carrying with us our baggage of the institutional, large-assembly oriented culture of the modern-day church. If we do this as biblical interpreters, then we will come up with some shallow views of the organic nature of the church, if not some false conclusions. It is not necessary to be meeting in small groups throughout a city or region in order to understand the organic function of the body. But doing so does help us identify more with the emotional make up of the disciples in the first century.

If any of the early disciples stepped foot into one of our impersonal assemblies today, they would probably feel quite strange. What transpires during some large assemblies today is often far removed from the small assembly context of the early disciples. For this reason, we are often challenged in our efforts to restore the participatory behavior of the early disciples in their assemblies. Though modern-day assembly behavior will often prejudice our understanding of the organic function of the New Testament body of Christ, we must at least give our best efforts to understand Luke's description of the early disciples as they moved about from house to house.

No knowledgeable church historian disagrees with the fact that the early members of the body met in the homes of the members throughout the Roman controlled world. This is an axiomatic truth that needs no proof outside declarative statements in Scripture. If one would feel that such a historical fact is not true, then it is his burden to prove the contrary. Therefore, we will not dwell on the historical fact of house assemblies, but focus on the New Testament record that such was a fact of how the disciples regularly met when they went about their function together as the universal body of members.

For the record, there are enough examples of house assemblies in the New Testament to prove the historical point that this was where the early disciples commonly met.

- *"And daily in the temple, **and in every house**, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"* (At 5:42).
- *"I kept back nothing that was profitable, and teaching you publicly **and from house to house**"* (At 20:20).
- *"Greet the church **that meets in their** **[Priscilla and Aquila's]** **house**"* (Rm 16:5).
- *"Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, **with the church that is in their house**"* (1 Co 16:19).
- *"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nympha and **the church that is in her house**"* (Cl 4:15).
- *"To our sister Apphia, Archippus our fellowsoldier, **and to the church in your house**"* (Pl 2).

The preceding historical statements are a good example of the behavior of the early disciples in reference to their coming together in small groups. If one would take the position that all examples of the early disciples constitutes a command of God, then he might have some problems with the disciples meeting in their homes. Those who are of a legal persuasion often do this, and thus they are saddled with a problem, especially if they are making their argument from the air-condition office of a magnificent purpose-built church building.

We could make such theologians more uncomfortable by stating that if there is a statement of command behind the examples of house assemblies, then the example is binding. We need not quote Hebrews 10:24,25, but the Hebrew writer enjoined on his readers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. If this statement is used to defend the house assemblies of the early disciples as law, then we need to sell the church buildings and start meeting in our homes. If the house assemblies of the early disciples establishes an "authoritative example," then not meeting in houses would be functioning contrary to the word of God. Remember what we said in being careful about using an example to establish a command? But we need not sell our church buildings and start meeting in homes in order to be the organic church. The New Testament places little emphasis on where we assemble.

Nevertheless, the houses of the members in the first century were historically the common place of meeting of the early disciples. However, if meeting in the homes of members was a law to be obeyed, then the Holy Spirit would have revealed specific commands on the matter and the discussion would have been closed.

When the Bible interpreter comes to historical statements that are made in reference to the function of the early organic body in assembly, **it must be clearly understood that the disciples were meeting in the homes of the members throughout the cities that are mentioned in the New Testament**. Unless we understand this, we will have a difficult time understanding fully the organic function of the universal body of Christ. It is for this reason that we question those books that are written on the organic body that come from the pens of

those who are caught in the stalemate of stationary assemblies that are stalled in purpose-built buildings. It is most difficult to write objectively on a matter that one is not first behaving.

It is crucial to understand that when we see the organic body functioning throughout the book of Acts, this function is not defined by either where or how the early disciples assembled. From Luke's record of the organic function of the body, only occasionally does he mention the assemblies of the disciples. His lack of emphasis on the assemblies is almost obvious, since he wanted us to focus on how the early disciples functioned in their communities as individual parts of the body of Christ.

Though Luke places little emphasis on assembly, obsession with assemblies today does obscure our objectivity in reference to this subject. What is unfortunate today is that too many people define the function of the body by what the disciples do on Sunday morning between 10:00 and 12:00. It is doubtful whether one will come to a full understanding the function of the organic body of Christ if his definition of such is based on what transpires between an "opening" and "closing" prayer.

We must be careful about our obsession with assemblies. Luke was not. Our obsession with the assembly of the disciples is so acute that we go so far as to identity ourselves as the true church by what transpires on Sunday morning between an "opening" and "closing" prayer. Some have become so obsessed with the assembly of the modern-day church that they have completely forgotten the mark of identity that Jesus said would signal His disciples, that is, love (Jn 13:34,35).

Love is an organic function of body life, both among the disciples, as well as the disciples' relationship with their neighbors. Rituals of worship have nothing to do with loving one another, for we often sit as mute spectators in pews while someone leads the assembly through the theatrical performances of what we assert to be actualized worship. Some have even moved to concert assemblies by which they determine that their faith is lively and their Christianity active. All such obsessions with assembly are only efforts by some to validate their religiosity without manifesting an organic love of one another outside the assembly.

Organic function is about loving one another, and the New Testament is saturated with passages on our relationship with one another. Organic function is about doing that which is good to all men (Gl 6:10). The New Testament is a book of life-style principles that take place outside assemblies. When the New Testament speaks of an assembly, it is in the context of how we can encourage one another to organically love and do good works outside the assembly (See Hb 10:24, 25).

Since the disciples were organic in their lives outside their assemblies, then we would expect that their organic relationship with one another would be reflected in their assemblies. Since the early assemblies were a reflection of their organic function, then the assemblies were participatory. "Each one" had the opportunity to function in the assembly. But each one must so function as to show respect to others, lest someone think he is more important than the others when the disciples come together in assembly (1 Co 14:36-38).

It was not normal in the early assemblies of the disciples that any one person would function in a dominant or prominent manner. The regular assemblies of the early church were never built around a prominent personality and the ministry of his gift alone. There were no audience-oriented assemblies. If their assemblies were audience oriented, then the organic function of the body could not be reflected in their assemblies.

The entire purpose of context of 1 Corinthians 14 was to bring order to assemblies that were to be participatory, and thus, organically oriented in function. We would conclude, therefore, that members who are not functioning organically in their every day lives, will produce non-organic assemblies when they come together. The fact that some were not functioning organically in their lives reveals why they forsook assemblies that were meant to encourage love and good works. Again, Hebrews 10:24,25 is an organic passage. If one was not functioning organically in his life, then certainly he would not show up at an assembly that would embarrass him concerning the inactivity of his behavior. When love is in action, the serendipity is the coming together of loving people.

Chapter 5

THE ONENESS OF THE SCATTERED

The disciples are not defined exclusively by doctrinal belief, but by belief and behavior. In fact, if we would first apply Jesus' identity of His disciples, then they would first be defined by behavior, that is, a loving behavior (See Jn 13:34,35). The epistles identify the belief of the disciples, but Luke seeks in Acts to identify

the body by its functioning parts of love in action. Acts is thus the "Acts (function) of the body."

If we approach the book of Acts in order to construct a doctrinal outline to identify the church, we will miss the point. Since Acts was written as an historical document on behalf of Paul who was facing a Roman court, Luke wanted Theophilus to conclude that Paul behaved as he did because of what he believed. And it was not Paul alone who behaved in such a manner, but also a whole host of believers who preceded him. The manner by which the body functioned was evidence of its Divine origin.

A. Birth of the body:

In order to understand the organic function of the body, we need to begin our study at the very beginning when the organism of the body was given birth. The first context to study in order to better understand the function of the early body of Christ is Acts 2:40-47. This was the birthday of the body. This historical context becomes the springboard from which we begin to understand the functionality of the members of the body in their relationship with one another and the world in which they lived.

On the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in A.D. 30, it all started. After the gospel of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension was preached by the apostles, Peter called out to the audience, *"Save yourselves from this perverse generation"* (At 2:40). And then birth began. *"Then those who received his word were baptized"* (At 2:41). Multitudes received his word, and thus, about three thousand people gave birth to the body by being born again in baptism (At 2:41). About three thousand were born again of the Spirit and the water in order to save themselves from the perverse generation in which they lived (See Jn 3:3-5; 1 Co 1:12,13).

B. One, yet many assemblies:

Now we wonder where these three thousand born-again people, who were still dripping from the waters of baptism, met the following Sunday. Where did they meet *"in the breaking of bread"* (At 2:42). The answer is obvious. Out of necessity, they had to meet in their homes. And since there were about three thousand of them, **then the meeting of "the body" was split into different places of meeting that first Sunday after Pentecost, and every Sunday thereafter**. This means of assembly never changed for about three hundred years, not until Constantine hijacked the church during his reign as Caesar of Rome in the early fourth century.

The necessity of disciples meeting at different places at the same time **did not** disrupt the unity of the believers. They were still the one body of Christ, though there were hundreds of assemblies in Jerusalem the following Sunday after the Pentecost Sunday. It is important to understand that **the assembly of the organic body does not affect the function of the body**, nor does the assembly of the members at different places at the same time constitute different independent churches. To think so would be thinking illogically concerning what happened the first Sunday after Pentecost, for the baptized believers were meeting in different houses throughout Jerusalem.

One is not determined to be a part of the organism of the body by assembly, but by being added to the body by God upon his or her birth from the waters of baptism (At 2:47). Therefore, when the first person was added to the already existing group of disciples on the day of Pentecost, then we conclude that the body was born and began to function. The body existed apart from any assembly, for assemblies of the body began the following Sunday. **Thus the existence of the body is not identified by any structured or ritualistic assembly**. **It is identified by those who have submitted to the kingdom reign of the Head of the body, and their submission to His kingship by their obedience to the gospel**.

C. Scattered unity:

Knowing that the body existed before its first meeting in different places the following Sunday after its birth, helps us understand better the functionality of the organic body as it is recorded in Acts. The body exists and functions apart from its assemblies, though assemblies are a part of its organic function.

In the beginning, the disciples continued to be taught by the apostles, for the apostles were the only "Bibles" at the time, being the "verbal Bibles" for the body (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). So the apostles continued in the ministry of teaching the disciples (At 2:42). The disciples continued to be in fellowship with one another in their love feasts regardless of the necessity of their meeting for the love feast and Lord's Supper in different houses. The fact that they had to eat the love feast/Supper at different locations at possibly different times did not mean that they were not one body. This was nothing new to these early Jewish disciples. There were no theological debates that all the disciples had to be together in the same place in order to be the one body of Christ, or to celebrate the one body by partaking of the one bread (See 1 Co 10:16,17). If we brought up the argument that all the members had to be in one place in order to cel-

ebrate the oneness of the body with the Supper, then the Jewish believers would think that we were somewhat ignorant of the Old Testament on this matter in reference to the Passover.

Exodus 12 is our commentary on the Jewish thinking on being one, while being scattered everywhere. Exodus 12 is the Lord's directions concerning the eating of the Passover meal. It is necessary to understand this context in order to understand the organic function of the early Jewish disciples in their observance of the love feast/Lord's Supper as the scattered body of Christ in different assemblies.

In His instructions to Israel, the Lord commanded that *"each man will take a lamb for himself, according to the house of his fathers,* ***a lamb for each house****"* (Ex 12:3). If one lamb would provide more food than what was necessary for one family, then *"****let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the souls****"* (Ex 12:4). So two families were brought together to eat the Passover feast in the fellowship of one's home. Now we need to read carefully verse 6. *"And you will keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. And* ***the whole assembly of Israel*** *will kill it in the evening."* Now keep in mind that **the whole assembly of Israel was scattered throughout all the land of Palestine** when they followed these instructions on keeping the Passover. And yet, **they ate the Passover lamb together as one nation in the evening as they all killed together and ate the lamb throughout the land of Palestine**. They were being one, and yet being apart from one another in their own homes.

For those "churchologists" who persist in viewing the function of the organic body from the bottom up, they need to take another look at God's view of Israel from the top down. God viewed His people of twelve separate tribal groups as one nation, which nation celebrated its oneness by observing the Passover as one whole nation at the same time every year while being scattered throughout Palestine. Though they celebrated individually in their homes, **they were still one nation "under God."** God finalized the instructions concerning the Passover feast with the words, *"So this day will be a memorial to you. And you will keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You will keep it as a feast by an ordinance forever"* (Ex 12:14).

Now when we read the concluding instructions of God concerning the Passover feast, think of what the early Jewish disciples were thinking and doing in the context of Acts 2. They certainly continued the concept of the Passover feast, **though it changed in meaning according to the instructions of Jesus** (See Mt 26:26-29). It became a love feast during which the early disciples took the bread and fruit of the vine in order to remember and celebrate. At least we know that the love feast and Supper continued together to the middle and end of the 60s, when both Peter and Jude wrote in reference to the love feast (See 2 Pt 2:12; Jd 12).

Now back to Acts 2. In view of what God intended that Israel remember while being scattered throughout Palestine on their farms, we need to read again Acts 2:44. *"Now all who believed were* ***together*** *and had all things in* ***common****."* Though we might want to say that they were "together in one place of assembly," this **is not** what the texts says or means. **They were together in spirit**, which meaning is qualified by the statement that they "had all things in common." Though separated throughout Jerusalem in their assembly in different homes, **they were together as one organic body through their common needs, desires and mission**. And as we will see later, though they were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, they still had all things in common. They still continued to function as the one organic body of Christ. There was no such thing as "independent" groups who had declared their autonomy from the whole body. Such a behavior would have been unheard of among the early disciples at the time of the birth of the body of Christ.

Though the disciples were separated, and sat on Sunday in different homes throughout early history, did not diminish the fact that they had all things in common and were together in spirit and mission. This is simply the nature of the universal organic body of Christ. In fact, the disciples' coming together in Jerusalem was exemplified by the fact that resident disciples sold possessions and goods so that the visiting believers who were baptized could stay on after Pentecost in order to continually be taught by the "verbal Bibles," the apostles (At 2:45).

The organic function of the body began in Acts 2, and would continue wherever the gospel was preached and obeyed throughout the world. It would never split up into independent groups that would be ruled by chief pastors and popes, or synods of elders. Attempts were made to denominate the disciples, but the teaching of truth on unity in the epistles crushed the theology of would-be "church popes."

D. "In the temple":

The text of Acts 2 states in reference to the historical functionality of the body that the disciples were *"daily with one accord* ***in the temple*** *and breaking bread from house to house"* (At 2:46). Now we would caution ourselves here. The text says that they continued with

one accord "in the temple." This function of the organic body has nothing to do with the assembly of the saints for worship. The text states that they were with "one accord" at a particular location of function. The location is defined as "in the temple." Now what does this mean?

Into the building of the temple structure itself, **only the priests could go**. There were temple guards to keep everyone else out. Do not think for a moment that the early disciples were meeting in the temple building itself for their assembled worship. "In the temple" included the outer courtyard of the temple, which area was considered part of the temple. These were the grounds that surrounded the temple over which there was no roof structure. A stone wall separated the temple proper from the outer courtyard of the temple. Paul defined this wall as the "middle wall of partition (separation)," beyond which no Gentile could go (Ep 2:14). So at the time, if there were any Gentiles among the first 3,000 disciples, then they would have been barred from the assembly if the disciples were meeting inside the temple building for assembled worship.

"In the temple," therefore, does not refer to the assembly of the disciples for worship and fellowship inside the temple building. It does not refer to the temple building itself. The meeting of the disciples for fellowship is in the phrase "breaking bread from house to house" (At 2:46). So what does "one accord in the temple" mean?

Acts 5:42 is the commentary. *"And daily **in the temple** and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching **Jesus as the Christ**."* In this historical statement, "in every house" is added as another location with "in the temple." It is clearly defined in this statement what the disciples were doing with "one accord" in the temple courtyard and from house to house. They were doing just what Jesus did "in the temple." *"I sat daily with you, **teaching in the temple** ..."* (Mt 26:55). After the establishment of the church, the early disciples were daily "teaching and preaching Jesus **as the Christ**" in the temple. The historical statement of Acts 5:42 is a statement of fact concerning what the disciples continued to do after the events of Acts 2:46. They were still doing in the temple what they started from the beginning. They preached Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, that He was the Christ, the Messiah. And to whom is this message preached? **It is preached to unbelievers**. The disciples already believed that Jesus was the Christ. Therefore, "in the temple" in Acts 2:46 and Acts 5:42 **is a statement of location concerning where evangelism was taking place**. They are not statements that refer to church assembly and edification, but to the preaching of the gospel message to the yet unbelieving Jews who came to the temple courtyard.

In Acts 2:46 when it states "breaking bread from house to house," the meaning is on the function of the disciples in their organic interaction with one another. Therefore, when we speak of the function of the organic body, the church, "in the temple" was a place of evangelism. "House to house" refers to the function of the members in their fellowship of breaking of bread (love feast and Lord's Supper). "In the temple" was the evangelistic response of those who met together in order to stir up love and good works over the breaking of bread (See Hb 10:24,25).

If one did not want to be in the temple courtyard preaching and teaching Jesus as the Christ, then certainly he would not want to be stirred up (provoked) unto doing such in the assembly of disciples in someone's home. Now maybe we have a better understanding of Hebrews 10:24,25. It was written specifically to Jewish disciples, possibly to those who lived in Jerusalem a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Hebrew writer wanted to give every chance to the Jews to obey the gospel before God brought down judgment on national Israel by the termination of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. And if Hebrews was written by Paul, then we can understand his emphasis that those to whom he wrote not forsake the assembly wherein they could be stirred up to preach Jesus as the Christ "in the temple."

Take another look at the function of the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem. These Jewish disciples had a unique opportunity and responsibility for world evangelism by preaching Jesus as the Christ to visiting Jews throughout the world who came to Jerusalem for the annual Passover/Pentecost feasts. Now we know why the Ethiopian eunuch was confused about how to understand Isaiah 53, which was a prophecy of the Christ. When he was returning "from the temple," where certainly he had encountered some Christians who were "in the temple" teaching that Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, he was confused. Philip only concluded what the Jerusalem disciples were teaching "in the temple," that is, that Jesus was the fulfillment of all prophecy concerning the Christ. And now, as the radio commentator Paul Harvey regularly stated, "Now you know the rest of the story."

In reference to the eternal mystery of the gospel that not even prophets could understand from their searching of the Scriptures for centuries, this good news was eventually revealed to the apostles on the A.D. 30 Pentecost. This is the message that must be taken to the unbelievers of the world.

Chapter 6

ALL THINGS IN COMMON

The historical setting of the events of Acts 4 give us some idea of the organic function of the disciples throughout the city of Jerusalem. We would correctly assume that these events took place a few years after the inspirational beginnings of A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost. From those early beginnings, the number of disciples continued to multiply considerably. If Acts 5:42 is in any indication of the early evangelistic zeal of those first disciples, then we would assume that what Luke recorded in this statement continued from the very beginning. *"And daily in the temple and in every house,* ***they did not cease*** *teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."*

Acts 5:42 is an evangelistic passage. The temple courtyard was the mission field, and it was there that the disciples continued to preach Jesus as the Christ. Their message was to the unbelievers, not the believers. It is only natural, therefore, that the organic body as a whole functions in preaching Jesus as the Christ in any region where there are parts of the body.

The disciples were persistent in their function to preach the message of the gospel. They were so persistent that the Sadducees and priests became *"disturbed that they* [Peter and John] *taught the people and preached in Jesus and the resurrection from the dead"* (At 4:2). As a result, *"they laid hands on them, and put them in custody"* (At 4:3). But it was too late. *"Many of those who heard the word believed. And the number of the men was about five thousand"* (At 4:4). There were now about 5,000 brothers of the church who lived in the area of Jerusalem. Including the sisters, we could estimate that there were about 10,000 brothers and sisters scattered throughout Jerusalem and the surrounding region.

A. Common function in preaching:

An unfortunate mistake that many church historians make at this point in their studies of early church growth is that they do not calculate where these approximately 10,000 Christians were assembling on Sunday just a few years after the events of Acts 2. Because too many have read into the historical text of the Scriptures their present building-oriented prejudices, some have even assumed that there were church buildings scattered throughout the ancient city of Jerusalem. In these buildings it is assumed that the early disciples were meeting autonomously, and thus, denominated from one another. Some have even asserted that the disciples were meeting in the temple courtyard with the permission of the priests and temple guard, **who in this context arrested the preachers and threw them in jail**. If we have any hope of understanding the organic nature of the early church that is revealed in the New Testament, we must always conclude that in the regions surrounding Jerusalem, as well as in all the early cities of the Roman Empire where the message of the gospel was preached, **the disciples met in small groups in their homes**. It is critical to understand the house fellowship culture of the early disciples in order to understand the organic function of the disciples in every city and region.

Our studies of the organic function of the body in Jerusalem are crucial to understand the same function of the body in all regions surrounding Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and the many cities to which the gospel went. If we can use Luke's description of the organic function of the body in Jerusalem and Judea as a commentary of how the body functioned in every region where the gospel was preached, then we are on our way to understanding the organic body. We study Acts, therefore, in order to develop an accurate commentary on the function of the organic body throughout the world.

We have discovered in studies of church history over the last four decades that those church historians who do not recognize the house assembly function of the early disciples in Jerusalem and Judea, have a difficult time correctly understanding the organic function of the body in other regions where the gospel was preached. Almost without exception, those authors who write books on the organic church usually set their writings in the function of the members of a local independent congregational setting. Instead of viewing the church universally, and thus, from a heavenly point of view, they relagate organic function of the body to programs and committees of a particular local autonomous group. Such is a narrow view of the universal body of Christ. Also, such a view lends itself to producing groups who take pride in their organization, and thus, they as a local "organic" institution set themselves up as the group to be admired and followed by other groups. The result of such congregational pride is that one's organized church is championed above other groups. But when we come to the organic function of the body that Luke portrays in the book of Acts, we see an entirely different picture.

In the context of Acts 4, the disciples of all the city were meeting throughout all Jerusalem and Judea in the homes of the members. The organic body was not composed of many independent groups who were autonomous from one another. No one group in a house set themselves above or apart from the other house assemblies, neither did any group organize to be in competition with any other group. The temple courtyard was the local mission field to preach Jesus as the Christ to those unbelieving Jews, as the Ethiopian eunuch, who traveled to Jerusalem (See At 8:27). Everyone participated in this evangelistic effort as one functioning body.

Since Luke places little emphasis on the Sunday assembly of the disciples, we conclude that his emphasis is on the individual disciples as a whole who were functioning as one body. These disciples never attempted to cluster up into independent groups that were separate from one another, and thus, exclude one another. In fact, Luke places absolutely no emphasis on the identity of the church by ceremonial acts that were performed on Sunday morning. No disciple was ever validated to be such by "faithfulness" to some Sunday morning performance of a ritualized assembly.

B. Common function as the whole:

The two preachers, Peter and John, were leading the way by preaching in the temple courtyard. They were subsequently arrested and put in custody (At 4:3). On the next day, they were brought before Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander. Even many of the family of the high priest were in the court room (At 4:6). And as usual, Peter could not contain himself because of the Spirit, and thus, he preached the gospel to everyone in the court room (At 4:8-12). The result of the trial was that *"they called them* [Peter and John] *in and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus"* (At 4:18). Peter and John basically said, "We can't do that." *"So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way that they might punish them* ***because of the people, for all glorified God for what was done****"* (At 4:21).

Once Peter and John were released, *"they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them"* (At 4:23). So where did they go in order to inform "their companions"? Who were these "companions"? We would assume that these could have been the other apostles, or at least a few who had assembled in a house for special prayers for Peter and John. When the release of the apostles was made known, *"they* [the companions] *lifted up their voices to God* ***with one accord****"* (At 4:24). After their praise of God, *"****the place*** *was shaken where they were assembled together"* (At 4:31). We must keep in mind that Peter and John first went to someone's house where the "companions" were gathered. The whole body was functioning in prayer for Peter and John in many house assemblies, as the whole body functioned as one in contribution and evangelism.

"Now ***the multitude*** [the body] *of those who believed were of one heart and one soul"* (At 4:32). And because they were of one heart and soul, nothing happened among the disciples throughout Jerusalem that was not reported to all the disciples. The disciples functioned as one organic body. They were what some might call extreme in this organic nature. *"****No one said that any of the things that he possessed was his own. But they had all things in common****"* (At 4:32). If this does not teach the organic nature of the body, then there is no other way to explain such. When there was a need among any of the disciples in all of Jerusalem, the local *"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). We can gasp all we want at this, but this is the identity of the organic body in action. Such seems so strange to those who cherish their individualism and ownership of possessions. But there it is in Holy Spirit inspired writing.

Now we must give our present house and land owners some relief on this point. Remember what Jesus said in His prophecy of Matthew 24? Specifically, He said in reference to 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."* The Jewish disciples in Jerusalem knew exactly what He meant. They believed the prophets concerning the consummation of national Israel. They knew that Jerusalem would be leveled, which it was in A.D. 70. If one believed in Jesus, therefore, then it was best to disinvest and get out of town, which thing the early disciples did when they were later scattered out of Jerusalem and Judea (See At 8:4).

The Jerusalem disciples also recognized that God was working in the Diaspora of the Jews. Jews from all the Roman Empire were in Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast of A.D.30 (At 2:5-12). It was an opportunity for world evangelism by preaching to and converting visiting Jews who would return home. The following year during another Passover/Pentecost feast, these disciples would bring others to hear what the apostles were preaching and doing (See Is 2:1-4). After the Passover/Pentecost feast, the resident Jews thus sold houses and lands in order to keep the visiting Jews at

the feet of the apostles for continued teaching (At 2:42). This evangelistic outreach continued for at least fifteen years by the apostles after the Passover/Pentecost feast of A.D. 30.

Chapter 7

THE WHOLE MULTITUDE

Acts 6 has always been one of the events in the history of the disciples that clearly illustrated the early organic function of the body. The event of this chapter took place in Jerusalem a few years after the beginning. What gave rise to the body healing itself on this occasion of a dysfunction arose from a complaint by some parts of the body who were being neglected. As we follow Luke's account of this event, we are given a beautiful picture of how God meant for the body to heal itself on the foundation of its definitive character of love (See Jn 13:34,35).

The word "murmuring" sets the background to what transpires in the text of Acts 6:1-7. This problem may seem odd if one comes from a "local independent church" point of view of the organic body. But it must be understood on the background of what James said in reference to the identity of the functioning body. *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of orphans and widows in their affliction ..."* (Js 1:27).

James, the Lord's brother who wrote the preceding statement, became a prominent leader among the disciples in Jerusalem (See At 15:13; Gl 1:19). Taking care of widows was a function of the whole body, not just one single autonomous assembly. Since this function became dysfunctional in the early beginnings of the church, then there were problems in the whole body life of the ekklesia in Jerusalem. And in the context of the whole body that resided in Jerusalem, there was dysfunction in reference to the widows. This was not a dysfunction of a particular assembly of the body in Jerusalem. It was a dysfunction that should never have happened in the function of the organic body as a whole. The problem, therefore, had to be sorted out before the parts of the body in Jerusalem could function properly. In order to correct the dysfunction, the body worked as a whole in order to heal the cancer of unconcern in reference to some widows.

The existence of the dysfunction reveals that all the disciples worked as one organic body in Jerusalem. If the dysfunction were typical of only one of the house groups in the city, then it would not have affected the entire body. But the fact was that the dysfunction in one part of the body affected the entire body. No one part of the body, no one house group, could ignore the problem by claiming that they were independent from the rest of the groups of the whole body. In fact, the problem possibly developed as a result of some disciples' efforts to be autonomous from the Greek widows. In their practice to be autonomous from their responsibilities to take care of all widows, they became a sect unto themselves.

This one case of dysfunction clearly reveals that the church functioned as one, not as individual groups working together as one. This is not a picture of independent groups working in cooperation in order to solve a dysfunction. It is a picture of the one body functioning as one body in a particular city or region in order to correct a problem among the members of the body.

A. Disciples everywhere in Jerusalem:

The Acts 6 event took place a few years after the initial beginning of the body in Acts 2. *"The number of the disciples was multiplying ..."* (At 6:1). We would assume correctly that the number of disciples in Jerusalem was now in the tens of thousands. They were meeting in homes throughout the city. Because they had all things in common, no one group ever considered declaring their independence from the whole body. No one group had a right to be denominated from any other group, or the responsibilities of every disciple to minister to the whole body. This is brought out in the nature of the problem that developed and the steps that were taken to correct the problem.

What produced the problem was that some groups tried to pull away from others on the basis of race. A certain race of widows was thus being neglected in the daily administration of the food distribution of the whole body because of the withdrawal of some from others. It seems that some sought to overlook parts of the body who were to be included in the whole. Separating any part of the body from the whole was denominating the whole body. And in this situation, the separation led to a dysfunction of the body as a whole. The separation of one group, or groups, from the whole, led to the extreme dysfunction of not carrying out one of the primary functions of the body, that is, taking care of widows. The fact that some would declare their independence from a

certain group of the whole, indicates how far some will go to assert their autonomy from their responsibilities of the body as a whole.

B. The multitude:

In view of what the apostles did in order to correct the problem, we wonder what some, who promote the separation of disciples, would think in reference to the solution of this dysfunction. The apostles *"called the multitude of the disciples"* (At 6:2). Did this "multitude" refer to the disciples of any one particular assembly, or sect of assemblies? If it did, then we might assume that there were autonomous assemblies of "the multitude" of disciples in Jerusalem. But such a conclusion would seem questionable in view of the fact that the problem was generated by some who actually did seek to function independently from the body as a whole. Their desire to function independently was manifested in their willful neglect of certain parts of the body. What does seem to be most evident is that "the multitude of disciples" is a reference to all the members of the body in all of Jerusalem. This call by the apostles certainly demonstrated that all the parts of the body in Jerusalem were one and should function as one, without neglecting any one part of the body.

C. From among you:

Now this is interesting. "The multitude of the disciples" throughout the whole city was instructed to consider "the multitude" as one quorum of people from which to make a choice of men to take care of the business at hand. If we view "the multitude of the disciples" to be divided into autonomous groups, then we might have the situation being set up by the apostles where there would be a "church conference" wherein churches might compete with one another for recognition within the city. If there were independent groups, some might have objected that the seven chosen men could not come from seven autonomous "churches," lest someone's autonomy be violated. Some might have objected that the seven chosen men could not work outside the "authority" that prevailed within their "local church." These particular scenarios all seem quite frivolous in view of what actually transpired in the fellowship of the organic body in Jerusalem as the members functioned to solve a dysfunction.

What we do see is that the organic body at the time became denominational, and thus dysfunctional in reference to the administration to widows. The disciples were not behaving as one body. Because they were not, the dysfunction occurred. In order to correct the problem, everyone was called together by the apostles in order to start again the organic function of the body in reference to caring for all the widows. The apostles called on all the members to again function as one body as it did in the beginning when no one had unfulfilled needs (At 2:44,45).

"Among-you-seven-men" was the solution to the dysfunction. These men were chosen from the multitude of the brethren, not from specific independent groups. The men were chosen because of spiritual qualities, not on the basis of being politically correct in an environment of groups who were making a plan to "work together."

Luke clearly wrote concerning this event from the top down. He wrote to reveal how Jesus worked from heaven through the apostles in order to keep the body focused on what it was to be doing. It is interesting to note that throughout all the proceedings that took place to solve the problem, not one word was ever said about church autonomy.

D. The multitude is pleased:

The result of the apostles' advice concerning the solution to the dysfunction was that *"the saying pleased the whole multitude"* (At 6:5). Everyone was pleased, not only because the apostles gave some good advice, but because there were no power squabbles as to whose supposed autonomy was compromised. Everyone was simply pleased that the body was returned to its proper functionality in reference to the widows. And because the body returned to normality, *"the word of God increased"* (At 6:7).

When the body functions without internal dysfunction, the gospel is preached to the lost. Dysfunction causes souls to be lost because the parts of the body are not functioning harmoniously in their relationships with one another. Luke wanted to remind us of this point by making the statement of verse 7.

When the organic body functions properly, "the number of the disciples" will multiply. When the whole body in Jerusalem functioned as one united body, people were saved. Growth, because of oneness, happened then, and it will happen today in any city where all the disciples of the whole body function with the common purpose of preaching the gospel. But when certain groups of disciples are marginalized for some reason, as the Grecian widows in Jerusalem, then the body becomes dysfunctional in its evangelistic outreach.

When any one group of disciples ignores any other group of disciples, then those who are doing the ignoring have become denominational and dysfunctional. They hinder the growth of the whole body.

Chapter 8

FROM JERUSALEM AND BEYOND

Paul states the principle that causes the body to function organically. *"**And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it**"* (1 Co 12:26). It is love that implements this mutual suffering. Now we need to see this mutual suffering in action in order to identify the organic body. When love goes into action, we start identifying the true body of Christ.

The organic body began to grow out of Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and to *"as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch"* of Syria (At 11:19). In all these regions *"a great number believed and turned to the Lord"* (At 11:21).

This is where the recorded account of Acts 11 becomes quite interesting. Luke recorded in Acts 11:22, *"Then news of these things came to the ears of **the church** that was in Jerusalem."*

Now if we would read into this context our present independent behavior, then this statement of the Holy Spirit would be somewhat confusing. At the time when these events that took place in Antioch, some have estimated that the number of disciples in Jerusalem could have been well over 30,000, since the estimated date of the events in Acts 11 was probably about ten years after the beginning of the church in A.D. 30. We have no reason to doubt this date and these figures. But if the church was this great in members in Jerusalem at the time of the events of Acts 11, then why did the Holy Spirit refer to the church in Jerusalem as "the church," not churches? And when we consider this great number of disciples in Jerusalem, where would they be meeting on Sunday? When we view the church through the eyes of Jesus from heaven, then it is "church," not churches.

If one prejudices his thinking with modern-day traditional independent groups, he will not be able to answer objectively the preceding questions according to Jesus' point of view of His body. But for those who are not prejudiced by a denominated behavior of the church, or the denominational theology of church autonomy, then the answer is easy. **There was only one body in Jerusalem**. There was only one church in Jerusalem **because there was only one church in the world**. The members of that one church were meeting in different places throughout the region of Jerusalem. **The fact that they met at different locations on Sunday did not divide the members from one another**. They were one organic body functioning in a manner that spread even to Antioch.

The disciples in Antioch were also a part of the one universal body with one universal Head. **The necessity of the disciples' meeting in different places does not justify their separation from one another as autonomous groups.**

A. A teacher is sent.

When the news of what was happening in Antioch reached the disciples in Jerusalem, Luke records that *"**they** sent Barnabas off to Antioch"* (At 11:22). Now who is the "they"? It was "the church" in Jerusalem that heard of the body growth in Antioch, and thus, "they" (the body parts in Jerusalem) responded by sending a teacher to Antioch. It was the organic body functioning as one both in Jerusalem and in Antioch. When a part of the organic body heard that there was a need for teaching in another location where members of the universal organic body existed, then the natural thing for the body to do is nurture itself. Is this not the organic body functioning according to what Paul described in Ephesians 4:11,12?

> *And He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and **teachers**, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ**.*

Acts 11 is a beautiful illustration of Ephesians 4:11,12 in action! One of the "teachers" of the body in Jerusalem (Barnabas), was sent by the body to "equip the saints" of the body in Antioch. This is *"**the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies**, according to the effective working of each part ..."* (Ep 4:16).

The parts of the body that were residing in Jerusalem had no choice in reference to helping the parts of the body in Antioch. They subsequently sent Barnabas, the teacher, to Antioch because this was the global nature of the functioning body being "held together."

Some would seek to separate the parts through a spirit of denominational autonomy. But such could not be further from the truth of how the early church functioned as a global organic body seeking to be held together by what every joint supplies. Actually, what took place is a beautiful picture that explains how and why the early church grew so fast, and possibly why we grow so slow today. We struggle to grow as a dysfunctional fellow-

ship because each group tries to do their own thing. We seek to work in our dysfunctional separation from one another. If Satan can continue this "divide and conquer" strategy among God's people, then His people will continue to be handicapped in their evangelization of the world. In our backwardness of working independently of one another, we will never realized the potential of what we can do together as the one body of Christ.

B. Teachers went about.

We are not finished with the text of Acts 11. When Barnabas was overwhelmed with his teaching ministry in Antioch, he went to Tarsus to find another teacher (At 11:25). *"And when he had found him* [Paul], *he brought him to Antioch"* (At 11:26). Then the text says, *"... for a whole year that* ***they assembled with the church*** *and taught many people"* (At 11:26).

Now where they assembled for this seminar of teaching, we do not know. The text does not say that all the disciples assembled at the same time at the same place. (It is unfortunate that some believe that the disciples must all be together at the same place at the same time in order to be considered a church. But such is a fictitious fantasy and has no support in any portion of the Holy Writ.)

What is significant in this statement is that it was "the church," not churches that assembled for the teaching. We would certainly assume that by this time there were more disciples in Antioch than could assemble in one house. At least there were certainly more new Christians than what Barnabas could handle as a single teacher. The disciples met in many houses throughout the city. However, the Holy Spirit still said that they were the one church in the city. There were not many churches, but only one. How Paul and Barnabas taught the one body in Antioch would probably be explained by how his ministry of teaching was accomplished in Ephesus years later. Luke later wrote what Paul said concerning His teaching ministry in Ephesus, *"...how I* [Paul] *kept nothing back that was profitable, and teaching you publicly* ***and from house to house****"* (At 20:20).

C. Many teachers are sent.

This is still not the end of the Antioch story in Acts 11. The function of the organic body was not a onetime happening with the sending and teaching of Barnabas. The text continues to read, *"Now at this time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch"* (At 11:27). Here again the function of Ephesians 4:11,12 is explained. The organic body continued to function as one in the regions around Jerusalem and Antioch. Teachers came to the students, not students to the teachers. The members of the body who were teachers ministered to all the body anywhere. The number of disciples had grown far beyond the ability of everyone to assemble in one location. Therefore, many prophets had to come to Antioch in order to move from house to house among the disciples.

D. The body ministers to itself.

To illustrate how the body functions as one, look closely at what happened on the occasion of a famine. Agabus prophesied that a great famine would come, which famine did come in the days of Claudius Caesar (At 11:28). *"Then* ***the disciples****,* ***everyone*** *according to* ***his*** *ability, determined to send relief to the* ***brethren who dwelt in Judea****"* (At 11:29). Who are these "disciples"? They were at least the disciples in Antioch. They were members of the one body, parts of which were in Antioch. We would assume that these parts of the body were in other places than Jerusalem, for the famine was in Judea. The disciples (parts) in Antioch made a contribution for relief, and then sent it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul to the elders of the parts of the body that were suffering in Judea. Now some have wrongfully assumed that these were the elders of Jerusalem only. But that is not what the text states. It simply states that it was sent to the brethren **in Judea**, and given to the elders of the body. We would correctly assume that it was given to the elders of the brethren in all Judea, Jerusalem being only one city in Judea. Through Luke, the Holy Spirit helps us view the church in Judea from the top down. We now see all the elders of Judea as elders of the church of all Judea, not just the elders of one city, and certainly not the elders of one group of disciples in Judea.

This is the universal organic body functioning as one body. The elders of the body in Judea knew where the relief funds were to be distributed, for they were known by the brethren in all Judea. The obvious means by which to distribute the relief funds was through those who knew where the funds needed to go.

Now we need to go beyond what the Antioch parts of the body did in famine relief to the rest of the parts of the body in the rest of the world. We refer again to what the Macedonian and Achaian disciples did *"concerning the ministry to the saints"* in famine relief for the Judean disciples (2 Co 9:1-5). We must notice carefully how Paul explained this universal function in the context of 2 Corinthians 5. As 1 Corinthians, the second letter to the disciples in Achaia was directed to all the saints in

all Achaia (See 2 Co 1:1; 11:10). Paul wrote to the Achaia brethren, *"... I boast of you to those* [brethren] *of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago"* (2 Co 9:2). Paul's reference is to the organic function of the members, not different assemblies of the members.

Paul was headed to Achaia to collect their promised contributions for the famine victims of Judea. He sent brethren ahead in order that the collection was made before his arrival (2 Co 9:3). He had to do this because the contribution came from disciples throughout the region of Achaia. If the contribution were coming only from those within the city of Corinth, then the collection would not be a problem.

Paul did not want the brethren throughout Achaia making any contributions upon his arrival (1 Co 16:2). He did this *"lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared"* (2 Co 9:4). The point is that he referred to the organic function of the disciples throughout the province of Macedonia, working with the disciples throughout the province of Achaia, on behalf of the disciples throughout the province of Judea. Where is there any mention of autonomous assembly function in the midst of this organic body function? It is simply **not there**. Individual members are autonomous to freely function together as the one body in order to supply what the body needs to cause growth. When every part of the body sacrificially supplies for the whole body, then the body spiritually grows *"for the edifying of itself in love"* (Ep 4:16).

What is so encouraging about standing back and seeing this picture being laid out by the Holy Spirit in Acts 11, and the letters to the Achaians, is to see the organic body functioning as one body. When there was a spiritual famine, teachers were sent where the body was weak. When there was physical weakness, the body came alive and nourished those parts that were in hunger. It was the whole body ministering to the whole body. There were no debates over who was in control. There were no power struggles among preachers, no arguments as to who was the boss, or who was in control of the distribution. When the distribution had to be made, it was given to the greatest slaves of the body, the elders (See Mk 10:35-45).

Can we ever restore this beautiful picture of the body coming from such a splintered practice of autonomous denominationality that we experience today? Is our baggage too much on this point to be discarded? Need we remind ourselves of what Paul wrote? *"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). Christ is one and the individual members of His body are one. There is no need to divide His precious body into pieces by collecting the members under the signpost of a man-invented name. If we do, then we will present to the unbelieving world a picture of hypocrisy. Jesus still says,

> *"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****"* (Jn 17:20,21).

Chapter 9

GO TELL THE BRETHREN

In Acts 12 Peter was in trouble again. On this occasion he was the victim of a political move on the part of Herod. Herod had killed the apostle James, and then *"he proceeded further to take Peter also"* because it pleased the Jews who wanted to stop the preaching of the apostles in Jerusalem (At 12:2,3).

So Herod seized Peter and into prison he went. However, *"the angel of the Lord came to him ... and struck Peter on the side"* (At 12:7). He instructed Peter to put on his clothes and sandals, and follow him out of the prison. When Peter finally realized that he was not experiencing a vision, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (At 12:12).

We have no suggestion as to why Peter went to the house of Mary. It is assumed that Mary's house was the house where Jesus instituted His last supper with the disciples. It is also assumed by historians that this may have been the house in which about 120 disciples were assembled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came upon the apostles in Acts 2. If all our assumptions are correct, then Mary's house was very large, and thus, could accommodate a great number people.

Mary's house was also a well known landmark for the disciples in Jerusalem. Everyone knew where it was, and thus, on this particular occasion there must have been a significant assembly of disciples in the house praying for Peter.

After some confusion, and lack of communication

because of excitement, Peter finally made himself past the outer gate of the house and into the midst of the disciples. Once Peter *"described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison,"* he made a significant statement. *"Go tell these things to James and to* ***the brethren****"* (At 12:17). Then Peter himself *"departed and went to* ***another place****"* (At 12:17).

Now consider the events as they historically explain the function of the organic body. Peter first goes to a house and announces that he has been released from prison. He then tells others to go to other places and announce that he has been released, and thus affirm that their prayers have been answered. He himself goes to another house to do the same. The clear picture is that the disciples were assembled throughout the city in different houses and praying for Peter's release. There was no meeting at one specific location. All the meeting and praying was from house to house as one body of Christ.

The disciples did not function separately or independently from one another. In prayers and concern for Peter, they functioned as one body in reference to their prayers for the release of Peter. They functioned as one body in their announcement that Peter was released. Even these many years after the beginning in A.D. 30, the body was still functioning as one body in the entire city. When prayers were offered and announcements made, it was from house to house, not from one independent church to another. The announcements applied to the whole body.

Chapter 10

SELF-HEALING OF THE BODY

The organic function of the universal body is clearly revealed in the event that is recorded by Luke in Acts 15. The historical setting is that *"certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren, '****Except you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved****'"* (At 15:1). These legalistic brethren were moving about among the members of the body in different regions. They originated out of Judea, but they were going about teaching their legal doctrine of salvation by circumcision to other cities and regions where parts of the body existed. The Acts 15 meeting, therefore, was a discussion forum. It was a meeting to reveal the error of the circumcision teaching, and a time the Jewish brethren reassured the Gentile brethren that they need not submit to circumcision.

It was not a meeting to establish some organizational structure or appoint "popes" that would rule over the disciples. Such meetings are senseless simply because there is only one Head who has all authority. And this Head is sufficient to lead by His word all the members of the body throughout the world. Only those religionists who do not submit to the "all authority" that proceeds from Jesus through His word alone, must organize under networks of authorities in order to maintain their existence.

Meetings that are conducted to appoint individuals who assert authority over the members of the body steal away the authority that Jesus alone has over His body, as well as the initiative that each member must exercise in his or her motivation by grace in the love of God. Such meetings are thus "non-organic." They hinder the function of the members of the organic body as they take away the initiative of the members to work in their communities. They often hinder the freedom that the members have to function as parts of the body. This does not discount the fact that the members should work together, or be organized in their ministry. But the body must be careful about establishing power structures that steal the freedom of members to exercise their gifts to minister to others in the realm of their own freedom (See Gl 5:1).

The church was never established on the foundation of networked authorities, *"for no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Co 3:11). As we survey through the New Testament concerning the organic function of the body, one principle is strikingly clear. **There was never a network of authorities who manipulated the function of the parts of the body**. Any group of churches who would so function today has moved away from the freedom of individual members being connected to the only Vine, Jesus Christ (See Jn 15:1-8). When one allows Jesus to reign in his heart, then he needs no other kings.

Being organized for reporting and connectivity is not organization under authorities. The parts of the body are networked because they want to stay in contact with one another, not in order to show up to guarantee their connectivity to the one Vine. Since the body is organized as multiple members being connected to the same Head, then the parts stay in contact with one another in order to work together.

The Acts 15 meeting was about teaching, not organization. Now it is interesting to note first that in order to counter the practice of the legal Jewish brethren, **the church nowhere resorted to a doctrine of autonomy** to stop these brethren. Neither was a network of authorities established who would determine either the teaching or behavior of the disciples. No teacher who was going about teaching was barred from any assembly by church authorities. On the contrary, the organic body went to work in **dealing with the erroneous teaching**. The disciples did not use some organizational structure to combat the teaching, but dealt with the teaching itself. The fact that the legal brethren could easily move among the body of members is evidence that there was no such thing as independent churches. Neither were there networked churches who were controlled by a hierarchy of authoritaties who determined what churches were accepted in the network and what teachers were allowed to teach in the churches.

Too often we have encountered those who know their Bibles so little that they become defensive against legal brethren by resorting to a supposed doctrine of separation instead of dealing with the fallacy of the doctrine itself. On the occasion of Acts 15, the leaders of the whole body dealt with the teaching, not by establishing some organizational structure of the church that they presumed the legal brethren would be violating.

So how would we suppose a universal organic body would deal with a false teaching? In order to answer this question, we must follow closely the events that transpired as the situation in Acts 15 developed and came to a climax.

A. Deal with the teaching:

The problem of legal circumcision was first debated locally where the teaching originated. *"Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them ..."* (At 15:2). This debate first took place in Antioch where the circumcision brethren had come to impose circumcision on the Gentile brethren. Now since these circumcision brethren had come from Jerusalem, a decision was made to deal with the problem in Jerusalem. So after the local discussions in Antioch, *"they* [the Antioch brethren] *determined that Paul and Barnabas, and* ***certain others of them****, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this question"* (At 15:2). *"Therefore, being sent on their way* ***by the church*** *... they came to Jerusalem"* (At 15:3,4).

So from the area where the body was affected by the teaching, representatives went to where the problem originated. **It was the organic body sending a cure from the infected parts of the body to where the virus of legal religiosity originated**. It was the body working as one in order to heal itself of this cancer.

B. Identify the origin of the teaching:

Now when the parts of the body from the region of Antioch arrived in Jerusalem, they found that the cancer was brought into the body secretly through Pharisees, whom Luke identified as false brethren (At 15:5). Now the apostles and elders came together and debated the matter right where the legalistic cancer originated (At 15:6,7). Representative parts of the body—Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James—presented arguments that revealed the fallacy of the doctrine of salvation by circumcision. Now notice carefully how the organic body responded:

> *Then it pleased the apostles and elders,* ***with the whole church****, to send chosen men* ***of their own company*** *to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas named Barsabbas, and Silas,* ***leading men among the brethren*** (At 15:22).

The whole body functioned together as one. The parts of the body in Jerusalem and Judea sent parts who were "leading men" to make an announcement of the decision to the parts of the body that were in Antioch. This is the organic body functioning as one body in order to cure itself of a cancerous doctrine.

C. Announce the triumph of freedom:

A letter was written in order to correct the problem. Notice those from whom the letter came: *"And they wrote this letter* ***by them****: '****The apostles and elders and brethren*** *..."* (At 15:23). The letter did not come from a hierarchy of church authorities. **It came from the church, the entire body**. Now notice those to whom the letter was written. *"... greetings to* ***the brethren*** *who are of the Gentiles* ***in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia*** *..."* (At 15:23). Thus the letter came from parts of the body in Judea and was sent to parts of the body in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. This is the universal organic body functioning as one body wherever there were parts of the body whose freedom was being endangered. Again, this is *"the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part ..."* (Ep 4:16). When this happens, growth is caused in the body as the whole body functions universally in a spirit of love among the parts in order that the freedom of all parts is guarded (Ep 4:16).

D. Validated by Christ, not church:

There was an apologetic in the letter that was sent out from Jerusalem. Read carefully: *"Since we have heard that some went out **from us**, to whom we gave no commandment, have troubled you with their words, unsettling your souls"* (At 15:24). The Jewish circumcision brethren who went out sought to validate that they had some authority by affirming that they were sent out by the Jerusalem disciples. When brethren have no biblical authority for their teaching, they try to establish some fictitious authority by claiming that they are "apostles (Gr. "sent out") of the church." When one involves himself in this nonsense, you can know that his motives are questionable. Disciples are validated as such only by Jesus and His word. If one does not base his teaching on the word of Christ, then he is no disciple of Christ. The church is looking for teachers who teach the word of Christ, not for those who teach their personal experiences, or manipulate the members through political maneuvers.

So the Jerusalem parts of the body wanted the parts of the body in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia to know that though the cancer of "circumcision bondage" originated from Judea, the church itself was not the origin of the cancer. There was no "church authority" by which the circumcision brethren could validate their doctrine.

E. Rejoicing in our freedom:

In order to validate the authenticity of the letter that parts of the body were writing to other parts of the body in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, local parts were sent with Barnabas and Paul (At 15:25-27). These two (Justas and Silas) would bear witness to the actions of the body that *"assembled with one mind"* in Jerusalem in order to cure the cancer (At 15:25). So when the delegation arrived in Antioch and read the letter, *"they rejoiced over its encouragement"* (At 15:31). They were free from circumcision.

But it did not stop there. *"And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words"* (At 15:32). Here again is the action of the organic body nourishing itself in the teaching of the word of God. God *"gave some to be ... **prophets*** [teachers] ... ***for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry**, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ep 4:11,12). Judas and Silas did not become prophets (teachers) when they arrived in Antioch. They were prophets of the universal organic body, and thus, wherever they went they carried out their gift from the Holy Spirit to teach the word of God to the people. Wherever they went in the world, wherever there were parts of the body, they assumed their responsibility to exercise their spiritual gift of ministering the word of God to the body.

They did not have to ask permission to exercise their gift. Such would have been rude to the Holy Spirit, since the God gave "some to be prophets" in the universal body (Ep 4:11). Only when men seek to separate unto themselves parts of the body do they feel that their permission must be given to those who minister the word of God. This was the problem with Diotrephes. He had claimed parts of the body over which he exercised autonomous control. Unfortunately, he would give no permission to any evangelists, including the apostle John, to speak to his autonomous group of denominated disciples over which he maintained control (See 3 John 9-11).

Have you ever noticed in the New Testament that apostasy is often identified by different personalities leading away disciples after themselves to form their own independent groups? Paul warned that grievous wolves will *"**draw away** the disciples after themselves"* (At 20:29). Some use appealing words and flattering speech to draw away disciples after themselves (Rm 16:17,18). Some *"creep into houses and **lead captive** gullible women"* (2 Tm 3:6). Some *"**turn away** their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables"* (2 Tm 4:4). We move away from the one organic body when we turn to independent groups that have no dealings with one another. Sectarianism among the people of God is division of the church, for sectarianism is division over favorite issues or personalities that have no reference to the eternal salvation of those who follow such issues.

Chapter 11

"SEE OUR BRETHREN"

In his desire to revisit disciples that resulted from his first mission journey, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return for a visit. Because of the dispute that arose between Paul and Barnabas concerning the matter of John Mark going on this journey, we often overlook Paul's view of the body of members that were scattered throughout the world. Therefore, we need to take another look at the context of Acts 15:36-41 with the view

that the members constituted the body wherever they are in the world.

On this occasion, Paul suggested to Barnabas, *"Let us go again and visit* ***our brethren*** *in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing"* (At 15:36). On the first journey, Paul and Barnabas visited several cities in Asia Minor. They visited Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and possibly many other cities that are not mentioned in Luke's historical account of the journey. In Luke's account, he recorded that *"they had designated elders* ***in every church*** *..."* (At 14:23). Though we live with the unfortunate word "church," where "assembly" should generally be used to translate the word *ekklesia*, the fact is that Luke recorded that at the end of the first journey, Paul and Barnabas went back through the cities where they had baptized a great many people. Luke used the word "*ekklesia*" to refer to the many assemblies of the body of all the members in each city.

When Paul approached Barnabas about returning to the cities on a second trip, he referred to all the disciples in the area as *"****our brethren****."* He did not separate the brethren from one another into different assemblies in each city. Paul made no mention that there were different groups of brethren who were separated from one another in the cities. He did not refer to them to be different "churches." They were "the brethren" in all the cities.

Also add to this the fact that he wanted to see *"how they are doing."* It was not that he wanted to see how each independent church was doing, but how **each brother of the body** was functioning as members of the body of Christ. The pronoun "they" refers to the brethren, not to different independent churches.

When we continue with Luke's narrative, Paul and Barnabas separated, but each went on to a different area that was covered in the first mission trip. Barnabas and Mark went on to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia (At 15:39,40). But when it says that Paul went through Syria and Cilicia, it reads that he was *"strengthening the churches"* (At 15:41). From this statement we would conclude that he focused on the assemblies of the brothers in these regions, for it was in their common assemblies that he could meet with disciples in the area.

Both Paul and Barnabas, with Mark and Silas, were functioning as the universal body by carrying out their ministry of exhortation and teaching. They left Antioch of Syria, and their ministry of teaching with the brethren there. But they went on to other areas where there were other brethren who needed teaching. They were functioning teachers of the universal body, and thus needed no invitations or permission to teach among the brethren throughout Asia Minor. There were disciples in Cyprus, but Barnabas and Mark needed no special letter of invitation, or authorization from some hierarchy of authorities to go and minister to the brethren in Cyprus. As gifted parts of the organic body, they used their gifts to minister unto the body, wherever there were parts of the body that needed their ministry of the word.

Unfortunately, things have changed since those early days of the organic body. If there is a weakness in the body in some places today, the Diotrephetic syndrome has been so established that those who have the gift of teaching the word must seek permission to exercise their gift among the brethren. Some authoritative synods over churches have become so exclusive that teachers find it difficult to move among the brethren with their gift of teaching and exhortation. Unless there is some permission from a "higher authority," the teachers are refused entry. We see this nowhere in the New Testament church. There was no hierarchy of control of the brethren in the first century. But today, men who seek to steal some of the authority of Jesus have established hierarchal synods of authority to which churches must register in order to have "qualified" teachers come their way. If Paul and Barnabas could see what some synods of churches are doing today, they would be quite disheartened.

The apostles of our Lord did not exercise any apostolic authority that is assumed by many in the organized religions we witness in Christendom today. For example, Apollos had the gift of exhortation. With a great knowledge of the Scriptures, and by his own free-will, he traveled to teach others (See At 18:24-28; 19:1). On one occasion Paul requested that he go to Rome (1 Co 16:12). But Apollos did not want to go at the time Paul requested. Therefore, Paul did not exercise any hierarchal authority over Apollos as a Christ-sent apostle. Also consider the fact that Paul did not want to take John Mark on his second mission journey. Barnabas did. If Paul had some "apostolic authority" outside the authority of the word of God that was revealed through him, then Barnabas would have sinned by working against the wishes of Paul. The fact was that Paul had no apostolic authority over either Apollos or Barnabas.

There is an erroneous doctrine that often arises among some evangelists who seek to have authority over separated members of the body. Diotrephes sought to do such with those over whom he maintained control (3 Jn 10). But John said that his works were evil (3 Jn 11). Titus was left by Paul in Crete among some new disciples. He was not left there over the disciples. He was exhorted through letter to set forth those who would function as shepherds according to the inspired record of

Paul's letter to him (Ti 1:5-16). This did not give some special authority to Titus. He was only given the responsibility to make sure that the designation of shepherds take place among the disciples in Crete.

In a similar way Timothy ministered in the region of Ephesus among all the disciples. It was not that he had authority over one "autonomous assembly" of disciples, but was "to preach the word" to all the disciples, regardless of where the disciples showed up on Sunday (2 Tm 4:1-4). His responsibility was to the parts of the body in the area of Ephesus, not to one specific assembly of the parts. Paul's exhortation to him was to preach the word, not to maintain some authority among the disciples over a particular assembly of the disciples. Timothy's authority was only in the word of God that he was to preach. For this reason, Paul reminded him of the Divine origin of that word (See 2 Tm 3:16,17).

Chapter 12

BLUEPRINT FOR STARTING AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH

In our travels throughout the world in the last forty-five years we have encountered thousands of independent churches. Most of these groups affirm their autonomy from one another, and each is led by either a dynamic preacher or by a group of men who are dedicated to leading people to a closer relationship with God. Unfortunately, many of these groups seek to maintain their denominated status as an independent group of disciples who would remain separate from other independent groups. Some of these churches are very active and do a great amount of work in their efforts to organize the membership of their churches. Most of the groups that we have encountered are centered around one individual who is often the one who started the group. This individual maintains a center of reference for the group, and thus, all decision making is focused on his desires. In order to maintain his center of reference status in the group, he often keeps his fellowship of followers separated from other groups.

We need to commend those individuals who have worked laboriously for the Lord. Many preachers have struggled alone in efforts to bring people to God. They have sacrificed self and family to do the best they can with what they have known. Because some of these sincere leaders have been the product of another's dysfunctional system of leadership, they have simply copied the sectarian spirit of their fathers. As a result, they have minimized the possibilities of their work by keeping their labors independent from others who have the same desires in helping people to be closer to God and His word. Though we have been somewhat negative in this book in reference to this sectarian behavior on the part of religious leaders, our negativity must be considered in the context of what power can be released if we would learn to work together as one dynamic body of God. We are reminded of what God pronounced that men could do when they are determined to work together. *"Nothing will be impossible for them that they have imagined to do"* (Gn 11:6). It is for this reason that we are searching again the Holy Spirit's record of the early behavior of the church of Christ.

We have searched throughout the New Testament in order to find a scenario where individuals sought to establish their own independent churches, and subsequently found an ideal blueprint of how one can do this. Since the Holy Spirit inscribed the words of this blueprint, we have no question concerning its effectiveness in accomplishing the desired end of establishing an independent church that is exclusive, not inclusive. In the context of the subject of this book, we thought it necessary to go through this description of how to establish an independent church. We have deemed this necessary since there are so many preachers out there who have done such, some doing such with beliefs and behavior that are contrary to the will of God.

The text of this blueprint is 3 John. The historical setting was that evangelists, including the apostle John himself, were going about from disciple to disciple, from group to group, in order to teach and edify the whole body of Christ. However, in accomplishing this circuit teaching ministry there were some groups who hindered God's plan of church edification and evangelism. These autocratic personalities had established independent groups that followed a typical blueprint for being autonomous. And thus, they felt no need for the coming of either evangelist or apostle to their group. In fact, they hindered those who had the gift of teaching. They were not allowing that either apostle, evangelist or missionary come to their independent groups.

The disciple in this context who maintained an autonomous group of disciples was named Diotrephes. If one would seek to establish a group of disciples as an

independent church, then they should follow the principles that Diotrephes followed in order to establish this independent group. Here are the key points to follow if one desires to establish a group of disciples that is autonomous from all other groups in his area:

A. "Love to be first" (3 Jn 9):

A preacher who wants to start an independent church must love to be first among the disciples. He must see himself as the one around whom all things transpire. If anyone of the group would seek to do anything in the church, then they must have his permission. In this way, his ego is reaffirmed and he is confirmed to be the center of reference of the group.

His love for the position of being first is reaffirmed by keeping people ignorant of the word of God. He does this by preaching little Bible or using the Bible as an idol to which allegiance is given, but not a book to be studied in order to establish one's faith on truth. In this way, if any of the members of "his church" would determine if a teaching is true, then they will first ask him. The members must not be encouraged to study their Bibles for themselves lest they discover that some of his teachings are erroneous. As long as the members must consult him in matters of Bible teaching, then he remains first among the brethren.

We have found that one way in which preachers often intimidate the members into submitting to their direction is that they resort to continually saying, "God told me." This gives the preacher a way to escape his own personal study of the word of God. At the same time, the members are encouraged to believe that he is indeed a man of God, since God has supposedly spoken to him personally.

If the preacher is a leader of an independent experiential group, in his lack of Bible study and knowledge thereof, he will resort to supposed "experiences" and "encounters" with angels or the Holy Spirit in order to solicit the allegiance of the audience. As long as his disciples believe that he has had some personal encounter with the supernatural, then they reaffirm that he is first among them.

Another means by which preachers who love to be first reaffirm their position is to be dynamic from the pulpit. Through their charismatic speaking they are able to bring the people to tears through the power of his persuasive speaking. If he is good, he will bring in an orchestra to chime the emotions of the people in order to produce a theatrical environment wherein the innocent fall victim to his charms. He then proclaims himself to be an apostle or prophet, knowing that the people know so little about the Bible that they have no biblical definition of such ministries. In all this, the charismatic preacher feeds on the attention of the people, and thus, he is firmly established in his love of being first among the people.

B. "Do not receive competition" (3 Jn 9):

If one would keep his position of being first, then he must be suspicious of any other leader, both within and without his autonomous church group. One should allow this suspicions of others to be great enough to reject anyone from coming to his group, even if it would be someone as the apostle John, the apostle of love. Since a good leader of an independent church considers himself first, then he would consider any other leader to be of the same character as himself, that is, one who loves to be first. Therefore, he will not receive other leaders into the fellowship of his group because he seeks to be independent from others. And being independent means that no one else should be allowed to meddle in the affairs of his church. If others were allowed into his body of believers, then his position of being first would be threatened. For this reason, other evangelists must not be allowed in.

C. "Slander the competition" (3 Jn 10):

In order to keep other leaders out of his church, the Diotrephetic leader must convince the church for which he preaches that other leaders are either liberal or false prophets. He thus preaches paranoia about false teachers going about from church to church. Since he assumes his leadership because of loving to be first, and not preaching the Bible, his only recourse is to keep the competition away by convincing his adherents to keep them away. He thus builds suspicion in the hearts and minds of the people concerning any other leaders. He generates false accusations against those he would keep out of his group. Since he uses slander to accomplish this, and not Bible, then he has reaffirmed that in order for one to build a big church, one does not have to know the Bible. Political maneuvers are all that is necessary in order to build and maintain a big church group that is based on a single personality.

D. "Maintain one's independence" (3 Jn 10):

In order to maintain the independence of the group from other groups, all that is needed is a mandate that no one in the group receive those of other groups. Therefore, in promoting the behavior of not receiving others,

one has successfully established himself as the leader of an independent church.

Independent means that one group does not receive another group with open arms. If a group would be independent, therefore, the blueprint is simple at this point. One group of disciples should simply not associate with any other group, lest "sheep be stolen." If the leaders of independent churches do not receive one another, then each can maintain their autonomy and still exist in the same community.

E. "Intimidate the adherents" (3 Jn 9):

In order to establish a truly independent church, the members must be intimidated into asking permission for all that they do. In this case, Diotrephes developed an atmosphere of fear by forbidding any member from receiving any evangelists or brother who was not a member of his church. In doing this, he successfully stopped the organic function of the universal body of Christ. And so, his control was complete.

His group is identified as a true independent church because of the last point in the blueprint to quarantine one group from other groups. When the adherents of one group are intimidated not to fellowship those outside their group, then the full circle of autonomy has been established. The authority of the preacher has been established. This authority is then used successfully to intimidate the adherents to maintain the autonomy of the group at the expense of fellowshipping other groups.

F. "Disfellowship rebels" (3 Jn 10):

Those who would not submit to the autocratic control of Diotrephes are to be cast out. No rebels are allowed. And by rebel, we would mean anyone who rebels against the authoritative control of the Diotrephetic rule of the preacher, or any power structure that is set up within a particular sect. If loyalty is not manifested through submission to the control of the leader, or synod of leaders, then the Diotrephetic leadership will simply cast out the disloyal members. In this way, the rest of the members are intimidated into following the desires of the leader, and thus, the autonomy of the group from other groups is guaranteed.

The preceding is a perfect blueprint for establishing an independent church. If one would follow every point, he would be sure to establish and maintain his church's autonomy from all other churches. Unfortunately when John wrote these words, he identified such behavior on the part of leaders **to be evil** (3 Jn 11). So we would conclude that if one establishes an independent church in this manner, he is doing evil.

Chapter 13

EKKLESIA IN THE EPISTLES

We are burdened with the word "church." It is a word that is so loaded with traditional modern-day baggage that it is difficult to determine a correct understanding of the body of Christ as it is defined in the New Testament. We invariably bring our baggage with the word into the New Testament, and thus, develop distorted concepts of the organic body of Christ. As all words, we define them by the environment in which we live and the experiences we have with people and things. The word "church" is defined in this manner, and thus, present-day religious practices inevitably find their way into the interpretation of various scriptures. We thus come to some twisted understandings of the *ekklesia* (church) as the Holy Spirit defined such in the Scriptures. Therefore, when we seek to define objectively the organic function of the disciples as it is explained by Luke in Acts, and the other writers in the epistles, we come up with a definition that is somewhat different than the understanding and behavior of many modern-day churches. This is an insurmountable problem in biblical interpretation and application. In many situations, what we would define as church according to our present-day behavior would certainly be strange to the early disciples.

Nevertheless, we are stuck with the word "church." We thus go to the Scriptures and seek to go back to the original dictionary in order to develop a biblical definition of the church. It is challenging to redefine the word according to the New Testament, while at the same time, ignore some of our present-day practices and beliefs. But we must make the effort in order to come to a better understanding of the body of Christ, specifically the organic function of the body. Though this may be a near impossible task, we have no option but to submit to biblical definitions.

With the concepts that have been previously stated,

we need to take another look in the epistles wherein the Holy Spirit sought to correct some dysfunctional beliefs and behavior that came into the body life of the early disciples. We must keep in mind, however, that when the Holy Spirit corrects dysfunctions in the body through the epistles, we need to be careful not to develop a concept of the body according to the dysfunctional groups of disciples who created the problems. We would certainly not want to define the function of the body by what was happening in Corinth. It is for this reason that we use the book of Acts to define first the function of the disciples in a particular area, and then, we make our judgments concerning the function of the body as it is defined in the epistles. When we have this approach to understanding the practical function of the ekklesia, we do not come to the conclusion that what the disciples did on Sunday was the primary function of the organic body.

A. *Ekklesia*: assembly, not organization:

The Greek word that was unfortunately translated with the loaded English word "church," simply means an assembly. In Acts 7:38, Steven referred to the assembly (ekklesia - church) of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. Throughout the Sinai law, reference was made to the assembly, which Hebrew word was translated "congregation" in the older translations and "assembly" in the later translations. But the assembly of Israel was a reference to the totality of God's people that was called out of the nations. In the use of the word "assembly" in reference to Israel, more was meant than just gatherings of Israelites.

The concept of the assembly was theologically important to Jewish thinking. Israel was the church (assembly) of God that assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai after the people had been called out of Egypt and baptized (immersed) unto Moses in the Red Sea (1 Co 10:1,2). Israel was called out of Egyptian Captivity, but more important than being called out of captivity, she was called out of the world of nations for the purpose of bringing the Messiah, the Redeemer, into the world. During Jesus' ministry, He used the word *ekklesia* on two occasions. In both occasions, His use of the word is found in the book of Matthew, **which book was specifically written to a Jewish audience**. Therefore, when Matthew recorded Jesus' use of the word, the Jewish audience to whom Jesus was speaking brought into the word their historical definition from the Old Testament.

1. *Ekklesia and testimony:* In Matthew 18:17, Jesus was speaking to Jews who, as He, were living under the Sinai law at the time. Therefore, when a Jewish brother sinned against another Jewish brother, then they were to deal with the matter according to the precepts of the Sinai law (See Dt 17:6; 19:15). If the offending Jewish brother did not listen to the one who approached him about a matter of offense, Jesus said to do what the Sinai law commanded, "*Tell it to the ekklesia* [church]" (Mt 18:17). Jesus was simply repeating what the Sinai law required when one person sinned against another (Dt 19:15). This was not a new law for the ekklesia that would exist after Acts 2. This was something that had been practiced in the ekklesia of Israel for over 1,445 years.

What is important to remember is that what Jesus repeated from the Sinai law was a function of the church of Israel throughout its history. In Deuteronomy 16:15, specific instructions were given concerning the organic function of Israel in their interpersonal relationships with one another. Jesus did not use the word ekklesia in the context of Matthew 18 to refer to an organizational structure, **but to a relational behavior** that was practiced among God's people. It was a relational behavior of Israel from the time of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, to the time of the ministry of Jesus when He made reference to the law. But His use of the word ekklesia (church) in the context of Matthew 18 did not refer specifically to His ekklesia (church) that was to come. In the context of Matthew 16, He spoke of His ekklesia that was to come, which ekklesia would be based on who He was.

2. *Establishment of the ekklesia of Jesus:* Now we go back in Matthew's record to the Jews to when Jesus first used the word ekklesia. Jesus said to Peter, *"And I also say to you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build My church*** [ekklesia] *and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"* (Mt 16:18). In this context, Jesus was using a term with which His Jewish audience was very familiar. The Jews had been the church (ekklesia) of God since the days of the wilderness wanderings 1,445 years before. In the giving of the Sinai law, Moses said to Israel, *"A prophet will the Lord God raise up to you .... This is the one who was in the assembly* [ekklesia] *in the wilderness"* (At 7:38). Jesus was previously with the ekklesia of Israel in the wilderness, and now in the context of Matthew 16:19, He would build His ekklesia that would be based on His sonship. Therefore, when Jesus used the word ekklesia in Matthew 16, Peter and the other Jewish disciples understood exactly what He meant in reference to the ekklesia being God's people. Jesus was going to establish an ekklesia as Israel was established as an ekklesia at the foot of Mount Sinai. Though the disciples did not understand

all the implications of what Jesus said, they certainly understood what He meant in reference to the use of the word ekklesia, for they had their "Jewish dictionary" right there in their minds.

What is also interesting to note in reference to the apostles' understanding of the ekklesia at the time Jesus used the term, was that they completely understood that the ekklesia (assembly, church) was a reference to the people of Israel who were God's people. Though the people were organized by God through Moses, the reference was still to people. The ekklesia was a reference to the people of Israel as a collective group that had only one king, God the Father. So when Jesus said He would establish His ekklesia, they assumed that He would be the king. He would be the king of His people as God the Father was the king of Israel. And this is exactly what Jesus meant in a statement that followed verse 18. In verse 19 Jesus said, *"And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."*

The disciples did not know that Jesus was soon to ascend to heaven in fulfillment of prophecy (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). But in the statement of Matthew 16:19 there is a hint. As God the Father reigned from heaven over Israel, Jesus would reign from heaven over His kingdom, of which the ekklesia would be included. Therefore, the kingdom reign of Jesus would be from heaven at the right hand of God. It would not be a reign "of this world," or on this world. Jesus would thus exercise kingdom reign "from heaven" over all things (Ep 1:20-23) and over the assembly (ekklesia) of His people on earth, just as it was with Israel during the Old Testament era. Only when Israel began to behave earthly and carnally did they reject the kingship of God the Father and call for a king on earth (1 Sm 8:6,7). And so it is with many today. They seek for a King Jesus on earth that they can see. And those who are not satisfied with a King Jesus in heaven as the head of His ekklesia, they establish a head on earth. (If one studies the apostasy of Israel, he will have a historical commentary of the apostasy of religionists in these days.)

And now we bring this definition of ekklesia into its fulfillment in the function of the body that is described by Luke in Acts, and referred to throughout the epistles. The ekklesia of Jesus is universally one ekklesia, and thus, when the epistles were written in order to correct dysfunctions in belief and behavior, the Holy Spirit, as the Old Testament prophets with Israel, worked to guard against apostasy and sin among the people of King Jesus. We thus keep in mind that the word "ekklesia" was not a religious term. It was a common Greek word that was used in Roman society to refer to a common assembly of the citizenship of a city. (See the use of ekklesia in At 13:43; 19:30,32,39,41.)

The assembly (ekklesia) in the Roman cities did not make the citizens who gathered to be citizens of Rome. Those who assembled were first citizens, and then they gathered to settle community matters as an ekklesia. So it is with the ekklesia of Christ. An assembly on Sunday morning does not make the attendees citizens of the kingdom. **They are first citizens, and then they assemble. Those who define the ekklesia by what the ekklesia does during the assembly make a fatal error by using the assembly of the ekklesia as the definition of God's people**. But if there is only assembly, and no organic function, then the people are not a church (ekklesia) of Christ. We sometimes forget that the ekklesia existed before the ekklesia had its first assembly on the first Sunday after the Sunday of her birth on the Pentecost of Acts 2. God added about 3,000 baptized believers to His people before there ever existed an assembly of the believers on the following Sunday (At 2:47).

B. Function of the ekklesia:

Almost without exception, it would be easier to understand the multiple house assembly function of the earthly church if the word ekklesia were more often translated "assembly." As stated in the beginning of this book, one cannot arrive at a complete historical understanding of the organic body unless he assumes that the disciples were meeting in the homes of the members throughout any particular region or city. There were no church buildings. There were no large assemblies in civic or school halls. Because Luke's purpose in Acts was to explain the organic function of the body, we have a better understanding of the function of the ekklesia throughout the book of Acts as we guard ourselves against reading our present-day assembly culture into the text. When the word "church" is used today, everyone wants to focus on locations, assemblies and concerts. But this is not the definition we receive of the church in the book of Acts, nor is this the picture that is painted in the epistles. In the epistles, when assembly is mentioned, it is usually in the context of correction some dysfunction of the ekklesia in reference to the members' relationships.

If one does not understand the house meetings of the disciples in their assemblies, then he will have a very limited understanding of the size of the church after it was introduced in the cities of the Roman Empire. Luke wanted us to understand that in the first city where Jesus was introduced as Lord and Christ, the very first Sunday resulted in about 3,000 being baptized (At 2:41). The ekklesia then grew to 5,000 men, and beyond (At

6:7). He mentioned numbers of disciples. He did not focus on assemblies, but on the growth of the body in members. His point was that we must not think that when Jesus was introduced into a city that the number of disciples remained small. Consider a few examples of this organic growth of the ekklesia in key areas throughout the regions of the Roman Empire. When we understand the nature of the growth of the ekklesia, we in many ways understand the meaning of the ekklesia..

1. *Circulation of Scripture:* At the conclusion of his letter to the disciples in the city of Colosse, Paul wrote, *"And when this letter is read among you, see that it is also read in the church* [assembly] *of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the letter from Ladiocea"* (Cl 4:16). In this one statement we see the function of the organic body of the first century as the members circulated the inspired documents of the New Testament. We also have a glimpse of why the letters were copied. When the Colossian letter was read in all the house assemblies of the disciples in the city of Colosse, according to Paul's command, someone certainly made copies of the letter before they sent it on to the disciples in Laodicea. And likewise, the letter that was sent to Laodicea was certainly copied before it was sent to the disciples in Colosse. This was the whole church functioning as one body in the circulation of inspired Scripture.

When an inspired letter was sent from the hand of Paul, or any of the New Testament writers, it was to be read to all the disciples who lived everywhere. This is brought out in Paul's statement to the Thessalonian disciples. *"**I charge you** by the Lord that this letter be read to **all the brethren**"* (1 Th 5:27). Though the letters were originally written to the disciples in one city, all the disciples in that city were to have access to the letter, as well as the disciples who lived in other cities as Colosse and Laodicea. This was the beginning of the circulation of the New Testament Scriptures.

Because the body functioned organically and universally, we have the New Testament Scriptures in our hands today. We can only imagine what would have happened if some individuals who ruled over independent groups of disciples, and refused to receive others, would refuse to send on the letters. This may have been what happened when John first wrote to the disciples in the area where Gaius lived. John wrote, *"**I wrote to the church**, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us"* (3 Jn 9). What happened to that letter? If the early church was set up as independent and sectarian groups with autocratic leaders as Diotrephes, then it could have been that we would not have any New Testament Scripture today. At least the first letter of John to which he referred in 3 John 9 possibly ended up in some trash bin where Diotrephes lived. This would not have been the first time when a prophet wrote an inscription that was destroyed by the enemies of the truth (See Jr 36:23).

2. *The plurality of the singular ekklesia:* When the word ekklesia is used in the singular, we do not necessarily have to infer that only one assembly of disciples is indicated, which assembly of disciples was meeting at the same time in a particular location on Sunday with other groups in the same city. This assumption is contrary to the historical fact that the disciples were meeting in several houses throughout a particular city that was addressed in a New Testament letter. A few examples will clarify this.

a. The ekklesia (church) in Judea, Galilee and Samaria: In Acts 9:31 Luke used the singular form of the word ekklesia to refer to the whole body of believers who assembled in houses throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. *"Then the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified"* (At 9:31). If we understand that Luke's use of the word ekklesia in this statement refers to the individual members of God's people in these three regions, then there is no difficultly in understanding his use of the term to refer to the whole of the disciples, not to a single assembly of disciples. This is brought out in the last half of the verse. *"And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, **they** were multiplied"* (At 9:31). The plural pronoun "they" finds it antecedent in the word "church" in the first part of verse 31. Therefore, the word "church" is a reference to all the disciples in Judea, Galilee and Samaria, not to the multiple independent assemblies of the disciples. It was the people who were comforted by the Holy Spirit, not the assemblies.

b. The ekklesia in Jerusalem: Consider also Luke's historical statement concerning the disciples who functioned in Jerusalem. He wrote concerning the news of the disciples in Antioch, *"Then news of these things came to the **ears of the church that was in Jerusalem**"* (At 11:22). People have ears. And, there were more than one assembly of "ears" in the entire city of Jerusalem. Therefore, the news of the events in Antioch was delivered to all the disciples in Jerusalem, regardless of where they were on Sunday. The news of the body was spread throughout the members who constituted the one body. The word ekklesia in the context of the news report of Acts 11 referred to the disciples throughout the entire city of Jerusalem.

3. ***All the saints in all the city:*** As previously stated, what many Bible interpreters have failed to understand, or believe, is the dynamic growth of the early church in every city and region where Jesus was announced to be the King of kings and Lord of lords. Somehow, we read into the early growth of the body our stagnant growth that we experience in our own cities today. But this is an unfortunate prejudice in understanding the phenomenal growth in the number of disciples throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke went to the city of Philippi on Paul's second mission trip (At 16). A traveling expatriate salesperson named Lydia and her household first obeyed the gospel (At 16:11-15). A jailor and his household also obeyed the gospel (At 16:25-34). Paul, Timothy and Silas then went on to Thessalonica. Luke stayed behind (See At 17:1). So the early beginnings of the body of Christ in Philippi was composed of a jailer, Lydia, with their households, and Luke who stayed behind to minister to the small group.

From five to six years later we see another picture of the Philippian ekklesia. From prison Paul wrote, *"Paul and Timothy, the bondservants of Jesus Christ, to* ***all the saints*** *in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the* ***overseers*** *and* ***menservants****"* (Ph 1:1). Something had certainly changed from that small group of disciples that was composed of a government employee (the jailor), and a passing expatriate salesperson (Lydia), in whose house the first disciples probably met. At the time the letter of Philippians was written, there were designated leaders among "all the saints."

Now keep in mind that there were no church buildings, schools or civic centers in which the early disciples were allowed to meet. Therefore, in Philippi, "all the saints" in the city had surely far outgrown the ability to meet in the house of Lydia. They were meeting everywhere in as many homes as was necessary.

So how did the overseers service "all the saints" in Philippi? Your guess is as good as ours. But the fact is that they did. And the fact that the Holy Spirit did not define the organic function of the overseers among the disciples says that He expects us to decide how to do such in our case. Paul addressed the overseers of the city, just as he called the overseers of the entire city of Ephesus together when he passed by that way (See At 20:17).

Nowhere in the New Testament do we see a synod group of elders designated over independent sects of disciples that are denominated throughout the cities in which the organic body of Christ was established. The ekklesia is always viewed as the whole of all parts of the body in the city. Shepherds functioned among the parts in order to nurture the whole body of believers. The body far outgrew the ability of the members to meet at the same place at the same time on Sunday, and thus, there were city elders who worked among all the members of the body in the cities. Such promoted the unity of the body, and thus, the body grew in unity. It was not stymied by denominationality.

It has always been correctly stated, "United we stand. Divided we fall." Nothing could be more true in reference to the growth of the organic body of Christ. A dismembered body is dead, or at least incapacitated to the point it can do little to fulfill the mission of Jesus. And such is the case in many places of the world where the growth of the body is stymied because of a lack of cooperation among disciples. Because members disjoint themselves from one another into small isolated groups that have nothing to do with one another, they remain small and dysfunctional until their last breath of life. But when the members remain connected to Christ, they of necessity must remain connected to every member of the body in their region. And when the body is connected, it grows. Is this not what Paul said in the following statement we are not ashamed to repeat?

> *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).

If we work contrary to the above plan, **we will not grow**. When joints cannot supply the whole, then the whole hurts. **The condition upon which the whole body organically grows is when every part is allowed to do its share in supplying its help to the whole**.

When there are many parts of the body within one city, but those parts are huddled up in groups that have nothing to do with one another, **then the body will not grow**. This is exactly what Paul infers in Ephesians 4:15,16. There is something wrong when two elders or members live across the street from one another, but on Sunday morning drive off to two different independent groups that have little or nothing do with one another. How can one ever teach that there is one body when he practices such divisive behavior?

We have always been amused with those writers and preachers who have used the context of Ephesians 4:11-16 to apply to their exclusive sect within a city. They assume that there must be an organization of the parts within their independent group in order for their group

to grow. It is believed that they can have growth on their own, apart from all the other parts of the body in the city. When all the other groups of disciples within a city do the same, then we have this monstrosity of a body and deformed picture of a crippled union of denominated bodies trying to do their own thing apart from one another. This is not what we see in the New Testament. This is not the function of the organic body of Christ that functions universally with all parts supplying with their gifts that which causes growth of the body. It is actually the picture of a backward and dysfunctional body, claiming to be united in Christ.

If one feels that the statement of the Holy Spirit in the preceding quote of Ephesians 4:15,16 refers to the organization of local autonomous and denominated groups of disciples, then he has seriously misinterpreted what the Spirit says in reference to the organic function of the universal body of Christ.

The individual parts (members) of the body must remember that they are joined to Christ. Assembly of the parts is a serendipity of being jointly joined to the same Head. The parts must be cautious about being captivated by a single authority or group of authorities and lords into an exclusive group. Paul warned of this in Galatians 5:1: *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free ...."*

Chapter 14

DEAL WITH LORDS, DON'T ATTACK THE BODY

The history of how an apostasy is carried out can never be used as the authority to answer the teaching of the apostasy itself. History identifies the problem. History is not our source of authority when discussing matters of faith. Our source of authority is the word of God. **That which we use to correct apostasy is the word of God**.

When theologians use history as the authority to counter false doctrine, then they have set themselves up for endless debates over tradition. They have betrayed their lack of emphasis on the authority of the word of God. The Pharisaical Jews went after Jesus because He in so many ways worked against the authority of their heritage. On more than one occasion they argued with Jesus for breaking their imposed Sabbath law traditions by healing people on the Sabbath (See Mt 12:1-8, 9-14). This is usually the mistake theologians make when their "heritage doctrine" is contravened. But "heritage authority" is useless unless it is the heritage of the word of God.

We say this because of an error church historians have often made to argue against the universality of the body of Christ. By using a Catholic interpretation of history, they have formulated arguments for group autonomy that are foreign to the New Testament body of Christ. Now that the doctrine of autonomy has become a part of the heritage of some, they use autonomy as an argument against the universal and organic function of the body of Christ. Such is unfortunate, but does lay the foundation upon which we must again look to the New Testament in order to see how the Holy Spirit directs us to prevent power structures among groups of disciples, and unbiblical Catholic structures of organization in the universal body.

Since there were no earthly hierarchial power structures on earth in the early church, then we wonder why some groups are so organized in their church structures today in order to center their organization around a prominent power figure on the local level.

From our study of Luke's record of the first twenty years of the organic function of the disciples, there was no problem with any one group or one man becoming the center of reference, and thus, the controlling figure among the disciples. There were some local problems in Achaia and in the area where Gaius lived. But autocratic leadership did not affect the global church for over twenty years after Acts 2. However, the Holy Spirit knew that apostasy to power figures was coming, for He gave the disciples numerous warnings about this apostasy. As we study through these warnings, please note how the Holy Spirit prepared the disciples to work against regional and universal hierarchy apostasy. Also note carefully that He never directed the disciples to resort to a supposed doctrine of church autonomy to counter the threat. This teaching is never mentioned in the New Testament.

As Jesus during His personal ministry with the twelve disciples, so we deal with autocratic personalities who would be a problem today. Since it would be individuals who would cause the apostasy to a hierarchial control of the universal body, then Jesus established a mandate upon which all leadership must be established among His ekklesia. If this mandate is broken, then there will be those who will take advantage of the sheep of

God in order to be power figures to establish their own kingdoms.

A. Leaders are slaves.

Mark 10:35-45 (Mt 20:20-28) should always be the guiding principle upon which the leadership of the organic body of Christ rests. In this context, there is one striking principle that must be used to be the guiding principle of how we interpret every passage in the New Testament that deals with leadership among the disciples. Jesus clearly stated His foundation principle of leadership in verses 42 & 43.

> *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.*

How can something that is stated so clearly be completely ignored by leaders who claim authority over the flock, or a group who claims authority over an independent fellowship of disciples?

Autocratic leaders are not wise. **It is an axiomatic truth that the more the leaders exercise authority over the members and lordship over the parts of the body, the less the body grows**. When considering this principle, do not confuse a tidy organization of the parts (members) with growth. The New Testament never speaks of growth as growth in organization and programs. The only time we see a program in the New Testament was when there was a dysfunction in the body. Seven men were chosen by the body in order to correct the dysfunction (See At 6:1-7). But when the dysfunction was corrected, the committee was terminated. God took out Stephen, one of the seven, and Philip and his family went on to Caesarea to do evangelistic work (At 21:8,9). So contrary to some who are eager to organize themselves with committees and programs in order to cause growth, it seems that the first committee that was organized in the organic body was terminated as soon as the dysfunction was corrected.

Programs and organization help parts to connect in ministry, but the organization of the program must never become an authority that steals the lordship of Jesus away from the individual member to respond personally to the grace of God in his or her ministry. We serve Jesus, not programs. Organization can give the individual parts direction, but the individual parts must be moved by the grace of God, not by some authority that is invested in an organization (See 2 Co 4:15).

If any person or group of people assume authority and lordship over the body, then they are contravening what Jesus mandated in Mark 10:42,43. **Jesus simply stated that there will be no lords and authorities among Him disciples**. He seeks to remain the only Lord (Ep 4:4-6). He seeks to maintain all authority (Mt 28:18). Have you ever wondered why Jesus made the following statement to a group of men just before He left them?

> ***All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*** (Mt 28:18).

Maybe men have a problem here. We seek to have people under us. We want to be over and in control. But not among God's people. One might be the boss of his own company, but when he is with the saints, no one is to be intimidated into thinking that he or she might be fired from God's family.

This caution about becoming lords of authority in the organic body began twenty years after the organic body was born in Jerusalem. It continued among some parts of the body until the foundation was laid for what eventually became the Roman Catholic Church. The problem for the development of such a worldwide structured organization was not the result of a flaw in teaching concerning the function of the organic body. The problem was with men who sought to lord over the flock of God. When a group of lords gathered, they eventually appointed one lord for themselves, and then finally referred to him as the pope. But because this apostasy happened in history does not mean that Jesus made a mistake in organizing the organic body. Jesus' organized body was perfect. It was man who was not perfect. And when we put a few Diotrephetic lords among the sheep, freedom is lost, and the body becomes dysfunctional in leadership.

B. Prophecy of coming dysfunctions:

There were some Pharisaical "circumcision brethren" in Jerusalem in the early days of the body. These brethren brought a dysfunctional teaching into the body life of the Palestine disciples that worked against the gospel (See At 15; Gl 1:6-9). The autocratic leadership of Diotrephes brought an evangelism dysfunction into the group or groups where he exercised control (See 3 Jn). The same dysfunction in leadership arose in Achaia when some brought into question the apostleship of Paul (See 1 & 2 Co). So in the context of Acts 20 on his last trip through the regions of Ephesus, Paul issued warnings to the leadership of the church of Ephesus. They should be on the lookout for those among them who

would seek to be lords and authorities over the flock of Jesus, contrary to the mandate of servanthood leadership that Jesus set forth as the behavior of leadership among His sheep (See Mk 10:35-45). In order to leave this mandate in their minds, Paul *"he sent to Ephesus and called the presbyters of the church"* (At 20:17). These were the elders among all the disciples who lived in the region of Ephesus, disciples who were meeting in houses throughout the area. We are not told how the elders functioned as servants among the flock of God. The Holy Spirit simply wanted them to understand that they were there as shephers, not lords of the flock.

Among many things that Paul discussed with them, there was one particular warning concerning what was coming. *"Also from your own selves* ***will men arise****, speaking perverse things,* ***to draw away the disciples after themselves****"* (At 20:30). From this warning, we are told the origin of those who would arise as lords over the body. It would be from among the shepherds themselves. We are told what certain shepherds would do. They would speak perverse things. And we are told why they would speak the perverse things. They would seek to draw away disciples after themselves. Therefore, whenever a leader either speaks or behaves in a manner to draw away disciples after himself, then he is "speaking perverse things."

It must be noted that Paul used the plural "men" in reference to those who would arise in order to establish autonomous groups after themselves. He could have meant that from a collective, individuals would arise. Or, it could be that a group within the elders would arise from among the elders in order to lord over a group of the sheep whom they would separate from the whole as an independent church of followers. Was he speaking of the rise of a group of elders as an authoritative synod among all the elders of Ephesus? When just one elder, or even a group of elders, violate the principle of Mark 10:42,43, they will seek to be lords over the flock, exercising their assumed authority in order to gain control of a portion of the flock, and thus declare their autonomy from the whole body.

Paul's argument to prevent the apostasy of hierarchal control over independent groups of the body was first to give a warning that such was coming. In giving the warning, the disciples could be on guard for anyone among the elders who might manifest autocratic behavior over any group of the universal body. If there came a time when any leader, or group of leaders, functioned in a sectarian manner over any groups of the whole body, then that leader, or group of leaders, was dysfunctional.

The fact that Paul made the prophecy that autocratic leadership would come, that such leadership would draw away disciples, meant that the apostasy would happen. And since it would happen, then what should be the response of those who refuse to be drawn away? Historically, their response was that they carried on as the organic body. Historical records were written about those who drew away disciples after themselves. The Catholic library is full of these records. However, in their quiet life of organic function, the disciples simply carried on quietly in history, refusing to be a part of those who were drawn away into apostasy by lordship leaders and heads of the body on earth.

C. The lordship problem.

What Paul said was coming, Peter warned his fellow elders that they should not involve themselves in, that is, lordship leadership. He exhorted that the shepherds not lead *"under compulsion, but voluntarily according to God ...* ***not as being lords*** *over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock"* (1 Pt 5:2,3). It seems that there were some elders in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, those to whom Peter wrote, who were rising up to be lords over the flock.

When shepherds cease leading organically through the example of a servant, they will seek to lead autocratically through the commands of a lord. When one digresses to lordship, then he has stolen some of the lordship of Jesus and a percentage of His "all" authority. It is then that such a one, or group, must remember that the Chief Shepherd is coming for His sheep. If one has stolen some sheep through lordship leadership, then he will answer to the one Lord who rules over His sheep from heaven.

It is again interesting that when Peter deals with the problem of lords who would rise up through autocratic control, and separate to themselves a group of sheep, he does not seek to prevent the apostasy by teaching a doctrine of supposed autonomy among independent groups of sheep. He deals with the lords, not by referring to some supposed organizational structure of the body. **A supposed doctrine of autonomy is not an argument against those who seek to lead groups away to be autonomous after their own perverse lordship over an independent group of disciples.** Peter's only reference to the organization of the body is simply that there is one Chief Shepherd. And that is enough. One Chief Shepherd with all authority is all the body needs to function organically in all the world.

As Paul dealt with the "men" who would arise to establish autonomous groups after themselves, Peter deals with the "lords" who would seek to lead such groups. Neither Paul nor Peter used "church organiza-

tion" to prevent the problem of a hierarchial organizational structures that would seek to establish lords and authorities among the disciples. They dealt with the individuals who would cause the problem. They dealt with individuals because it was individual members who dysfunctionally led the sheep. Therefore, whenever there is a dysfunction in leadership, the problem is with the function of leading members. It is a problem of people, not doctrine in reference to church organization.

D. The autocratic problem.

The warning about which both Paul and Peter spoke was illustrated by the rise of an autocratic leader among some disciples in the region of Gaius and Demetrius. The problem was an individual who rose up among the disciples because he loved to be first, and subsequently, was seeking to establish an autonomous group under his control. Once he had arisen among the disciples, he took control. His control over the disciples was to the extent that he threatened to kick people out of the fellowship of his group if they did not conform to his dictates (See 3 Jn). Some Diotrephetic lords do not make a public announcement of kicking out their opposition. They simply refrain from associating with John and Gaius.

When the apostle John wrote to correct the problem that faced Gaius and the body, he dealt with the individual who was causing the problem. He did not resort to organizational structures in order to help Gaius deal with the problem of autocratic leadership. When all the members of the body submit to the lordship of King Jesus, there is no need for any organizational authority to be constructed to which the members must conform. When all members submit to the one Lord who is head over all things, then the body is organized to function.

The seriousness of the Diotrephetic situation was that the organic function of the body in evangelism was disrupted by autocratic control. We do not know the location where Gaius lived, or whether Diotrephes had taken control over one group of disciples or several groups in the region where he lived. What we do know is that he disrupted the body function of Gaius and those Diotrephes threatened to excommunicate from the body.

Gaius was functioning well as a body member. He was financially receiving and sending out evangelists (3 Jn 5,6). These evangelists were moving among the churches, preaching the gospel to the unbelieving Gentiles (3 Jn 6). Gaius, as all Christians, was obligated to support these evangelists because they went forth for the name of Jesus (3 Jn 7). The evangelists who went forth did not take contributions from the unbelievers, and thus, to be fellow workers for the truth, these evangelists were to be supported by the senders (3 Jn 8; Rm 10:15). This was God's system of organic function of the body in order to preach the gospel to the world. But Diotrephes stopped this function. He did not receive and support the evangelists himself. He did not stop at this. He also threatened others not to receive them (3 Jn 10). When such people disrupted the organic function of the body to evangelize the world, then they are in serous trouble. And such was Diotrephes, for a Christ-sent apostle was coming his way (See At 5:1-11; 13:8-11).

E. The puffed up problem.

When dealing with problems of dysfunctional leadership in the organic body, our task is to deal with those individuals who are causing the problem. Individuals cause problems of autocratic leadership, and it is individuals with whom the body must deal to correct the dysfunction.

We do not correct autocratic individuals by resorting to some self imposed system of organization among ourselves. Autocratic individuals **are not** contravening church organization. They are stealing from the lordship of the Chief Shepherd. The body functioned just fine in Judea for two decades after its beginning in A.D. 30. From there, the body grew into areas where there were particular problems in reference to leadership. For example, in Corinth, after the first five years of existence of the body, certain individuals became puffed up and took advantage of the innocence of the sheep of God. It was in situations as this that the Holy Spirit moved the hand of men as Paul to write corrections.

The personality problem that set the stage for the arrogant leaders in Corinth who set themselves against Paul, was that they suffered from pride. They were arrogant and puffed up. Paul wrote, "*Now some are arrogant, as though I would not come to you*" (1 Co 4:18). In this situation, a Christ-sent apostle was coming to them with judgment from God. "*But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills. And I will know, not the speech of those who are arrogant,* ***but the power***" (1 Co 4:19). And when it came to power from God, these puffed up leaders had no power. However, they would suffer the power of God through a Christ-sent apostle, for Paul said that he was coming with the rod. "*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 coming with more than a hard sermon. He meant the same as his dealings with Hymanaeus and Alexander, "*whom I* [Paul] *have delivered to Satan so that they might learn*

not to blaspheme" (1 Tm 1:20). People died before a Christ-sent apostle (See At 5:1-11). Others were struck blind (At 13:10,11). In correcting dysfunctions in leadership, Paul went right to the problem. He dealt with the individuals who were causing the problem in Corinth. The New Testament does not beat up on the church for the problem of dysfunctional leaders. Fear is struck in the hearts of those who would infringe on the lordship of Jesus.

Some who have zeal to lead often have difficultly leading with a spirit of servanthood. We have found that this is a common problem with young Christians who seek to be leaders. Diotrephes was possibly an older person, but probably young in the faith. It may have been that the disciples laid hands on him too hastily (See 1 Tm 5:22). Whatever the case, he played a dominant role among the disciples, and thus, was doing that which was evil (3 Jn 11). When individuals dominate the sheep of God as lords, they are wrong. They are doing evil.

It is interesting to note the behavior of two leading men among the disciples in the early days of the body life in Jerusalem. Luke wrote of Barsabbas and Silas, that they were *"leading men among the brethren"* (At 15:22). Though they were leading men among the disciples in Jerusalem, they did not assert their leadership in a dominant and arrogant manner. This was brought out during the meeting of the disciples in Jerusalem that Luke recorded in Acts 15. During the meeting, only Paul, Peter, Barnabas and James spoke. Barsabbas and Silas simply played a submissive role as good servant leaders. They did not crave to be seated in the "chief seats" (See Mt 23:6).

F. The dysfunctional fellowship problem:

Whenever there is a dysfunction in leadership in the fellowship of the organic body that is caused by either erroneous behavior or beliefs that are contrary to fundamental teachings, then those who participate in the dysfunction are in trouble. Peter would know this.

When Peter went to the Gentile church in Antioch of Syria, he functioned well with the Gentile brothers by joining with them in fellowship and food (Gl 2:12). We could understand why he participated in the organic function of the body in the love feasts because he was the first apostle that God led into a Gentile house (At 10,11). But in Antioch, his participation in the organic fellowship of the one body became dysfunctional. It become dysfunctional to the point that Paul stated that *"he stood condemned"* (Gl 2:11). He stood condemned because he allowed visiting Jewish brethren from Jerusalem to intimidate him into behaving dysfunctionally in reference to fellowshipping the Gentile brothers. He *"withdrew and separated himself"* (Gl 2:12).

Whenever brethren withdraw and separate themselves from other faithful brethren, then they stand condemned. Peter's withdrawal and separation was based on an unjustified fear of *"those who were of the circumcision"* (Gl 2:12). The other Jews and Barnabas were also drawn away into this dysfunctional relationship with the Gentile brothers. They thus failed to be *"straightforward about the truth of the gospel"* (Gl 2:14).

We have witnessed that when people are driven by their appreciation for the grace of God, they work more abundantly (See 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). But when they are tied up in complex organizations and programs of men, they often seek to serve the organization rather than the One who revealed the grace. Instead, what does work are grace-driven people who are organized for work. They do not organize according to the Western definition of being "team members." There are no chiefs among Jesus' organic "team." The organic body is the "team." The team leader is Jesus.

No person in the New Testament brings out this point better than Paul. When he was a strict Jew working under the organization of law, he performed well. No one could argue with his performance under law (See Ph 3:1-11). But this all changed when he was freed from the structure of legal religiosity. Legal performance under organization will produce results. But freedom under grace will produce everlasting results. This was Paul's conclusion:

> *But by the grace of God I am what I am. 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).

Grace-driven leaders have a difficult time being lords over the sheep. They understand so well that grace was revealed to them by a humble Servant on the cross (Ph 2:5-11). They understand grace to the point that they feel no desire to stand between the sheep and the Chief Shepherd. Grace-driven leaders seek to serve, not to lord.

Grace-driven leaders understand what Paul wrote in Philippians 2:5: *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus."* The mind of Christ is giving up our comfort zone in order to break into the lives of others with the gospel. This is what the Son of God did for us when He left being in the form of God in order to be made in the likeness of men. This is the true definition of service. When disciples have this mind, then they are looking for people to serve.

Chapter 15

ALL AS ONE IN ROME

The Holy Spirit's letters to the disciples in Rome and Achaia are illustrations of the oneness of the body in any city or region. We are careful about using the word city, for in the Roman times there were no "city limits" that marked whether one was in an urban or rural zoning, as is typical of today. For example, Cenchrea was the harbor city of Corinth (Rm 16:1), but it was about seven kilometers away from the city proper. So when the word "city" is used in the New Testament, one must always include the regions around the primary population centers.

A. One body of many assemblies in Rome:

Paul addressed the letter of Romans *"to all who are beloved of God in Rome"* (Rm 1:7). Now who are these "beloved"? Were they those who were of one assembly in Rome, or were they all the saints in all the region of Rome who were meeting on Sunday in different house assemblies throughout Rome? To answer this question, we go first to chapter 16.

In Romans 16 Paul sends his greetings to many people and groups in the area of Rome, and evidently, the regions around Rome. He begins by sending greetings to Priscilla and Aquila (vs 3). There was an assembly of disciples (church) that was meeting in their house in Rome (vs 5). He then moves on to other individuals and house assemblies in Rome who were not of the house assembly of Priscilla and Aquila. These were those who were of the households of other disciples. *"Greet those who are of Aristobulus' household"* (vs 10). *"Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus"* (vs 11). *"Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and* ***the brethren who are with them****"* (vs 14). So there were other brethren who were fellowshipping in assembly with these five brethren. Paul then moves on to mention other individuals *"and all the saints* ***who are with them****"* (vs 15). In other words, the whole church in the area of Rome was composed of many members of the body who were assembling in several homes of the saints. This multiple-assembly understanding of the church is brought out by Paul in verse 23 in reference to Gaius, with whom he was staying at the time he wrote the letter. *"Gaius my host, and host of* ***the whole church****, greets you."* Did all the saints in the area of Gaius meet in the house of Gaius? Obviously not. The meaning is that he was hospitable to every saint that came his way (See 3 Jn). Every disciple of the whole body was welcome in the house of Gaius if they passed his way.

So when we speak of the whole church in Rome, we are not speaking of independent assemblies, but all the members of the organic body in the area of Rome (Rm 1:7). It is in this context that Paul cautions us about starting our own group to the exclusion of others.

> *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*** (Rm 16:17,18).

In the contexts of Romans 16, it is clear that Paul is specifically teaching against groups that would declare their autonomy from other groups of disciples, which groups would be based on favorite opinions or legal systems of belief and behavior. These groups would be led by those who serve their "own belly." (It may be that in the metaphor "belly" Paul wanted his readers to reflect on what he previously wrote in chapter 14.)

We have found it somewhat amusing that those who accuse others of dividing the church because they do not conform to the traditions of the fathers, quote Romans 16:17,18 with the reverse meaning than what Paul was emphasizing in the context. **Paul was arguing against forming autonomous groups of disciples** that were led by individuals, who with smooth and fair speech, beguiled the hearts of the innocent.

Sometimes our independent thinking is revealed in our terminology and use of the Scriptures. When one is independent in thinking, he will seek to steal away the freedom of the disciples who are free in Christ as members of the body. In the contexts of Romans 16, Paul was warning against being tethered to any specific independent group, lest in being so aligned one would be distanced from other brothers living in the same city. There is more in the commonly heard statement, "place membership," than simply letting the other disciples in town know that you are there.

If there were a statement against groups of disciples declaring their independence from other groups of disciples, it would be Romans 14:7. *"****For none of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself****."* As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are our brother's keeper. If

your brother across the street falls victim to ill fortune, but on Sunday sits in an assembly at a different location than we do, we are still responsible to help this brother. Simply because disciples meet in different places does not give them the right to ignore one another in times of need. We wonder what Paul would have written of the Gentile brethren who were meeting in different places when there was a famine among the Jewish brethren in Judea, but did nothing about giving to the famine victims?

Paul's statement in Romans 14 is in reference to individuals, not groups. In the context of Romans 14, there was a division between individual disciples who associated the eating of meats with idol worship, and those who had long grown out of such associations, knowing that God created all meats to be eaten. So there could have existed among all the disciples of Rome the "Vegetarian Church" and the "Meat Church." In both cases, brethren were thinking about their "own belly." They had forgotten that *"the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ..."* (Rm 14:17).

The "vegetarian" and "meat" groups were causing the divisions over their differences. Particularly, the vegetarians were legally binding where God had not bound. They taught that all disciples should abstain from eating meat. Paul's exhortation to the mature brethren, who knew that all things could be eaten, was that they must walk in love until the vegetarian brethren grow out of their scruples concerning the eating of meat. Lest there be a division, everyone needed to remember that they were all one body. *"For he who in this thing serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men"* (Rm 14:18). *"Therefore,"* Paul wrote, *"let us follow after the things that make for peace ..."* (Rm 14:19).

This brings us to Paul's final statements to all the members of the one body in Rome. He is not addressing independent groups, but all the saints (Rm 1:7).

> *Now the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be of* ***the same mind toward one another*** *according to Christ Jesus, so that you may with* ***one mind and one mouth*** *glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rm 15:5,6).

Paul did not address this statement to a single assembly of disciples. It was addressed to all the disciples in Rome who were meeting at many different locations for their Sunday assemblies. Paul's focus was not on some organized group of disciples on main street in Rome. His address was to individual saints. And the individual saints must never behave in a way that they are divided from one another because of where they sit on Sunday morning. *"Therefore, accept one another as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God"* (Rm 15:7).

(As with the book of Romans, one should read the other New Testament letters through with the understanding that the letters were addressed to saints as individuals, and not to groups that were independent from one another.)

B. One body of many assemblies in Corinth:

In their independent denominationalism it seems that some Achaia disciples had progressed to the point of having little consideration for one another. Paul began the 1 Corinthian letter by identifying the saints in the region. *"... 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). It was still the church, singular, but saints, plural.

But in the second letter Paul identified the totality of all those to whom he was addressing in the first letter. In the second letter to the Corinthians he was more specific concerning those he was correcting in the first letter. Both letters are tied together to be to the same people because the second letter is a follow-up exhortation concerning what was written in the first letter. The second letter, however, was *"to the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are* ***in all Achaia****"* (2 Co 1:1).

In 2 Corinthians it is also indicated that he had preached in all Achaia. *"As the truth of Christ is in me, no one will stop me from this boasting* ***in the regions of Achaia****"* (2 Co 11:10). There were members in Corinth, but from what he states in the second letter, we come to the conclusion that the first letter was also directed to "all the saints" who were in "all Achaia." Since this is true, then the love-feast/Supper problems in 1 Corinthians 11 could have been the periodic gathering of all the saints in all Achaia who came together for the fellowship event where they were to be reminded that the eating of the one bread *"was the fellowship of the body of Christ"* (1 Co 10:16). This better explains Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:18, *"... when you come together in assembly, I hear that there are divisions among you ...."* The partisan dysfunction was manifested when everyone of Achaia came together for the periodic and regional love feast/Supper meeting. Their coming together for the love feast/Supper was the occasion where their organic dysfunction was manifested, and thus, it was not possible to eat the Supper in such a dysfunctional assembly (1 Co 11:20).

In both letters Paul was not addressing any particular assembly of "all the saints" in all Achaia. This must

be clearly understood in order to understand both the context of the assemblies of the early saints, but also the message of the letters written to them. There were many members of the body around Corinth and Rome, but only one universal church. We must never assume that all the saints of the one body had to be assembled on Sunday morning at the same place in order that the singular term "church" be used. If we do this, then we are reading our present-day scenario of denominational division into the one body of Christ.

In the Corinthian letter Paul went straight to the point. Some of the saints in Achaia had already divided. Contrary to the impending division that threatened the disciples in Rome who would be tempted to divide by those who spoke with smooth and fair speech, the saints "in all Achaia" divided over personalities. *"Now I say this, that each one of you says, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I am of Apollos,' and 'I am of Cephas,' and 'I am of Christ.'"* (1 Co 1:12). So among all the saints of Achaia there was a sectarian behavior of disciples according to the particular personality they were inclined to follow.

It may have been that Apollos and Cephas (Peter) went to surrounding towns of Achaia when they preached in the area. When different groups arose from their preaching, the members of those groups naturally gravitated to their "father in the faith" (See 1 Co 4:15). They thus called themselves after their favorite preacher, which carnal nature manifested itself when they came together for their periodic celebration of the love feast/Lord's Supper meeting.

Paul's answer to the declaration of independence from one another based on personalities was simple. *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Co 1:13). Everyone would have certainly responded to this question by declaring that Christ is not divided. If we would answer this question in this way, then there can be no divisions among the members of the one body in any region that is based on personalities. In fact, there can be no divisions of the body though they have to meet at different places at the same time. They are still the one organic body of Christ regardless of where they meet.

Before he addressed the problem of denominational division among those of the one body, Paul made the well-known statement 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.*

In knowing that the disciples in Corinth met throughout the region of Corinth in different houses, what would we conclude he meant in the above statement? The answer is obvious. Though out of necessity the members of the one organic body had to meet at different places, **where they met was no excuse for not being of the same mind and speaking the same thing, being perfectly joined together by what each part of the body supplied**. Where the disciples had to meet did not automatically divide them into different autonomous groups. If it did, then they might be inclined to prohibit teachers from coming to minister the word of God to every group, which was the case in the group that was dominated by Diotrephes (3 Jn). All the saints in all Achaia were one body. There were a great deal of dysfunctions among them, but they were still the one body *"being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part ..."* (Ep 4:16).

It would be historically out of context to think that the letter of 1 Corinthians was written to a specific independent group of disciples who were meeting together at the same location. This is not what we conclude from reading these two correctional letters (1 & 2 Co), for the letters applied to every saint in Achaia who needed correction concerning the organic dysfunctions about which Paul wrote.

Chapter 16

ORGANIC FUNCTION OF GIFTED PARTS

Those who have read well the New Testament letters that were written to the saints throughout the Roman Empire come to some similar conclusions. The letters were not directed to the elders of the churches as if they were a synod of ruling over autonomous groups of sheep. The letters were not addressed to independent groups, but the saints of the entire region of the cities. And most important, the letters were written to address dysfunctions in the relationships of the individual members of the universal body of Christ with one another and Christ as they encountered one another on a daily basis.

A. Romans 12:

Of many contexts of Scripture that could be sited on

this point, Romans 12 is probably one of the easiest to see the organic function of the members of the body in Rome. We know that the disciples were meeting in small groups throughout the region of Rome. But where the members sat on Sunday did not inherently divide them into autonomous groups that were independent from one another. They were all members of the one universal body of Christ. See if this is not the case as we work through Romans 12.

1. *Different functions of the many:* *"For as we have many members in one body, and* ***all members do not have the same function*** *..."* (Rm 12:4). Does this remind us of Ephesians 4:16? All the members of the one universal body, many of whom were in Rome, did not have the same gifts. But *"the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies"* functions to cause growth (Ep 4:16). Paul is not talking about one group in Rome that was dysfunctional. He addressed all the saints in Rome (Rm 1:7).

2. *Many members, but one body:* *"So we, being many, are* ***one body in Christ****, and everyone* ***members one of another****"* (Rm 12:5). What constitutes the body are the members, who are many. *"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). How can we continually read passages as this that speak of one body, and yet come up with the teaching that the members have the right to huddle up into autonomous groups that are independent of one another? Is there a carnal reason for the teaching of group autonomy? When we read the New Testament of our Lord Jesus, the fact that He is the one Head of the one body is glaringly clear.

3. *Gifts for everyone:* *"Having then gifts* ***differing according to the grace that is given to us*** *..."* (Rm 12:6). *"And* ***He gave*** *some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ep 4:11,12). Paul mentions other gifts in the Romans 12 context. But all the gifts are for ministry. Does this mean that when one who has the gift of teaching goes to a supposedly autonomous group across town, he does not have the right or responsibility to exercise his gift for the *"edifying of the body of Christ"*? Does this mean that each of these gifts must be exercised only within each autonomous assembly? Must we assume that every assembly of disciples had all the gifts that Paul mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12?

Later in his life, the apostle Peter was designated a shepherd of the body because he was gifted by God to be a shepherd/teacher (See 1 Pt 5:1). He wrote to the *"sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia"* (1 Pt 1:1). He said that he was a "fellow elder" with those elders in these regions (1 Pt 5:1). Does this mean that if he were traveling through either of the preceding regions that he ceased having his gift of shepherding?

Now those who would claim that the elders can steal some of the authority of Jesus (see Mt 28:18), would also assert that he would have no "authority" in the regions to which he wrote. However, these folks have missed the point of shepherding being a gift given, not authority that is assumed. Is this not what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11, *"He gave some to be ... shepherds and teachers"*? God was not parcelling out authority when He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherds. He was giving gifts of ministry of the word for the *"edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ep 4:12). If one thinks that the giving of the gifts come with authority, then he is in trouble (See Mk 10:35-45). Gifts refer to responsibility given, not authority assumed.

The gifts were given for body function, not to claim formal positions. Notice how Paul continues in Romans 12. *"Let love be without hypocrisy ... be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another ... contributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality ... rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* (Rm 12:10-15). These statements refer to the function of the organic body as members use their gifts of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.

B. 1 Corinthians 12:

We have the context of 1 Corinthians 12 because of the dysfunction of the body in Achaia. Therefore, we must keep in mind that when we are studying through this text that Paul is writing to all the disciples in Achaia (See 1 Co 1:2; 2 Co 1:1). The dysfunction of the body in Achaia was manifested in the efforts of some to move toward being independent from one another as the whole body of Christ in the region of Achaia. Specifically, some were denominating themselves according to different personalities (See 1 Co 1:12). This classic correction of the one organic body in a region of multiple assemblies is one of the greatest arguments against groups of disciples declaring their independence from one another. It is a picture of the universal function of the organic body as each gifted part plays its part in building up the body in any region of the world.

1. *Many members, but one body:* *"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 ..." (1 Co 12:12). All who have obeyed the gospel in baptism, have been baptized into the one universal body of Christ. We are not baptized into a local church, but into the one universal body. God adds us to His people throughout the world (See At 2:47). And because we have been baptized into the body (Gl 3:26,27), we have the responsibility to function for the body. The fact that the body is one means that no member has a right to function autonomously from any other part of the body.

2. *Organic function:* *"If the foot says, 'Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body?"* (1 Co 12:15). The answer to the question is "no." No one member of the body has the right to disconnect from the whole body. **Since this is true of each part of the body, then certainly no group of members can declare their separation from the whole body**. Simply because there are a number of "feet" meeting at the same place on Sunday does not give them the right to declare their independence from the rest of the body. The reason this cannot happen is that an assembly of only "feet" would be a monstrosity. Paul's argument is that the connectivity of all the parts is necessary in order for the body to function organically as a normal body. *"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?"* (1 Co 12:17).

Organic function is based on all the parts of the body, wherever they are and whatever they are gifted to be. They must function as connected parts of the body throughout the world. Assemblies of the body do not assume that each assembly has all the parts that are required for a functioning body. Our erroneous understanding that assemblies constitute all the functioning parts of the body is revealed in the fact that those who are gifted with being shepherds/teachers (Ep 4:11) are often not found in most of the independent assemblies of the body throughout the world. But the fact that there were gifted shepherds who were fellow shepherds throughout the region of Achaia (See 1 Pt 5:1,2), means that all the parts of the body could be *"fitted and held together by what every joint supplies"* throughout all Achaia or wherever the shepherds visited the sheep (Ep 4:16).

Where the shepherds regularly sat on a pew on Sunday did not validate them to be shepherds. If a shepherd decided to sit on a pew across town in another assembly, where he did not regularly meet, would this mean that he ceased to have the responsibility of a shepherd during that "assembly hour" when he was not at his "home church"? Think about this. And then consider the fact that shepherding does not take place on Sunday if the shepherd is not doing the teaching. The New Testament does not speak of any spectator shepherds.

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). God diversified the body by gifting the members differently. *"He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some shepherds and teachers"* (Ep 4:11). We must remember Romans 12:4: *"For as we have many members in one body,* ***and all members do not have the same function****."* The members of the body have been gifted differently *"according to the grace that is given to us ..."* (Rm 12:6). Those who assume that Paul is here talking about only local single assemblies of the body, will have some difficulty with what he says. They would have difficulty in explaining why a group of two or three who are gathered together in the name of the Lord do not have all the gifts about which he speaks in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. If the two or three meet in a home across the street from a shepherd who sits on a pew at the "downtown church," then are they without the function of a shepherd when they are in trouble.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is discussing the whole universal body of Christ. In the first century, he is explaining how the body functioned in order to nurture the needs of the body. When teachers were needed to correct a lack of teaching in one area of the body, teachers were sent. When the body needed the ministry of shepherds, shepherds did their work of shepherding. The belief that the body is broken up into autonomous groups that are independent from one another just does not fit the Holy Spirit's description of the organic function of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.

3. *Harmonious functionality:* If there is an "eye" in one assembly in a region where the body exists, that "eye" cannot say to the "hand" in another assembly of the body in the same region, *"I have no need of you"* (1 Co 12:21). If this would happen, then those parts of the body that needed help from the "eye" would be neglected.

The "feeble members" are necessary for body function because they offer the opportunity for ministry. What happened in Jerusalem with the neglected widows was that the parts of the body that had the supplies to minister to the Greek widows held back their supplies because some parts of the body separated themselves from their responsibility to take care of some widows. The gift of administration was stifled because some had separated themselves from other parts of the body.

Paul explains organic function. *"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). What a beautiful picture! Therefore, *"if one*

member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Co 12:26). Organic means that no part of the body is neglected. Ministry is stifled when a group of disciples declare their independence from any of the members.

4. ***Mutual ministry:*** Though the body is one and universal, it is composed of individuals that God gifted with ministry (1 Co 12:27,28). There are numerous gifts, but we would not for a moment assume that all these gifted individuals would be held up at the same place. If the organic behavior of the body in Judea is any commentary on 1 Corinthians 12, then at least we know how the organic body functioned with the gifted teachers. When there was a need for teaching in Antioch, parts of the body in Judea sent Barnabas to teach the new disciples. Barnabas then realized that the need was too great for him alone, so he went into Cilicia and found Paul. These two taught for a whole year in Antioch, but they too realized that the opportunity was too great for them. The members of the body in Judea, therefore, sent a team of teaching prophets to Syria in order to continue the spiritual nurturing of the parts of the body in the region of Antioch. This is the organic body functioning universally with all those who have special gifts that bring nurturing to the whole body.

C. 1 Corinthians 14:

Since the body is organic as the individual members function daily as living sacrifices (Rm 12:1), then we would certainly be correct to conclude that the members would reflect their organic behavior when they came together in assembly. When the Achaian disciples came together, they created a dysfunctional assembly because of pride and disrespect. Their assembly was so dysfunctional that it was not possible for them to partake of the Lord's Supper. They could not because they harbored ungodly sectarian attitudes, some even being drunken on the occasion of their coming together (1 Co 11:17-20).

Paul corrected the Achaians' dysfunction around the Lord's Table in 1 Corinthians 11. In 1 Corinthians 14, he corrected their organic dysfunction in their assembly for the love feast/Lord's Supper. His statements of correction reveal the organic function that should be characteristic of all members when they come together in assembly.

1. ***Pursue love:*** **Love is an organic word, and thus, when love is expressed among disciples in assembly, then there must be organic function in the assembly** (1 Co 14:1). According to John's definition of love, the participatory assemblies of the disciples must manifest a loving behavior in the assembly as all members relationally functioned. *"Let us not love in word or in tongue,* ***but in deed*** *and in truth"* (1 Jn 3:18).

2. ***Edification ... exhortation ... comfort:*** In the context of 1 Corinthians 14, there was a particular dysfunction in reference to their use of the gifts of languages and prophecy. The gifts of languages and interpretation were functional gifts in that everyone in the assembly could have the opportunity to understand what was being said by those who were gifted with either languages or interpretation. However, love for everyone was expressed only when everyone in the assembly understood what was being taught through either languages or prophecy (1 Co 14:4,5). If there were no interpreter present, then the one who spoke in a language that could not be understood by everyone present must be silent. If the one speaking in an unknown langauge functioned with an interpreter, then he was functioning out of love for all the people. If the one who was speaking in a language did not cease to speak in the absence of an interpreter, then he was functioning selfishly and arrogantly, and not in love for those who could not understand.

3. ***For everyone:*** Paul wrote, *"I wish that you all spoke in languages ..."* (1 Co 14:5). The assumption is that not everyone in the assembly could speak in languages. But, the assembly was of a nature that would provide each member with the opportunity to use the gift of languages if he was so gifted. Their assemblies were not one-man bands. They were not one-man audience oriented. They were participatory. However, Paul's correction was that only one speak at a time in a language, and then, only if an interpreter were present (1 Co 14:13-17). If no interpreter were present, then Paul instructed that the one speaking in a language could not function organically in the assembly (1 Co 14:19). To speak a language without an interpreter present would not be walking in love (1 Co 14:17).

4. ***Be mature:*** The assembly of the organic body must manifest spiritual maturity (1 Co 14:20). Children behave disorderly, but mature Christians behave themselves with sobriety. In their dysfunction in assembly, the Corinthians were behaving as children.

5. ***Every one:*** Paul's correction of their dysfunctional assemblies began by assuming that every attending member could come to the assembly with that which would edify, exhort or comfort (1 Co 14:26). *"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"* (1 Co 14:27). If no interpreters were present, then those who would be speaking languages must be quiet (1 Co 14:27-29). If one receives a revelation while sitting, then he must be given the opportunity to speak (1 Co 14:30).

Each one must present their teaching in an orderly manner by speaking one by one (1 Co 14:31). This orderly conduct must manifest the nature of an orderly body life among the members (1 Co 14:33). In order to correct the dysfunction that was happening in their assemblies, the women must remain in silence in reference to speaking in either teaching or prophecy (1 Co 14:34). They are not allowed to speak in prophecy or languages in a manner where they would assume a dominant role in expressing their gifts. Only the men were to be in such a position in an assembly in using their gifts of either languages or prophesy (1 Co 14:34; see 1 Tm 2:12). In everything that transpired during the assembly, the final correction would be, *"Let all things be done properly and in order"* (1 Co 14:40).

The early disciples functioned as the body in their relationships as they encountered one another every day. But this was also a universal function, for when parts of the body were suffering famine somewhere in the world, those who had supplies sent to their brothers who were suffering from the famine. When teaching was needed among new converts, teachers were sent to teach. The instructions in reference to the function of the body of members in the New Testament was directed to the whole body that ministers to itself. When Paul said *"be of the same mind toward one another,"* his instructions were not limited to a particular group of disciples. They were instructions to all the saints in all the world in order that the global organically function as one body.

Chapter 17

THE GUARANTEE OF FREEDOM

The key biblical teaching that keeps the organic body free from autocratic leaders and synods that would bring the sheep of God into bondage is the freedom by which Christ has set us free. When discussing the concept of freedom in Christ, we have often failed to teach that there is more to freedom than freedom from sin. When one is set free in Christ, he is also set free from anything that would bring him into a bondage that would in any way hinder his relationship with Christ. When the body is brought into bondage by either human religious traditions or autocratic leadership, whether local or international, then the true organic function of the body is hindered. We can ask Paul about this truth by reading what he wrote when he compared his life under restrictive legal religiosity under Judaism with his freedom in Christ (See 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15).

Particularly in the writings of Paul we discover that our freedom involves freedom from legal religiosity. And in Paul's discussions of freedom from legal religiosity, he goes beyond the practice of making the law a legal code by which one would seek to earn himself into eternal glory. He speaks of any law or tradition that men might impose on others in order to bring men into bondage. Specifically, he speaks of anyone who might dictate laws or traditions that must be followed, and thus, bring into a sect those who conform to the wishes of a dominant leader or synod of leaders.

A. Guarded freedom:

It is the responsibility of leaders to guard the freedom of the sheep. Embedded in Paul's final words to the Ephesian elders is this responsibility. *"For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock"* (At 20:29). Grievous wolves were coming. It was the responsibility of the shepherds of the flock to guard the sheep that they not be brought into bondage by the wolves.

The men who would arise as grievous wolves would be self oriented. Paul continued in Acts 20:30, *"Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things,* ***to draw away the disciples after themselves****."* Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders was based on the nature of what some of the sheep would become. Timothy worked in the area of Ephesus, and to him 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****. And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables* (2 Tm 4:3,4).

The sheep are of the nature to follow. And if the sheep lose their love of the word of God, then they become the opportunity for autocratic leaders to lead them away after themselves. We live in a world of Christendom where few religious people have a love for the truth (See 2 Th 2:10-12). These are those who are ripe for the delusion of "pastors" who rise up to draw away those who have itching ears to hear the music of misguided religiosity.

God knew the fickleness of people. He knew that this desire to investigate some new thing was in the nature of a free-moral being who would seek to venture into philosophies and theologies that would lead them from truth. For this reason, He placed within the leaders of the disciples checks and balances. With evangelists, there was the check and balance of preaching only the gospel message (Rm 1:16) and the word of God (2 Tm 4:2). With teachers of the word of God, they had the mandate of speaking only as the oracles of God (1 Pt 4:11). Now with shepherds, who would remain in one area, God set a plurality of men to oversee the flock. There should be a plurality of shepherds (pastors) in the church of every city (At 14:23; Ti 1:5).

Shepherds were given the responsibility to oversee. They were men who were gifted with leadership ability (See Ep 4:11). Now suppose there was only one shepherd (pastor) among a flock. Would not the scenario of Diotrephetic leadership arise if there were no checks and balances of the plurality of elders in place to guard against such? Lording over the flock happens when the plurality of men do not keep one another in the position of servants to the flock of God (See 1 Pt 5:1-5). If leaders who are gifted to lead are not guarded by a plurality of fellow leaders, then it would only be natural for one person to rise up and take control of the sheep. The lack of servanthood accountability of a plurality of leaders may have been the opportunity to take control of the church in the vicinity of Gaius (See 3 Jn).

B. Free to grow:

Legal religiosity, either in reference to God's law or the laws of men, always destroys the organic function of the body. Free men always "labor more abundantly" than those who labor under law (1 Co 15:10). They always allow the grace of God to cause growth beyond their imagination (2 Co 4:15).

Cults produce growth. But there is no freedom while living under the strict organization of a cult. Some in Colosse had evidently been involved in the bondage of cultic religiosity. This was the setting for what Paul wrote in Colossians 2:14. *"... **wiping 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**."* The "handwriting of ordinances" about which Paul speaks was more than the Old Testament law. His statement was also a reference to any ordinances that men might impose on other men in order to lead them captive into bondage.

Men bring men into bondage through dictates that are bound on the minds of the innocent. Sometimes the dictates are written, and subsequently, they become a code of "handwritten ordinances." It is then that the organic function of the body is hindered. It is hindered by men who have imposed on other men their code of belief and conduct. The group that follows the "handwritten ordinances" may grow, but it is not growing as a church of Christ. It is growing as a church of men, for the adherents to the code of ordinances are promoting codes of men, not Christ. Churches that are started and controlled by an autocratic leader do not grow beyond the control of the autocratic leader's realm of control.

In order to build an independent church that is identified by "handwritten ordinances," autocratic leaders recruit others to submit to their dictates. This is exactly what Paul warned the Galatian brethren in Galatians 4:17: *"**They zealously recruit you**, but not for good. Yes, they want to exclude you so **that you might be zealous for them**."* When enough people have been zealously recruited by a leader to follow a certain legal ordinance, then the recruiter forms an autonomous group that is independent from other groups who are following other creeds. He has now started his own church, which church remains autonomous from other churches because all the members have been recruited to follow the dictates of the autocratic leader. Though other groups may believe in Jesus, the autocratic leader maintains the independence of his group by marshalling everyone to the code of his beliefs and behavior. Once the group adopts the behavior of the leaders, then he has a church of recruiters. In their recruiting of more members, they ask potential members to dismember from other groups in order that they might "place membership" with their group.

But we must not forget what Paul said in Galatians 4:17. If an individual has allowed himself to be recruited to a particular code of legal doctrine, then **he is excluded from the true church of Christ that lives in freedom**. One cannot follow after the legal codes of any man and still be a part of the organic body of Christ.

(It is amazing that we unknowingly become that from which we have historically argued against for so many years. We become denominational ourselves in our behavior against denominationalism.)

C. Cry freedom:

The argument against becoming a heirarchial organization of authorities is in the very words of Paul 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."*

When we maintain our freedom in Christ from the "handwritten ordinances" of men, there is no problem

of falling victim to the bondage of autocratic leaders. Freedom is not guaranteed by bringing all the parts of a body into the bondage of some organization that is controlled and maintained by the "handwritten ordinances of men." Freedom is guaranteed when the parts claim and maintain their freedom in Christ from the bondage of man's "handwritten ordinances."

It is the responsibility of all the parts of the organic body to maintain their freedom from any part that would dictatorially impose opinions on any part of the body. It is also the responsibility of all the parts of the body to help one another to maintain their freedom in Christ. When the organic body functions in the realm of freedom, then there is no need to formulate organizational structures in order to prevent apostasy to heirarchial authorities. For freedom did Christ set us free. We are set forth to be free for the purpose of freedom. Therefore, a functioning organic body will flourish in the realm of freedom that each member enjoys in Christ. **When free men maintain their freedom, they guard themselves from lords who would lead them into captivity**.

Chapter 18

UNIVERSAL, NOT ECUMENISM

We are subservient to the definitions of the words of our times. This leaves the Bible student at a disadvantage when discussing Bible subjects with those who do not know the Bible, or are simply religious. Religious people who are not familiar with the word of God can never really get on the same page in communicating Bible truths. This is a prevailing problem when discussing restoration to Bible authority in matters of faith. But getting on the same page of definition is crucial if we are going to work ourselves out of the quagmire of the religiosity of Christendom to a faith that is based on the word of God.

When speaking of the universal organic body of Christ, there is invariably a great misunderstanding in the use of our terms that we use to discuss religious matters on this subject. The misunderstanding comes from a twisted concept of "Christianity" that is harbored by those who profess to be followers of Christ, but have little or no knowledge of the Bible. For example, the word "ecumenical" means universal. The body of Christ is ecumenical, **but it is not ecumenical in the sense of fostering political compromises of faith in order to promote union, instead of unity**. Ecumenism is defined as "the practice of promoting cooperation or better understanding among **differing religious faiths**" (Webster). But this is not the ecumenical body of Christ. **Do not think for one moment that the universal body of Christ is a political agreement of "differing religious faiths" that have worked out some agreement to be a union, or counsel of world religions**. On the contrary, we must keep in mind that the "differing religious faiths" have gone out from the universal body of Christ. They are faiths of apostasy, not faiths that are based on the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). The very fact that the word "faiths" is used in the plural betrays the adherents of each faith that they religiously differ. But there is no difference in the fundamentals that establish the one faith of those who are members of the ecumenical body of Christ.

If we seek to restore the body of Christ, but bypass the word of God as our final authority in matters of faith, then we will never realize our dream. The result of men who have left the word of God in order to validate their religiosity on either feelings or traditions, has led to what we now see in Christendom today. And what we see in Christendom today is not one organic body, but a monstrosity of denominated bodies who are disjointed from one another, and often, in competition with one another. Only when we desire to return to the authority of the word of God will we ever have a chance of coming to a unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Ep 4:3). Bringing different faiths together under the umbrella of an ecumenical heirarchy of authorities is not unity. It is union.

The word of God only must establish the way back to unity that manifests the bond of peace by which the organic body is identified. We can follow the word of God back to the ecumenical body by discovering the road that leads to apostasy that many took away from the faith in the first century. Once we discover these roads to apostasy, then we can make every effort not to go down those roads, lest we end up being part of one of those many "differing religious faiths." Here is how one can determine if he is not part of the one universal organic body of Christ:

- If a Christian would seek to return to and walk in darkness, then he walks away from the one organic body (1 Jn 1:1-5).
- If a Christian sins, but refuses to repent, then he moves out of the universal body of Christ (Hb 10:26; 1 Jn 5:16).

- If a Christian does not hold fast to the word of God, but moves away to a faith that is experiential based instead of based on the word of Christ, then he has forsaken Christ (1 Co 15:2).
- If a Christian does not continue in the faith, then he establishes his own faith (Cl 1:23; Hb 10:38).
- If a Christian does not take heed to the word of God, then he will take heed to other things in order to validate his faith (1 Tm 4:16).
- If a Christian seeks to live an immoral life, then he is going down a road to destruction (1 Co 5:5).
- If a Christian does not continually discipline himself, then he will be disqualified (1 Co 9:27; 2 Co 13:5).
- Christians who have departed from the faith by following deceiving spirits and teachings of demons, have left the faith (1 Tm 4:1).
- Christians must be cautious not to be led away with the error of the wicked (2 Pt 3:17).
- Christians who are deceived into following those who would lead them away after themselves, have moved away from the body (At 20:28-30).
- Those who are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin have fallen away from the body (Hb 3:13).

Apostasy from the one organic body of Christ is a reality. There are warnings throughout the New Testament to which Christians must take heed in order not to be led away from the one organic body of Christ (See Mt 24:4,5, 11-13; At 11:21-23; 14:21,22; Rm 8:12-14; Cl 4:4-8,18; 1 Tm 1:19,20; 3:6; 4:1,16; 6:10-12).

The universal organic body of Christ is not a union of "differing faiths" who have made compromises in order to be a world council of churches. The body is composed of disciples who seek to do the commandments of Jesus. Jesus established this as the foundation upon which we would prove our love for Him. *"If you love Me you will keep My commandments"* (Jn 14:15). *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me"* (Jn 14:21). *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). Therefore, it is 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).

We know who the members of the organic body are because they have their Bibles open and are searching the commandments of the One of whom they claim to be a disciple (At 17:11). They are willing to forsake all necessary religious traditions, all divisive names, and the religious heritage of their fathers if necessary, in order to make their way back to the word of Jesus. On the part of many, this will be a tremendous sacrifice. But if we love Jesus, we will love what He says. And when we love what He says, His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3). Those who are of the Way of Jesus, therefore, are identified by their desire to speak where Jesus has spoken to us through His word, and are cautious to guard the freedom that Jesus promised and in which we stand in His word. In matters of faith, they seek the authority of the word of Christ.

For continued study on this subject, see
Book 65, *The Power Of Many As One*,
Book 25, *Sectarian Denominationalism*,
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Book 56

The World As It Is

Our world view determines how we view the world in which we live. Our world view is that mentally deep-seated thinking which is our subliminal view of all things. Our world view determines our values and our behavior. Our world view is developed through our social experiences from childhood and our education. If our experiences and education are dysfunctional in our relationship with our Creator, then we will view our lives, and the world in which we live, from a distorted point of view. Our values and behavior will follow. This is a particular problem with those who do not have God and His word in the formation of their world view. But for those who do, it is still often difficult to look beyond the twisted morals, philosophies and theologies within society in order to see the world as it is in God's eternal purpose to bring inhabitants of this world into His eternal presence. In order to correctly form our world view, it is essential to saturate ourselves with God's word. The more knowledge we have of His communication to us through His word, and the more we implement that word in our lives. And the more we live His word the better we will understand the world that He created for us. The better we understand our world, the more patient and steadfast we will be as His children until this world has fulfilled its purpose, and is gone.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Don't worry. It will get worse before it get's better"? We live in a world that seems to have all gone wrong with no hope of anything getting better. When we factor in the consequences of sin, it is not hard to believe this. In fact, if we were to ask those Christians to whom the letter of Revelation was written, they would agree with the forecast that it is going to be a gloomy future. It would get worse for them before it got better. What was coming was not good. John's literary picture of the future for the Christians of that age was that things were definitely going to get worse before they got better. That is why the Holy Spirit lifted John's hand to write the prophecy of the letter. No matter how bad it got, the Holy Spirit wanted Christians to know that they would come out on top.

Though there was gloom and doom in the future, the message of Revelation was one of hope. In the midst of a future that seemed to be only gloom, the Spirit's message to those early Christians and us through John will always be, *"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). We must never forget this. Though news reporters would continually flood our minds with pictures and reports of sin ravaging the world in which we live, there is an undeniable hope for those who believe. There is always hope for those who side themselves with the King and Lord of all things. The "better" may not be of this world, but it will certainly be in the new heavens and earth to come. So hang in there.

We would now sit back for a moment and take another look at some of those forces that seem "to make war with the Lamb." As Christians, we see the futility of the efforts of those who would steal away peace from our world. Those social anarchists who would presumptuously walk contrary to the word of God are viewed through the eyes of the Lamb as futile enemies of truth. The angel of Revelation would proclaim their efforts to be futile if they would set themselves against those who are more than conquerors through the One who loved us. Their efforts are futile in reference to that which we yearn, eternal life. They are futile because of the statement, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rm 8:31).

Though we might come to the conclusion that all that is happening can only come to a gloomy end, we must remember that the final outcome of all things will be victory for those who are in Christ. We are not one of those prognosticators who would instill fear in hearts concerning the "signs of the times" in order to generate repentance and fill church houses and coffers. We are of the assembly of the victorious who remain faithful because of the cross of grace that was revealed outside Jerusalem over two thousand years ago. Our faith is built on what He did for us, not on what we can do for

Him in response to fear of present and impending dangers, either imagined or real. We will continue to believe that *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"* (Rm 8:37).

As we work through the concepts that follow, we must focus on the God-defined purpose of this world. God is working. He has headed us toward heaven. Though our world may seem somewhat chaotic at times, we must always remember that out of chaos will come better things. We must never be tempted, as the Hebrew Christians, to turn back from Jesus as a result of present tribulation. We must make a bold statement as the Hebrew writer made after reviewing a series of better things we have in Christ: *"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 1

A WORLD VIEW WITHOUT A WORLD

Unlike animals, man is an inquisitive being. And being inquisitive we wonder. Since we are moral beings in a world that is corrupted with moral chaos, we wonder why "in the world" are we here?

If we could answer the question as to why the world exists, and why we are here, then we can understand our purpose (mission) as children of God. And when we understand our purpose, then the world begins to make a great deal of sense, even to our finite minds. Since we are all wondering about who we are and why we are here, then it is incumbent upon all of us to ponder a few concepts that will help us to be more content with the state of things as they exist in this world.

A. The necessity of creation:

We would begin our quest to understand our existence by answering questions concerning the existence of a world that seems to have gone morally wrong. It is a world full of the most heinous violence that man can conceive against man. Genocide is a word that is found only in the dictionary of man, for no animal behaves in such a hideous manner. But we wonder why such behavior is uniquely characteristic with man.

These ponderings are all answered in one statement of Scripture: *"God is love"* (1 Jn 4:8). This, ironically, explains everything. We say "ironically" because we wonder how a world filled with hate could have originated from an eternal source of love. But the answer is simple. Love must have an object upon which to pour out love. And since God is love, then there must be those upon whom He can pour out His love. So here we are with all our moral warts, unconditionally loved by a loving Creator who seeks that we be with Him for eternity. In order to create creatures of love, God needed an environment in which His created beings could love. He had to create an individual who could make decisions of good and evil within this environment. Does this make any sense?

In order to be lovable, there must always be a response to love. In other words, when one says, "I love you," the answer that is desired by the one who makes this statement is, "I love you, too." In order that the statement "I love you, too" be sincere, there are conditions. The one upon whom God would shower His love must be truly free to say, "I love you, too." If there is no freedom, then the responding statement to love would only be robotic. So we must be created truly free in order to make a sincere statement of love. Add to this the necessity that we must be in an environment wherein freedom to make such a statement is neither hindered nor programmed. This means that we must be truly free-moral individuals with the ability and freedom to make our own statements that are based on our own choices. The fact that we must be truly free to make choices must be true since it would be difficult for God to love a pre-programmed robot.

B. The curse of fallibility:

God knew that His free-moral creation would go wrong. Our free-moral freedom comes with this risk. This risk is based on the fact that truly free-moral people must be fallible. We are indeed human because we are fallible. And because it is not possible that a free-moral being could ever live without going wrong, then there had to be a plan in place before creation to reconcile the fallible to his infallible Creator. And so after the first sin of His first two free-moral and fallible beings, God said in Genesis 3:15 to the tempter of our fallibility, *"And I will put enmity between you* [Satan] *and the woman, and between your seed and her* ***Seed****.* ***He will bruise your head****, and you will bruise His heel"* (Gn 3:15).

This is the first announcement for the purpose of

the existence of the world and its inhabitants. It is ironic that the first statement in the Bible concerning man's redemption from his fallibility was made to Satan, who, through temptation, led man from his innocence.

Love demanded creation. Creation demanded freedom. Freedom comes with the risk of sin. And sin demands redemption. If there was the need for redemption—and there was—then we would ask, "Redeemed for what?" All this is in the statement of Genesis 3:15. It was a plan conceived before the creation, but enacted only when the fullness of time came on a wooden cross outside the city limits of Jerusalem of Palestine. Sin first came, then the Son, and then, the salvation. But again, salvation from what and for what?

C. Signpost to our destination:

The concept of redemption for salvation means little to most people of the world. But it means something incredible to those who stand at the grave of a departed believer. What salvation means was revealed only a short time after the Creator confronted the first two fallible sinners in a garden of paradise. Their deportation from that garden, which was meant to be an eternal dwelling, reveals the original purpose for which creation was enacted. The eternal triune God said among themselves, *"Behold, the man has become as one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, he must not be allowed to put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat,* ***and live forever****"* (Gn 3:22). And therein is revealed the meaning of "salvation."

Saved from sin without the promise of living forever is meaningless. In order to restore eternality to the created, there must be an answer for that which separates the created from the presence of the One who only has the gift of eternality. Therefore, in order for God to be a just God in the creation of man, then He had to provide the means by which the sin, which He knew would occur, could be rectified. The answer to the problem of fallibility had to be a sufficient means by which the fallible sinner could once again be restored to that which brings eternal life, that is, his walk with God. This is the salvation for which all of us yearn. We are told little when this drama was played out in the garden of Eden. But enough was revealed that all believers from that time were looking for a "crushing blow" that would rectify what was given up by two fallible people who resigned themselves to their own flaw of fallibility.

Chapter 2

THE RIGHT PLACE FOR NOW

God is love, and our existence is evidence of this fact. So in creating us, He has said, "I love you." If our response, "I love You, too," that we would make to our Creator is to be sincere, then we must have the freedom **not** to make the statement. We must be able to rebel, to sin, to morally corrupt ourselves to the lowest level of sinful degradation. If we are truly free-moral beings, then we must have the option to turn our backs on our Creator; to live and to die in eternal extinction. Unfortunately, it is the choice of most people to turn their backs on the God of love. Though sad, the option for eternal doom is inherent in our being truly free-moral individuals. It is not that we inherently sin. It is that within inherently free-will people there is the possibility of making sinful decisions. And we all make such decisions. And when the norm of society chooses to make bad decisions, then we end up with the condition of society that is explained in Genesis 6:5.

But you might ask, "If God is love, and thus had to created a truly free moral individual who could go wrong, then why would He even create us in the first place?" The answer is that He had to. It is simply the nature of love. Love must love something, else it is not love. A loving God cannot exist alone in eternity with a simple proclamation that He is love. Love is meaningless without action. And since love had to create, then love also had to provide a means by which the loved could perpetually exist in the presence of a loving God. This too was a loving act on the part of our God of love.

This brings us to questions concerning the environment in which God placed us, an environment wherein we can go wrong. We can become unloving. So here we are, in the best of all possible environments for the existence of a truly free-moral individual with all the possibilities to love as our Creator, but with the possibility to go incredibility wrong.

Ours is an environment where choices can be made between good and evil. It is an environment in which we can be held accountable for our moral fallibility. It is even an environment where we pay the consequences for violating both moral and physical laws. And yet in all the evil and suffering of this environment, we can

think of no better environment for the existence of a truly free moral person to make choices of either good or evil.

We must keep in mind that we are not alone in this environment. We must never forget that in this environment there are other individuals who also have the right to choose. And some of those in our environment, as we, also make bad choices. For example, it is often the desire of a free moral being to exalt himself above or against his fellow man. He seeks to rule over his fellow man. All these desires define the nature of a free-moral person. These desires also answer the question as to why evil and suffering exist in the best of all possible environments in which a truly free-moral being must exist.

In all our consideration of these matters, we must not make the mistake of blaming the physical environment for the bad moral choices we make. When we say the "best of all possible environments," we mean that this must be an environment wherein a physical being can function with the opportunity to go morally wrong. And for this created physical being to exist, there must be physical laws that govern its existence. And if these laws are violated, then there are consequences that are usually immediate. If one jumped from a ten-story building, he would immediately discover the consequences of his violation of the law of gravity upon his arrival at the foundation of the first story. The problem comes when others suffer when one violates a physical law of this best of all possible environments. A speeding vehicle can kill other people than the irresponsible driver of the speeding vehicle.

A. Freedom and destruction:

Now we come to a true understanding of the historical statement of Genesis 6:5. God created man and placed him in the best of all possible environments to make moral decisions. Because it is not in man to create his own moral codes that are constant and universal, God delivered to man eternal standards of moral conduct by which he must walk in order to prevent moral chaos (See Hb 1:1). But as the centuries went by after creation, evil prevailed over good as man as a whole sought to walk after his own moral standards. It came to the following moral low that is stated 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****"* (Gn 6:5). And if you know the rest of the story, only Noah and his family made it out alive from this moral self-destruction. Movies are made with this theme.

It is imperative for the biblical historian to understand the purpose of the flood of Noah's day in order to understand God's work with man throughout history. So many questions are answered. Particularly, we ask concerning the existence of the nation of Israel, and then, the existence of the church. The existence of both are related to one another in reference to what Genesis 6:5 explains concerning the nature of free-moral individuals who choose to live outside the will of their Creator.

In all the mess of sin, the cross of the Son of God reveals that it was not fiendish of God to create man. It does so by His offer of a plan of escape to free-moral individuals He knew would go wrong in sin. The cross also explains the purpose for which God created man in the first place. Only in the cross do we have answers concerning why we are here and where we are going. And only in the cross do we discover that this world was created for a specific purpose. If we miss this purpose, then we will live with a host of unanswered questions, if not a life of despair. We will also be faced with the accusations of atheists as to why we would believe in a God who would create that which He would eventually have to condemn to an unfortunate end. (See *Biblical Research Library*, Book 25, chapter 5.)

B. Preservation through a nation:

If it is not possible for those of society to save themselves and escape moral degradation that comes by living outside the moral bounds of God's law—and it is not—then God will work through those who walk by faith in Him in order to accomplish His eternal purpose for all that now exists. Though societies go wrong, individuals can go right. And right living individuals can exist in the midst of societies that have gone wrong. Noah did it. God chose to work through the fathers of faith that began with Noah, extended through Jacob, and then through the descendants of Jacob in the children of Israel. God continues to work through individual heroes of faith in order to accomplish His plan for His creation.

Israel was chosen out of the people of the world in order to preserve a segment of society, and a moral environment for individual heroes of faith until the cross of the incarnate Son of God. Israel was chosen to fulfill promises to Abraham, our father of faith, until the Blessing that would come through him could redeem those who walk by faith (See Gn 12:1-4). The nation of Israel was chosen through Abraham even before its existence. God made this choice through Abraham in order to create a "spiritual Israel" after fleshly Israel that as a nation was dissolved into the One who would be the Messiah for all people who walked by faith. Therefore, Israel, as

a social environment for the remnant of the faithful, was only a means to an end. When the end came—Christ—then the means was termination, which termination included the special covenant relationship that God had with the nation of Israel. The faithful have since the cross moved again into a worldwide moral environment as it was from creation to national Israel. God is still focusing on individuals of faith who now make up the remnant of His people in this worldwide environment. (Do not forget this point for later discussions.)

It might be said that God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to continue His purpose for the creation of the world, but ended up with Israel, a stiffnecked nation of people. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were men of great faith in a world environment that had morally gone wrong.

The cultural environment of Israel was as God identified them to Moses: *"I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people"* (Ex 32:9; 33:3-5). Even Moses confessed to God, *"... go among us, for this is a stiffnecked people ..."* (Ex 34:9). And in reference to God giving Israel the land of Palestine, Moses stated to the Israelites, *"Do not say in your heart ..., 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land ....' Not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart, do you go to posses their land ... for you are a stiffnecked people"* (Dt 9:4-6). But God used their "stiffnecked culture" to preserve a segment of humanity in order to bring His Redeemer into the world. If He could get a stiffnecked people headed in the right direction, then at least a remnant of faithfuls would survive until the fullness of time and the revelation of the Redeemer.

God used Israel to drive out the morally wicked who possessed the land *"in order that He might accomplish,"* as Moses said, *"the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"* (Dt 9:5). As we said, God chose the fathers of faith, but ended up with a stiffnecked people in order to bring the Savior of the world to those who have chosen to walk by faith. Israel was used as a vehicle through whom God accomplished His purpose for the creation of the world. We learn something in God's use of Israel that identifies how He works today. He can use the worst case scenario of this world in order to accomplish His mission. **We must not think for a moment that the wickedness of man can in any way detour the plans of God for the purpose of this world and the destiny of His children**.

Chapter 3

WE ARE HERE FOR NOW

We were created for eternity. We are blessed with a spirit from God that is conditionally eternal only in the presence of our eternal Father (2 Th 1:6-9). We are the result of an Eternal Love, and thus, we are headed for an eternal presence with this Love. In order that our transition from here to there happen, God had to guard His justice by offering instructions on how to find the Way (At 9:2). This offer was made for those of His creation who would chose to follow His directions into His eternal presence. In order that God's justice be true and unaccused, an opportunity to transition from the confines of this material world for the eternal presence of God was made possible through the sacrificial offering of God Himself. The totality of His intervention among men, therefore, is based on the promise that God is working to get us from here to there. For this reason, we must view all that transpires in the present world as God's efforts to get as many people as possible into His eternal presence. We are thus not confused by the chaos that prevails in many places of the world. We are not confused or discouraged because we know that our God is at work to deliver us from this testing environment.

We seek answers to the question, "Why was the world created?" and "Why Israel?" The answers can be found only in the statement that will be made by Jesus at the end of the world, *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation* [creation] *of the world"* (Mt 25:34).

The world was created by a loving Father who seeks to bring His loving children, whom He now claims as His own, into His eternal presence, in which presence, their eternal existence is guaranteed. Now we must consider this for a moment. Since the creation was never meant to be an end within itself, then there must be a reason for its existence, and ours. Its existence was to produce an environment for those who will exist beyond its termination. There is no Bible teaching that says that the world will continue as it is without end. If one were to adhere to the philosophy of evolution, then he might come to the conclusion that matter (the earth) is eternal. But if one believes the Bible, then there is an end to the heavens and earth that we now

experience (Compare 2 Pt 3). The world as we know it will come to an end, but not those children of faith whom God has prepared for His presence in a new heavens and earth (See 2 Pt 3:13). They are His children in this present world, but they are not of this world. The fact that this world is temporary, therefore, establishes the conclusion that the world was created for an eternal purpose that will exist beyond the termination of the world itself.

We are here in order to prepare for being somewhere else. Christians are only *"sojourners and pilgrims"* on their journey through the existence of this world (Hb 11:13). This world is simply not their home. It is a place of transition to the eternal presence of the Father of their spirits (Hb 12:9). Since this world is a place of transitioning sojourners and pilgrims, then when there are few sojourners and pilgrims to transition the world will no longer be useful for the purpose for which it was created.

If there is a finality to this world, then this world exists for the purpose of those who will exist beyond this world. Those who will exist beyond this world are those who are of the faith of Abraham. By Jesus *"all things were created .... All things were created through Him and **for Him**"* (Cl 1:16). All things were created for Jesus, including all humanity. All was created for a purpose, that purpose being *"for Him."* Jesus would have no need of an eternal earth as it now is, since the eternal existence of the faithful who now inhabit the world are not dependent on the existence of the world. But as one with the loving God, the Son of God has an eternal dwelling for us that is not dependent on the world as we know it. He will thus discard the created world in order to preserve that which does not depend on the material for its existence.

So what would be His purpose in creating a temporary environment for us? If this environment is coming to a close, then those who walk by faith will exist beyond the end of this world. As we move closer to the end of all things, we must conclude that His allowance of the continuation of this present world is simply **for the purpose of giving birth to more sons of faith who will dwell with Him in eternity**. Since this world is coming to an end, then we would conclude that there is some reason why God would bring this world to an end. And since we would conclude that there is no limit to the population of heaven, then we must also conclude that this world will exist until it has fulfilled its purpose.

Now Paul revealed that there would be living Christians around at the time when Jesus would appear for a second time (See 1 Th 4:13-18). We would correctly assume, therefore, that God has planned a specific time for the termination of this present world. We will never know that time until we hear the final trumpet. It will be the remaining faithful "Noahs" who will hear the trumpet. At the sound of that trumpet, the resurrected and changed saints, we will together enter with the living and changed saints, enter into an eternal existence in the presence of God. Whatever God does with the present world is not our concern. We only know that we will be restored to eternality, which thing Adam and Eve gave up in the beginning (See Gn 3:22-24).

If the purpose of this world is to populate that which is to come, then this world is useful for this purpose as long as citizens are produced for eternal dwelling. But when this world is no longer conducive to the population of that which is beyond this world, then this world is no longer useful for the purpose for which it was created. This brings us back to the teleology (the end purpose) that was expressed in Genesis 6:5-7. In the flood, **God terminated the population of the world because the world produced no more sons of faith**. When this world no longer produces that for which it was created, then it is gone, in a moment, at the voice of an archangel, at the sound of the last trumpet (1 Th 4:15,16).

If the world is here, therefore, for the purpose of populating heaven, then our business is God's business to get people into eternal glory with Jesus. Since the Christian is no longer his own, but has been bought with a price (1 Co 6:20), then it is simply senseless for him to consume upon himself that which is temporary. It is his primary mission to bring glory to God by focusing on the mission of God and the purpose for which this world was created. Terms and phrases as "materialistic," "worldly minded" and "carnal" define those who are caught up and confined to this temporary existence. But terms as "evangelism," "mission minded" and "hope" define other-world minded people. These terms find the centrality of their biblical definition in the purpose for which God created all things, and then gave a mission to those who are of faith.

The closer one gets to the heart of God, the closer he gets to the mission of God that is inherent in the creation of this world. Evangelistic minded Christians are in touch with God. They are in touch with the mission of God and His purpose for the creation of this world. Their world view is centered around the purpose of taking as many people as possible into eternal glory. It is the love response of their hearts to follow after their loving Creator, whose mission it is to have loving beings in His presence for all eternity.

In order for the loving to be with the eternal Lover, God came in the likeness of the created (Ph 2:5-11). He

was incarnate in the flesh of man (Jn 1:14). However, after His resurrection, His body of flesh was changed into that which we will also be changed after our resurrection (See 1 Co 15:35-58). We do not now know the nature of His resurrected and changed body. But we know that when He comes again, we will be changed to be like Him. John wrote, *"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).

When we consider this one statement of the Holy Writ, we are held in awe at the sacrifice that the Son of God made for us. The Son will "appear" a second time. In order for Him to appear, there would have to be substance to His presence. We will "see Him." In order to be seen, there must be a body that would reflect His glory. His will be a bodily appearance. John says that we will be like this body of His. Ours will be a changed body (1 Co 15:50-54). But we will see Him as He is, in His permanently incarnate, but changed body. John is saying that the Son of God permanently incarnated in the flesh of man on our behalf (Jn 1:14). Though He was changed in His resurrected body, there was something permanent about Him giving up the form of God (See Ph 2:5-11). He did this for us. We are driven to our knees by the intensity and extent of His love for us. The permanency of His eternal sacrifice wonderfully manifests His abiding love for us throughout eternity. What words are there in any human language that would explain this love, this sacrifice? **He did this for us!**

If Jesus, the loving Creator of all things, created us for an eternal existence with Himself (Cl 1:16), then this is love beyond what any man can experience on this earth. We are driven to be in the presence of this eternally incarnated loving Creator. We cannot help ourselves. And we cannot but seek to take everyone we know with us into this awesome realm of love and freedom from the sufferings of this present world that has gone wrong in so many ways. We cannot help but cry out as John when he was so emotionally overcome with the awesome visions of Revelation, *"**Come, Lord Jesus**"* (Rv 22:20). We realize that we were created not for here, but for there with our Lord Jesus.

Chapter 4

WE WOULD PROGNOSTICATE

Many of us have spent our lives in daily Bible study, taking moments to breathe in order to survey the world around us. We are as the prophets of old who *"inquired and searched diligently ... searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify ..."* (1 Pt 1:10,11).

What a Bible-saturated mind invariably does is start on a journey of viewing the world around us through the eyes of God and recorded Bible history. So many principles of history have been revealed throughout the Bible that the Bible student cannot but view all history through a biased understanding of how God has worked in the affairs of this world, which past works and affairs are recorded in the Bible. When we come to a certain saturation point of Bible history, one begins to perceive some incredible works of God in the past, which perception molds our world view of how God now works. We begin to understand that God is still working to bring about His purpose for all things, especially for the good of His people. We then begin to fully appreciate what God promised in Romans 8:28: *"And we* [Christians] *know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to* ***His purpose****."*

And this is our quest in our obsession with recorded Bible history. We seek to know **His purpose** in a world that often seems like it is out of control. And in a world that seems to be out of control, we begin to understand through a knowledge of His word and work that actually everything is under control. He is upholding everything with the power of His word, and thus, we trust His work (Hb 1:3). We conclude:

> *"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).

If there are those who would think that our world view of history is prejudiced by too much Bible, then they are right. We offer no apologies. We would believe that the Bible was laid in our hands as a gift of God, and thus, a gift that would be our road map to make our way through this twisted world in which we live. We are thus tainted with the impressions of inspiration of the Holy Writ. Our philosophy of history is anchored

in what has been recorded through the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit as He took writer after writer throughout history through His inspirational influence to map out how God has worked in the past in order that we have faith in His work in the present and in the future.

If we would affirm that *"whatever things were written before were written for our learning"* (Rm 15:4), then we have learned well. If there is nothing new under heaven, as Solomon eventually learned (Ec 1:9-14), then our understanding of the present, and our prognostications of the future, are seated in the words the inspired history Book. This is the encouragement that the inspired word of history offers.

In one's mental saturation with inspired history, he of necessity comes to only one conclusion: *" ... all things work together for good to those who love God."* We must never forget this. This biblical world view of history is especially important to remember if we are in the depths of despair in a situation wherein there seems to be no hope. We are sure that Job eventually remembered this throughout his trials. We too must remember the promises of God: *"Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved"* (Ps 55:22). *"He will not suffer your foot to be moved. He who preserves you will not slumber"* (Ps 121:3).

As driven students of Bible history, we must be incurably optimistic when faced with the despair that the world dictates. If one's world view is based on the reports of the nightly news, or the daily newspaper, then he will conclude that everything has gone and is going horribly wrong. We often lead ourselves to believe that there is no hope. And truly, we are often lost in a world of misfortune and failure. We often cry out in complaint as Gideon: *"Oh my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us?"* (Jg 6:13). Even Job had his moment of complaint.

> *My soul is weary of my life. I will give free course to my complaint. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, "Do not condemn me. Show me where You contend with me. Is it good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands and shine on the counsel of the wicked?"* (Jb 10:1-3)

We must not forget that the nightly news and the daily newspapers are in business to make money off the misery of our lives. They economically thrive on those who thirst after seeing and reading about doom and gloom. Christians who are led by a fickle desire to allow their environment to form their mental state of mind, must turn off the news and stop reading the newspapers.

We must repent of our culture of complaint that has developed out of a Facebook circulation of immoral junk and jokes. We must turn our attention to reading from the Word that says *"we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"* (Rm 8:37). If we watch the news and read our newspapers more than we study our Bibles, then we are in trouble. If we spend countless hours every day reading circulated junk about which to complain and gripe, then we need to repent. We need to start studying our Bibles again. Satan is not dumb. After all, he has more Christians spending more time on Facebook and YouTube than in the study of their Bibles.

We would thus look past the circulated news of doom and reports of despair. We are "other-world minded," and thus, our philosophy of history is not based on a glamorization of broadcasted sin. It is based on a Divine theme, a salvational plan that is being played out in the best of all possible environments that was created for the purpose of bringing free-moral individuals into an eternal dwelling with their Creator.

We would believe that there is infinite Divine control in a world that we too often and finitely assume to be out of control. We often allow ourselves to believe that it is all wrong when it seems that all things have gone wrong. We sometimes erroneously conclude as Habakkuk questioned, *"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). We choose not to be thus minded. We so choose because we believe that God is in control. We choose to believe that the wrong will eventually be righted by the One who upholds all things by the power of His command (Hb 1:3).

So we cannot help ourselves from being incurably optimistic. If the "Bible tells me so," then we have no other option but to conclude that the One who upholds all things by the word of His power will eventually bring about that for which He created all things. His "plan of salvation" is not yet complete. The cross has taken place. But the crown is yet to come.

When the Malaysian MH 350 flight was lost from the radar of humanity, there was great mourning on the part of the families of everyone who was on board the fateful flight. A placard stand was erected in the airport at Beijing. On it one could write a brief statement in reference to the rescuers' efforts to find the lost plane. As we noticed the brief statements of the placards that were hung upon the display stand, there seemed to be two categories. There were those notes from the family members who had no world view that included God. These notes simply read, "Have hope." And then there were the other notes that were placed there by those who

had God in their world view. These notes read, "Hope and pray."

Hope by itself may give one a sense of peace of mind, but hope without the possibilities of Divine intervention leaves one with only the abilities of the rescuers. The Christian has hope, but his hope has a foundation of faith in a God who is working all things together for good. It is this hope that we would have, not simply a fatalistic optimism that everything will somehow work itself out by chance.

And herein is the wonderful gift of having in our hands an inspired record of how God worked all things together in the past for the good of those who loved Him. We would thus walk by faith as those faithful ancients about whom the Hebrew writer inscribed the words, *"**These all died in faith**, not having received the promises. But having seen them afar off **were assured of them**, and **embraced them**, and confessed that they were foreigners and pilgrims on the earth"* (Hb 11:13). We want to be so assured of what God is now doing in order to work us toward the crown, that we will confess that we too are only foreigners in this world.

In our study of Divine history, therefore, we have hope for the future because of the evidence of how our God worked in the past. Someone rightly stated it: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Hb 11:1). **Our God has given us evidence of how He has worked in the past in order to give us hope of how He is working now and will continue to work in the future**. This is how the ancients of old functioned in their daily walk of life, and this is how we will do the same in our lives today (Hb 11:2).

Chapter 5

THE NONSTOP GOD

When the Son of God stood with His incarnate feet on Palestine soil, He said, *"My Father is working until now ..."* (Jn 5:17). And we conclude that He is still working today.

If we conclude from Scripture that God knows the future, then we must conclude that He knows what He is doing by working all things *"together for good to those who love"* Him in the present. If we come to this conclusion, then we may be somewhat frustrated with our own lack of ability to understand what He is doing in the present in order to bring about that which is good for His children. But most important, we might struggle with our faith that He is able to bring about the finality of His eternal purpose for this world.

We assume that God is presently working. But our difficulty is perception. We have a difficult time perceiving His present work in the affairs of this world, and specifically, in our lives. This is particularly difficult for "inactive Christians," if there is such a thing. Those who have their lives programmed with a rigid schedule are at a loss to determine that God is working in their lives. Those who are so consumed with the affairs of this world, have a difficult time perceiving the work of God. This is the sadness about those who are doing nothing in the realm of walking by faith. If our faith takes us only to a non-relational assembly with others who are also "dead in the water," then no one is perceiving, or experiencing the work of God in their lives. Unless one is launching by faith out into the deep waters of work for Jesus, then he has no realm in which to perceive God's work in his life. It is easy to have faith while standing in the boat. But it takes faith to jump in deep waters and walk. If we do not walk by faith, we will have little faith in the One who is able to reach down and answer our cries for help. Just ask Peter.

We need to take this quest for the abundant life beyond our personal lives. We must enter into the realm of God's work in the world of affairs around us. In order to do this, we go to our source book by first examining the faith of the saints in the Old Testament who walked in the comfort of God's directing hand. **The faith of these giants of faith is revealed through their steadfastness while living through the apostasy of Israel, and often not perceiving that God was even working through their sin**. Their faith was revealed throughout Israel's history in the wilderness wanderings, during the time of the constant torment of the Canaanites whom Israel did not flush out of the promised land, as well as their eventual going into Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. They simply, or magnificently, trusted that **God was working**.

It is always challenging to understand that God is working throughout the worst of circumstances. But if we conclude that He is working all things together for good for His people, then we must hold to this conclusion, regardless of the doom and despair that we might be enduring in our present lives.

We have found that some have difficulty believing

in a God who is working things out for the good of those who are enduring the sufferings of this world. But the God in whom the Christian believes is not impotent in reference to the affairs of man. We are not deist, that is, believing that God created the world and then walked away. We believe in a God who *"is not far from every one of us;* ***for in Him we live and move and have our being****"* (At 17:27,28).

God's work in the affairs of man did not begin two thousand years ago. It has been His business since the beginning to be involved in His creation. Jesus reminded the Jews, *"**My Father is working until now** ..."* (Jn 5:17). And so, this is the conclusion we take away from Galatians 4:4. *"But **when the fullness of time came**, God sent forth His Son ...."* God was working from the beginning to bring Jesus into the world. The beginning of what eventually concluded in the "fullness of time," reached back to the very beginning of time, before the Garden of Eden, before the first "Let-there-be" statement was made and the earth sprang into existence (See 1 Pt 1:19,20). We believe in the working plan wherein our Savior was crucified before the creation of this world (See Mt 13:35; Ep 1:4; 1 Pt 1:20). We believe in an involved God who worked from the very beginning of that which exists to the "fullness of time" that climaxed in the cross. But we also do not believe that God went on vacation at the cross.

God's involvement in the affairs of the world since the beginning of time assumes that there is purpose to this world, and that purpose is Divine. The "fullness of time" marked only one milestone of His work in time. One milestone was accomplished at the cross. This was a salvational milestone that was measured by the "fullness of time." But since the cross, we have entered into another time zone, of which it too will come to a fullness. This fullness of time will end in the crown. And because we have not yet reached this milestone, **we conclude that God is still working in the affairs of mankind in order to bring about His eternal plan for us**.

Our foreknowing God has worked throughout history in order to bring into His eternal glory and presence those who will make a free-moral choice to serve Him. He is the God in whom *"we live and move and have our being."* He is a God who cannot keep His hands off His creation. And because He cannot keep His hands off, He is *"upholding all things by the word of His power"* (Hb 1:3) in order to get us to our crown at the end of all things.

In order to increase our faith in this God in whom we believe, we must go back in history to an era where we might conclude that things got out of control. At least those who were experiencing the calamity of those times might think that God had vacated His creation and forsaken His people. We go back to the history of Israel in order to be reminded that our God is in the midst of His work right now, as He was with Israel, in order to bring about the intervention of His Son again into the affairs of man.

Our case that our God is transcendent—He intervenes in the affairs of this world—is proved by the Bible record of His work among His people, which work will not conclude until we hear the sound of a last trumpet. This is a thrilling story of God working all things together for the good of all those who walk by faith. We know that it is often difficult to perceive His work during times of struggle. But we must keep in mind the crowd of Old Testament witnesses who remained faithful in their struggles, while they too found it difficult to look around to find tangible evidence of His presence (Read Hb 11). But in reading of their faith there is such an exciting story. It is one from which we cannot walk away without believing that the one true and living God is the one "in whom we live and have our being." He is a God whose presence is not defined by our words concerning distance, but a God who is simply here and there at the same time. He is not confined to the definition of our words, nor to the hands on our clocks. His being and work are not limited to the definition of the words in our dictionary.

Chapter 6

A WORLD VIEW WITHOUT A WORLD

We would conclude that God has worked in the affairs of this world and in the lives of His people. He so worked in order to bring about the purpose for which He created this world. But we must understand why He had to work in our affairs. Since He created us to be free-moral individuals with the ability to choose, and placed us in the best of all possible environments in order that we be able to make choices, He knew that we would make choices that would lead to our harm. He knew that when the collective of humanity would make the same bad choices, humanity would end up in moral degradation.

So we start with all humanity that went all wrong. A principle of humanity is brought out by the wickedness of man before the flood of Noah's day. Of that generation of mankind, God pronounced, *"... 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). Herein is revealed a principle that we must not forget when studying the history of humanity. **Societies become worse, not better, when they are left to walk after their own moral codes**. This is not being pessimistic about life and this world. We know this is true because the Bible says that it is simply **not in man who walks to direct his own path** (Jr 10:23). And since man cannot be left alone to establish his own moral codes of behavior, then there must be direction from above. But even when Divine direction is given from above, the majority of mankind can still go wrong. But those faithfuls as Noah who walked by faith, can survive even in the midst of total moral degradation.

So in view of the fact that we morally go wrong, even with the written directions of God in our hands, God transcends history in order to do His will regardless of our evil inventions. God never left man with the responsibility of carrying out His eternal plan of redemption. He could not do this because all sin (Rm 3:23). In view of what happened to all humanity before the flood of Noah's day, the moral planning of man could never be the foundation upon which redemption could take place. God must personally work in history in order to bring about His purpose for which He created this world. **And the purpose for this world is to bring created beings into eternal dwelling in His presence**. If we are to make any sense out of this world, then we must accept this reason for the purpose of the world and our existence in it.

So the fact that man morally digresses to the point *"that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart"* are only evil, God uses the efforts of Satan, who seeks to destroy man, to bring about His plan for those He created. He illustrated this providential work with His chosen people Israel. He recorded His workings with Israel, and thus, from this record He expects us to read and learn how He continues to work with His spiritual Israel today (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

Israel was chosen out of the nations of the world for a specific purpose. **That purpose was to reveal in time the faithfulness of God in preserving a segment of society for the revelation of the Redeemer of all those who would walk by faith**.

The Jews were not chosen because they were more righteous than other nations. They were not chosen because they were more obedient. They were a stiffnecked people. But this stiffnecked nature would aid in their preservation. In order to pave the way for the coming Redeemer, God needed a people who was tuff-skinned and determined, even though in their hardheaded nature most of them would eventually rebel against His moral standards. Nevertheless, after they would pass through the fire of their Assyrian and Babylonian bondage punishment, the remnant of Israel that would emerge from captivity would never again go after idols and flirt with immorality. Their captivity would purify them in anticipation of the Savior who would come in the fullness of time of national Israel and the fulfillment of all prophecy concerning the Christ (Lk 24:44).

God worked everything for good through Israel. If we step back and take a look at Israel's rebellion and captivity, we can see how God took that which was a national calamity in order to bring about the salvation of millions of people throughout the world.

As students of Bible history, we must never forget the reason why God chose Israel from the nations of the world. Knowing this reason helps us understand why He wanted all the Canaanites vacated from the land of Palestine. And if they would not vacate, He instructed Israel to eradicate their evil culture. If Israel did not morally cleanse the land of promise in which God intended to preserve a segment of society, then there would be the danger that God's people would go the way of all humanity as in the days before the ark of Noah was lifted from the face of the earth.

It seems that in God's efforts to use Israel for His purpose, He struggled with their history of rebellion, repentance and renewal. When it seemed that the Israelites were on the verge of destruction, God came to their rescue. This repetitive story of rebellion, repentance and renewal started when they were only three months out of Egyptian captivity. But Moses pled for Israel and God relented to let them survive His fury against their rebellion (See Nm 14:11-20). When they came into the land of promise, they did not drive out the evil culture of the Canaanites. We know the rest of that story. Throughout their independence in Palestine, the cycle of rebellion, repentance and renewal continued until there was no cure but eradication from the land. And thus they went into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. But in all this social turmoil we must not forget that God was writing a history book from which we today could find our way to Him in eternity.

Chapter 6

GOD PURPOSEFULLY WORKS

The Old Testament history books are a literary road map of the work of God in the affairs of this world. God has recorded this history for the sake of His people. When Paul reminded both the disciples in Rome and Achaia of this recorded history, he surely wanted them to remember the fact that God was still working in the lives of His people at the time he wrote both Romans and the two Corinthian letters (See Rm 15:4: 1 Co 10:11). We too would give heed to his exhortation in order to do the same. Old Testament history was not simply recorded to give us a historical narrative of Israel, but to give us sign posts of the work of God in the affairs of this world. He thus expects us to conclude that since He worked in such a manner in times of old, **then He is doing the same in these times**.

From the day the Israelites were baptized unto Moses in the Red Sea (1 Co 10:2), to the time when about 3,000 were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins 1,445 years after the Red Sea baptism (At 2:41), God worked among His people in order to bring about the cross of redemption and the phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 (At 2:1-4).

Israel was purified through the wilderness wanderings. After they were purified of their rebellious spirit and bondage mentality, they were placed in the land of promise. All went well until the people began to fall under the influence of the Canaanites they failed to eradicate from the land. They were then consigned to suffering their deportation into all the world. In being scattered throughout the land of their captors, they were again purified. After the captivity, the remnant was spiritually prepared to again participate in the eternal plan of God to preach the gospel to the world.

A. The scattering:

Because of their rebellion against God, Israel was taken into the wilderness of Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. But we must not forget that God was working in their struggles of captivity in order to turn their rebellion into repentance and to accomplish His plan to bring the Savior into the world. He was working in order to lay the foundation to take the message of the Savior into all the world.

The foundation for world evangelism was first laid when the northern ten tribes of Israel were carried away into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. Nineveh was the old capital of the Assyrian Empire. As biblical historians, we often make the mistake of viewing the expanse of the empire of Assyria to be from Nineveh to the west, since this is the only history we have of the Empire in the Bible. But we must view the empire to have also expanded far to the east. We do not know how far east the Assyrians extended their empire, but we can make some guesses. It surely extended as far east as it did west, and thus the territory of the Empire could have extended to the eastern part of modern-day Iran, and possibly into Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the context of the vastness of the Assyrian Empire, we wonder concerning the extent to which the Jewish captives were carried away when the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722/21 B.C. We wonder because we must understand that God was setting the world stage for something awesome that would come centuries later in the history of Israel. So when we read historical statements as the following, we must see God at work for the salvation of man:

> *For the children of Israel* [the northern kingdom] *walked in all the sins of Jeroboam that he did. They did not depart from them until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight as He had said by all His servants the prophets.* ***So Israel was carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day*** (2 Kg 17:22,23).

This deportation of Israelites also affected other peoples over which Assyria reigned, for other peoples were brought into the land of Canaan.

> *And the kingdom of Assyria brought people from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Ava and from Hamath and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel* (2 Kg 17:24).

Now keep in mind that in all this movement of peoples, God was establishing a foundation upon which world evangelism would later take place over seven hundred years after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel.

In order to continue the laying of the foundation for world evangelism, a little over 130 years after the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel, the same process of deportation started with the southern

kingdom of Israel, Judah. By the time of this deportation, the Babylonian Empire had conquered the Assyrian Empire. In reference to Judah, it was the same story of taking Jewish captives and spreading them throughout an empire. These captives were being planted in order to bring forth fruit centuries later.

> "*Now the rest of the people* [of Jerusalem] *that were left in the city, and the fugitives who fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard* ***carried away***" (2 Kg 25:11).

Jeremiah prophesied during the last days of the southern kingdom. In his prophecies, God promised through Jeremiah that He would scatter His people throughout the nations of the world. At least one thing is certain when we read these prophecies of Jeremiah. In reference to the scattering of the southern kingdom as a result of their sin, God was using Israel's rebellion as the foundation upon which He would universally crush Satan. Jeremiah recorded that the Lord said, "*And I will cause them to be moved into* ***all kingdoms of the earth*** ..." (Jr 15:4; see Jr 9:7). This global movement of Israelites was presupposing that God would centuries later commission the disciples to "go into all the world" where He had scattered His people (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15). They would go into all these lands to which Jews were scattered in order to preach the gospel of deliverance from the bondage of sin.

Babylon, the capital of the Babylonian Empire, was south and further east of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. We would presume, therefore, that the captives of the Babylonian captivity were carried further east than the captives of the Assyrian deportation. These captives may have been deported as far east as the region called "India" in those days.

The Babylonian Empire was eventually conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire, whose borders extended from India to Ethiopia. This was a massive empire, an empire throughout which Jews had been deported by the previous empires of Assyria and Babylonia, which kingdoms had been conquered by the Medes and Persians. During the reign of Ahasuerus, one of the kings of the Medo-Persian Empire, Esther 1:1 states that King Ahasuerus "*reigned over 127 provinces* ***from India to Ethiopia***." When a letter of deliverance was sent throughout the kingdom that the Jews be allowed to deliver themselves from the wicked plan of Haman, this letter went to scattered Jews **who were living from India to Ethiopia** (Et 8:9). We would conclude, therefore, that by the time of Esther, there were Jews living as far east as India and as far south in Africa as Ethiopia.

B. The prophecy of the plan:

Now that we have taken a brief tour of Jewish deportation throughout the world, we must consider what this meant in reference to world evangelism and God's eternal work to take the gospel into all the world. A very significant prophecy of Isaiah lays the foundation upon which the world would be evangelized through the scattering of the Jews throughout the ancient world. This prophecy was made at the time the northern ten tribes of Israel were initially taken into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. It was made by Isaiah who prophesied from about 740 to 700 B.C.

With the carrying away of the first Jews into world captivity, God wanted these Jews to know that something would happen in their future that would turn their captivity into a blessing for all the world. He wanted them to know that He was still working in Israel regardless of their captivity and deportation throughout the world. Isaiah wrote the following historical prophecy:

> *And it will come to pass* ***in the last days*** *that the mountain of the Lord's house will be established on top of the mountains, and will be exalted above the hills.* ***And all nations will flow to it****. And many people will go and say, "****Come and let us go up*** *to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths,"* ***For out of Zion will go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*** (Is 2:3,4).

The Passover/Pentecost feast was a time when the Israelites came before the Lord to celebrate their independence from Egyptian captivity. It was an annual event where as many Israelites as possible would be assembled before the Lord. When we combine this annual event with the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2,3, something wonderful was to happen in the future. From the time Isaiah made the prophecy, the thought of his message was in the minds of the Jews for centuries. However, Isaiah had stated something that they could not possibly have understood. It could not be understood until after it was fulfilled. And it would not be fulfilled until **over 700 years after Isaiah made the prophecy**.

During this 700 years, God was laying the groundwork for world evangelism through the captivities of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. He was scattering His people throughout the world and permanently planting many of the Israelites in the economic culture of the nations to which they were taken as captives. Throughout the centuries, the Jews embedded themselves in the culture and economic structures in

whatever nation they lived from Ethiopia to India, and beyond. They were building synagogues as religious/cultural centers in order to maintain their identity in the lands where they lived and prospered for over seven centuries. **God did not want them to lose their identity as Israelites, for when the prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled, God wanted the world to know that He had kept His promises to His people**. God knew what He was doing.

The Israelites surely had no idea that God was working through them as displaced captives. We can come to this conclusion because we have the opportunity of reading the recorded history in the Old Testament, and the final outcome in the New Testament. But when Israel was struggling through the captivities and living the history, they were certainly puzzled as to how God would turn their calamity into their good, but particularly into the good of the world. It is certain that they had no idea that all the scattering of the captives was connected with the mystery of God. Even the prophets could not understand this mystery when they recorded their inspired prophecies concerning what was to come. The prophets knew something was up, but they had no idea of the mystery that God had in His mind for all the world. The predicament of the Old Testament prophets was clearly stated by Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

> *Of this salvation the* [Old Testament] *prophets have inquired and search diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow. To them it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you they ministered the things that are now reported to you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, which things angels desire to look into.*

C. The fullness of the times:

"***But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son ...***" (Gl 4:4). On the Passover/Pentecost feast of A.D. 30, God had a surprise for those traveling Jews who came to Jerusalem from Italy, north Africa and the Far East. **Acts 2 is a record of the beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2,3**.

During His ministry, Jesus attended at least three Passover/Pentecost feasts. During the last feast, He was crucified, and the fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2,3 began. Of the three thousand who were obedient to the message of the apostles on the A.D. 30 Passover/Pentecost, some were from the far corners of the Roman Empire, which Empire now encompassed all the preceding world empires of Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece (See At 2:8-11).

The travelling Jews who experienced the message of the apostles of the A.D. 30 Passover/Pentecost, returned to their homes in far off lands. They went home with a tremendous message on their hearts of what they had heard and seen, and experienced in obedience to the gospel (At 2:38,41). But we must not forget that there was another Passover/Pentecost a year later in A.D. 31. When this Passover/Pentecost came, those who were at the A.D. 30 feast a year before said to their fellow Jews who were not in Jerusalem the year before, "*Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord ...*" (Is 2:2,3).

And they went, year after year to the annual Passover/Pentecost feasts. It was in Jerusalem where the apostles stayed and preached the gospel to the world through those who came. The sojourners came and heard the message of the gospel. They saw the miracles of the apostles. They heard and obeyed the gospel. They then returned home with a message on their hearts. The change of the paradigm of faith was so great that the early Christians turned the world upside down as the message of the gospel went from synagogue to synagogue, and nation to nation as returning Jews from the Passover/Pentecost feasts in Jerusalem returned to their homeland nations throughout the world (See At 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8). The system of evangelism was so effective that Paul could write in A.D. 61,62 that the gospel "*was preached to every creature that is under heaven*" (Cl 1:23). God's system of world evangelism through the deportation of His people throughout the world centuries earlier had worked.

D. Initial fulfillment of the plan:

So what would we conclude from this planned system that God worked out over seven centuries? There is certainly at least one important conclusion we must make. **God is always working things together for good to bring about His eternal purposes**. We are sure that the Jews who suffered during the seven centuries of social turmoil did not understand God's redemption plan, for it was a mystery to everyone. The system by which God would evangelize the world was a mystery. The redemption through His Son was a mystery. Though the Jews experienced the captivities, they did not understand what God was doing in allowing them to be scattered among the nations of the world in order to get His redemption plan preached. We must not forget this point.

In order to reestablish the identity of Israel, a remnant of Israel eventually returned to Palestine after the

captivities. This return of the remnant was in fulfillment of the promises that were made to the fathers. But the majority of the Jews had to remain scattered throughout the world. God was planning to use their settlement in the lands of their former captors as a means to take the gospel into all the world. **God works, and His work in these global matters is often never detected by those who must live through them by faith**.

We must conclude that He is working even today through national calamity in order to bring about good for His people and the finalization of His eternal plan. He is simply not finished with His eternal plan for our existence. Our speculations concerning His work can only be based on the assumption that as He worked in the past He will work in the present and future. Since those things that were written before were written for our learning (Rm 15:4), then we conclude that we must learn from those recorded workings in the past in order to determine how He is working in history today. However, we would be cautious about adding details to His mysterious workings that He is now working out in the affairs of the world. We serve a mysterious God, one whose ways are past figuring out. *"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). We would never assume that we understand His "unsearchable judgments" as some modern-day prognosticators would, and subsequently make millions of profit at the expense of the ignorant and curious.

We believe in a God who knows the future. Since He knows the future, then even before He delivered Israel from Egyptian captivity, He knew that the Jews would eventually rebel and go into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. His eternal purpose was always to use Israel as the medium through which He would preach the gospel of Jesus to the world.

As Israel, we are free to make our own moral decisions. But in our freedom to make bad decisions, God can use our failures for His purpose. He did this with the nation of Israel. He can do the same today with us. Though we would be tempted to despair because of the wickedness of the world in which we live, we must continually remind ourselves that God is working everything together for the good of His people. As we stated before, God did not stop working in the affairs of the world at the cross. There is yet the crown that will complete His eternal plan for the creation of this world.

Chapter 8

WORLD VIEWS IN CONFLICT

As we venture through the comparison of the opposing world views of Christianity and Islam, we must caution ourselves concerning definitions. We can only be generic in our identity of Islam because of the vast interpretation and application of Qur'anic law. Our identity of true Islam, therefore, will be illusive. The same is true of our definition of "Christianity." Islam is denominated into so many different expressions of belief and behavior that it is quite difficult to use any one sect of Muslims as the definition of the religion. Those non-Christian faiths who are looking from outside of Christianity would say the same about trying to identify who is truly a Christian. Even those within the realm of what is call Christendom have a difficult time identifying what determines one to be a true Christian. The Muslim has the same difficulty in determining from within those who are truly Muslim. Within the present conflicts within Islam throughout the world, it is not uncommon to hear one Muslim saying concerning another Muslim that he is not a Muslim. We confess that we are also guilty as Christians.

In defense of generic definitions, we admit that we are responding from within a social quagmire of religion. Nevertheless, in our efforts to make some sense out of this world in which we live, we are forced to use generic definitions, guarding ourselves as much as possible from creating stereotypes. So we will use the term "West" to refer primarily to the non-Islamic Americas and Europe. We will be careful and fair to our Islamic friends not to lump our definition of their faith with the atrocities committed by those whom we would generically refer to as radicals, or to use the present-day politically correct term, Islamists. We would appreciate the same consideration from our Muslim friends in their definition of Christianity.

Regardless of our inabilities to stereotype religious faiths, there is certainly a general conflict going on in the world today within the ranks of the Muslim world, as well as the Muslim world against Christianity. It is a conflict between religious faiths that move people against one another. It is a conflict of ideologies that are expressed through religion, or non-religion. We seek, there-

fore, in our own inadequate way to give some meaning of the struggles between faiths and ideologies that prevail throughout the world today. We would do this because the atheists of our day are having field day concerning why anyone would ever want to believe in a God that would cause so much violence in the human race.

We would begin our discourse concerning with a present generation of young people in the West under the age of thirty who are somewhat challenged concerning history and world events. They are less knowledgeable of historical world events than previous generations. It is not that they are less informed about the world in which we live, but their view of the world is different from previous generations. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (an educational research organization in America), reported that 12th graders in America scored lower in testing in the subject of history than in any other subject of their schools.

The Millennial Generation has grown up in a society of taking for granted the privileges they have received in a materialistic society of entitlement. They take their freedom for granted. Their culture seems to move the participants away from the real world of oppressive world governments to an unrealistic dream world where everyone will somehow get along at a distance from one another in texting (SMS). This lack of understanding of oppressive ideologies and governments was clearly revealed in the percentages of young people of America who thought that Israel was recently wrong in defending itself from a neighboring state—Hamas in the Gaza Strip—that seeks to annihilate the nation of Israel from the face of the earth. The fathers of this historically naive generation of the West, however, represent a different point of view concerning the conflict between Israel and Hamas that took place in 2014. Because their fathers better understood the real world in which we live, the greater percentage of the fathers who were fifty and older supported Israel's right to defend itself against those who are seeking its annihilation. They understood why Israel bombed the invasion tunnels into their land by a religious group (Hamas) who considered it an honor, according to their faith, to cause the death of women and children by provoking retaliatory strikes from Israel to defend itself.

One of the critics of the younger generation of America wondered why Israel did not engage in dialog with Hamas. A CNN news reporter interviewed Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, and asked, "You have been criticized for not engaging in peace talks with Hamas. Why do you not do this?" Netanyahu simply responded, "How can you negotiate with someone who wants you dead? Must we negotiate our suicide?" (We would caution the West that the day is coming when the stance of present-day Israel against Hamas will be a prophetic message of their own survival against the onslaught of Islam.)

Answers to international questions may have simple answers in a young Western cocooned generation who think that people are entitled to their freedom without any cost. But we feel that such a generation must have a reality check. Those who take their freedom for granted need to remember the cost that their forefathers paid to gain and retain the unique freedom they have been handed on a silver platter. And second, they need to be thankful to God that the name of a free nation is written in the "place of birth" on their birth certificates.

We must never forget that freedom is not something that inherently happens within society or religion, but is something for which society and religious leaders fight, and then vigilantly work to preserve. We see a young entitlement generation in the West that has not learned this vital principle of history.

It was the young entitlement generation in America that put Barak Obama into power a few years ago as President of the United States. However, it was the same generation that deprived Obama of a majority in the Senate in 2014 because they did not show up again at the voting booth. As we predicted with Obama, and consequently the entitlement generation that put him in office, he, as well as they, had to learn that there is a real world out here of some who truly hate America. And like the citizens of Israel, they would like to see the "great satan" (America) dead.

It is difficult to negotiate with a terrorist at Starbucks when he has a loaded gun under the table directed straight at you. Terrorists did not grow up in a Starbucks culture of entitlement where differences are worked out over a cappuccino. They are representatives of a fanatical religious world view that seeks to take populations back in history to oppressive regime management. Theirs is not a future world view of prosperity, but a backward advance into the Dark Ages of survival existence.

When it comes to the righteous saints of God, the matter becomes even more complicated and dangerous. Where particular societies of our present world have digressed to the moral degradation explained in Genesis 6:5, the righteous are subdued at all costs. Such places of moral degradation exist in our world today. And it is from some of these places that dates as 9-11 will live on in infamy. This is the world as it is.

What most people of the West, young and old, do not fully appreciate is that true Islam is a religious/po-

litical system that is very different from the Western world view. It is a theocratic governance of the people with the Qur'an being the "constitution" of the state. The West must not be deceived by the moderate Muslim who has ignored this Islamic mandate of theocratic government, and thus watered down some teachings of the Qur'an in order to reside within democratic structures of states that are governed by secular constitutions, which constitutions guarantee a separation between church (religion/faith) and state. In the constitution of Islam (the Qur'an), there is no separation between faith (church) and state. State is the religion, and thus, in order for the state to properly function, the constitution of the religion must become the law of the state.

All this is right out of the theocratic system of government of the Old Testament. The Israelites were fortunate in the fact that God wrote the constitution (the Law), though the Muslim would claim the same for the Qur'an. The Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) was the law of the Israelite state. Since some in Israel today seek to be an Israelite state according to the Old Testament law, they too have the same problem as the true Muslim who would seek to establish a true Islamic state according to the Qur'an. Fortunately, the majority of present-day Israelites have modernized. They have ignored the mandates of a true Israelite state by separating secular state and the ballot box. However, there are those conservative Jews who would again reinstitute the Torah as the constitution of a theocratic state.

In reference to the theocratic law of Islam, we can thank Turkey and other democratic/Islamic states for doing the same in reference to Islam. The vast majority of the population of Turkey are Muslims, but they are Muslims who have modernized by ignoring the theocratic mandates of the Qur'an. Iran would be similar, though Iran struggles between giving absolute power to an elected president or to the Ayatollah (high priest) of Islam.

But the true conservative Muslim has a theological problem that the Christian does not have in reference to theocratic statehood. Christian Jews understand that in order to prevent what happened to the world's population before the flood (Gn 6:5), God had to build a nation that was founded upon faith in one God. God thus started with Abraham to build this nation. He then promised that from Abraham's seed a great nation would spring forth as the stars of heaven (Gn 12:1-4). This great nation would preserve faith for humanity until the promised Blessing would come who would redeem all those who lived by faith.

When the Redeemer came, it was the fullness of times, which meant the consummation (end) of the state of Israel and the beginning of the spiritual kingdom of King Jesus (Jn 18:36). A national/religious paradigm shift was made at the cross. The Bible teaches that the old world order (Israel) and her law (the Torah) were consummated at the cross (Cl 2:14). And by consummation, God meant termination. In the eyes of God, Israel as a state no longer existed after the cross. National Israel was dissolved in Christ, and thus national Israel became the spiritual Israel, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

> *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 3:27-29).

Unfortunately, Islam does not have this conclusion to its theocratic system of law. Muslims are bound by the Qur'an to establish sharia law (the law of the Qur'an) as the constitution of an Islamic state. Those Muslims who live in democratic states, therefore, must compromise the teachings of the Qur'an every time they go to a ballot box and cast a vote. Everyone else must always remember, therefore, that once the majority of the democratic state becomes Muslim, then the ballot box, according to strict Islam must disappear if true sharia law is to be established as the constitution of the state.

Every person within a democratic state in which there are also Muslims, must never forget that the teleology of the conservative Muslim is that Islam must eventually become the religion of the world. Once in the majority in every nation, then they must, according to the Qur'an, bring in sharia law in order to produce a true Islamic order of governance.

For the radical Islamist, it is only a matter of time before the whole world becomes an Islamic state. It is then that the radical Islamist believes there will be true peace. But as manifested by the present bloodletting between the Muslim Shi'ites and Sunnis, we know that such peace will never exist, even if all of us become some brand of Islam.

Westerners must not forget that radical Islamists do not see the world as they do. Their world view is different. In their world view, Islamists want to see the world as they want to see the world. For example, they view the world as the goal for world domination. What has fueled their convictions to accomplish this goal are some very significant conflicts that have transpired on the world stage in the last half century. For one example, the Islamists sees this generation of Israelites to be quite

soft. They also see the present generation of Americans in the same way. And they are probably right. When they hear the phrase "no boots on the ground," they are encouraged to believe that the West is afraid to engage in conflict concerning their own beliefs. The radical Islamists thus establish their world view on the basis that the West is timid, and thus impotent in reference to mortal conflict.

In 1967, the whole Middle East Arab world launched a combined attack against the state of Israel. But in only six days the army of the state of Israel that represented Israel's culture at that time, obliterated the attacking armies of the united Arab states. In another Middle East conflict in 1973, Israel almost took Cairo, Egypt and Damascus, Syria, capitals of two surrounding nations. But at the same time they could not defeat the small underground army of Hezbollah radicals who held out in Lebanon next door to Palestine. So the Islamist's conclusion to Israel's failure to eliminate radical groups as Hezbollah and Hamas is evidence that the state of Israel is weakening. The present radical Islamic world believes that the present generation of Israel has become weak, and thus, will eventually fall to Islam rule.

Now add to this the last decade of war when the West bungled the social structure in Iraq. And we must also not forget the continued existence of the Taliban of Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, and the growing Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al Shabaab in Somalia. If the West could not with all its military power annihilate the Taliban and Al qaeda, then all Islamists throughout the world conclude that they will never be defeated. In their world view, they believe that they will eventually defeat the West. As Western nations continue to forsake spiritual ideology in order to trust in bombs and tanks, the radical Islamist has convinced himself that his ideology (Islam) will eventually prevail over the carnally armed defences of a nonreligious West that is afraid to engage his enemy with boots on the ground.

Recent failures of the West against theocratic Islam have convinced the radical Islamist that he will eventually prevail worldwide. Islamists now view the West to be on the defensive, and thus, they are on the offensive. As the softened West cringes from "boots on the ground," groups as ISIS simply draw radical Muslims from all the world to participate in their worldwide mission to establish their definition of a true Islamic state in the Middle East that will eventually grow into all the world.

You cannot win with timid, or halfhearted measures when in conflict with one who is willing to die for his faith. And it will truly be difficult for secular states to win a war against a theocracy that teaches its children in Madrass schools throughout the world to be martyred for Allah in their conflict with the infidels.

It is truly the purpose of the Christian to evangelize the world (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). However, it is not the purpose of the Christian, as the misguided Roman Catholic Church of the Dark Ages, to "Christianize" the world through political and military Crusades in order to make the Pope the supreme world leader. On the contrary, Christians preach a message that calls for an individual and voluntary surrender to Christ. No swords or guns are ever involved. In order to continue the preaching of their message, Christians seek that secular governments exist in order that they might lead a peaceful and quiet life (Rm 13:1-7; 1 Tm 2:1,2). Christians never forget that secular government functions as a ministry of God for the sake of His people, for government is ordained by God to retain the authority of the sword among the people. No Christian ever wants the church to have this authority. The New Testament is not a constitution for state law, as the Muslim so regards the Qur'an. The New Testament is a moral guide by which individuals behave themselves within the structure of any state that guarantees their freedom. The New Testament does not teach that the church has the authority of the "sword" by which the members can behead and deliver stripes to disobedient members. But such is the teaching of the Qur'an.

We must remind ourselves of the concepts that were brought out by Winston Churchill in a brief speech he made in 1899.

> Individual Muslims may show splendid qualities, but the influence of the religion paralyses the social development of those who follow it. No stronger retrograde force exists in the world (*The River War*, 1st ed., vol. II, pp. 248-250).

Chapter 7

A ROAD MAP OF GOD'S WORK

It is the nature of Christianity to bring freedom to all men. In the historical context of Jesus' statement, *"And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (Jn 8:32), Jesus was not referring only to spiri-

tual matters, but freedom to walk the way of God that would deliver people from the bondage of the Jew's religious/political way of life (Judaism). It was a way of walking in sin, for the system separated people from the commandments of God (See Mk 7:1-9). Paul elaborated more on this walk of freedom in Christ in his letter to the Galatians: *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty* [freedom] *by which Christ has made us free, and* ***do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage****"* (Gl 5:1). The word "entangled" assumes a behavior of life that brings bondage. Reference was to more than "committed sin," but to a religious/political way of life and ideology that separated the adherents of such from the freedom that Jesus offers. Jesus brought (1) freedom from the confines of sin, (2) freedom from the bondage of man-made religious/political systems as Judaism, and thus, (3) freedom to think free in Christ. It is in this realm of freedom that Christians have the opportunity to be the best they can be without being intimidated into bondage by the religious/political powers that may prevail. When Christians are guaranteed their freedom through submission to God, they can be the best they can be in a society that guarantees both religious and political freedom. And when we are personally the best we can be, society as a whole prospers. Herein is the secret to establishing a prosperous nation. As someone once said, "Just as freedom from sin for the individual can be found only in Christ, even so, can the freedom of a nation be found only in Him."

What the religious leaders of Judaism did not realize at the time when Jesus made the statements of John 8 was that He was bringing the people freedom from the bondage of their religious/political system. In Galatians 1:14, Paul also had this freedom in the background of his thinking when he reflected on the bondage he promoted as part of the Jew's religion. *"And I advanced in* ***Judaism*** *above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral* ***traditions****"* (Gl 1:14).

When the religious traditions of the fathers is connected with the politic of the people, then there is a theocratic political party that is advanced by zealots as Saul (Paul). The people at the time of Jesus were in bondage to this man-made theocratic political system that was upheld by military men as Saul, and religious leaders as the scribes and Pharisees (See Mk 7:1-9). It was this political system that Jesus confronted. It was a theocratic system that was far removed from what God originally instituted through the giving of the law to Israel on Mount Sinai.

The Judaism of Jesus' time, as Islam today, was a political/religious ideology that included faith and state. The weapons of the Christian against such ideologies are spiritual (Ep 6:10-20), but the weapons of those who seek to maintain such political/religious ideologies are carnal. It is for this reason that many African countries will not allow an Islamic Party, as the Muslim Brotherhood, to exist in the political system of the country. They realize that such political parties will seek to use the "sword" of the state to advance the religion of the party. And such tried the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt when they were briefly in power in Egypt in 2014.

As in our relationship with God, so in our relationship with one another under the rule of law. **If one seeks true freedom, he must always bring himself under the rule of law**. But for a country to be united, everyone must come to an agreement that there will be a separation between religious law and state law. This is necessary lest we establish a theocratic government, and then one particular religion seeks to bring all the citizens of the state into their religion by using the laws of the state. And if any citizen does not "convert," then he must be exterminated.

There is a reason why the American civilization flourished from its early beginnings. The freedom of America was based on the fact that oppressed people from all over the world could find freedom of religious thought that was guaranteed by the new and unique constitution that separated religion and state, and thus gave the individual citizen the right to be truly free without the intimidation of some other person's religious faith. By the thousands, oppressed people from around the world fled to this constitutional society of freedom. They continue to do so today.

Illegal immigrants are found in truly free nations, not in nations that are governed by despots or religious authorities who keep the people in bondage. It is interesting that people still flee to the religiously free West in order to escape the religious oppression of the countries from which they have fled. We thought it interesting that the March 1, 2013 *Time Magazine* reported that many Roman Catholics become evangelicals when they arrive in America. It is true that we can often find free nations by the direction in which immigrants are fleeing.

With the right to be free in a free society, there is the opportunity to think freely. And when men and women think freely, they come up with all sorts of ideas and inventions. Societies that do not allow free thought will always be those societies with companies that violate copyrights and patents in order to copy the inventions of a free market society. America can thank God for the culture of freedom that was first revealed through Jesus Christ, and written within the pages of the New

Testament for posterity. The New Testament principles of freedom, not laws, actually made their way into the American constitution, and then established a freethinking culture, and thus an industry based on invention.

God knew that people would prosper if they were only given the right to think freely. What made America great was this spirit of freedom that was renewed through Jesus Christ. It was the central goal of the writers of the American constitution to guard freedom of thought and movement. The result of this document is what we now witness today as the "American way of life."

The constitution guaranteed the freedom, and free men prospered on the moral foundation of the word of God. This does not make the New Testament the constitution of the state. It only reveals the moral foundation of freedom upon which a freethinking constitution was written. Upon the foundation of such constitutions, every person of society has the opportunity to prosper upon the basis of the principles of being free to prosper. Therefore, we must always keep in mind that when the statement "rule by constitutional law" is used, what is meant is that "rule of law" guarantees the freedom of the people to be fruitful.

Several nations of the world have failed to prosper because they have been submitted to the bondage of traditionalism, or struggle under the dominance of oppressive and corrupt dictators, regimes and religions. When there is no freedom, it is usually not the fault of the people, but some social figure or institution who seeks to keep the people in bondage.

When societies enforce the traditional thinking of the fathers on the people, then there is little room for free thinking and new ideas. Change for the better in these societies is often accomplished through social chaos which no one likes, and thus, everyone shuns. In Africa, tradition ("this is our culture," as it is commonly stated) has crippled the development of the continent for centuries. But this is rapidly changing. Europeans first revealed to people some idea of what freedom can produce. But when the colonials left with either funds for roads, schools and hospitals, what came next was oppressive and corrupt dictators who would not allow the people to think and act freely for themselves. A humble civil worker was not allowed to make a decision on his own unless he checked with some higher authority. And for this reason, the business dealings of such cultures ground to a crawl as one authority on top of another was consulted until a final decision was eventually made for a business to function. "Red tape" is simply another way of saying, "We are in control."

In South Africa we have always had fun with real estate agents who struggle with an archaic system of transferring house ownership. In South Africa it takes about 7-8 **weeks** of red tape to transfer the ownership of a house to a new owner. In America it takes from 3-4 **days**. Now spread this snail-pace business culture that is stuck in a quagmire of red tape throughout most of the business dealings of the economy of Africa and you can understand why African countries will never compete with truly free-market economies. Then consider the fact that South Africa is one of the most efficient economies of Africa. But on the optimistic side, throughout Africa this "red tape" control culture is slowly vanishing away as a new and educated generation immerges. The best is yet to be in Africa.

Strong traditionalism, both in cultural interaction and business dealings, is a manifestation of apprehension, if not fear. It is apprehension about change. It is apprehension about making mistakes. It is a fear of losing the identity of our heritage in order to accept and adopt something new and better that brings greater prosperity for the future. And now we know why a world view with deeply embedded Bible principles releases nations from fear in order to prosper in an environment of freedom.

When faith replaces fear, then God can do great things in taking entire populations out of the archives of the past and poverty in order to set them on their way for a better future. This is the world as God would have it. God said to Adam, *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it"* (Gn 1:28). God meant that Adam lead humanity into prosperity through that which was created. Religions that bind people to poverty in caves are not from the God who created us with the ability to be fruitful.

There has always been too much concern about China taking the economic lead of the world away from America. It is certain that this will eventually happen, but please keep in mind that presently there are 1.4 billion people in China competing in this race against only 230 million people in America. Because China is new on the world economic scene in reference to being a free-market economy, it still takes over a billion people to complete with a few million in order to win the economic race. But just watch China. A new nation is slowly being born. Christian faith is growing at light speed within the country. We cannot but conclude that the same spirit of freedom that grew America will grow China. Freedom will eventually change the culture as the Christian youth assume the direction of the country in the decades to come. Just watch what God does with this nation as millions are moved by faith in His Son in order to discover freedom to work and think. China will become a great and noble nation far beyond what we

see today. The transformation has already started. President Xi of China is tackling corruption, and the youth of the nation are tackling Satan with Christ. China is on its way.

Oppressive government is never sustainable. It is not sustainable because God created within man the desire to be free. Islamic government that is reflected in theocratic systems as ISIS and the Taliban, seek to take people back to the Dark Ages. Such political ideologies exist only because of the leaders' power over the people who are held in bondage by fear, just as it was during the ministry of Jesus and the early Christians. It is simply not natural for men to be in the bondage of fear, and thus, the citizens who are captivated by the bondage of such ideologies always seek to think freely. If they cannot within their own societies, then they become a refugee in one wherein they can think freely.

Regardless of oppressive governments, people still seek to be free. We recently listened to the CNN interview of a 30-year old man who was born in a North Korean prison camp. From the day of his birth, he lived 24 years in the prison until he escaped. Before his escape, all he knew was prison camp life. But if prison life was all he knew, then why did he have the urge to escape, which he did at the age of twenty-four? From where did this inner urge to be free originate? It came from God, for God created us to be free and to think freely, and through free thinking we would develop a better life for ourselves. For this reason, God wants to free people in order that they enjoy the abundant life. Maybe this will help us better understand what Jesus meant in the following statement: *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (Jn 10:10).

Jesus not only took care of our sin problem that was introduced into the world through Adam, He also restored a way of life that Adam sacrificed because of his sin. Adam was driven from the Garden of Eden so that by the sweat of his brow he would have to toil the ground in order to survive. But in Christ, we continue to toil the ground, but we do so in appreciation for all that God did for us at the cross. The only motivation Adam had to toil the ground was the hope of eating the fruits of his labors. The Christian farms the ground in appreciation for the fruit that will eventually come from the cross.

Freedom of thinking and movement is a precious thing. We must never forget that it is always Satan's goal to destroy the freedom of men in order to bring them into the bondage of religious/political systems the lead us away from God. With freedom, therefore, comes the responsibility to always seek truth. Paul explained in Ephesians 4:11,12 the ministries of teaching the truth. The reason these ministries were instituted among God's people was explained by Paul in Ephesians 4:13,14:

> *... 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 statue of the fullness of Christ.* ***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 the cleverness to the deceitfulness of error****.*

Crafty men who seek power will always seek to steal away the freedom of those over whom they seek to be dominant. Does this help us understand why truly Islamic states do not want the young girls to be educated? When ISIS or the Taliban take over a city or region, the first thing that must go is education, especially education of the women. Freedom must be contained in order that men might be dominant over women.

An ignorant people can never be a free people. And thus, an ignorant woman can never be free. Dominant husbands have forgotten, or never learned, that in cherishing their wives, it is their job as the head of the wife to lead the wife to be the best she can be. And in order to lead one's wife to be the best she can be, a husband must lead his wife by love, not dominating his wife through fear. But this social scenario can never happen in a truly Islamic state.

A society that is built upon the nature of God, is a society that is humanitarian. It is a society in which the inhabitants care for the poor and unfortunate. It is a society wherein one loves his neighbor as himself. And since God is defined as love, then we understand that the roots of a truly humanitarian society can be traced back to the peoples' concept of a Higher Power who was lovingly benevolent to them. If the citizens of any nation find the one true and living God, then they will develop a humanitarian society.

Societies that are built on false gods that are created after the imagination of greedy, power hungry megalomaniacs are controlled by fear, not love. These created gods are oppressive since their inventors have sought to create and maintain power over the people. The adherents of such false gods become intolerant of any "apostates" (dissidents). Thus the creator of these gods kill those who oppose them, or those who disagree with their religious faith. They behead the apostates in order to purify their religious state.

The theocracy of Israel under Old Testament constitutional law was to prevent what transpired and led to the necessity of the flood of Noah's day (See Gn 6:5). By the time of Noah, all humanity had become useless

for that which it was created, that is, to populate heaven. With Israel, God ushered in a theocracy wherein the state, with Him as the only King, was to preserve faith. The Old Testament guarded Israel against the idolatrous nations that surrounded Israel and were predominant in the world.

We must keep in mind, however, that Israel was only one nation, one state, a segment of the world populations through whom God would bring the Redeemer into the world. It was not the purpose of Israel to make all nations theocratic states as Israel. Israel was to be unique among the nations. The Old Testament law that was given specifically to Israel, was meant to keep Israel separated from the nations. Jonah did not go to Nineveh in order to make an Israelite state out of the Assyrians.

But now, radical Muslims seek to make the world of nations, one nation/state that is governed by sharia law. By doing this, they seek to use the "sword" of the state to threaten citizens into the one-world theocratic state of Islam. God never did this with Israel. All the theocratic laws of the Old Testament were meant to preserve, not propagate the state of Israel. Muhammad forgot this point because of his little understanding of the purpose of the Old Testament, and his military ambitions.

We need not wonder what the goal is of people as Omar Ahmad, the founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations:

> Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Qur'an should be the highest authority in America (*San Ramon Valley Herald*, July 1998).

And his fellow operative, Ibrahim Hopper, the director of the above organization, stated,

> I wouldn't want to create the impression that I wouldn't like the government of the United States to be Islamic sometime in the future (*Minneapolis Star Tribute*, April 1993).

The same God who created the theocratic nation of Israel was the same God who so loved His creation that He gave His only Son (Jn 3:16). This is the God who commissioned that the gospel be preached to all the world (Mt 28:19,20). He did not commission the apostles to preach a catechism of law by which all secular nations would become one theocratic nation. The one nation that is created by the preaching of the gospel is spiritual. It is not of this world (Jn 18:36). Through the preaching of the gospel, the Christian seeks to bring all men into Christ wherein all are one man in a spiritual kingdom (Gl 3:26-29). For this reason, those who come into Christ do not have to burn their national passports. Every Christian can have dual citizenship, one in the earthly state in which he lives, and one in heaven to where he is going.

The God of love is not promoted by terrorists who seek to "denationalize" the world in favor of a universal citizenship of one Islamic state. God only will eventually be the terrorist of those who reject Him by the creation of their own gods. And since God is defined by love, then His love sets us free to love. We thus love because He loved us first (1 Jn 4:19). If we are citizens of God's heavenly kingdom, therefore, there is no terror in love (1 Jn 4:18). And we know that we are not truly free until we love, even our own enemies. Oh, how wonderful is the one true God of heaven. No imagination of the most intellectual and moral person of earth could have ever created Him with human reasoning. It is for this reason that we know that He is the true and living God.

Chapter 10

EARLY BEGINNINGS OF ISLAM

Any study of the world in which we now live must include a study of the Islamic faith. Our international news media almost daily reports on events in reference to Islamic countries, usually wars and bombings that are associated with some radical group of Islam. In all the conflicts, there is a great deal of misunderstanding between the Western world and the world of Islam. The misunderstandings are almost always based on the fact that neither side of the conflict understands the other. The West cannot sift through all the radical groups of Islam and clearly understand the core nature of the Muslim who is trying to bring his faith into modern times. On the part of the West this misunderstanding is particularly difficult. Western thinking is almost totally biased toward the separation of "church" and state. But the true Islamic world is theocratic. There is no such thing as a separation between one's faith and the law of the state.

The Muslim often views all Christians to be in a theological box wherein he judges all Christians from the twisted perspective of medieval crusaders. This maligned judgment of the West is so critical that the Muslim cringes at even the mention of the word "crusade." And thus, accusations are thrown back and forth between the two world views in order to increase the conviction of the adherents of either group to cling to their perspective faith.

What we would say to our Muslim friends is that they are not too objective in viewing everyone of the world of Christendom to be Christian simply because one believes in Christ. In this context of discussion, we would use the word "true" Christianity in order to identify in Christendom those who have obeyed the gospel and do the will of their Father in heaven (See Mt 7:15-23). Christians are not religionists who invent for themselves all sorts of man-made religious beliefs and practices, and then claim to be Christian simply because they shout "Jesus, Jesus" on Sunday morning.

The Crusades of the Middle Ages were certainly not the work of true Christians. The Crusades were political efforts on the part of apostate religionists who masqueraded themselves as Christians in order to prop up their religious/political power in Europe. And simply because the Crusaders, and those in this modern times, either carve a cross on their shields or wear one around their necks, does not mean that they are true Christians according to the definition of a Christian that is given in the New Testament.

The true Christianity of the New Testament focuses on the humble devotion of disciples who seek to be servants of others in a society in which order is maintained by a secular government. Simple Christians do not seek to usher in a new system of government. They are simply willing to pray for those in power in order that all citizens might lead a quiet and peaceful life of serving others (See 1 Tm 2:1,2). Muslims must understand that true Christianity has been hijacked by religionists just as they claim that Islam has been hijacked by radical Islamic murderers. So we say to the moderate Muslim, let us all live in peace wherein we can be friends, and then, disagree concerning our faiths in the context of healthy discussions. However, all of us must be allowed to confront one another's beliefs under a government that allows separation of faith and state. If a Muslim does not allow this—and true Islam cannot—then the true nature of Islam is revealed. In other words, this environment of freedom of speech cannot exist in a truly Islamic state.

Christians must also be fair and objective in their search to understand true Islam. They must not make their judgments based on what they see on the news media, which is often twisted. As Christians are embarrassed by the twisted portrayal of Christianity to the Muslim world, so moderate Muslims are embarrassed by the behavior of those Islamic sects of Islam who have emphasized the aggressive statements of the Qur'an in order to advance their efforts to gain power and oil wealth.

Though there is definitely a difference between the Bible and the Qur'an, Christians must keep in mind that neither simple Christians nor moderate Muslims seek carnal war with one another. It is only when the radicals of Islam start obsessing over the aggressive statements of the Qur'an that we have trouble. So in order to help those of the West, particularly Christians, to better understand Islam, it might be good to review the birth of the Islamic faith. Its birth and conquest of the Middle Eastern empires will provide some definition of Islamic beliefs, and the "holy book" that originated out of the struggles that prevailed in the century of its birth. Fundamentalist Muslims would view the application of Islam today in our world in the same manner.

A. The birth of a religion:

Islam was born out of a conflict that one Arab person, Muhammad Idn Abdullah, had with his fellow pagan Arabs, unbelieving Jews, and those who were actually apostate Christians. At the time, the seat of authority of "Christianity" had moved from Jerusalem to Rome and Constantinople. A division had occurred in Christendom by the seventh century that had established the another seat of authority in Constantinople (the Greek, or Eastern Orthodox Church).

After its initial birth, Islam was accepted by millions and spread throughout the Middle East in the seventh century. It spread like wild fire because of the apostate "Christianity" of the day. We would learn much today by reflecting on the reasons that led up to the birth and early growth of Islam in the Middle East. Some of these lessons may be difficult to accept by Christians today. Nevertheless, history is a good teacher in order that we not repeat the mistakes of the past.

B. Growth out of conflict:

The historian Tertullian (160-220) stated, "The blood of the Christians is the seed of the kingdom." What he meant was that when the kingdom of God was persecuted in its early beginnings, it grew. It grew because Christians responded to persecution with love. And it was the Christians' love of Christ and one another that

drew people to Christ. It was love at the core of the gospel message that caused the growth. The early Christians lived the pronouncement of Peter:

> *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 persecutors of the early Christians were intrigued by the commitment of Christians to their Savior who gave them hope by so loving them (Jn 13:34,35). They had to wonder why the Christians would so willingly die for their Savior who loved them so much.

Christianity was first the object of persecution by the Jewish religious/political system, and then came the persecution of the Roman state. Since Rome had developed its own state religion, beginning with Nero, the Romans saw Christians as insurrectionists against the state because they would not proclaim Caesar as lord. The state/religious persecution of Rome ended under Emperor Constantine only when Christianity was eventually made the state religion of the Roman Empire. Once this happened, Christianity began to apostatize into what we know today as the Roman Catholic Church. It is inevitable that once a faith becomes connected with the power of a state, it becomes the persecutor of all those who do not conform to its man-made mandates. The designated religionist of the state use the state to enforce their mandates upon those with whom they disagree, and thus, consider enemies of the state. When this happens, we can know that the religion is from man and not God. Constantine, therefore, became the demise of true Christianity. By the time of Muhammad, it was not Christianity that Muhammad encountered, but an apostate state religion.

Roman Catholicism corrupted for centuries those states that it controlled, even as late as the 1950s and 1960s. In Italy, as in many other countries where Catholicism was dominant, it was very difficult for one to get a job if he was not a Catholic. This socio/economic intimidation also prevailed throughout Latin American countries. Catholicism was not the state religion, but everyone who was in power in the state and business were Catholics. In Latin America, it was not until the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in the 1960s that the religious stranglehold of Catholicism on society was broken. The growth of Pentecostalism was actually a social revolution against a religion that was too connected with the state. In South Africa today we too still live with the legacy of churches that aligned themselves in the past too close to politics in the struggle against apartheid. Many of the religious leaders of these churches now consider their churches as small political parties that might somehow fuel their personal ambitions to be somehow voted into a seat in parliament.

The past history of Catholic control of states illustrates the problem of Islam, and should caution all would-be political pastors. Muslims have a difficult time separating the beliefs and behavior of Islam from the laws and function of the state, since the Qur'an teaches that there is no division between faith and state. The Crusades of the Middle Ages were a result of an apostate Christianity being aligned with the sword of the state, and thus, the Roman Catholic Church of the times used that sword to maintain and propagate its authority throughout the territory the state controlled. And in order to increase allegiance to the state (the church), bands of "believers" were organized (crusaders) to go fight against the unbelievers (Muslims). In order to recruit and build an army of Crusaders, a holy cause had to be given to the recruits. The recruits were thus told that they must free "the land of our Lord," which they would call, "the holy land."

(Actually, there was nothing holy about it. It was only a segment of dirt on earth where our Lord determined to set His foot in fulfillment of His promises that were made to the fathers. Once He had accomplished His mission, and His foot left earth at the ascension, the Bible nowhere teaches that He would ever set foot on earth again.)

After Christianity was adopted by the Roman state as the state religion, those who assumed that they were Christian began to ride on the shoulders of the Roman state. It was then that Christianity began to go into apostasy. While unity prevailed among Christians during the early centuries of struggle and persecution, disunity began to prevail across those lands where the name of Christ had gone through the efforts of the early evangelists. The moral and doctrinal norms that produced unity in the first century began to be influenced by the false philosophies of men by the fifth and sixth centuries. Because the greater number of those who professed to be Christian aligned themselves with the power of the state, these began to persecute non-Christian faiths, even those who were of a minority of Christianity who refused to compromise their faith by aligning themselves with the state.

The Christianity that prevailed over the unbelieving world during the first three centuries of the existence of the church, began to be changed into a religious-state monster that unleased persecution on all other faiths after A.D. 325.

The transformation of "Christianity" to a state re-

ligion continued for the next three centuries after A.D. 325. But in A.D. 610, a new world order in religion was born, which order we deal with today as 1.4 billion Muslims populate the world. During the seventh and eighth centuries, the "Christianity" that was represented from Rome, and then also from Constantinople, was morally destitute and doctrinally corrupt. It was not the Christianity we read about in the New Testament. As a result of its divided nature and institutional appearance that was upheld by the state, those of the Arab world began to look for something else. The Arab world perceived that Christianity must work through the power of the state in order to be successful, for this was all that they knew of the Christianity of the day. This is what they witnessed in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. They also perceived that Judaism worked through the efforts of the Jews to reestablish their state in Palestine.

Both Judaism and "Christianity" claimed to be from one God. But the Arabs concluded that God would certainly not be so divided. The Arab world concluded that if God works, then certainly He must work outside and apart from secular and pagan states that existed at the time. Religion, therefore, must become the state in order to banish wars between states, and subsequently bring peace to the world.

Islam had its small beginnings with a militant Arabian name Muhammad. Muhammad was born around 570. He grew up into being a religiously zealous young man, and subsequently, began preaching in Mecca, Saudi Arabia in 610. Though he initially believed in the inspiration of both the Old and New Testaments, his preaching generated great opposition from the "unbelieving" (idolaters) Arabs, as well as the Jews and Christians of his time. He initially instructed his disciples to pray facing Jerusalem, but later in his life after he moved away from the influence of the faith of the Jews and Christians, he called on his followers to pray facing Mecca. The Jews were dedicated to Jerusalem. The Christians were focused on what he perceived was the center of their faiths, Rome or Constantinople. So in order to refocus the Arabs, he needed a city. That city was his hometown, Mecca.

Because of the great persecution that he first faced in Mecca, he eventually fled to Medina north of Mecca. It was in Medina that his following grew. Their number grew to the point that there was relentless persecution of himself and his followers by pagan Arabs, Jews and Christians, even in Medina. But it was in 630 that Muhammad and his followers militarily overcame their opposition in Medina, and then they marched to and conquered Mecca, which he subsequently made the sacred city of Islam.

Muhammad died in 632, and over the next one hundred years, his followers militarily and economically spread Islam throughout the Middle East to as far east as India. Islam essentially wiped Christianity off North Africa, and then spread up through Spain, Portugal, and was about to advance into France. Now consider this. By the end of the seventh century, almost eighty percent of the Mediterranean world had been "Christianized." However, within one hundred years after the beginning of Muhammad's work, Christianity was almost eradicated throughout all the territories that were conquered by Muslims.

This rapid growth of the Islamic faith would have continued on into Europe if it were not for one battle in history. In 732 a historical battle was fought in the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain. It was in this year that Charles Martel stopped the advance of Islam into western Europe at the Battle of the Tours. If Martel had not won this battle, Islam would have inevitably advanced into all of Europe, possibly into England, and then made its way eventually to the New World through those who migrated to America, if indeed they as Muslims would have desired to go to the "new world." But we will never know the significance of the 732 victory in the Pyrenees Mountains. The future of the world was changed by this battle.

Chapter 11

HISTORY WELCOMES A NEW IDEOLOGY

One wonders why Islam made such a rapid advance across the Middle East and North Africa in only one hundred years after its beginning. Though Charles Martel stopped the advance of Islam into Europe at the Battle of the Tours, its advance continued to the east and northeast of Arabia into the territories of the Byzantine and Persian Empires. Even to the middle of the tenth century there were great numbers of "Christians" converting to Islam. In fact, it is estimated that over one million Christians had converted to Islam by the end of

the tenth century. The answer to this conquest over Christianity reveals some interesting lessons for Christians today, some lessons that might be appropriate for to learn something from history.

A. Dysfunctional religious and political leadership:

By the middle of the fifth century, the Roman Empire had lost its influence over the Mediterranean Sea basin. Rome itself fell in 476. The western territories of the Empire had waned before the fall of Rome. At this time in history, the Persian and Byzantine Empires became the dominant powers of the eastern parts of the former Roman Empire. For two centuries, these two empires conquered one another back and forth, during which time one or the other was the major controlling empire of the Middle East.

In 614, the Persians, under the rulership of Chosroes II, besieged and took control of the city of Jerusalem. He did this with the help of the Jews, and subsequently, many church buildings in the city of Jerusalem were destroyed and the Jews were allowed to take control of the city. But in 629, the Byzantines retook the city, and the Jews were banished. Nine years later, Jerusalem was again besieged and finally fell to the Islamic Caliph Omar. What Christians were left in the city were allowed to stay, and the remaining Jews were assigned to what became known as the "Jewish Quarter."

From the seventh century until the middle of the twentieth century, Muslims controlled the city of Jerusalem, with the exception of those brief periods when the Crusaders conquered and occupied the city.

By the middle and end of the seventh century, the Byzantine and Persian Empires had consumed themselves in so much war with one another that they exhausted their efforts to maintain control over the territories they had formerly conquered. The "Christianity" of the time had removed itself from focussing primarily on the central and western part of the now dysfunctional Roman Empire. The center of the Eastern Orthodox Church established its seat in the city of Constantinople. By this time in history, we must keep in mind that Christianity was no longer identified as the true Christianity of the New Testament. It was a divided religion that had institutional power structures seated in both Rome and Constantinople. As a result of this turn in the focus of Christianity from the lives of the people to power struggles within the institution, both political and religious confusion prevailed among Christians throughout the Middle East.

The groundwork was thus laid for the birth and expansion of a new ideology that appealed to the people. The collapse of the Byzantine and Persian Empires opened up the opportunity for a religion that encapsulated both political and religious ambitions. Since the Christianity of the era was more political than practical, Muhammad was presented with the opportunity to give birth to a simple faith that met the needs of the Arab people, which faith would consolidate his military force in order to conquer the western areas of Arabia. The Roman and Orthodox churches had both failed the people in that organized churches became consumed with power struggles from within. Muhammad simply presented a faith to the Arab people that was for the people and by the people. In order to do this, of course, he had to proclaim himself as a prophet, and thus become the center of focus to unite the people. Self-proclaimed prophets are always narcissistic in that they think the world revolves around them.

B. Allegiance to one God:

Muhammad was very successful in his attack against the polytheism of the nomadic Arabian tribes. He saw in Judaism and Christianity the power of the concept of one God to bring people together into one family of believers. Since the roots of his religiosity were initially established through a shallow contact with Judaism and Christianity, he knew enough about both religions at the time to bring the simple concept of the one God into the Arabian tribal groups who were divided among themselves because of beliefs in many gods. The commitment of his followers to the concept of the one God was very appealing, and thus, it became a strong political force to subdue and unite a divided Arabian people. The theology of the one God, who in Arabic was called Allah, was a rallying deity around whom the Arab people were brought together as one religious/political movement.

C. Substituting complexity for simplicity:

The simple Christianity of the New Testament had by the seventh century become a conglomerate religion of man-made creeds that had evolved out of the marriage between Christianity and state powers. Judaism was a confused assortment of the traditions of the fathers. Both faiths were thus complex and confusing to the simple Arabian tribes who were basically uneducated and rural in their culture. When faith becomes complex through an assortment of doctrines and traditions, it removes itself from the daily needs of the common people.

The manner by which Muhammad claimed his words to be the word of God compared closely with the

revelation and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is mentioned twenty-five times in the Qur'an, with a similar description of His life and ministry as that revealed in the Bible. According to the Qur'an, Jesus was born into this world through Mary. He was a prophet of God. He was the revelation of the "word" to man. He was the sinless man of God who would again return to bring judgment upon all men. Muhammad simply cloned this story of Jesus However, he would claim to be the last of God's prophets to man, and his writings, the last "word" from God to those who would submit. He and his teachings thus appealed to those who were confused with the complexity of what was called Christianity and Judaism.

Muhammad presented to his followers a simple legal means by which every man could assume that he was legally right with Allah. If one repeated the creed of Islam, observed the Ramadan Fast every year, gave alms to the poor, prayed five times a day, and made a pilgrimage to Mecca at least one time in his life, then he was a good Muslim. Islam, as a simple faith, appealed to the uneducated.

D. Integration of faith with all aspects of life:

It seems that Muhammad gleaned his theology from the theocratic system of the Old Testament law. He successfully brought together the everyday life of the individual with the civil laws of an Islamic state, thus making Islam a theocratic system of power. When one became Muslim, his or her entire life was centered around Islam. There was no dichotomy of faith and state, secular life and religious life, work for gain and worship. When one was Muslim, all life was given duty to live one's faith. This made Islam a very powerful military incentive that was able to spread rapidly to defeat empires that needed the allegiance of the subjects to be faithful to a state that did not necessarily represent the wishes of the people. With Islam, the people are the state. Any attack against an Islamic state, therefore, was an attack against Islam.

War to the Muslim is always religious. Victory in war by the Muslim, therefore, is not simply the overthrow of a dictator or monarch or king of a secular state. It is an advancement of Islam to bring the totality of the function of one's life under the umbrella of being Muslim. Muhammad was able to weld together the patriotism that citizens manifested toward a secular state with the devotion of a subject to his god. The combination of the two gave the individual Muslim a most valiant cause for which to fight.

Victory to the Muslim in war was not the simple conquest of an enemy. It was the conquest of the Islamic faith over an infidel state. When Muslims go to war, therefore, they do not simply fight and die for a state, but for their faith. Even war between Muslim sects is a jihad to maintain one's allegiance to his particular sect of Islam.

The secular citizen who is devoted to a state alone will never understand this thinking. But when one fights for the survival of his theocratic state, he is fighting for the existence of his faith and God. This is the reason why the Israelites dominated their enemies when they conquered the land of promise. Israel went to war against the "infidel" nations within the land of promise in order to introduce God and His law into the land. If one of the "infidels" wanted to stay in the land, then he had to become a proselyte, that is, a convert to the God and law of Israel. As stated before, Muhammad gleaned his theocratic theology right out of the Old Testament. If one would seek to understand the theology of Islam, a good study of God's laws for Israel when they entered into the land of promise would help.

E. Economic benefits of common religiosity:

One of the prevalent economic practices of the Arab world at the time of Muhammad was the slave trade, which trade is still sanctioned by the Qur'an. This practice existed for centuries among Arabs who captured people out of Africa, and then sold them across the Middle East as slaves. One can only imagine how willing many Africans were converted to Islam simply because they were less likely to be sold as slaves.

Add to this the sociological fact that Islam permeated the totality of one's life. If one lived within an Islamic society, he would convert to Islam in order to be a part of a community that was comprised primarily of Muslims. One had to be a Muslim in order to fit in with the community. If at all possible, all business dealings of Muslims were done with fellow Muslims. For this reason, there was a great conversion of many to Islam simply for the purpose of economics. When Islam became the majority faith in any society, those who were not Muslim were simply boycotted out of business if they did not convert to Islam. Those who worked for a Muslim as an employee eventually had to convert to Islam if they wanted to keep their jobs. Muslims today still use this means to convert people of any society. For this reason, Islam grows easily among the poor, or those who feel that they have been disenfranchised from the economics of society.

F. Offer of a simple faith:

By the seventh century, the religious leaders of Rome and Constantinople had turned Christianity into a corrupt religion that was identified as a regional state faith with many catechisms, rather than a daily way of life that met the spiritual needs of the people. The hierarchal leadership of religion in Rome and Constantinople had so distanced itself from the needs of the common people, that there was a deep spiritual void of spiritual leadership in faith among the people. This unconcern on the part of the "Christian" religious leaders among the people of the time was so great that no need was felt to translate the gospel records of the New Testament into Arabic until the middle of the tenth century. As a result, that for which God had intended the written Scriptures to be among His people was vacant in the lives of the Arabian people for over nine centuries.

Luke wrote the gospel record of Jesus to Theophilus to correct word-of-mouth misunderstandings concerning the life and ministry of Jesus (Read Lk 1:1-4). If these misunderstandings of Jesus started to be circulated **less than forty years** after the personal ministry of Jesus, then just imagine what misunderstandings concerning Jesus prevailed among the Arabs by the time of Muhammad. If within forty years word-of-mouth communication concerning Jesus corrupted who He was and what He taught, then how corrupted would word-of-mouth information concerning Jesus be after over nine hundred years? Christians of the West will never understand this because they have taken for granted printed Bibles at a bookstore or online at the touch of a keyboard. Because the West is quickly turning away from printing Bibles for the world, they are laying the foundation for a biblically ignorant world to arise that is fertile soil for the spread of Islam.

Add to this the fact that the Christianity of the era of Muhammad was burdened with controversies over traditions and catechisms because of ignorance of the word of God. The authority of the word of God had long left the "Christianity" of the day. Christianity was subsequently viewed by the Arab people to be a foreign faith with foreign doctrines and traditions that were void of spiritual strength in the lives of the individual Arab. This inevitably led to the following reason why Muhammad's teaching became so appealing to the Arabs, and many other cultures who suffered from the same spiritual void.

G. Muhammad's teaching was Arabian:

According to the thinking of the Arabian people, by the beginning of the seventh century Christianity was a "religion" that was centered in foreign countries. To the Berbers of North Africa, for example, Christianity was never a faith that was adopted within the culture of those who believed, because the leadership of "the church" was somewhere else. Doctrine, tradition and dictates were handed down from some foreign city in another country. And because there were no copies of the Bible in the hands of the common people, the people were subject to the dictates of "church authorities" of either Rome or Constantinople. Religious authority was in the authorities of the church in a foreign land, not in the Scriptures in local hands. In reference to Judaism, all traditions came from the Jews and were sent out from Jerusalem for the Jewish world to obey. At every annual Pentecost/Passover Feast these traditions were renewed in the minds of the faithfuls who made their trip to Jerusalem and returned to their homes throughout the Middle East. With both Judaism and Christianity, the institutionalized church leadership of each perspective faith stole the authority of the Scriptures from the faith of the people. The faith of the people was based on either pope or priest, depending on who was in power at that time over the church.

We see this same apostasy today when people place their faith in the local pastor who has graduated with a degree from the "University of Jerusalem." The people have forsaken their personal knowledge of the Bible and handed their brains over to the pastors. The result of this has led to the rise of "miracle churches" that have grown throughout the world as favorite pastors proclaim their miracles to gullible audiences who have little knowledge of the Bible.

But for the humble Arab Bedouin, Muhammad was their prophet. His teaching was their faith since they accepted his claim that he was a prophet. Islam supposedly originated from their land, though this is highly debated among historians (more later). Arabic was their religious language. And Islam would always have its capital in Arab territory. And by word of mouth, Muhammad gave to the people what he claimed to be their own message from Allah. The appeal of these aspects of Islam was so strong to Arabians that the Islamic faith swept across Middle East and across every society of people who felt disenfranchised by the institutionalized "Christianity" and Judaism of the day.

The tragedy of Christianity during these centuries of the spread of Islam was the fact that Christianity had turned from being a rewarding personal relationship of the disciple to Jesus to being a religion that was hijacked by church authorities in a foreign land. And because the structure of popes and bishops and priests had become

the identity of the institutional religion, the common person felt detached from the God he was to serve on a daily basis.

As a result of this apostasy from true Christianity, the evangelistic spirit of the individual disciple simply vanished. There was no mission spirit in the church simply because "church" was a hierarchy of religious authorities in another land, not an expression of personal faith in one's daily life. Such should be a tremendous lesson for every Christian today. When "church" is identified by "church authorities," then we know that we are in trouble.

We must never forget that Christianity is about relationships, first with our Lord, and then with one another. We must never allow "church" to become an institutional organization of hierarchial authorities who separate themselves from the people. The church is the people. So what happened with the beginning of the preaching of Muhammad was that he came at the right time in history to the Arabs when meaningful Christian faith had vanished from the individual lives of the people, especially the Arabian people.

H. Right message for the right time:

We must not think that the rapid acceptance and growth of Islam is evidence of divine origin. Such rapid acceptance of Muhammad as a self-proclaimed prophet is assumed by Muslims to be proof of his supposedly divine calling. Likewise, the phenomenal spread of Islam in a century throughout a vast territory of Middle East could be assumed to be evidence of divine intervention, but it is not.

Muhammad's message to his followers was simply the right message at the right time. The Qur'an is not a book of great literary genius or prolific prose. Its literary style is actually quite awkward and disorganized as a catechism for a legalistic faith. Nevertheless, Muhammad was accepted by millions to be the final prophet of Allah, and his "word" as the final word from Allah to man. So why such a phenomenal acceptance and growth of Islam across the Middle East, across North Africa, up into Europe, and on to the borders of China?

The time was simply right for a paradigm shift in religion in a world where Christianity ceased to be Christianity. The personal faith of Christianity had digressed to an organization of church authorities who handed down dictates from a foreign land. In the Arab world, Muhammad came at the time when what was known as Christianity no longer appealed to the people of Arabia. The result was a paradigm shift of faith that has changed the world from the day Muhammad died.

Before Muhammad there were great spiritual leaders, even some greater than he. These wrote with great literary excellence, certainly better than the awkward literary style of the Qur'an. There have been great literary works of religion published and distributed since. But from the first century, none of these great men and their masterpieces of religious literature affected the religious world as much as Muhammad and his teachings. It was simply that the Middle East was religiously in a void of personal faith, and thus, ripe for the introduction of a new faith that would appeal to the common man, with "scripture" that was in the language of the common man. And since Muhammad became a great military leader to unite the Arabs, what he said gained great acceptance among his followers.

The same paradigm shift of Christian faith happened in Europe during the Reformation Movement of the sixteenth century. It happened because the same religious cultural conditions were in place. When the Bible was eventually translated into the language of the people, and great men of faith stood up to the institutional authorities of the Catholic Church, change was in the air. The people were subsequently led from the bondage of institutional religiosity to a faith that was based on Scripture, not institutional churchianity. Unfortunately, many of these initial Reformation churches have become that from which they fled. They too are now led by church authorities who seek to maintain the heritage (traditions) and identity of their particular denomination. Muhammad was most successful in his appeal to the people because he was of the people and for the people. What is necessary today is another restoration in order to get people back to the authority of the word of God.

Chapter 12

THE WORLD OF ISLAM

The story of Muhammad Idn Abdullah—and indeed it is a story—began with a zealous leader of Arabia. He was a trader from Mecca, Saudi Arabia. When he was twenty-five years old, he married a woman who was fifteen years older. When he was eventually expelled from his hometown of Mecca because of his teach-

ing, one of his followers brought him his six-year-old daughter to marry, which marriage was not consummated until the child was nine-years-old. Muhammad eventually added more wives as he grew older. So what would we think a religious leader would do to justify such multiple wives? You guessed it, write some scriptures that justify one's behavior. aS Surah 33:50,51 of the Qur'an, Muhammad wrote,

> O Prophet! We [Allah and his messenger] have permitted to you your wives to whom you have given their dowries, and those you already have, as granted to you by Allah .... if the Prophet desires to marry her, exclusively for you, and not for the believers. We know what We have ordained for them regarding their wives and those their right-hands possess. This is to spare you any difficulty. You may defer any of them you wish, and receive any of them you wish. Should you desire any of those you had deferred, there is no blame on you.

The story is told that when Muhammad was forty, he was praying in a cave on Mount Hira, and subsequently had a surreal emotional experience. While in prayer, the angel Gabriel supposedly appeared to him and said that he was now the messenger of God. He was commanded by Gabriel to write, but Muhammad refused. It is said that Gabriel squeezed him to the point that Muhammad thought he would die. Muhammad then began to recite the first verses of what is now called the Qur'an. Since it is believed that Muhammad could not read or write, he dictated words to a scribe who in turn transcribed his words on any writing material that could be found. Muslims affirm that because Muhammad could not read or write that this is evidence that his words were directly dictated to him by Allah.

The beginnings of Islam thirteen centuries ago was among the Arab tribal groups, who were at that time mostly polytheists. The Arabs worshipped tribal gods and had no sacred history as the Jews and Christians. They also did not have a sacred text of Scripture. Neither did they have a supposedly common sacred language. The Jews had Hebrew into which their sacred text came to them from God. The Christians had Koine Greek into which their sacred text was transcribed. But the Arabs had none of those things that Muhammad considered to be necessary to start and maintain a new faith, and thus be the identifying characteristics of one's religious faith.

The Jews and Christians believed in one God. The Jews had holy prophets, and the Christians had holy apostles. But the Arabs had neither one God, a sacred text of Scripture that was written in a specific language, nor a holy city as Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople. What Muhammad did was bring to the Arabs all that the Jews and Christians had that he believed gave identity to their faith.

Until his death in 632, Muhammad sought to bring to the scattered Arabs a faith they could claim as their own. He was so successful in this quest that he and his followers united under his teaching, and subsequently, became a strong military force. In one hundred years after his death, so many people and civilizations united under his teaching that at the height of Islamic influence, Islam stretched from north Africa to southern Europe in the west, and to the countries of India and western China in the east. At its zenith, the great Islamic Ottoman Empire was formed in 1258, which extended throughout all the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire lasted until World War I when it was eventually broken up by the victorious Allied powers after the war. Segments of the Empire were subsequently signed over to be governed by prominent Arab leaders.

One of the significant nations that eventually came from the Ottoman Empire was Saudi Arabia. What is unique about this sparsely populated desert nation is its Islamic influence throughout the world today. In the eighteenth century, a Muslim scholar by the name of Wahhab sought to teach a pure form of Islam to the Arabian tribal groups of the Arabian peninsula, which is today modern Saudi Arabia. In the 1930s, the al-Saud family took control of the area, and thus it is called Saudi Arabia today. This nation became the birth place of Wahhabism.

Wahhabism is taught throughout Saudi Arabia, which nation also promotes the building of mosques throughout the world where the same teaching is propagated, especially in America. Those Muslims who promote Wahhabism, therefore, would be considered very strict in their implementation of Qur'anic teaching. They would be pure or orthodox Muslims, or those who are true to the legal dictates of the Qur'an. Subsequently, no other religious faith may be practiced in Saudi Arabia. This form of Islam is very aggressive in establishing mosques and Islamic schools throughout the West today.

A. Roots of an Islamic world view:

We often hear of Muslims being called to jihad (holy war). Jihad is defined as "holy war." By most Muslims today this is a principle of warfare by which the Islamic faith is to be extended throughout non-Islamic peoples. Some moderate Muslims will often define jihad as one's personal inner struggle for spiritual

growth. But in the historical context of the origin of the word, this definition is far from the thinking of Muslims, especially those in the Middle East. In the Middle East today, jihad is always defined as it was during the military struggles of Islam in the seventh century. It is warfare against the unbelieving nations of the world until the world is totally Islam. Western residents must not forget this point, and subsequently be deceived into thinking that jihad is something personal with the Muslim. It is personal only in the sense that individual Muslims seek to unite together in order to take the world for Islam.

We witness on the news media constant conflicts in the Middle East, conflicts that are usually generated by some brand of Islamic radicals who zealously promote their Islamic denomination. In the last few decades, "terrorism" has been a primary weapon of Islamists who seek to impose either judgment on the "infidels." They have also terrorized those they assume to be Muslim apostates. But to be fair and clear, not all Muslims are terrorists. But it seems that all terrorists in the world today are Muslims seeking to impose judgment on the "unbelieving" world of infidels. What all civilizations considered absurd years ago (the suicide bomber) has become a common "weapon" of Islamists in their jihad against the infidels of the world.

For the Islamist, the killing of innocent people justifies the end result of jihad against the infidel. In November 2014, a German reporter made his way into the ranks of the ISIS movement in Syria. He interviewed the ISIS fighters in order to determine the basis of their world view. In a BCC interview with the German reporter, he stated that one jihadist ISIS soldier responded to his questioning, "We will kill as many people as possible in order to accomplish our goal. Whether we kill thousands, tens of thousands, or hundreds of millions, five hundred million, we will do so to accomplish our goal."

People wonder if the root of this radicalism is seated in the pages of the Qur'an. We often make judgments concerning the Islamic faith by the conflict that is constantly portrayed on the news. But we would urge viewers to be cautious about making such judgments concerning a particular faith that is based on the radical beliefs and practices of adherents who have hijacked a faith for their own political and economic agendas. Such happened in the history of Christianity during the ages of the Crusades, which political maneuvers by the Catholic Church were used to judge and condemn people who were not Christians according to their definition of Christianity. We would correct ourselves not to do the same in our judgments concerning another faith. Hijackers of faiths must never be consulted in order to determine the true beliefs of any faith.

There are certainly sprinkled throughout the Qur'an verses that incite violence against the unbelievers, as one surah states, "Fight them [unbelievers] so that Allah may punish them at your hands, and put them to shame." However, peace is promised for societies that conform to the teachings of the Qur'an. The preceding surah of the Qur'an certainly does not say that a Muslim has a right during times of peace to take the initiative to generate a fight with unbelievers. However, it is unfortunate that the radical Islamist feeds on the calls for violent aggression (jihad) regardless of the passive nature of the unbelievers among whom he lives.

But we must not forget that when the Qur'an uses the word "peace," a different world view is defined for the Muslim than what the Christian would understand the word to mean. The Qur'an would define the word "peace" to mean that when the world becomes Muslim, then there will be peace. All will live under because in obedience to sharia law.

The Qur'an is a book that focuses on prayer and good deeds. There are rules for acceptable prayer and religious rituals to be followed whereby the adherents may focus on a spiritual life. The Qur'an establishes rules for married life, divorce, community relationships, and how to raise children. There is a great deal of wisdom in the Qur'an for daily living since the Qur'an is meant to be the absolute law for an Islamic state.

The common denominator between Christianity, Judaism and Islam is that all three faiths trace their roots back to Abraham. Abraham was not a Jew, but a Gentile, and thus his identity was not determined by race, but by faith. As both Christians and Jews, Muslims also go beyond Abraham to Adam in their spiritual lineage. Both the Bible and the Qur'an call for faith in one God who is the creator and sustainer of the world. And in reference to salvation, both the Bible and the Qur'an call for repentance on the part of the sinner in view of an impending punishment of the disobedient in a fiery hell, but a reward for the righteous in Paradise or Heaven.

But when reading the text of both the Bible and the Qur'an, there is a vast difference between the world view that is explained in both documents. The Qur'an is like driving onto a California freeway. While driving down this freeway one will often come across an exit to a command of God, and then an exit to an outburst in prayer, then some theological pronouncement, or a story of some early prophet. Throughout the 114 surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an there are descriptions of judgment and punishment. There is no single focus on a theme in any surah.

When Muhammad supposedly recited the contents

of the surahs, his words were transcribed on various writing materials at different times, and then eventually, over one hundred years later, brought together into one book from the longest surah to the shortest. There is no chronological order of either the surahs or statements as they were transcribed over a period of time, and eventually collected together as the book of the Qur'an. Since this collection of the surahs took place over one hundred years after Muhammad died, it can be understood why the Qur'an gives the presentation of a collection of sayings, instead of a document that was specifically written to for people to understand clearly. (More later.)

B. Bible and Qur'an differences:

In reference to messages from God, the Christian and Muslim view their holy books from different perspectives. The Christian views the Bible from the perspective of what Peter wrote: *"For the prophecy did not come in old time by the will of man,* ***but holy men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit****"* (2 Pt 1:21). God allowed the writers of Scripture to use their own vocabulary and writing styles, as the Hebrew and Greek texts clearly reveal. But He inspired through the Holy Spirit that which was to be communicated and written down. As a result, the Bible is a collection of the writings of about forty men over 1,500 years of history. As the Qur'an, Bible literature was collected together into one book as we have it today. But throughout this "collection" there remains one central world view of the Bible, that is, the salvation of men through the cross of the Son of God.

Muslims regard the Qur'an after the meaning of its name, "The Recitation." Muslims believe that their scripture came as a direct dictation from Allah to Muhammad. Muhammad then recited the "word" to a scribe who wrote down the exact words that came from Allah. Muhammad was only a medium through whom Allah communicated his words to man. Since Muhammad was a self-proclaimed messenger of God, it would only be natural for him to make such a claim in order to guard against others adding to his "scriptures."

For the above reason, the Muslim considers the actual book of the Qur'an sacred in and of itself. It must not be desecrated in any manner. Christians, on the other hand, seek to know the message of Jesus and the God who is beyond the words of the inspired book. One can burn Bibles, but he can never destroy the message that is revealed through the Bible. The actual book of the Bible is not an idol to the Christian. But if the Qur'an would be burned, then it is a desecration to the religion, not just the book.

Muslims do not consider any translation of the Arabic to be regarded greater than the actual Arabic script, the language that Allah ordained to be the language to communicate his dictates to man. Translations of the Qur'an, therefore, are only interpretations. They are not to be considered God's original words. When Muhammad gave his supposed divine words to be inscribed in Arabic, he forgot that God had used Hebrew words two thousand years before to do the same for the Jews, and six hundred years before in His use of Greek for the Christians. And when Jesus quoted from the Old Testament during His ministry, as well as when the Holy Spirit quoted from the Old Testament in writing the New Testament, both quoted from the Greek Septuagint, which was a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Translation is accepted by God, and thus, there is no holiness in the "words," but in the message the words convey. Christians are concerned about accuracy in translation of the biblical text. However, they accept the art of translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts into any local language as sufficient to convey the message of salvation that is the theme of the Bible. This cannot be said of the Muslim's view of any translation of the Qur'an.

What Muhammad's claim does reveal is the fact that the Qur'an was culturally seated in the era of his own Arabic time capsule. By focusing on the Arabic language, the Muslim is trying to keep the Qur'an where it originated, in Arabia. As stated in a previous chapter, this actually added to the acceptance of the Qur'an by the Arab people, and continues to do so today. However, it continues to be a stumbling block for the propagation of Islam to the rest of the world. If one would be an accepted scholar of Qur'anic teaching, he must be able to study the Qur'an in Arabic.

The claim that the words of the Qur'an are the exact words of God is often confusing to Christians. But compare this to what actually happened when God transcribed directly on stone the ten commandments for Moses to give to Israel. The actual words were written in Hebrew by the "finger" of God. The writing, therefore, was the oral words that God dictated to Moses who gave them to Israel on tablets of stone. Israel considered the words so sacred that they preserved the two tablets in the ark of the covenant.

If we would compare this to New Testament teaching, it would be somewhat similar to Christ being the revealed "word" that came to man. Christ was the word that was revealed (Jn 1:1-14). After His death and ascension, He is revealed to us today through ink and paper (Jn 1:1-14). He is only revealed to us with words that describe who He was and is as the revealed word of God. But the book of the Qur'an was the revelation of

Allah through the Arabic words. In comparison to the two tablets of stone, the Qur'an is sacred. It is the book of recorded words that are the revelation of Allah himself. Muhammad was only the medium through whom the words of the book (Allah) were communicated.

This somewhat explains the beautiful Arabic art of Islamic countries. Because Muslims abhor any form of idolatry, they used the written words of the Arabic language to portray the revelation of Allah through Arabic art. The art depicts episodes in the life of Muhammad. Because Arabic words from the Qur'an depict the presence of Allah, through the use of such words Allah is portrayed through art in order to reveal his presence. Arabic art is the ever present revelation of Allah, for the artistic words are Allah in definition.

The rest of the religious world perceives an inconsistency by Muslims in reference to their vehement teaching against idolatry. Every definition that is used in any dictionary to define idolatry could be used to explain the Muslim's reverence toward the book of the Qur'an. They idolize the Qur'an, while at the same time condemn idolatry. The same can be said of the Muslim's idol reverence for the Kabah of Mecca, to which each Muslim must make at least one Hajj (pilgrimage) in his lifetime in order to march around this stone monument (idol). The black stone cube of the Kabah is supposedly where the pantheon of past tribal gods of the Arabs is confined. If this is not idolatry, then we will have to come up with a different definition of idolatry for our dictionaries. Many in Africa clearly understand this thinking, for many came out of animistic beliefs that spirits dwelt in stones and trees. But when they became Christians, they realized that such inanimate works of creation are not the dwelling place of the spirit world.

In comparison to simple Christianity, the true disciple of Jesus is far less of an idolater than the Muslim. We must not confuse this with the Catholics' use of the cross as an idol, for the New Testament places absolutely no emphasis on using material things or clothing as symbols of faith.

C. The "people of the Book":

The Qur'an distinguishes "the people of the book" from nonbelievers. Both Jews and Christians are acknowledged as "people of the book." However, the phrase "the book" is not a direct reference to the Bible, but to a heavenly text of Scripture that was written by God, of which, the Qur'an is called the only final and perfect revelation of this word. Throughout history, God revealed Himself as "the book" to His prophets in order to reveal His will to man. The Qur'an also claims that the revelation of "the book" of Allah were revealed to other religious people who are not mentioned in the Bible. In other words, Allah revealed himself to other people as he revealed himself to Adam, Abraham and Israel.

The Qur'an affirms that the revelations of "the book" were corrupted by the Jews and Christians, or at least the revelations were greatly misinterpreted. They could not, therefore, gain a clear understanding of Allah through the Bible. The Qur'an, however, supposedly corrected all these misinterpretations, and thus, only the Qur'an can be trusted as the true revelation of Allah to man.

D. Source of authority:

Muslims have always had an unresolved conflict for establishing authority between secular state and religion. The problem is not in the Qur'an, but in how it is interpreted and applied to civil society. Muhammad envisioned a society wherein everyone was Muslim, and thus, in submission to Qur'anic (sharia) law. In this way, the Qur'an would be the authority for the governance of the state and faith of the people. But throughout history, Muslims have never been able to resolve the conflict between religious authority through the Qur'an and the authority of an Islamic government with democratic principles of function.

When Islamic religion spread throughout the ancient world, it enveloped many peoples of different civilizations. However, it had great difficulty in bringing all these civilizations under the governance of a common system of Islamic law. As a result, there arose scholars of the Qur'an who in many of the conquered states settled disputes through *fatwas* (opinions) that were handed down to the people from the religious leaders. But in the Islamic democratic states today, the fatwas of the religious leaders do not have much authority. The result of this lack of Qur'anic authority taught by the imams through fatwas has left the door of interpretation wide open for the speculative interpretations of every Islamic leader who would assert himself to restore obedience to true Qur'anic teaching. The most radical Islamists would lead radicalized groups to establish a supposedly true Islamic state, and by doing such, seek to behead all other Muslims who would not conform to the prominent spiritual leader's interpretations of the Qur'an. Only in this way could true peace be established among the people.

Radical Muslims (Islamists) do not consider those Muslims who have modernized interpretations of the Qur'an to be true Muslims. And the modern Muslim

would be the first to condemn radical interpreters of the Qur'an as Osama bin Laden and the present ISIS movement in the Middle East. The fact is that under the umbrella of Islam there are all sorts of groups of Muslims, from the most modernized to the most radical Islamist. This assortment of sects that reside under the umbrella of the Qur'an is so vast that it is simply impossible today to define what is true Islam. The problem is that among all these groups, the spiritual leaders have their own unique way of interpreting the Qur'an.

We must not forget that moderate interpreters of the Qur'an have voiced their condemnation of those who would interpret the Qur'an to support their own selfish agendas to gain political dominance and commit genocide. Moderate Muslims condemn terrorist activities and suicide bombers. They condemn the murder of innocent victims by indiscriminate bombing. Muslim scholars of the West have experienced the benefits of democracy, free speech, and human rights since the first Muslims came to America as slaves, and then were freed. They, as South African Muslims, never wanting to go back to any form of bondage or apartheid. The majority of the Islamic scholars who have grown up in free societies believe that the Qur'an is open for interpretation in reference to a pluralistic society of different religious faiths. Even on the subject of women's rights, the modern Muslim movement seeks to promote the legalization of women's rights in the environment of democratic governments. The Malay Muslims of South Africa fought so long during the time of struggle against the oppressive apartheid government, that they never want to return to any oppressive form of government of the people.

In many areas of faith, both the Bible and the Qur'an have some common ground. Both teach that there is one God. Both teach the dignity of the human individual who must submit to the revelation that God has given to man. And both teach that the spirit of the humble life is the key to one's cohabitation with other people that God created to be culturally different. The problem often comes from radicals in the Islamic camp to seek to establish their radical interpretations of the Qur'an. And it is the radicals with hidden political agendas who lead themselves to believe that violence is justified as a means to an end to promote one's faith. Any means to accomplish the end is justified in the minds of the radical Islamist, and for this reason, the true Islamist is validated by the Qur'an to deceive the infidel in order to accomplish conquest over the infidel.

There have always been radical "Christians" throughout history. However, there is a vast difference between radical Christians who become cults and radical Muslims who become murderers. Radicals as Jim Jones and David Koresh sought to isolate their followers from society. Radical Muslims as Osama bin Laden seek to conquer and control society through violent means. The radicals of both Christianity and Islam manifest the nature of what either group considers divine authority. We would certainly conclude that the radical Islamist to commit murder leads us to believe that his source of authority is from man and not God.

Our plea to the moderate Muslim is that he reconsider the Christians' source of authority. What we would urge is that Muslims must not judge someone to be "Christian" if he simply calls on Jesus as the Son of God, but behaves after his own agenda. Christians would call such a person a religionist, but not a Christian. Such were the people of the Crusades and the religion that was promoted by the Crusaders. It was a religion of man, not of God, and thus, not Christian.

And we would call on all Christians not to assume that one is following Qur'anic teachings when he straps on a bomb vest in order to murder innocent people. Any religious faith can be hijacked by radicals in order to gain a following for political or personal purposes, and subsequently, cause pain and suffering in the lives of the innocent. This is exactly what Muhammad did with the invention of his religion. But supposed Christians are not innocent. The supposedly "Christian" liberation theologists of the 60s and 70s carried guns to overthrow Central American governments. Such a theology made its way into South Africa during the days of apartheid struggle. But these were not Christians, even though they carved the name Jesus Christ on their guns. They were religionists with a political agenda who sought to hijack Christianity for their own political means. There are Islamists who do the same today with Islam. But because they have promoted misinterpretations of their holy book does not mean that they are interpreting in their lives the spirit of the Qur'an. In times of peace, the preacher, as well as the Islamic imam, will find it hard to declare "holy war" on the basis of teachings of either the Bible or the Qur'an.

E. Influence of Hadith interpretations:

Other than the Qur'an, Muslims also have another source from which they derive information for teaching and interpretation of the Qur'an. After a century of the Islamic faith, the first dynasty of caliphs in Damascus (661–750) sought to draw allegiance to their ranks in the early conflicts between Muslims, as well as conflicts between Muslims and the opposition of Jewish/Christian forces. But primarily because the Islamic leaders

sought to acquire as much information as possible of the deeds and sayings of Muhammad, a search was made to collect as much of the oral information as possible concerning Muhammad who lived over one hundred years before. This collection of oral sayings and traditions was collected together into what became know as the Hadith, or "prophetic traditions."

In the collection of the material, it seemed that there were no scruples about falsifying information concerning the life and teachings of Muhammad. Those who gathered the material did what many "miracle working" preachers do today. They go about digging up any rumor of a miracle or mysterious event, write a book, and then hope to draw the gullible to their ranks in order to fill church coffers. So from Damascus, "pseudo-researchers" went from village to village in order to find information about the deeds and teachings of Muhammad. Now keep in mind that this search took place over one hundred years after Muhammad died. By this time in history, the only information that Muslims had of Muhammad came from word-of-mouth stories that were more often fantasy than truth. In fact, the Hadith, according to some Muslim scholars, contains contradictions, some absurd traditions, and according to some, outright blasphemous traditions.

Because the Hadith was used to write commentaries on the Qur'an, and determine interpretations, the Shi'ites and Sunnis accept two different bodies of Hadith. The largest sects of Islam (Sunni, Shi'ite and Ibadi), rely on their compilation of Hadith to determine sharia law, Qur'anic interpretations, and the early history of Muhammad and Islam.

The zeal of the early composers of the Hadith moved them to search beyond the facts concerning the early beginnings of Islam. They were actually too far removed from the early beginnings of Islam to gather many facts, and thus had to rely on oral traditions. The writings that were brought together were often copies of copies of their original autographs. The facts had already been corrupted through word-of-mouth communication for over a century.

What these eighth and ninth century redactors did do was construct a picture of the past as they believed it should be. They wanted to present the ideal of what they believed Islam would produce if one were obedient to the mandates of the Qur'an.

This search turned into a business as fanciful stories of Muhammad's sayings and deeds were collected and sold. And as the gullible person in search of a miracle laps up hearsay concerning some wonder that was worked in some far off country, so gullible Muslims eagerly received any tale about Muhammad and his sayings. As the demands increased for these tales of teachings and deeds of Muhammad, the accumulation of the material of the Hadiths increased.

The early history of the Islamic faith is based in the material of the Hadiths, depending on what sect of Islam one is studying. But as the faith of the "miracle research" of some religionists is based on supposed wonders that were not personally witnessed, so the faith of some Muslims is based on the fanciful stories of the Hadith. Depending on how serious a particular Muslim scholar considers the authority of the Hadith, will determine the foundation for his interpretation of the Qur'an. In recent years, however, there has been a general rejection of the authority of the Hadith in reference to Qur'anic interpretation. In fact, many recent Muslim scholars have rejected any authority of the Hadith, relying only on the authority of the Qur'an itself.

As with the Damascus caliphs who sought for fanciful stories to gain allegiance to their cause, so it is today with some Muslims who seek justification for unrighteous ways. We would caution Christians at this point not to underestimate the true nature of even the moderate Muslim who finds justification for barbaric practices in the pages of the Qur'an through the medium of interpretation by the Hadith. We must not forget that the Hadith justifies that Muslim women are subject to polygamist marriages, the right of husbands to beat their wives, female circumcision through genital mutilation, and the justification for "honor killing" (murder) of a daughter who would date a Christian. These are the realities of even "moderate" Muslims within democratic societies. All these moral injustices find their validation in the Hadith.

Chapter 13

THE PERPETUAL CONFLICT

Muslims have difficulty reconciling the two major groups (Sunnis and Shi'ites) that fall under the Islamic faith today. There is a prevailing conflict between these two major sects that is embedded within Islam because of history and interpretation of the Qur'an. Overall, Islam consists of about 90% Sunnis and 10% Shi'ites, with

minor groups as the Ahmadiyya and Ibadi scattered throughout the faith. The conflict between the two major groups has existed for centuries. The present ISIS movement in the Middle East is composed primarily of Sunnis. The atrocities of this movement have embarrassed most Muslims to the point that where we live in Africa, Muslims do not even want to talk about the matter. They do not because they have for so long assumed that if the whole world were Islamic, then there would be peace on earth among all men. But the reality is that embedded within Islam is conflict between the different sects that will never be resolved. The Muslim's argument that there will be peace once the whole world becomes Islam is simply a fantasy in view of the present conflicts between Islamic sects within those nations that are primarily Islam. If peace cannot be realized from within primarily Islamic nations today, then certainly Muslims must not think that the rest of the world would have peace if the whole world was Islam.

Add to this that there is a continued conflict within Islamic societies between moderate Muslims and fundamentalist radicals. In the Islamic conflicts of the Middle East, by far more deaths result from Muslim against Muslim than Muslim against those of other faiths. Boko Haram of northeastern Nigeria, after the example of their radical brothers in the Middle East, attack other Muslims. In this carnage, men, women and children are ruthlessly murdered or kidnapped in the name of Allah. In fact, the BCC reported that in 2014 an average of 5,000 people were murdered every month throughout the world by Islamic radicals. Most of those who were killed were Muslims. As long as there are Muslims who seek to modernize their interpretation of the Qur'an according to the reality of a developed world, then there will always be mortal conflict between the moderate Muslim and the fundamental Islamic radical. And since the radical Islamist in underdeveloped countries is intimidated by the developed secular world, he will always use his religion as an excuse to lash out at the rich infidel in order to justify his poverty.

This conflict will never be resolved because in those Middle Eastern countries where everyone is Muslim, there is a deadly war going on between the Shi'ite and Sunni differences of implementation of Qur'an interpretations. The result of the differences between the radicals of both groups will always be power struggles to determine who will be in control. The radicals of the two groups have little tolerance for one another when it comes to determining who is going to be in control of the state, and subsequently, the riches of the society, or poverty, depending on whose interpretation of sharia law will be practiced. This contention between the two sects began soon after the death of Muhammad, and will continue indefinitely into the future.

Muhammad was born around 570. He grew up in Mecca of western Arabia. In 622 he revealed his beliefs, assuming that he had received "word" as divine revelation from Allah. He asserted this claim to those of his Arab tribal group, who eventually accepted him as a prophet of God. All went well during his lifetime in presenting a united front to his believers. But when he died, things changed. Division within the ranks of the followers began ten years after his death in 632 and continue unto this day.

The problem was that Muhammad did not name a successor as the leader of the new Islamic ideology. Subsequently, one group of followers believed that the role of the caliph (the viceroy of Allah), should come from the bloodline of Muhammad. This bloodline should extend through the lineage of Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, who was named Ali ibn Bi Talib. But the majority of his followers believed that Muhammad's religious heritage and leadership should be passed down through the lineage of his friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr, who had no bloodline connection to Muhammad.

Shortly after the death of Muhammad, Bakr became caliph, though Ali would eventually become the fourth caliph before he was murdered in 661. Upon the death of Ali, the successor of Muhammad was again debated among Muslims. This dispute eventually led to a formal division between Muslims that exists to this day. The majority of the division backed Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria, and his son, Yazid. This group is today known as the Sunnis.

The minority group followed the succession of Ali through his son, Hussein. This group was collectively known as Shi'at Ali, meaning those who are aligned with Ali. This group is known today as the Shi'ites, or Shia. When these two divisions of Islam eventually met on a battlefield near Karbala on October 10, 680, Hussein was killed and decapitated.

Through the Sunnis' conquest of the Shi'ites at Karbala, the Sunnis sought to terminate the "apostate" Shi'ites. But the contrary happened. The murder of Hussein gave the Shi'ites a martyr, and thus, upon the martyrdom of Hussein, the followers of Hussein eventually consolidated Shia Muslims as a distinctive sect of Islam. The death of Hussein eventually became the most celebrated annual occasion of the Shi'ites because he was revered as one who stood up against the oppression of the Sunni sect.

The Sunnis continued their loyalty to Mu'awiyah and his successors. They eventually became the majority sect of all Muslims and were known for their oppres-

sion of all other sects of Islam. The word "Sunni" means those who follow Sunnah, or the Way of the prophet. The Sunnis assumed the belief and practice that the caliph was to be a political leader, as well as the religious leader of the people. This belief eventually made the Sunnis the dominant sect among all Muslims, comprising the greater percentage of all Muslims today.

But in opposition to Sunni beliefs and practices, Shi'ite teaching appeals to those Muslims who always feel the oppression of the Sunnis. Their religious leaders are the imams who seek to be the spiritual descendants of Muhammad. Through the leadership of their spiritual leaders, Shi'ites seek to maintain the spirit of Islam, and at the same time, the imams seek to lead Muslims to refuse the oppression of the Sunnis.

The 12th imam of the Shi'ites, Muhammad al-Mahdi, supposedly disappeared in the ninth century at the Samarra Shrine in Iraq. Most Shi'ites believe that Muhammad al-Mahdi was mysteriously hidden until a time when he will be revealed at an undetermined date. When he does reappear, it is assumed that he will restore a reign of justice throughout the world by promoting the beliefs and dominance of the Shi'ites.

Though the Sunnis and Shi'ites had minor conflicts with one another for centuries, it seems that in the unstable political atmosphere of the Middle East today, their differences have been accentuated and clearly revealed to the rest of the world. Their former tolerance of one another involved intermarriage and business. However, intervention by the West to deliver the Islamic countries from either Sunni or Shi'ite dictators who purported to have weapons of mass destruction, ignited old differences between the two sects. The opportunity was presented for struggle as to who was going to dominate the government of the supposedly liberated state and claim the riches of oil money. And because there seems to be no deep spirit of compromise among fundamental Islamists on either side of the conflict, too many fathers, mothers, sons and daughters have been and will be murdered by opposing sects. There seems to be no light at the end of this quagmire of religious strife to allow a restoration of peace in those Arabic nations where there is competition for power and oil riches by Sunnis and Shi'ites. However, we are optimistic that some peace will come to the Middle East, but it will not be negotiated by Western powers. This is something that must be worked out strictly by those of the Middle East.

There is thus a perpetual Middle East conflict within Islam that will continue in the years to come. The conflict is not for a religious victory of either sect, but for the right to govern those Middle East nations that are predominately Muslim. Sunnis and Shi'ites disagree over some matters of interpretation of the Qur'an, but they agree on the fundamentals. They agree on the requirements of faith and prayer, the infallibility of the Qur'an, and the veneration of the prophet Muhammad. And where we have witnessed great conflicts between Sunnis and Shi'ites, there is no evidence that one group is trying to convert the other to their particular historical lineage of spiritual leaders or brand of Qur'anic interpretations. They are simply in competition with one another in order to determine who will be victorious in any conflict.

The rise of Islamist movements as ISIS is different. The ISIS movement illustrates a conflict within Islam to restore a radical interpretation of the Qur'an in order to create a true Islamic state. All opposition to such movements as ISIS are given three options: (1) convert to the mandates of radical Islam and join in the restoration of a true Islamic state, (2) flee the territory that is claimed by the radicals, or (3) die. Because of these mandates by the ISIS movement, all forms of Christianity in ISIS controlled territory is now being eradicated. Many church buildings and synagogues that have been in existence for centuries in Middle Eastern countries are being emptied as those of Christian/Jewish faith flee ISIS controlled territory. All Muslims who would disagree and not convert to the ISIS definition of true Islam are killed.

What is so glaringly hypocritical about the ISIS movement—and all similar Islamic movements with a similar ideology—is that the money to continue their movement would disappear if they were eventually victorious in their final goal. Revenue from the sale of oil to the imperialistic and infidel enemies is needed to pay their soldiers and to run their vehicles to fight their battles. But if they succeed in their victory over the infidel, all this would disappear with the disappearance of the infidels. If they would by chance win the war against the infidel, then there would be no one to buy their oil in order to run their state. There would be no more infidel banks to rob and no rich infidel people to kidnap for ransom. The money would be gone and the people would be returned to camels and the sands of the Arabian desert. It would be like the horror of a Mad Max movie.

We wonder if radical Islamists think about these things while they are hidden off in some cave? The truth still stands that any oppressive government regime is impossible to continue over any length of time, especially those radical Islamic movements whose leadership has deceived the people into believing that there is freedom and peace through bondage and oppression.

The best way for the protestant world to understand

the division that exists among the many sects of Islam is to compare Islam with the protestant world of denominationalism. There are numerous denominations (sects) that fall under the label "protestant." All differ, having different names and being identified by various interpretations of the Bible in reference to their teaching. Islam is in like manner divided from within itself. As the protestant from a particular denomination of the protestant world would say that he is a "Christian," the Muslim would say he is a Muslim in reference to his allegiance to a particular sect of Islam. A Muslim still regards himself to be a Muslim, regardless of the particular denomination of Islam with which he is aligned.

The competition between differing sects of Islam is about political dominance of one group over another, particularly with the two major groups of the Sunnis and Shi'ites. The division is accentuated by a particular groups' interpretation and application of the Qur'an. Both Sunnis and Shi'ites seek political domination over the people in those nations where Islam is the dominant faith. However, what binds all sects of Islam together is not necessarily the fact that they all claim to be Muslims, but the fact that both groups have a common historical background (heritage) and religious authority, the Qur'an.

Generally, the Shi'ites consider themselves to be the oppressed and the Sunnis are considered by the Shi'ites to be the oppressors. In this conflict between the oppressed and the oppressors, these two sects are drawn together into a mutual conflict whenever one particular group is in the majority. If a particular sect enjoys the majority, then there seems to be peace as long as the minority group is allowed to maintain their particular religious heritage, and yet submit to the governance of the dominant sect. But in those countries of the Middle East where there is national upheaval, then the two groups are in competition with one another as to who will eventually rule the country.

The irony is in the fact that the conflict between the two groups is what draws them together. When either group feels that they are under the threat of being "christianized," then both are united as Muslims against the threat. When one group eventually succeeds in becoming the dominant group in a Middle Eastern country, then the losers of the conflict must submit, and thus, relinquish to the authority of the majority group, or at least to the sect that controls the military muscle. If they do not submit, as in the case of Shi'ites in the ISIS controlled areas that are primarily Sunni, then they must be eradicated.

The countries that form the majority of Shi'ites today would be Iraq, Iran, Bahrain and Azerbaijan. However, scattered throughout these countries are also Muslims of other sects. There are also a number of Shi'ites in the minority in countries as Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Pakistan that are predominately Sunni. But historically, the Sunnis have had the upper hand in political power, even in those countries where Shi'ites have had the numerical advantage.

Syria is primarily Sunni, but has been ruled by a Shi'ite minority known as the Alawites. The minority Shi'ites have maintained their power in Syria by marginalizing the majority Sunnis of the country in the military and government. Assad, the present president of Syria, is Alawite. The rebels of the country are primarily Sunni. The present problem is that the Sunnis feel that it is now their time in history that they should rule the country. And since the West has backed some of the Sunni rebels, the Shi'ites, who are backed by Iranian Shi'ites, now view the West to be on the side of the Sunnis. Now you can understand why the Iranians are somewhat suspicious of the West in their negotiations with Iran over nuclear power. And one can better understand why the Shi'ite majority of Iran seek nuclear power in order to intimidate the oppressing Sunnis that they not even think about asserting power over a Shi'ite Iran.

To western thinking, the conflict embedded within Islam is often confusing. We must simply keep in mind that in the Middle East, the sectarian conflict is more than a conflict over different religious beliefs among Muslims. It is a struggle for state control by radical Islamists in order to gain riches through oil, bank robbery, extortion and the sale of opium. It is about who controls the government and all the wealth of the country. And since both Sunnis and Shi'ites have been inherently competitive (hostile) toward one another for centuries, depending on who was in control of the state, the present upheaval in the Arab world has heightened their hostilities toward one another. This conflict between these two sects of Islam, therefore, will continue indefinitely in the Islamic nations of the Middle East since the two groups will always exist within any particular Middle East nation. Nevertheless, we would caution ourselves not to judge the entire Islamic faith by what happens among Muslims in the Middle East. It is unfortunate that the news media is obsessed with Middle Eastern conflicts, but we would never allow their reports to determine our understanding of Islam. Most moderate Muslims throughout the world are simply embarrassed by what is usually happening in the conflicts of the Middle East.

All this conflict can actually be blamed on the leaders of radical Islamists. Muhammad established Islam

as a religion of faith and state, and thus, when it comes to competition between sects within the Islamic faith, it turns into confrontation (war) as to who is going to rule the state. This did not exist during the lifetime of Muhammad. The historical irony is in the fact that what Muhammad established to bring unity among Arabs has actually condemned them to perpetual conflict and division. As outsiders looking on, we see in this conflict evidence that such a faith cannot be from one God who would promote unity. Man-made religions always promote division because they always reflect in their faith a distorted understanding of who their god is. As Christianity in its early beginnings, there is often division within a faith over loyalty to particular leaders when men seek to follow men rather than Christ (See 1 Co 1:12).

We can never become a brotherhood of believers until we all agree upon a common "dictionary" that we will use to define God. It is for this reason that there will never be a common understanding of God by Christians and Muslims. Each group has its own "dictionary." And, each group claims that their dictionary has been given to them directly from God. Therefore, when in discussions with Muslims concerning faith, quoting scriptures out of the Bible is often to no avail. What converts Muslims is the love of the God in whom Christians believe and who was manifested in the world through Jesus. When the love of the one true and living God is manifested in the lives of His followers, then God is defined. Jesus said something about this in John 13:34,35.

Please keep in mind that the former colonial powers of the Middle East region are also partly to be blamed for present conflicts. After World War I, the Ottoman Empire was divided up by the European victors of the war and portions assigned to different sheiks. There was little consideration given to the portions where either Sunnis or Shi'ites were in the majority. The colonial powers in Europe simply sat down at a table with a map of the region, and then started drawing lines—as they did with Africa—concerning which areas of the area would be considered a nation. They then declared the divided segments to be independent "nations," which concept was somewhat foreign to the nomadic and bedouin people of Arabia.

The present conflicts are an embarrassment to those Muslims who live outside the Arab world, and who, to a great extent, have conformed to democratic political principles of secular states and a life of peace and prosperity under democratic systems of governance. It is for this reason that Christians should never judge Islam by what is happening in the Middle East. Though the ideal of the Muslim will always be that the entire world become Islamic, the non-Arab Muslim focuses on those passages of the Qur'an that promote peace among those of differing faiths. As long as Muslims within democratic states submit to the constitutional law of a secular state, then there will be peace. But we must never forget that the ultimate goal of the Muslim that is supported by Qur'anic teaching is that the whole world be Islam. We would have to make the same claim as Christians.

This does not mean that when Muslims are in the majority that they will always seek to implement the sharia law of the Qur'an. However, true Islam would call for the institution of sharia law as the ultimate goal of the Islamic struggle against the infidel. Christianity, on the other hand, does not have a concept of civil law embedded within the teachings of the New Testament that must be implemented in society in order for one to be a Christian. The Qur'an does. Therefore, when Christians are in the majority, there is freedom of religion. The same cannot be said of those nations as Saudi Arabia where sharia law is the law of the state.

We must not forget that some of those nations that have historically been governed by either Sunnis or Shi'tes have not allowed "Christians" to function within their borders. Saudi Arabia is one of those countries. Christian faith has existed for centuries in countries as Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Pakistan, but it is against the law for a Christian to function within the borders of Saudi Arabia. It has only been since the ISIS movement in the countries where Christians have lived for centuries that they have been driven out of ISIS controlled territory. The Sunni Ottoman Empire encompassed those of the Christian faith throughout the Empire during the centuries of its existence. As long as the Sunni Ottoman caliphs had control of government, then peace was maintained between all religious groups of the Empire, including Sunnis and Shi'ites. But when there is a radical interpretation of the Qur'an by radical Islamists, then everyone, including moderate Muslims, are in trouble, for moderate Muslims are always considered to be apostates by Islamists. And so this is the world as it is among the 1.4 billion Muslims that are scattered among the populations of the world, but particularly in the Middle Eastern countries.

Islam is the fastest growing religious faith in the world today. Some have often wondered why this is so. The West has a very difficult time understanding why Muslims would be so much in conflict with one another and willing to be a martyr for their particular sect of Islam, or Islam in general. But what the Muslim cannot understand about the West is the willingness of the Western resident to die willingly for his country, but not for

his faith. What is confusing to the Muslim, for example, would be an area of the world where there is possible conflict, and yet, the churches that have sent out missionaries to those areas of possible conflict will immediately call their missionaries home upon the sound of the first gun shot. Muslims cannot understand in their wildest imagination why a Western individual would die for his state, but not for his faith. To the Muslim, to simply die for one's secular state is absurd, since no state will endure human history. Only faith continues long after every state flag has fallen and turned to dust. And so, we understand why Islam is the fastest growing faith of the world.

The fact that the Western citizen is willing to die only for his state and not his faith has empowered radical Islamists. As the West becomes more antagonistic to faith (nonreligious), the Islamist has convinced himself that he most certainly will prevail over a people who have no religious convictions. As the basically nonreligious Millennial Generation that is 80 million strong in America establishes the culture of the West in the coming decades, the Islamist is probably right. How can one who fights only for the privilege of a Starbucks' cappuccino win against one who is willing to die for his god.

In the conflict with ISIS in northern Syria, the ISIS soldiers would walk in front of their tanks in order to take the hit of the missile that was launched against the tank by opposing forces. They sought to protect the tank with their bodies, and thus in martyrdom, be guaranteed heaven. Their victory in the battle was more important to their faith than their lives.

Chapter 14

A BLUEPRINT FOR ORDER

The way of the natural world is order because all life was created by a God of order. Natural laws were created to guarantee that our world would not come apart, but would function orderly even at the microscopic level of neutrons. When looking at the smallest particles of the organic world, there is order. There is order in our galaxy and order in the organic environment in which we live. Order is simply the physics of all created things, whether material or organic or social.

Now this brings us to mankind. Among the inhabitants of this world, order is the norm. In times of social chaos, we must never forget this. Whenever we witness societies in chaos, social physics is struggling on the stage life to give birth to a new social order. Chaos may prevail for decades, but we must be assured that order will eventually prevail over social chaos. Just ask the historians of Germany or Japan. Decades of chaos resulted in order that has taken both societies past world wars to a new order of society that never wants to return to the decades of social chaos.

We see social chaos in the Middle East. But we would never base our judgments for the future of the Middle East on the social chaos that presently prevails. We will not because we understand that social chaos is not permanent. It is society groaning through the chaos of turmoil in order to give birth to a new order. Eventually, social chaos finds order. In our lifetime, social chaos may not find social order in the Middle East, but order will eventually prevail. We have hope that the present turmoil in the Middle East will eventually find some social order. And thus, we see a glimmer of hope in what is called the movement of the Rojava in the Middle East. Herein is a small movement of people who are bringing together into order all the parties that have historically caused the chaos of the past. We acknowledge this group here for the sake of the West that seems to think that the entire Middle East is about to get out of control. But we must be careful not to stereotype people by what we see on the news media of the West. Please keep in mind that the news media is trying to make a profit by focusing our attention on chaos, not order. There are not to many news reports made of peaceful societies. So for the sake of those who are obsessed with Middle East chaos, we would present a few facts here about what is happening among the Rojava.

The Rojava is a small enclave of primarily Kurdish people of all religious faiths within the borders of Syria, Turkey, and northern Iraq. The Kurds are the largest ethnic group in the Middle East who do not have their own homeland. They have struggled for decades to have such, but have been denied the right by the Turks, Iraqis and Syrians.

In 1916, when the English and French behind closed doors, drew lines on a map to form the Sykes-Picot agreement to divide the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds were left off the map, and thus, they were not given their own homeland. The English and French simply gave the Middle East to lords who eventually established authori-

tarian regimes by slaughtering leftist thinking people and intellectuals of the region during the 70s and 80s. As a result, the social dynamics of the Middle East was changed to what became dictatorial regimes who have now suffered the vengeance of the Arab Spring. It was the imperialistic West who propped up the authoritarian regimes for the sake of oil. Every time a citizen of the West fueled up his vehicle in the freedom of his own land, he added fuel to the fire that has now broken out across the Middle East. Therefore, before all of us of the West point fingers at those of the Middle East, we might think on these realities.

During the period before the Arab Spring, those of leftist organizations, trade unions, and student movements were either killed or imprisoned, especially in countries as Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Because of this oppression, particularly of those who were Shi'ite Muslims, jihadist movements began to arise in opposition. The opposition was not only against those within the region, but against those imperialists who propped up those to whom they had assigned power over the people and oil as a result of the Sykes-Ricot agreement. It was for this reason that the Rojava (meaning, "west," the western Kurdish region of Syria) were labeled terrorists by oppressing regimes, including Turkey, Syria and Iraq. They were labeled terrorists because they simply began to fight for their freedom in order that they too might have their own homeland and the right and freedom for self-determination.

The recent conflicts in the Middle East have brought the Rojava a long way in accomplishing their goal of having their own autonomous homeland. In preparation for such, they have written their own constitution. They have also divided themselves into autonomous cantons (states, provinces) in order to guarantee the freedom of everyone within each canton. They have refused to establish their statehood on the basis of any ethnic demands or interests. They have witnessed in the past one hundred years that nationhood that is built on ethnicity or religion will never bring peace among citizens. So in order to establish a society that is not based on a reaction to another oppressive government that is based on either ethnicity or religion, they have refused to become a part of the civil war in Syria, though many dwell within the borders of Syria. In order to guarantee self-determination among the people, they have established autonomous cantons that make decisions according to the assembly of all the people and faiths within the region of each canton.

The Rojava seek gender equality and to empower women at all levels of society. The seek both political and religious freedom. They are anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist, and seek to respect life and all living creatures. Their constitution is the most democratic of all the constitutions of the Middle East. Because of the recent conflicts that are raging in the Middle East, we thought it necessary here to give a translated quote from the first statements of the Rojava constitution in order to give the free world an idea of a blueprint for civil society that the Rojava are trying to write for the future of themselves as part of the Middle East.

> [We] the peoples of the democratic self-administration areas; Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians (Assyrian Chaldeans, Arameans), Turkmen, Armenians, and Chechens, by our free will, announce this to ensure justice, freedom, democracy, and the rights of women and children in accordance with the principles of ecological balance, freedom of religions and beliefs, and equality without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, creed, doctrine or gender, to achieve the political and moral fabric of a democratic society in order to function with mutual understanding and coexistence within diversity and respect for the principle of self-determination and self-defense of the peoples.
>
> The autonomous areas of the democratic self-administration do not recognize the concept of nation state and the state based on the grounds of military power, religion, and centralism.

It is quite interesting that a document as this would arise out of a broken part of the world where a movement as ISIS is seeking to annihilate this society of people while nations as Turkey stand on the sidelines and watch smoke rise from the Kurdish city of Kobane just a couple miles south of the border with Turkey. There are over 7,500 women in the military of Rojava, fighting beside the men. You have probably seen these brave young women on CNN and BBC, standing with their long black hair blowing in the Arabian winds while firing their guns against a barbaric Islamists aggression of society who believe they are implementing the true Islamic state. Some of the ISIS fighters think that if they are killed by a woman, they will go straight to hell. So we can only imagine that these brave young Rojava women soldiers, some of them "Christian," get up in the morning, clean and load their guns, and then encourage one another as to how many ISIS men they are going to send to hell during the day.

The next time you see on the news the historic battle that is taking place for Kobane, just remember that there are these brave Rojave women in there who are engaged in street battles from house to house, being led by a

woman commander, trying to protect this Kurdish city from falling to a modern-day "Nazi" barbarianism. And then think for a moment when you are trying to get your children to some soccer game on time, that some of your Christian sisters just scurried their children to a bomb shelter after the fall of the first mortar attack.

A CNN reporter interviewed one of the these Rojava women soldiers on the frontline only a short distance from the gunfire of ISIS soldiers. She said,

> One of my friends was wounded. She said to me before her death, "Let my blood bring freedom to the people." As ISIS soldiers crowded around her wounded body, she blew herself up and killed many of them.

Chapter 15

QUR'AN CONCEPTS

Though we have sought through these words to be as objective as possible in reference to true Islam, we would not have the reader misunderstand us. The fact is that Islam is a political/religious system of government that was born out of an era of conflict. It was given birth by one who was seeking to usher in among his Arab people peace among conflicting nomadic Arab tribes who were polytheistic and politically divided. Muhammad and his close friends were military people. As the leader of his movement, had his thoughts transcribed, and then his followers, who were often in conflict, fed upon them as political/religious dictates that must be implemented in every society that conquered. The result was that they inspired themselves to be victorious over unbelievers in their political/religious system of government in order to live in peace and unity among themselves.

Muhammad was one of the great spiritual and social leaders of his time. The fact that he is given credit for producing religious and social oracles is evidence of the fact that he was a leader who wanted to bring to his people under a creed that would encourage peace and unity.

Any reading of the Qur'an gives the impression that Muhammad sought to bring to the lives of simple nomadic people a life-style of social order in the chaotic manner by which nomadic tribes did that which was right in the eyes of each chieftain. In order to produce this order, he did what most religionists do in order to marshal the behavior of the adherents into conformity and uniformity. He produced laws that were eventually collected together over one hundred years after his death into what is now referred to as the Qur'an. This was a legal document of precepts and codes similar in nature to what God gave to Israel through the Torah. Israel needed "precept upon precept" in order to maintain order among scattered tribal farmers throughout the land of promise. Likewise, the uneducated bedouins needed simple directions on how to live the spiritual life and maintain a government of unity. And in reference to this need, Muhammad delivered.

It is often the desire of those who seek a following to do the same with the New Testament. Some leaders have interpreted from the New Testament a legal system of Christianity that is simple and legal: Five steps of salvation and five acts of worship. As long as one had obeyed these simple dictates, then he was fine with God, regardless of his behavior and thinking. The early uneducated rural farmers of America—and now the rest of the developing world—could easily understand this system of legal requirements. They could thus implement such a legal system of law in their lives in order to legally claim their salvation before God, and then judge others "unfaithful" if they did not conform to the code. Even "worship" was legalized in order to give attendees at assembly a sense of self-satisfaction that they had worshiped God according to law.

Muhammad, with different and more complex rules, did the same for the Arabs. Of course each system of religiosity is legal. And because the systems are legal it places the responsibility for salvation on the shoulders of the adherent to live perfectly in compliance with the laws before one can self-confidently claim salvation on the merit of his own obedience. But when the submissive adherent confesses to his inability to keep the laws perfectly, he is continually racked with guilt for not performing perfectly the codes of his legal religiosity. But the systematic theology of Muhammad appealed to the people. He was successful in that he gave people a legal system of behavior by which to conduct their lives in all aspects of human relationships, and by doing such, live in peace with Allah.

Because of the era in which Muhammad lived, we would assume that there would be many concepts in the Qur'an that are contrary to the Bible. When religions are invented by men, they inevitably reflect the times in which the men live. Such was the case with the birth of the Qur'an. When religious "scripture" is born out of

the contemporary times of the writers, the mandates of the "scriptures" of these "holy books" reflect precepts and concepts that are eventually dated with the death of the authors and the changing of the times. And because man-made "scriptures" are dated, they are inevitably in conflict with the unchanging word of God, which word finds its uniqueness in the fact that it is valid and relevant for all cultures until the end of time. Moderate Muslims are such because they seek to bring Islam into a modern age of the developed world. We must certainly commend them for this effort, though we do not cease to point out those problems that they have in doing this by ignoring some precepts of the Qur'an that are dated.

Now in reference to the Qur'an that Muslims have today, there is a very dubious history. Muhammad died in 632. However, the earliest materials that Muslims have today in reference to the life and teachings of Muhammad were written by Ibn Ishaq in 750. It takes little math to figure out that this is about 120 years after Muhammad died. Now this story becomes even more interesting when one realizes that Muslims do not even have any of the original autographs of the work of Ibn Ishaq. What is available are only some copies of the revisions and amendments of Ishaq that were produced by Ibn Hisham, who died in 834. Again, if we do the math, this is about 200 years after Muhammad died.

Now add to the intrigue of this story the work of Uthman Ibn Affan (644-656), the third caliph after Muhammad. This was an era when the Muslims needed a sacred book in order to consolidate the Muslims under his caliphate. So in order to marshal the people together under his rule, his scribes, with the help of the Samaritans, began to build a character model of Muhammad after the leadership of Moses. The Qur'an that Muslims use today was based on the material that was gathered by Uthman to produce a Qur'anic text. This is the Qur'anic text that is generally accepted by all Muslims today. However, this unfortunately means that the Qur'an that Muslims use today did not originate from Arab scribes. Muslims today assume that the Qur'an in their hands dates back to some original autograph of Muhammad at the time he died. But this is simply not true. There is absolutely no historical evidence that the Qur'an that exists today dates back to the time of Muhammad, or even immediately after his death. This history of the Qur'anic text is one of those embarrassing historical facts with which most Muslims are uncomfortable in discussing.

Now when we speak of the documents of the New Testament text, there is a similar history of collecting copies that were made from copies of the original autographs. However, there is a significant difference between how Christians view the New Testament text they have today and how Muslims view the Qur'anic text. Christians follow the message of the documents, and this message is clearly, and without any contradictions, revealed through the more than five thousand manuscripts that we have today of the New Testament. However, Muslims are always in a frantic search to verify the exact words of Muhammad because the Qur'an is the very revelation of Allah to man. Any corruption of the text of the Qur'an, therefore, would be a corruption of the revelation of Allah for Muslims today.

Now in contrast to Bible teaching, the following are a few example teachings of the Qur'an that might be interesting to the Bible student in order to determine some basic differences between teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible:

A. Mercy, forgiveness and forbearing:

In view of the present conflicts that prevail throughout the Arab Islamic world, we find the following statements of Muhammad quite interesting, if not a paradox to the militant Islamist:

> Allah is forgiving and merciful (Surah 2:218).
> And know that Allah is forgiving and forbearing (Surah 2:235).
> Allah is embracing and knowing (Surah 2:247).
> Allah is gracious toward mankind (Surah 2:251)

These statements are scattered throughout the Qur'an. All moderate Muslims of the world focus on these statements in reference to defining their Islamic faith to the Christian world. However, when we see the conflicts that are presently happening in the Middle East, we are led to believe that the conflicts are not the result of pious spiritual leaders who are trying to implement Islam. What radical Islamists seem to be doing is enriching themselves on the wealth of oil that is sold to the infidel. And in order to do this, power must be claimed. And in order to claim the power, Islamists must ignore the forgiving, merciful and forbearing teachings of Muhammad concerning his understanding of the nature of Allah.

B. Deceive for Allah:

Now Muslims would lead the world to believe that the basic nature of Islam is "mercy, forgiveness and forbearing." But the vast majority of Muslims throughout the world know that this is not always the case. The teaching of Taqiyya is a doctrine of the Qur'an. It is a

principle that gives the right to the Muslim to proclaim one's beliefs in a deceptive manner in order to escape persecution or harm. When in negotiations with the West, the Islamic nation would feel that it is their right to deceive the Western negotiators for the sake of promoting the Islamic cause. Surah 16:106 reads,

> Anyone who, after accepting faith in Allah, utters unbelief, except under compulsion, theirs will be a dreadful chastisement.

What the surah is saying is that a Muslim has the right to utter falsehoods in order to escape persecution. The same principle of deception and denial is taught in reference to breaking oaths, promises and other contracts with the infidel, if such is down for the benefit of the Muslim (See surah 2:225; 8:54; 9:3; 11:106; 40:28; 66:2). Would an Islamic nation that is governed by sharia law sign a treaty with the West, and then later recant on the conditions of the treaty? The Qur'an would certainly justify such.

C. Aggression:

We do not forget that within the pages of Muhammad's teaching that there are clear statements that encourage aggression. Surah 9:29 states:

> Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor abide by the religion of truth—from among those who received the Scripture—until they pay the due tax, willingly or unwillingly.

In contrast to this aggression that is taught in the Qur'an, note Surah 5:87:

> O you who believe! Do not prohibit the good things Allah has permitted for you, and do not commit aggression. Allah does not love the aggressors.
>
> And fight them until there is no oppression, and worship becomes devoted to Allah alone. But if they cease, then let there be no hostility except against the oppressors (Surah 2:193).

In reference to this aggressive spirit that is taught in the Qur'an, which was military aggression, the West must not forget that the radical Islamist obsesses over these statements in order to launch jihad against the free world. The West would certainly use military force to resist any formalized Islamic army that would endanger nationhood and the Western citizen's way of life. But such a military conflict with jihadist will not happen. Islamic jihad is covert. The aggression of the Islamist today is carried out through the infiltration of society under the umbrella of the "freedom of religion" embedded in the laws of the free world. Islamists in the West are using the freedom of democracy as the means to continue the Islamic war against the unbelievers.

This does not mean, however, that when Muslims have the majority vote that they will implement sharia law. There are countries as Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia that by far are Muslim in majority with Islam as the state law, but do not seek to oppress other faiths by a strict application of sharia law. We must keep in mind that the vast majority of Muslims throughout the world are moderate and want to continue on with peace in their lives as any citizen in the freedom of a democratic society. But we must never forget that deep inside, Muslims know that the world must become Islam. This is the thinking of the vast majority of Muslims, though the moderate Muslim would use more subtle means than outright military conflict.

It is certainly the goal of the Christian to make all the world Christian. His evangelistic outreach is through the proclamation of the gospel, to which people can voluntarily and individually respond. No one is forced to become a Christian. Those who would impose their faith on others, will eventually have others retaliate by imposing their faith on them. There is the vast difference between using terrorism as a means to impose one's faith on others.

If the Christian would succeed in his evangelistic efforts to reach the world, then he does not have in his back pocket a religious state constitution that he would impose on those who would volunteer to be Christian. Almost all modern Muslims in democratic states feel the same in reference to Islam and the Qur'an. However, we must keep in mind that movements as the Taliban, Boko Haram, ISIS, Al Sahabaab and Al qaeda have copies of the Qur'an ready to impose on the people as a state constitution.

We are often horrified at the horrendous atrocities that are being carried out by Islamic groups in different parts of the world. There is a reason for this. The radical Islamist accuses the non-Islamic world of attacking Islam. They are right, but not as they think. The attack is with the gospel, not with guns. In the early 1960s there was a book that was published annually entitled, *Unreached People*. In the early 1960s it was stated that about one billion people in the world had never heard the name "Jesus." But since then, this has all changed. The name of Jesus has been preached throughout the last fifty years to people all over the world. Few people

in the world today have never heard of the name Jesus.

Now we wonder why Islamists feel that they are under attack? The truth is that Muslims are converting to Christianity throughout the world. And what would we expect when the kingdom of darkness is under attack? Islamists know that the message of love that Christians bring through the preaching of the gospel will overcome the power of any religious system that is of this world.

Christians recall in their history when the same scenario of oppression of their faith happened at the beginning of the first century until the first of the fourth century. The Jews first persecuted Christianity, and then state persecution began with Nero and extended until Rome finally relented under Constantine and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Hate and military aggression of the great Roman Empire succumbed to love.

When one has an inferiority complex about his faith, his only recourse is terroristic aggression. When one knows that he is losing the battle for the hearts of men, then he will often lash out with fierce aggression. A once "unreached people" of the world are now being reached with the message of love from the cross that was expressed through grace and was poured out on the cross of Calvary. There is no power whatsoever that can stand against the power of the love and grace that was revealed on a cross a short distance from Jerusalem. Someone once asked us how to convert Muslims. There is really only one answer that would begin the conversion process. Jesus gave the "method":

> *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).

D. Islam only:

Surah 9:33 states that Islam is the only true religion.

> It is He who sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, in order to make it prevail over all religions, even though the idolaters dislike it.
> The religion before Allah is Islam (Surah 3:19; see 3:85).

This statement would also reflect the goal of Christians in reference to Christianity. What the constitution of a democratic state accomplishes is to offer both the Christian and Muslim, as well as all religious faiths within a nation, the social environment in which differences in faith can be freely discussed. If either side of the discussion would seek to impose the laws of their faith as the laws of the state, then we can know that that faith is simply the invention of man. If one needs the law of state to convert the people, then we can be assured that the law of one's faith is simply from man and not God. Those who lack confidence in their "system of faith" will always seek some way to impose their faith on others by using the law of the state.

But the doctrine of "Islam only" is totally contrary to the teaching that Jesus is the only way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). He is the only way into the realm of the eternal Father (At 4:12). Islam cannot be the only way, if the only way is through Jesus. The teaching that Islam is the only religion forces every Muslim to accept the following teaching of the Qur'an:

E. Denial of the cross:

Surah 4:157 states:

> And for their [Jews] saying, "We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah." In fact, they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them as if they did. Indeed, those who differ about him are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it, except the following of assumptions. Certainly, they did not kill him.

This is one point of teaching of the Qur'an that will always separate Christianity from Islam. There will never be a compromise between the two faiths, as some have attempted with the theology of "Christlam." Such teaching is a mockery of the Son of God and the cross upon which He poured Himself out for the salvation of all men.

Muhammad denied the very foundation upon which God labored for centuries throughout human history to accomplish. The cross is the centrality of the work of the one true and living God. And it is by the denial of this salvational event of history that proves that Islam is simply a religion of man. Because of this denial on the part of Muhammad, he will always be considered a false prophet by all Christians.

Muhammad's denial of this central reason for Christian faith speaks volumes concerning the digressed state of "Christianity" that he encountered. He placed no salvational emphasis on the cross, indicating that the supposed Christianity of the era had long forgotten that the Christian life is centered around the cross. What Muhammad encountered was a religion that was defined by organized religious people who based their faith in a

religious institution. There was no preaching of the gospel of Jesus and the cross at this time in history. There was only preaching of the church. If the gospel had been preached and lived throughout the Arabian areas of the world, then certainly Muhammad would have mentioned message of the gospel that "Christians" were supposed to be preaching. If "Christians" were preaching the gospel of the cross, Muhammad would have attacked the message of the cross and not simply what he considered to be the fraudulent claim of the death of Jesus.

Will this be the demise of the church in the years to come? Will we too stop preaching the gospel of the cross and the necessity of obeying the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in the waters of baptism for the forgiveness of sins? Will preaching of an institutional churchianity overshadow the cross? It seems that the digression has already started with those who obsess over "faith only" salvation to the neglect of obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See 1 Co 15:1-4; Rm 6:3-6; 2 Th 1:6-9). The central message of some in these days is a message of church, and not Christ. It is often a message of preserving one's religious heritage, and not preaching of our inheritance through the cross.

When prophets start preaching that people are individually predestined to either heaven or hell, then there is no need to proclaim the cross to which all men must have an opportunity to respond. When prophets rise up, and with sweet voices, proclaim that a simple faith only is all that is needed to be saved, then there is no need to preach the incarnate blood of Jesus Christ dripping from the cross of Calvary. When the obsession of our preaching is a catechism to define our church heritage, then the foundation of our faith moves from Christ to church.

We would assume that Christendom has moved closer to the era of Muhammad by promoting a churchianity that is sterile of the cross, but organize according to the laws of heritage. If one does not believe this, then he should take note of all the "miracle meetings" that are conducted throughout the misguided religious world of Christendom. People are drawn to the "miracle meetings" in hope of healing. Churches are thus filled with narcissistic attendees who come weekly and weakly for some "healing." They are "me churches" that seek something for self. They are not drawn into assembly because of what Jesus did for us through the cross. This certainly seems to be contrary to what Jesus said would draw people unto Him. *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to me"* (Jn 12:32). It is the cross that draws true repentant believers to Jesus, not miracles.

Please keep in mind that the digression from the preaching of the gospel and simple Christianity to an institutional churchianity identified by its organization took less than five centuries to developfully. This is the "christianity" that Muhammad encountered and rejected. In the middle of the first century, Paul started everything right during his three-year ministry in Arabia (Gl 17,18). Though Christianity was started right, it ended up wrong when people left the direction of the word of God. Digression from the gospel message is slow, but it eventually comes. Our task is to determine at what stage we are presently in concerning the digression of Christianity to being just another religion.

To think that Christianity without the Bible is static and uninfluenced and unchanging everywhere in the world, is certainly being naive as a historian. It is the duty of every disciple to check his Bible, and then look around and determine the state of the religious world in which he lives. Most of the time all one must do is simply look at those who are sitting beside him on Sunday morning. He should thus first check himself lest he become a part of that institutional religiosity which Muhammad encountered, and rejected. The "Christianity" of his day was so false that even he admonished the "Christians" to follow the teachings of Jesus (See Surah 3:161-166). We know that we have strayed a long way from Jesus when it takes an unbeliever to call us hypocrites in reference to the faith that we profess.

F. God is not three, but one:

Surah 4:171 states:

> O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, and do not say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, is the Messenger of Allah, and His Word that He conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and do not say, "Three." Refrain—it is better for you. Allah is only one.

Muhammad did not consider Jesus to be the manifestation of God on earth, and thus, not the Son of God. Jesus was simply a prophet/messenger from God. He was a prophet just as Muhammad claimed to be. When Jesus said, *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (Jn 14:9), He stated a teaching that was totally contrary to the concept that Muhammad had of Jesus.

G. Jesus not God, nor Son of God:

Muhammad denied the sonship of Jesus. To him, Jesus was, as he, only a messenger from Allah. In fact,

Jesus was created by Allah, and thus could not be as Allah himself (Surah 3:59).

> In blasphemy are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary (Surah 5:17; see 5:72)
> Christ the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger; many were the Messengers that passed away before him (Surah 5:75).

Muhammad taught that since Jesus was a created being, and thus not one with God, as the Bible teaches, then it would be wrong for one to believe and teach that Jesus was the Son of God (Surah 9:31). On this basis, he denied the deity of the Son of God. Of the twenty-five times that reference is made to Jesus in the Qur'an, twenty-three times reference is made to Him as only the "son of Mary."

Under no circumstances did Muhammad want people to think of Jesus as the Son of God. If such were believed, then the teachings of Jesus would be elevated above the teachings of Muhammad. Jesus would thus not have been just another prophet of God, as Muhammad so claimed He was. If in any way Jesus were accepted to be more than a prophet, then Muhammad's teachings would not have been accepted as teachings in a succession of prophets, of which Muhammad claimed to be the last.

H. Legal salvation by works:

Surah 23:101-103 state:

> When the Horn is blown, no relations between them will exist on that Day, and they will not ask after one another. Those whose scales are heavy—those are the successful. But those whose scales are light—those are they who have lost their souls; in Hell they will dwell forever. (Also see surah 34:3-5).

One's salvation, according to Muhammad, depends on the number of good works he has accumulated for the day of judgment. Now because the Qur'an taught this legal system of salvation, there was no guaranteed way that one would go to heaven, for one would never know if his works were sufficient to give him a pass into the presence of the many virgins that awaited him. Even if one did make it into heaven, there was no guarantee that he would stay there. So Muhammad came up with an ingenious way of encouraging his recruits for war, and at the same time, give them peace of mind that they would enter into the presence of all these virgins, and stay there. If one died a martyr for Allah, he was guaranteed heaven. The suicide bomber, therefore, is guaranteed entrance into the presence of the virgins if he commits his murderous act of suicide. If one would commandeer an airplane and fly it into a skyscraper, killing hundreds of infidels, then he would go straight to heaven.

I. Polygamy:

Surah 4:3 states:

> If you fear you cannot act fairly towards the orphans—then marry the women you like—two, or three, or four ....

Muhammad's teaching on polygamy rose out of an era of wars when fathers were killed in battle. The returning men from battle were given the responsibility of caring for the wives and children of those husbands and fathers who were killed in battle.

J. Believe in Jesus:

Surah 3:79 state:

> No person to whom Allah has given the Scripture, and wisdom, and prophethood would ever say to the people, "Be my worshipers rather than Allah's." Rather, "Be people of the Lord, according to the Scripture you [Christians] teach, and the teachings you learn."

In a mandate to his followers, Muhammad wrote in Surah 4:161-166:

> We have inspired you, as We had inspired Noah and the prophets after him. And We inspired Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Patriarchs, and Jesus, and Job, and Jonah, and Aaron, and Solomon. ... Some messengers We have already told you about, while some messengers We have not told you about. ... Messengers delivering good news, and bringing warnings; so that people may have no excuse before Allah after the coming of the messengers. ... But Allah bears witness to what He revealed to you. He revealed it with His knowledge. And the angels bear witness. Though Allah is a sufficient witness.

And then in a contradictory statement, Muhammad wrote in Surah 3:17:

> Verily, the true religion in Allah's sight is Islam.

In other words, the Christian is to believe in Jesus Christ, and thus be Christian. But then Muhammad affirms that there is only one religion, Islam. Then consider the fact that the Bible teaches that God does not deliver to man

"religion," but principles by which His people conduct themselves in the world and with one another. If one must follow Jesus in his "religion," then how can Islam be the only religion in the sight of God?

K. Disrespect for women:

Muhammad viewed women as property and a means to satisfy sexual urges and pleasures. This thinking is brought out in Surah 33:51:

> You may defer any of them [women] you wish, and receive any of them you wish. Should you desire any of those you had deferred, there is no blame on you.

L. Hope of a carnal heaven:

In the statements of Surah 56:10-35, Muhammad described his concept of the reward of obedient Muslim men. We do not presume that Muhammad was speaking metaphorically when he gave this description of hope for his followers. Since he surely did not, then the hope of heaven that is presented by the Qur'an is certainly carnal.

> And the forerunners, the forerunners. Those are the nearest. In the Gardens of Bliss. A throng from the ancients. And a small band from the latecomers. On luxurious furnishings. Reclining on them, facing one another. Serving them will be immortalized youth. With cups, pitchers, and sparkling drinks. Causing them neither headache, nor intoxication. And fruits of their choice. And meat of birds that they may desire. And lovely companions. The likenesses of treasured pearls. As a reward for what they used to do. Therein they will hear no nonsense, and no accusations. But only the greeting: "Peace, peace." And those on the Right—what of those on the Right? In lush orchards. And sweet-smelling plants. And extended shade. And outpouring water. And abundant fruit. Neither withheld, nor forbidden. And uplifted mattresses. We have created them of special creation. (See also Surah 3:11; 4:60).

While he was still alive and attacking caravans across the desert, Muhammad made some very carnal promises to his men in order to guarantee their loyalty and die for his cause. If they would fight with him, he promised that they could have the women they captured in order to satisfy their sexual desires. And then some of his men began questioning that if they were killed in battle, then they would have no women. So another revelation was squeezed out of Muhammad that said there would be virgins waiting for them in heaven (See surah 56:34-36).

There are many legal mandates and exhortations imposed on Muslims by the Qur'an. The religion is based on a legalistic system of behavior and salvation, and thus, emphasis for salvation is based on one's performance of those laws that Muhammad enjoined on his followers. It is a system of religiosity wherein there can be little grace, for grace cannot be the focus of a religious system that is based on legal perfection in obedience to law by those who teach the system.

Though there are many good principles that are taught in the Qur'an, the confusion it leaves with the reader would suggest that moderate Muslims probably spend little time in studying its text because of the nature of its legal system for salvation. The same could be said of many of those who profess to be Christian concerning their knowledge and study of the Bible. But at least by reading the Bible and the Qur'an, one would be encouraged to read the Bible simply because there is a literary flow of the text without all the rambling thoughts that seem to be characteristic with some parts of the text of the Qur'an.

We would encourage every Christian to be very familiar with the teachings of the Qur'an, especially those teachings where the Qur'an makes God a liar and a deity who has changed His mind from what He first said in the Bible. The Qur'an is filled with justification for lying, deception, slavery, women as property, the right to selfishly kill for the reward of heaven, military dominance of all nations, and a host of other teachings that are contrary to Bible teaching. If the Qur'an is from God, then God sure changed His mind on a great deal of moral issues that He revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.

We are certain that most moderate Muslims today are entirely unaware of many teachings of the Qur'an that are contrary to Bible teaching, and in many cases, contrary to the constitutional law of secular states. It is for this reason that Christians should be familiar with the teachings of the Qur'an in order to teach Muslims. This is being done by many Christians in Africa, and as a result thousands of African Muslims are being converted to Jesus. The day may come when we in Africa will need to send African evangelists to America in order to teach American Christians how to convert Muslims. Just keep in mind that the moderate Muslim's ignorance of his own source of authority is an open door to bring moral truth to those who are walking in ignorance.

Chapter 16

THE RISE OF A NEW WORLD

As you read through the following material, you will discover why we have added it to a book on this subject. What will be discussed is becoming a generation throughout the world that is being cultured with a world view that is in many ways opposed to the Christian's world view, but at the same time, produces an opportunity for the spread of Islam. Not only is the world view of Islam contrary to that which we see in the Bible, the new immerging generation that is arising in the developed world is in many ways also in conflict with Christianity. The selfless example that we see nailed to the cross of Calvary runs contrary to a narcissistic non-religious generation that has itself at heart and the world as its final destination. It is a generation that has forgotten that all we are is a clod of dirt invested with a spirit from God. The concept expressed in the words, *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (Gl 2:20), is on the other end of the spiritual continuum of a vast majority of this generation. It is imperative, therefore, that leaders of God's people understand this new generation in order to influence its direction by the message of sacrifice that comes from the cross. Therefore, do not read lightly over this material. It is by no means complete, but it will give you some idea of how this immerging world generation can easily lead to the fall of Christianity, and thus open the door for every religious invention possible to man, and possibly move the world closer to the Genesis 6:5 scenario. This religious scenario happened with the world prior to Noah. It happened with the cities of Sodom, Gomaoorah, Admah and Zeboiim (Gn 11:19; 13). It happened with the nation of Israel (Hs 4:6). And it can happen today to any society that claims to be "Christian."

We include these thoughts primarily for our audience outside America who have a romantic view of the West that is rapidly passing away. As the faith of European nations vanished, who first went into all the world with the gospel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so it is the case today with twenty-first century America. The "Christian nation" is rapidly becoming a faithless nation with little desire for anything that is religious.

Some of the recent statistics on this matter are shocking. They are shocking to the extent that it is time now that the rest of the world must take ownership of the future evangelization of the world, for the Western church is fast pulling out of world missions. As the American church brings its soldiers home from foreign nations, so the rest of us in the world must assume the responsibility of engaging Satan in our own backyards. We see the work of God throughout the world in all this cultural transformation. God is simply turning the work of Satan against himself. God removes the influence of foreign mission sources in order that local disciples take ownership of the evangelization of their own countries. Therefore, as fellow world citizens, we must get on with that which we are supposed to be doing without focusing on the financial crutch and leadership of the West. We must assume our responsibility to take Jesus into all the world. In order to do this, we must listen to what this new immerging generation is saying.

A. "We are changing."

All societies go through generational changes. Though traditions and customs may minimize these changes from one generation to another, there are still changes that take place as the next generation wants to do things differently, and often better. Such changes continually take place in every culture of the world. It significant, however, that there seems to be a most dynamic worldwide change going on at this time that is affecting worldwide cultures in the same way. It is not a sociological change that is unique with one particular world culture. Though this change is significant in the Western societies of America and Europe, we bear witness that the new **Millennial Generation** is not unique with the West only. It is worldwide.

We have traveled to many places of the world where we have witnessed the core nature of this new generation that is growing stronger on the world scene. It is a generation that has changed the Arab world through what was called the "Arab Spring." The rapidity of this generational change will answer some questions as to why some Muslims feel that Islam is under attack. It is this worldwide generation that seeks to be educated and informed as the rest of the world. No youth of the world wants to be left out, for young people know enough in the most remote places of Pakistan or Afghanistan that if they are left out of this new world citizenship they are doomed to live among the relics of the past and under the control of uneducated leaders or authoritarian clerics. The Muslim youth of this generation, therefore, no longer want to be uneducated recluses in caves, jungles

or deserts, and subdued by ignorant leaders who find self-esteem by oppressing others into the subjection to self-imposed legal religious codes. Young girls throughout the Muslim world want to be freed through education, something that Islamists as the Taliban, ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Shabaab simply cannot allow among the people over which they seek to dominate. The youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, Malala Yousafzai (17 years old), who recovered from a gun shot to the head by the Taliban, once said, "They only shot a body but they cannot shoot a dream." These are brave young Muslim girls who want to be educated, and also show the world that Islam is not the twisted religiosity that is often reported on the nightly news.

For the Islamists, the Muslim youth of the world made the mistake of buying a smart phone. These youth then discovered themselves joining in with the Millennials worldwide who seek to take this world into a new and better world order for themselves. They have discovered, however, that ignorance among clerical leaders has a hard time giving way to a better way, a life of freedom to think.

It is unfortunate that the Millennials who are culturally formed to work as a team find it difficult to produce the type of leaders who are necessary to take an Arab Spring into a truly democratic government. The young Google employee who inspired the Egyptian Spring simply said after all the changes that were made in Egypt, he wanted nothing to do with leading the country as a politician. The team culture of the Millennials is so strong that it has a difficult time producing the type of leadership that is necessary to stand alone and lead the way for the masses.

No book on a subject of world views would be complete without some thoughts on the rise and affect of the Millennial Generation on the world as it is and is to come. More books have been written on this generation than any other generation of civilization. Sociologists know that the Millennial Generation will change the world as it is. And for this reason, studies have been made and numerous books written in order to prepare the world for some interesting surprises that are coming.

In the context of our ministry of the word of God, it is important that church leaders understand some of the basic principles of the Millennial Generation in order that the gospel can be communicated effectively to those of this culture. Simply standing back and begrudging changes that one does not understand and cannot control is not an option for a church leader. He must understand and engage those to whom he is to preach the gospel.

The Millennial Generation is composed of those who were generally born between 1980 and 2000. In America, this generation is **80 million strong**. It is a generation that will eventually change America forever as it moves into being the leadership of the nation. Therefore, we write these words in order to prepare all of us who reside outside the continental United States and Europe to understand the nature of a changing West.

Every country of the world has its Millennials. Because of globalization and communication, no country of the world that has come online can escape the affects of this generation. Because Western cultures have been exported worldwide, the Millennials in countries throughout the world have more in common with one another than any previous generation of history. The Millennials have moved us from a world of national citizenship, to a borderless world of global citizens. There are no borders on the Internet, and thus, the Millennial Generation electronically travels freely throughout the world for information and relationships. If one were an imam in a cave in northern Afghanistan, then certainly he should be on guard against his adherents acquiring smart phones that would connect them to a worldwide citizenship. Once cave dwellers are connected, they realize how backward and underdeveloped they are. We can understand why the North Korean government is terrified about allowing the citizens of the country to have access to the Internet.

The 14th wealthiest man in the world, Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, has made it his goal to bring the world online through Internet connections. Facebook presently (2014) has 1.35 billion user connected, and it is his goal to connect the entire world. The present world population of the world is about 7.2 billion. Of this number, 2.9 billion people are using the Internet (*Time Magazine*, Dec. 25, 2014). This means that there are about 4.3 billion people who are not online. It is Zuckerberg's goal to get these people online and connected to the information that is available on the Internet. Education brings freedom, and thus Zuckerberg is a "digital pioneer" who will lead the world to be better by being connected. The world will thus continue to change rapidly in the decades to come. This change has already started and will accelerate as more people connect to information highway of the Internet.

A few years ago one of our brethren in South Africa said, "Brother Dickson, they are different." (He was speaking of Millennials who had visited South Africa.) The brother continued, "You can see it in their eyes!" So this was our impetus several years ago to do some research to see what the folks in Africa saw in the eyes of this new and different Millennial Generation that was going to reshape the sociological structure of world

society. We have since learned some good things, and some not-so-good things in reference to spiritual orientation of this generation. Therefore, these words are written to our older generation who seem somewhat unsettled about these new digital thinkers who have come onto the world stage of sociological drama.

In speaking to an older generation that does not know the difference between megabytes and bug bites, we thought it necessary to aid somewhat in understanding this generation to whom we are to take the gospel. Instead of scaring Millennials away with our archaic ways, we need to separate Bible from tradition in approaching a generation that is educated and moving on into the future. If a church leader does not do as Paul said below, then he will be left in his empty cave (pew), complaining that the world has all gone wrong:

> *I have made myself a bondservant to all,* ***so that I might gain the more****. So to the Jews I became as a Jew,* ***so that I might win the Jews****. To those who are under law I became as one under law (though I myself am not under law),* ***so that I might win those who are under law****. To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without God's law but under Christ's law,* ***so that I might win those who are without law****. To the weak I became as weak* ***so that I might win the weak****. I have become all things to all men* ***so that I might by all means save some****. And this I do for the sake of the gospel so that I might be a partaker of it* (1 Co 9:19-23).

B. "We are digitally connected."

In reference to what we have seen throughout the world, one common thread runs through this generation that will redefine the new world culture of the future. President George W. Bush once said many years ago that we were moving into "a new world order." He said this in reference to the change of the guard of several governments. But he may have miscalculated what the new world would actually be. Certainly, governments change, for they are the reflection of the people, whether a dictatorship or democracy, depending on what government the people first placed in control. But the new world order in reference to government is yet to arise to reflect the worldwide phenomena of the digital generation.

We would name this new generation after that which gave it birth and binds its citizenship together. It is the "Digital Generation." Digital communication gave birth to this generation through communication devices. They have exchanged person communication for worldwide connection. Cellphones, smart phones, Ipads, notebooks and an assortment of computers and electronic gadgets have opened the door for a worldwide connection with information and other people. This generation would not continue to exist without these digital devices. In fact, none of us would now be able to function in the developed world without some digital device. Wherever we have traveled in the world, this digital generation exists, whether on the off beaten roads of Africa or main street Beijing. It is a generation that is obsessed with their communication devices. It is a generation of which the digital communication devices are the very center of its culture.

Digital communication devices have changed the way the people of this generation relate to one another. If there were no digital or virtual communication devices, then this generation would culturally collapse. It would collapse because the relational part of the culture of this generation depends on the communication devices, not personal contact with others in communication. The devices are its heartbeat, because through the communication devices, the citizens of this generation stay in contact with one another. Instant worldwide communication now defines the world as it is. And we presume that this communication mania will intensify in the world to come. We cannot think that it is a bad thing for the world to become smaller through digital communication relationships.

C. "Everything is about us."

The letter "I" is worn off the computer keyboard of the Millennial Generation. If he had a computer, this would be the case with the narcissistic Diotrephes about whom John wrote, *"... but Diotrephes,* ***who loves to be first among them****, does not receive us"* (3 Jn 9).

A narcissist is one who is focused on himself. He seeks to be noticed, to be first, to have no competition, and the "winner" in all things. Narcissism is a personality disorder with which one is not born, but is trained to be from childhood. The present Millennial Generation is three times more narcissistic than the generation that is 65 and older in America. In fact, according to the National Institute of Health, among college students, 58% of those in their twenties scored higher on the narcissism scale than the same age group of college students in 1982.

This is a generation of people who are obsessed with themselves. They have grown up in a society where there are no losers and everyone is "the man." Some sports games of schools in America no longer keep score because they do not want the children to feel like they can lose. Every player on the field is "a winner" be-

cause he simply played in the game. Everybody is trained to be a winner, and a "good job" statement is made after every activity in which one involves himself.

Unfortunately, when this generation encounters the real world where there are losers, suicide is high, and riots on the street are easy when all these "winners" confront a police force that tells them that there are limits to what they can do in society. Since this generation is convinced of their own greatness, their social development is stunted, and thus, they simply have a hard time "growing up."

When one has obsessed over his or her self with countless "selfies" (self-taken pictures), both by parents and one's self in the developing years, what would we expect? When one's personal room is filled with countless trophies and award ribbons as to what a winner is, then we can understand why such communication mediums as "I"phones, and "You"tube (broadcast yourself), and "I"pads have been so financially successful. Tweeter is based on the social norm that one supposes that everyone is interested in one's every moment of life. Millennials broadcast their daily activities on FitBit, their whereabouts on PlaceMe, and everything else on 23 and Me. This is narcissism refined.

Many single people in Sweden do not seek to be married. In fact, 26% of the people of Sweden do not intend to marry. The same is true in America, for 26% of the Millennial Generation in America also do not intend to marry. Someone once asked why this is. The answer is simple. It is just too difficult to take two "I's" and make a "we" relationship. When one has lived a life of 25 years or so focusing on one's self, it is certainly difficult to change course to focus on someone else first.

The West trained their children to be this way because they were paranoid about rearing up losers, and in reference to family, those who would end in divorce. Parents wanted their children to have great self-esteem, for in having such they could find good jobs. Unfortunately, being obsessed with one's self may help to get the job, but not keep the job. Sean Lyons, coeditor of *Managing the New Workforce: International Perspectives on the Millennial Generation*, wrote,

> This generation has the highest likelihood of having unmet expectations with respect to their careers and the lowest levels of satisfaction with their careers at the state that they're at.

Instilling self-esteem within our youth is great. But we must keep in mind that self-esteem is only one step away from the mental disorder of narcissism. Only a fine mental line separates the two. It is as the psychologist Jean Twenge said,

> When they're little it seems cute to tell them they're special or a princess or a rock star or whatever their T-shirt says. When they're 14 it's no longer cute.

Twenge's advice was, "Just tell your kids you love them. It's a better message" (See Twenge's books, *Generation Me* and *The Narcissism Epidemic*). We believe the Bible says something similar.

But do not conclude that narcissism is a plague that is sweeping across the Western world only. We have experienced the same overconfident and self-obsessed Millennials everywhere we have traveled in the world. This is not a social problem for the rich and famous of the West. There are "poor" Millennials throughout the world who have been self-glamorized by the communication of themselves and desire for a materialistic way of life. Their focus on themselves has often been their escape from poverty.

However, the West has been particularly fruitful in producing the self-oriented generation of the Millennials. After all, it was the Baby Boomer parent generation of the West that was "me" oriented, and thus gave birth to and reared a generation of children who were obsessively focused on themselves. The "Me" Generation produced the "Me, Me, Me" Generation. For those of you who live outside the American society, consider the fact that you have in your house a picture of your wedding, and maybe a few other pictures of yourself. Now compare this with the average American Millennial who has surrounded himself with an average of 85 pictures of himself throughout his house (*Time Magazine*, May 20,2013). They are both the stars and audience of their lives.

D. "We are entitled."

A personality characteristic that is contrary to the spirit of Christianity is entitlement. This is the attitude that "I" have a right to a piece of the pie, to enjoy the pleasures of the things that this world has to offer because one believes he deserves to consume all things upon his own lusts. This is an attitude that is basically worldly, since the very drive of the individual who has been stricken with this earthly mentality is focused on those things that are of this world. The Holy Spirit dealt with this thinking in Colossians 3:1,2:

> *If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.*

Set you mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Any thinking that moves the Christian's mind from the heavenly to the earthly is simply worldly. This is the spirit of entitlement. Since those of the Millennial Generation are self-oriented, then they think they are entitled to that which surrounds them. They climb the mountain in order to have others see them, not in order to see the world. In order to be seen successful by their peers, they must give the presentation of being successful. This is not a generation that has grown up with worn shoes, or walked to school in knee-deep snow, up hill both ways. It is not a generation that had to put together a bicycle out of junk parts from a junkyard. They simply bypassed the new bicycle generation of their fathers and went straight for the new cars in their teens. It is a generation where parents have lavished the material world upon them, and now, they believe they are the center of their world, and thus entitled to everything that this world has to offer. It is a generation that finds it very difficult to follow the One who said, *"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"* (Mt 8:20).

The character of the Millennial Generation has never traveled through life with a lack of this world's goods. It is a generation whose thinking was developed by having everything, and thus having everything is their way of life. They know no other way to live. In fact, they believe that their materialistic way of life is what defines life. This is the "American dream," the "American way of life." Everyone in the world who does not live this way is "underdeveloped."

It is the goal of the West, therefore, to "develop" the rest of the world. The Western definition of the "developed world" is that the rest of the world must surround themselves with possession in which they too can consume upon their own desires (lusts). If a nation has not "developed" to where every citizen can walk into a Walmart shopping center for a tube of toothpaste and come out with a trolley full of consumer goods, then they are living in a "developing" nation. The apostle Paul wrote, *"If we have food and clothing, with these let us be content"* (1 Tm 6:8). We have always considered that if Paul walked into Walmart for a tub of toothpaste, he would walk out with only a tub of toothpaste.

What has developed the psychological problem among those of this "developed" generation is also the digital means of communication by which one can embellish himself with all sorts of media to broadcast his personal social status to his friends. When one starts broadcasting himself on Youtube, Facebook and Twitter, the "likes" and "followers" start inflating one's ego to the point of believing that he is some type of celebrity. When others start "liking" our broadcasted parties, pictures, vacations, and job promotions, then we start to believe that we are in the middle of a micro-universe where we are entitled to be popular.

Such digital means of broadcasting one's life becomes an obsession. Everything and every event in our celebrity lives is thus "posted" in order to retain our personal cheerleading "friends." We are obsessed with how many "likes" we receive when we post a picture of ourselves involved in some sort of activity. But when this means of self-glamorization goes wrong for young people, worlds collapse and suicide happens. When the self-glamorized are electronically bullied, it is just too much. When one who thinks he or she is always a winner, it is a traumatic experience when others digitally communicate that he or she is a loser.

But before we are too hard on the Millennials for being a self-oriented and entitled generation, it may be that they have simply adapted better to their environment. In the West, they have grown up in a very affluent economic environment. It is an environment in which every need has been satisfied with abundant options. Food markets do not have just one or two choices of breakfast cereal, but one or two isles of options from which to make selections. Their's is a consumer society in which every citizen is innundated with choices.

Millennials unconsciously feel that they are entitled to a host of choices simply because they have lived no other way. They are like the young Millennial who came with a group on a "vacationary" mission to an African country. This young group of vacationaries were teamed up with the locals to go out into the surrounding community. With one team, a local young Christian was horrified when his Millennial partner from the West threw in the trash a US$150 pair of Nike tennis shoes. The Millennial was just disgusted with the shoes because they had worn blisters on his feet.

E. "We are not religious."

In his release in the *Time Magazine* of his study of the Millennial Generation, Joel Klein wrote of this generation,

> [The Millennials are] not into going to church, even though they believe in God, because they don't identify with big institutions; one-third of adults under 30, the highest percentage ever [of America], are religiously unaffiliated (*Time Magazine*, May 20, 2013).

This brings us to the major "threat" that this gen-

eration throughout the world would pose to Christianity. In their book, *The Millennials,* Thom and Jess Rainer reported on their comprehensive survey of this generation, one of the first surveys that was conducted concerning the Millennial Generation. They reported initially in their book, "In many ways this generation is the most diverse generation in American's history" (*The Millennials*, p. 1). It is diverse in that it reflects a great deal about the multiplicity of influences that led to its creation, and thus, the various identities the generation offers to produce a new world culture. This is particularly true in reference to the "spiritual" nature of the Millennials. Rainer & Rainer wrote,

> **The shocking reality for us is that only 13 percent of the Millennials considered any type of spirituality to be important in their lives**.... **Most of the Millennials don't think about religious matters at all**" (Emphasis mine, R.E.D., Ibid., p. 22).

"This generation is not just agnostic to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. They are agnostic toward all matters religious" (Ibid., p. 23). Now here is something interesting that Rainer & Rainer discovered in their survey of over 1,200 Millennials.

> **Millennials are the least religious of any generation in modern American history**. Millennials are still spiritual. **Three out of four Millennials say that they are spiritual but not religious**. If you state you are spiritual, most people will take that at face value. If you state that you are religious, you will have to define what you believe. **Most Millennials are unable to define their beliefs** (Emphasis mine, R.E.D., ibid., p. 47).

Rainer & Rainer found that most Millennials "are no longer choosing to identify themselves with religion" (Ibid., p. 47). The percentages speak volumes concerning the spiritual nature of this generation. For example, only 6% of the 13% who claimed to be "spiritual," stated that they were "evangelical," or "Christian." Of this 6%, only 18% of these stated that their religion was of any importance to them. This is definitely not a religious-oriented generation. And it is 80 million strong in America and is growing up to shape the future of America. America is not only becoming non-Christian, it is becoming "nonspiritual" with no religious affiliation. Keep in mind that America is only 20-30 years away from this identity as a nonreligious culture.

One might say that the future for faith in the West is going to be greatly challenged by the onslaught of unbelief that is characteristic of the Millennial Generation. This is revealed in the thinking concerning where Millennials seek to find authority for their religious faith. One Millennial stated, "I really don't think we can say that any one person or any book is a real authority. You really have to examine what people say and then decide. You could find some truth in the Bible and maybe the Koran (sp)" (Ibid., pp. 228,229). Now consider this statement in the context of a non-committed "Christian" (religionists) who is living in the same society with a very committed Muslim. If the non-committed Christian has little regard for the authority of his faith, then certainly he will be overcome by the Muslim who has a firm conviction in the Qur'an which is the foundation of his faith. Does this give you any idea of where America could be headed?

Some of the Western Millennials, who still have some faith, are now establishing authority for their faith as many in Africa have done for centuries. Some in Africa have taken beliefs from past and present pagan religious beliefs, and brought them together into a syncretistic faith that they claim to be "Christian." It is not a Bible-defined faith, but one that is defined by the culture in which the African lives. It is as bad as what some Catholic priests did when they first went to Brazil in the footsteps of the conquistadors three centuries ago. In order to keep the money coming from Rome, they simply put Catholic names on the spiritualistic practices and ideas of the local pagan rituals of the tribal groups.

One of the amazing discoveries that Rainer & Rainer found in their survey of the American Millennial Generation was that in the top ten priorities of the lives of the Millennials, **faith or religion was not mentioned** (See ibid., p. 229). As previously stated, this is the most nonreligious generation that America has produced in its history. The institutional church failed this generation, since **70% of this generation feel that church is irrelevant to their needs**. The "faithful" 6% who still cling to some of their Christian roots, have also presented to the church their "me" culture. The Millennials are more concerned about their needs at home, than they are about the nations of the world. This generation will vote a president into office who promises "to bring our troops home," and then make him promise that there will be "no boots on the ground" of a foreign nation in the future.

This thinking of the Millennials has spilled over into the mission efforts of many churches of the West. And for this reason, the mission ministries of many churches throughout the West have been greatly diminished in the last two decades. We assume worldwide missions and missionaries from the West will continue to diminish and be a thing of the past once the "with-

drawn" remnant of the religious Millennials grows into the leadership of the Western church. We do not know of one missionary on the field who has not been affected by the Millennial mentality in the mission departments of supporting churches.

But in all the negative doom and gloom that we have thus written, there is indeed some great things that the Millennial Generation will produce in the future. Many of the 6% remnant are very committed. It may be that we have to go back to Jerusalem to an upper room wherein are again gathered only 120 faithful "Millennials" in the midst of an unbelieving world of the first century. But what those 120 did two thousand years ago in their lifetimes was truly phenomenal. They turned the world upside down. We believe the present faithful Millennials can do the same.

We see in the faithful of the Millennials today those of this fanatical conviction. One of these "fanaticals" visited us a few years ago. He said, "There is in our generation those who claim to be Christians, and those who are Christians. Some of us [Millennials] do not take our faith seriously, **but those of us who do will die for Jesus**!" And he was serious. We have friends who are Millennials who are men and women of tremendous conviction. They are truly those who will give their lives for Jesus. Maybe we have been uniquely blessed by some of these who have passed our way, but we can truly give our testimony that there are some "Timothys" out there among the Millennials who will take that remaining 120 faithfuls of this generation from an upper room into a revival of spirit and preaching of the gospel to the world. We pray for these truly committed and convicted Millennial faithfuls. It is truly an inspiration to be around them. Rainer and Rainer made their optimistic conclusion of this generation known in the following statement at the end of their book:

> Some churches in America will likely continue to decline and weaken because their leaders and members refuse to get out of their comfort zones. These churches will continue to have mediocre Bible study groups and anemic preaching. Not only will these churches fail to attract the non-Christian Millennials; they will forfeit the opportunity to reach Millennial Christians. **Christians who are members of America's largest generation will not embrace churches where the Bible is not taught and preached with depth and convictions** (Emphasis mine, R.E.D., ibid., p. 264).

Book 57

The Godly Giver

The greatness of Christian integrity is revealed in the life of the one who gives his life for others. Jesus focused the thinking of His disciples on this principle of faith when He said, *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends"* (Jn 15:13). And Jesus led the way. Any who would in turn be the friend of Jesus, will crucify their own lives for their friends (See Gl 2:20). Crucifying our lives for Jesus simply means that in order that we be a friend of Jesus, we must give our lives for others, just as Jesus gave His life for us. The body of Christ functions on earth when the members sacrificially give themselves to others. This is the core nature of the character of those who would follow the example of their Redeemer. When we crucify our own lives for Jesus, it means giving our time. And that which represents our time is our money. The money we earn from giving our time in a job, represents our lives. Money thus becomes a very important symbol of our being crucified with Christ. If we do not give our money (our time) for the function of the body of Christ, then we are a dysfunctional part of the body. No one can be joined and held to the body without being a sacrificial giver to the financial needs of the body. When Paul wrote that the whole body is *"fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,"* he meant both time and money. Without either, one is a dysfunctional member of the body.

There is a simple definition of the word "godly." The root meaning comes from the action of God as Jesus explained in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...."* God is a loving giver, and those who would be godly—godlikeness—must be givers. Therefore, in view of His sacrificial giving, *"we love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19).

We live in a world of churchianity (Christendom) where there is a great deal of ungodliness masquerading as godliness. We confess that godliness is always our struggle. It is a struggle because we seek to be like God, while at the same time, we have these selfish, narcissistic yearnings to consume upon our own lusts because we seek to be "the man." It is a struggle that prevails with all men, rich or poor. In the developing world, this struggle can be traced back to the time when some missionary/evangelist initially took the sweet name of Jesus to some far off nation. Some godly sender made sacrificial contributions in order that the message of the gospel be preached to all the world. But something went wrong in that many of the converted did not emulate the godly giving of those first senders of missionaries and evangelists. The self-proclaimed poor of the developing world offered all sorts of excuses to convince the sending disciples that they were still a "mission point," even after centuries of holding out their hands to the senders. In the world in which we live, this is a predominant problem among those who would live after the sacrificial life of Jesus.

We suppose a principle of New Testament missions was violated. Paul took no bag of money with him to hand out payment to Timothy. All Paul had was a needle, and thus said to Timothy, "Get to work helping me make tents so we can preach the gospel" (See At 20:31-35). But that all changed when the financially endowed sent their "money" (missionary) force into all the world in the last three centuries. A psychology of dependency developed in the minds of some of the converted, and thus the financial function of the body has handicapped in the "mission points" of the world. A cuffed-hand theology and behavior was developed. And to this day, the converted are having a difficult time taking ownership of evangelizing their own nations by supporting their own evangelists.

But we must not place all the blame on those godly givers who sent the first evangelists, and continue to send them today. The messengers only followed, in many cases, the example of colonial governments who built roads, and hospitals, schools, and everything to bring the "Third World" into being renamed the developing world. These colonial powers built, and then they handed out loans to financially dysfunctional new governments, and then again, forgave the debts. Now what would we expect of the citizens of these lands, but to continue what

was perpetuated by good-hearted people of colonial powers who simply wanted to give people out of "poverty" into our definition of being "developed." Unfortunately, all the giving developed a culture of dependency that left the receivers continually subservient to the handouts of former colonial givers.

This is where many of us in the developing world are, trapped in a culture of an extended hand, waiting around for the next NGO, or the next foreign church, to show up and do for us what we should be doing for ourselves. Those godly givers of the West should not become frustrated with our situation, for our forefathers created these "receiving" societies whose residents have a difficult time in assuming the responsibility for their own destiny.

The good news is that in most of the developing world the younger generation is growing out of the "cuffed-hand" culture of their fathers. They are taking ownership of their GNP. They are doing so well in this struggle of financial rebirth that they have recognized the ungodliness of the cuffed-hand churchianity of the past and are giving to the birth of a new future. It is a refreshing wind of change that will take the church of the developing world on to victory, regardless of the sins of the fathers. It is now time for a true financial partnership of the universal body of Christ to revive the organic growth of the body of Christ, just like it was in the first century.

This change in the paradigm of thinking moves us to focus again on how God would have us think and behave as His children, as members of the global body of Christ. After all, He sent forth the ultimate example of how we should give in our godliness. He defined godliness by which godly people take action. We would do well to rehearse not only His teaching on the matter, but also on how the early disciples financially functioned in partnership with one another as the organic body of Christ. Their sacrificial giving was seated in what God required of Israel from the very beginning of the nation. Jesus came with a new message. His was a message that was encapsulated in the statement, *"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).

The early church simply picked up where Israel left off and was illustrated in the living sacrifice of Jesus. They believed and obeyed the new commandment of love. Their giving of themselves to the Lord was recorded for posterity, and thus, we have today a beautiful book of how to get the job done in our own lives. The secret to doing what they did was revealed in one statement that Paul made concerning the Christians in Macedonia: *"****And this*** **[sacrificial contribution]** ***they did ... they first gave themselves to the Lord ...****"* (2 Co 8:5). This was the living sacrifice about which Paul wrote in view of the fact of all that God has given to us. It was thus only natural that the Holy Spirit communicate this appeal: *"Therefore, I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God,* ***that you present your bodies a living sacrifice****, holy and acceptable to God,* ***which is your reasonable service****"* (Rm 12:1).

We can always identify those who have sacrificially given themselves to the Lord. **Those who are sacrificial givers are those who have given themselves to the Lord**. Once one gives himself wholly to the Lord, giving of one's money only comes naturally. And those who are not sacrificial givers ... well ... continue to read what follows.

Chapter 1

OLD TESTAMENT GIVING

God is the creator of all things, and thus all things belong to God. He is the creator of man. Notice very carefully what God said when He created man.

> *And God said to them ...* ***have dominion*** *.... I have given* ***you*** *every plant bearing seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree .... To you it will be for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth ...* ***I have given*** *every green plant for food* (Gn 1:28-30).

The above makes man only the steward of what was created for him by God. Man, therefore, must remember what God says, *"The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine"* (Hg 2:8; see Ez 18:4). Also, *"... the world is Mine and its fullness"* (Ps 50:12; see At 17:24-28; Cl 1:15-17). It is as the Psalmist wrote, *"The earth is the Lord's and its fullness, the world and those who dwell on it"* (Ps 24:1). *"For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ... for the world is Mine and its fullness"* (Ps 50:10,12).

If we would seek to take personal possession of that which belongs to God, then we are irreverently trying to take ownership of that which does not belong to

us. We must always remember that we only have dominion over that which already existed before us.

One of the first challenges that faces the new Christian is to realize that all that he has first originated with God, and thus all things belong to God. We are only stewards of that which we have control. We must grow out of claiming our own wealth, for it is God who gives us the opportunity to have wealth through the things He created (See Dt 8:11,17,18). God eternally owns all that exists since He is the origin and eternality of all that will exist.

Because of the benevolence of God, man has been given the right to possess and use ("have dominion"), but not the right to take ownership of that over which God has made him a steward. God can never give up His ownership of all things. He cannot because He is the creator and sustainer of all things. It is necessary to understand that, *"we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out"* (1 Tm 6:7). Job realized this truth. After having lost all, Job declared, *"Naked I came out of my mother's womb and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed is the name of the Lord"* (Jb 1:21). When we consider the things of this world over which we have dominion, we are actually "naked possessors."

One of the first evidences that one is truly a mature child of God is discovered in one's realization that everything belongs to the Lord. At the same time, one of the evidences of unrighteousness is when one seeks to take ownership of that which is God's. Good stewards seek to be righteous, and thus, they follow the life-style of Proverbs 3:9: *"Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the firstfruits of all your increase ...."*

The righteous are known for being good stewards of that which God has allowed them to have possession (See Lk 16:10-12). The good steward, therefore, uses that which has been given to him by God in order to honor God (See Mt 25:24-27). Paul wrote, *"Moreover,* ***it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy****"* (1 Co 4:2). But when the steward seeks to lay claim to that which is truly God's, then he has turned into an idolater. He is not trustworthy. He idolizes the material by excluding the rightful owner of all things. Every materialist is an idolater. Of such people, the Holy Spirit charges in reference to our personal struggle with materialism, *"... put to death your members that are on the earth ... covetousness, which is idolatry"* (Cl 3:5). With these principles in mind, consider God's teaching on being a good steward by faithfully offering to God that which manifests one's reverence for Him.

A. Abel offered to the Lord:

The reverential action of offering back to God that which is His has existed from the beginning. The offering of that which is of this created world did not originate with Old Testament teaching through the law of Moses. On the contrary, from the very beginning it was required of man to manifest his reverent worship of God through commanded sacrifices.

> *"Now in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.* ***And the Lord looked with favor on Abel and on his offering****"* (Gn 4:3,4).

We do not learn until the writing of Hebrews 11:4 why God looked with favor on the offering of Abel. *"****By faith*** *Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that* ***he was righteous*** *...."* God had favor with Abel's offering because Abel was righteous, that is, he did that which was right according to the will of God. And in order to do that which was right according to the will of God, the will of God had to have been revealed to both brothers. What God would accept as a correct offering was not a guess on their part. Both Abel and Cain offered according to acceptance or rejection of the instructions of God concerning sacrifices. Abel walked by faith in the word of God (See Rm 10:17). Cain sought to walk contrary to the instructions of God concerning an appropriate offering. His offering thus manifested his unrighteousness, which unrighteousness was later revealed by his killing of Abel. It is imperative, therefore, that when it comes to doing what God would require of us concerning offerings, we must follow His instructions.

B. Abraham and Jacob offered to the Lord:

Four hundred years before Moses inscribed any laws concerning offerings and contributions, Abraham had given a tenth (tithe) offering to Melchizedek (Gn 14:20; Hb 7:4-10). Melchizedek was functioning as a priest of God, and thus Abraham was obligated to continue Melchizedek's ministry as a priest by giving sustenance to him. Long before Jews existed, Abraham, as a Gentile, was giving to a Gentile priest of God, Melchizedek. Sacrifices and offerings, therefore, were not confined to Israel alone. Such things were not an invention of the Israelites.

The grandson of Abraham, Jacob, also gave offerings (Gn 28:20-22). Both Abraham and Jacob made their contributions and offerings before the law of Moses was given on Mt. Sinai around 1445 B.C. We must assume

that God instructed the people of faith that the spiritual representatives for God must be supported (See Hb 1:1,2). Since tithing was practiced by the patriarchs before the law of Moses was given to Israel, then we must assume that it has always been a command of God to contribute to His spiritual workers. And when sin came into the world, God instructed that sacrifices be offered for sin. From the time man first sinned and needed atonement before God, and direction in living through spiritual leadership, God has required sacrifices and contributions from man.

C. Israel offered to the Lord:

The Old Testament law of Moses (the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Old Testament), was given to the nation of Israel on Mt. Sinai as the law of the covenant that God made with the nation.

Within the Old Testament law, there are numerous instructions concerning offerings that were to be offered for sin, and contributions that were to be made to the Levites as God's spiritual leaders among the people (See Lv 27:30-34; Nm 3:11; 18:20,21; Dt 14:22-29; see Book 45, in the *Biblical Research Library*).

There were several different tithes that were required of the Israelites. There was the **first tithe** that was "holy to the Lord." The tithe of the **firstfruits** of the crops was also to be given. There was also the **second tithe** that was eaten by both the Levites and the one who offered the tithe. In the following statement, notice why God enjoined these tithes on the people:

> *You will surely tithe all the increase of your seed that the field brings forth year by year. And you will eat before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose to place His name there, the tithe of your corn* [maise], *of your wine and of your oil and the firstborn of your herds and of your flocks,* ***so that you may learn always to fear the Lord your God****"* (Dt 14:22,23).

Tithing reminded people of God's ownership of all that exists. When they offered their tithe, **they were manifesting their reverence to God for all that He had given to them as a blessing**. If they failed in their tithes and offerings, therefore, they would not be offering worship to the Lord who created them as a nation among nations.

Besides all the tithes for their spiritual leaders, there were many other laws given to Israel in reference to being benevolent to the poor. There were contributions that were to be made as freewill offerings. When Moses built the tabernacle, the people gave abundantly to its construction, even to the point that he had to ask them to stop giving (Ex 25). When the harvesters cut the crops of the field, the Israelites were not allowed to cut the corners of the field in order that the poor glean from the harvest (Lv 19:9; see Rt 2:15). They were not to gather every grape from their vineyards in order that the poor be able to glean from the harvest (Lv 19:10).

When people today seek to bind legally on God's people the commanded contributions and offerings that were required of Israel, they seem to forget that God required of Israel more than the ten percent tithe. What was required of Israel in offerings amounted to more than thirty percent of the products that they generated through their labors. We must keep in mind that the contributions and offerings that were required of Israel were for the support of the nation, not just the Levites. If we would seek to bring laws from the Old Testament over into the new covenant that we now have with God, then we must bring over all the laws concerning contributions and offerings that were required of Israel. It may be convenient to think only of the ten percent, but to be consistent, when considering the contributions and offerings of Israel, one must think of thirty percent and more. What we do learn from God's requirements of Israel is that He required contributions and offerings. We must also continue contributions and offerings for our spiritual growth in Christ today. The nature of our contributions and offerings has changed, but not the principle of giving.

D. David offered to the Lord.

At the end of his life, David prepared for the building of the temple. All that he did in reference to preparations for the building truly identified him to have a heart of worship.

In 1 Chronicles 22:5 it is stated that *"David* ***prepared abundantly*** *before his death."* His free-will giving was planned, and it was planned to be in abundance. David purposed and planned for the building of the temple, which his son, Solomon, would eventually build. Though God did not permit David to build the actual temple, this did not mean he could not prepare materials for his son to use in building the temple after he died. In preparation for the building of the temple, David was even given by God a building pattern. *"All this,"* David said, *"the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand on me, even all the works of* ***this pattern****"* (1 Ch 28:19).

Now when it came to prepare for the building, David had the plans, and thus, he knew what it would take to build the building. So the people partnered with

David in the preparations for the temple.

> *And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite.* ***Then the people rejoiced for what they offered willingly****, because* ***with a whole heart they offered willingly to the Lord****. And David the king also rejoiced with great joy* (1 Ch 29:8,9)

It is significant to notice what David said after the contributions were made. David realized that all that was given actually first belonged to the Lord. *"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty.* ***For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Yours****"* (1 Ch 29:11). They willingly returned to God that over which they had dominion because of their reverence for the God who actually owned what they returned to Him. David continued, *"But who am I, and what are my people that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort.* ***For all things come from You and from Your hand we have given to You****"* (1 Co 29:14). **They willingly gave out of a heart of gratitude because they realized that they were only stewards of all that belongs to God**. This is the secret to bountiful giving. Our bountiful giving manifests the depth of our spirituality. It manifests that we understand that all belongs to God, and thus, our contribution to God's work is only returning to Him that which is rightfully His. Now see if this is not what David said in the following statement:

> *I know also, my God, that You try the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me,* ***in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things****. And now I have seen with joy Your people who are present here* ***to offer willingly to You*** (1 Ch 29:17).

One will not offer willingly to God with a cheerful heart if he does not realize that all things belong to God. David's uprightness, therefore, as well as the uprightness of the people, **was manifested in their willingness to return to God that which was rightfully God's**. David and the people thus worshiped God through their willful giving. We could conclude, therefore, that if anyone would not willingly return to God that which is God's, then he is not worshiping the God who owns all things. The materialistic idolater allows his possessions to take the place of the God who should be idolized in our giving.

Christians are no longer under the law that was given to Israel (Rm 7:1-4). We are under the law of Christ. However, what is important to remember concerning the laws and practices of the patriarchs concerning offerings and tithes is Romans 15:4. *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning ..."* (See 1 Co 10:11). We learn from the offerings of the patriarchs that **God requires offerings from His people**. We are not under the tithe of the ten percent, but we are certainly under the principle that as Christians we must give to our Lord. And if anyone does not give to the Lord, then he falls under the condemnation of Malachi. The Lord first reminded Israel, *"For I am the Lord.* ***I do not change****"* (Ml 3:6). The people to whom these words were written had turned from the will of God. They had manifested their lack of reverence for God by withholding that which belonged to God. God judged them with the words, *"****Will a man rob God****? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings"* (Ml 3:8). When we withhold from God that which belongs to Him, then we have robbed God of His possessions. Israel's sinful state was identified by their not returning to God that which belongs to God. We would judge any society to be "God robbers" if they lack in giving to God.

The world and all that is in it belongs to God. In her backslidden state, Israel's fall from God was identified by a violation of the laws that pertained to returning to God that which was His. But their sinful behavior went deeper than violating laws concerning tithes and offerings. They had turned from serving the one true and living God to serving gods they had created after their own imagination. And these gods in their minds said that what they possessed was their own. Their lack of giving their offerings to God, therefore, revealed their covetousness. When one ceases to reverence the one true and living God, then he will minimize, if not terminate his offerings. He will do so because he thinks that the possessions he has acquired belong exclusively to him because of his hard work to acquire them. Offering to God is something that is simply natural for those who know that all they possess belongs to the God who created all things. When one does not give to God, then he is covetous, and no covetous person has a right to be forever in the presence of the One who owns that which he covets.

Coveting is not living the gospel by which we have been saved. In fact, coveting is the opposite of the sacrificial giving by which the Son of God gave Himself for us. Having the mind of Christ, therefore, is to give of oneself, and all that he has. Paul explained: *"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).

Chapter 2

THE HAPPY STEWARD

Giving to help others is a fun thing to do. In fact, after Jesus washed twenty-four dirty feet, and 240 stinky toes, He said to His disciples, *"If you know these things, **happy are you if you do them**"* (Jn 13:17). What He said to His disciples was if they wanted to be happy, then they must find ways to give themselves away to the needs of others. If they find themselves at any time unhappy, then they must just look around for some dirty feet.

The struggle of the Christian is not so much in learning how to become a good steward, but in learning that as a disciple one is a steward by life-style. Once the disciple of Jesus fully realizes that he has been bought with the price of the precious blood of God's Son, then he begins to understand that he is not his own. All he has and all his life belongs to the One who bought him (See Gl 2:20). All that the disciple owns, therefore, is returned to its rightful owner. Once he recognizes the rightful owner of all things, the disciple assumes his rightful position of being a steward over that which belongs to the rightful owner. Once one comes to this understanding of discipleship, all struggles to return what is rightfully God's is over. It simply becomes a joyous thing to return to the Rightful Owner that which one has for so long selfishly consumed upon his own lusts. This was the secret to Christian maturity that the early disciples discovered. It is the reason why they were so sacrificial and happy in their giving immediately after they gave themselves wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

All our studies that we would do in reference to offerings and contributions are of no avail unless we learn what stewardship is as a Christian resident of this world. It is absolutely imperative that the concept of stewardship be understood from every angle of obedience since this is the answer concerning why the early Christians were so sacrificially giving in reference to one another and the world in which they lived. Theirs was simply a benevolent culture that we in our world of consumerism and possessions have a very difficult time understanding.

The recorded examples of stewardship in the Old Testament were written for our learning (Rm 15:4). Abel, David, Abraham, and the other Old Testament heroes of faith, realized that **personal ownership of the things of this world was never a concept to be applied to man in his relationship with God and the things of this world**. We are not the true owners of that which we possess. We are stewards. The patriarchs realized that it was not possible to have a wrong attitude toward the things of this world, and at the same time, have a right faith toward God. In order to have the right attitude and faith toward God, they first realized and confessed that *"**the earth is the Lord's and its fullness** ..."* (Ps 24:1). They realized, as Moses instructed Israel, that *"**the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's your God, the earth also, with all that is in it**"* (Dt 10:14). And notice carefully what David said to the people after they had made their free-will offering for the construction of the temple: *"For all things come from You **and from Your hand we have given to You**"* (1 Ch 29:14). Every Christian must ask himself what Paul asked the Corinthians. *"**And what do you have that you did not receive**?"* (1 Co 4:7). When one answers this question correctly, then he has confessed that he is only a steward of all that he has. He is on his way to being a happy disciple. But realizing that one is a steward of God's things, and behaving as a steward, are two different things.

A. Stewardship beyond the collection plate:

One of the unfortunate "religious practices" that has crippled the teaching that we are only stewards of that over which God has given us dominion, is the culture centered around the "church collection plate." With this practice has come selfishness and a justification for material excess. We need to see the theology of the collection plate for what it really is, and the culture that it develops in the minds of God's people. It has developed the following:

1. *Legal giving:* The collection plate has developed a legal approach to giving. When the collection plate is coming our way, we think, "How much should I give?" Such thinking is an appeal to a sense of what we feel is our duty to give. If we place anything in the plate, regardless of the amount, we feel that we have performed our duty before God. We have settled a legal account for "worship."

2. *Guilt giving:* By thinking that we must legally give, and then pass such off as some "act of worship," we have concluded how little we can give in order to relieve our conscience about our giving. We have led ourselves to believe that the legal "act" of giving has

somehow constituted our worship before our God. We have led ourselves to the conclusion that God is satisfied with a trivial gesture to contribute some small amount. We have thus satisfied our conscience that we have performed an "act of worship," and are then released from worship with a "closing prayer."

It is unfortunate that we have propagated such thinking and behavior throughout the world. This teaching on giving has conveniently worked in those cultures of the world in which there are those who are always looking for something to be given to them. But in their culture of asking and expecting from others, Christians have failed to understand their stewardship of those things that surround them every day. So with the flip of a coin in the collection plate, such people sign off God and any feelings of guilt that they are responsible to God for all that they possess. But we cannot sign off our discipleship by the deposit of a coin in a collection plate. Disciples give to the collection because of who they are, not in order to maintain their discipleship.

3. *Selfish giving:* Once we have relieved our conscience by a trivial gift, we then deceive ourselves into believing that what we did not give now belongs to us to consume upon our own lusts. But we have forgotten that we have no claim to that which is left, for it too belongs to God. **The faithful steward realizes that that which remains in his pocket after the passing of the collection plate, is as much the property of God as that which was given**.

The only difference between that which one places in the collection plate and that which remains in his pocket, is that which has been placed in the collection plate has been turned over to be distributed by the decision of the group, whereas that which remains in our pockets remains in the power of our own decision as to how we will use it for God's glory. Whether in one's pocket or in the collection plate, it all still belongs to God. Peter reminded Ananias that when his contribution was yet in his pocket, it was his to use (At 5:4). He had no right to lie about the amount given, since all that he had actually belonged to the God before whom he lied. Haggai reminded the people that the silver and gold belong to God, whether given or kept in one's own possession (Hg 2:8). The faithful steward understands this. He is the one who will give to the collection plate, but after the "closing prayer," he will also give to the poor man begging on the steps of the temple.

B. Stewardship beyond the tithe:

Efforts to bring over the legal "tithe" (tenth) of the Old Testament law into our new covenant relationship with God is sometimes a selfish effort on the part of some. Such destroys the New Testament teaching that Peter explained. *"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... **but with the precious blood of Christ** ..."* (1 Pt 1:18,19). Paul told the financially dysfunctional Corinthians, *"... **you were bought with a price** ..."* (1 Co 6:20). And that price was the precious blood of the incarnate Son of God. Whoever would want to stop at ten percent in his giving to God has totally missed the point of the high price that was paid for his salvation.

When one comes to Christ, he should be careful. He must not bring his selfish behavior of the world into the organic function of the body of Christ. In reviewing the behavior of the Old Testament faithfuls, and the mandates concerning the contributions and offerings of Israel, we learn that those who would live by faith are sacrificial stewards in reference to those things over which they have control. Now the question is, How does one behave as a good steward?

In leading Israel to the sacrificial new commandment that He would introduce to those who would follow Him (Jn 13:34,35), Jesus taught that there were the faithful and wise stewards, as well as the wicked and lazy stewards. He taught that there were stewards who **had little**, **but did much** (See Lk 16:10; 19:17). He taught that there were those stewards who **did little with little** (Mt 25:26). And He taught that there were those stewards who did **much with much** (Mt 25:20). But when stewards would come to Christ in order to be His disciples, they would learn how **to do much with little** (See 2 Co 8:1-4). As disciples of Christ, the task is to learn that we own nothing, but owe everything. And because we know that we owe everything, we are as Paul confessed, *"**I am a debtor** both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise"* (Rm 1:14). Paul was a debtor because he realized that the entirety of his life had been bought. This realization moved him. He wrote,

> *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).

The crucified disciple is not concerned with percentages of time and money, but with the principle that the totality of his life has been given in payment for what Jesus paid for him at the cross.

It is often an unfortunate shame that those who legally bind the tithe on their adherents today often give more than those who claim they are disciples, but are

not under the tithing system of the Old Testament. We must first remember that the percentages that are given by legalistic givers, does not justify bringing Old Testament laws over into the law of Christ. The lack of commitment on the part of those who have supposedly given themselves as living sacrifices to God must be reconsidered (Rm 12:1). Our commitment to Jesus is not based on percentages, but on the principle of one who has crucified himself with Christ. If we would be as Paul, we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Christ. This would include everything we are and have.

If we fully understand the cost of our salvation, there is no limit to what we will give. We will never allow ourselves to be bound by percentages in our giving. The problem actually lies in the fact that those of a consumer society have created a "Christian giving" after the desires of entitlement. We have convinced ourselves that that for which we have worked so hard is certainly ours by ownership, and thus we have a right to consume what we have upon our own lusts. But we forget that we have been bought with an eternal blood offering. Our love for God for this offering must motivate our sacrificial offering for Him. Phillip's translation of 1 John 3:18 is appropriate: *"Let us not love merely in theory or in words—**let us love in sincerity and in practice**."* Any discussions concerning giving, therefore, must certainly conclude that our giving exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees who gave only a tenth. Our problem is often that we give only a tenth of that which we should be giving.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that death will be swallowed up in the victory of the resurrection (1 Co 15:54-58). *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."* Now immediately after he spoke of things concerning death, he turned his discussion to, "*Now concerning the collection for the saints ...*" (1 Co 16:1). Maybe he was trying to remind us of something in the background that we must seriously consider when we discuss the subject of contributions. Two men once stood at the grave of a rich man. One turned to the other and asked, "How much did he leave?" The other responded, "All that he had."

Stewardship begins with a penitent heart. Before we came to Christ, we lived after the selfishness of consuming upon our own lust, walking *"**according to the ways of this world**"* (Ep 2:2). We were dead in our sinful way of life. But in repentance, this life-style was reversed. All our personal goals in life and standards of living changed when we allowed ourselves to be bought with the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pt 1:18,19). Purchased people are debtors to the One who bought them.

God seeks for the broken and contrite heart of repentance (See Ps 51). In our repentance, God looks beyond a legal sacrifice in fulfillment of law. He looks to the heart of the one who gives the sacrifice (See 1 Sm 16). Our stewardship, therefore, is a manifestation of our most inner repentance. If our stewardship is crooked, our heart has not yet been fixed with repentance. We will continue to give into the collection plate. But when it comes by, we realize that we are actually measuring our spiritual health as a steward of God by what we release back to God who give it.

Chapter 3

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Jesus' mission during His ministry to the Jews was to lead them into a new paradigm (covenant) in their relationship with God. This meant two things: (1) He had to lead Israel to Himself as the Messiah (the Christ), and thus, the cross. (2) He had to prepare the Jews for the end of national Israel and lead them to a new covenant relationship with God (See Jr 31:31-33; Rm 7:1-4). The cross would end the old covenant and establish the new (Cl 2:14; Hb 10:9). The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would end the Jewish state. Jesus' ministry, therefore, was transitional in reference to God's work among men on earth. God was transitioning His relationship that He had with all men from creation to the cross to a new era from the cross to the final coming of His Son. During this new era He would work with all mankind through Jesus Christ.

It is crucial to understand that Jesus' ministry was a time of transition. During His ministry, Jesus made many statements concerning offerings that were meant to transition the thinking of the people to the time when they would accept Him as the Savior of the world. The Jews would be transitioned out of the legal structure of the Old Testament law in reference to offerings into a new covenant wherein there would be grace-motivated giving in response to the cross offering of Calvary. We thus understand Jesus' teachings on giving during His ministry as teachings to bring the Jews to a time when they would not be governed by law under the Old Testa-

ment, but by the law of faith and grace that would, in the context of giving, move them to give far beyond the restrictions of a ten percent tithe. In fact, giving out of the motivation of grace would move them to give beyond their ability (See 2 Co 8:1-4; compare 1 Co 15:10).

A. Golden-rule giving:

On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus said to the Jews the following statement:

> ***Give**, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, it will be poured into your lap.* ***For with the same measure that you use**, it will be measured to you again* (Lk 6:38).

Some misunderstand this passage. It is not that giving is an investment plan with God. In other words, some believe that the more they give, the more God will give to them as "interest" on deposited money. They give as if investing in the stock market. This is selfish giving. Our brethren who live in poverty stricken areas of the world would argue that this motive for giving has certainly not helped them financially. Nevertheless, we have never seen an obedient child of God go without that which is necessary for life.

Look at Luke 6:38 again. Embedded in the statement is the "golden rule" in action. *"All things whatever you want men to do to you, even so do also to them ..."* (Mt 7:12). Now look again at Luke 6:38 above. Jesus first speaks about our giving to others. When we measure out grain to another person, we must "press it down" and "shake it together" in order that a full measure is given. And then, Jesus said, go the extra mile by letting it run over the top of the container. If one does this in his business dealings with others, then others will do the same in return. However, if one tries to cheat a person on the amount of grain that is given for a specified price, then others will cheat you.

Christians must take the initiative to do that which is right and fair to others. Jesus said that they must initiate the lavish giving. They must do so in a manner that will be reflected in how people will return the gift. If this is done, then others will treat the Christian with respect. This is giving according to the golden rule; it is giving according to how one would like to receive. One should give as he would like others to give to him.

B. Grace-driven giving:

Jesus was once in Jerusalem, standing where people came to give the temple tax, which was required of everyone. *"Now He looked up and saw the rich men putting their gifts into the treasury"* (Lk 21:1). These who could afford to do so, were also contributing their tax. But there was no sacrifice in their giving.

*"**Then He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins**"* (Lk 21:2). The poor also came to pay what they were obligated to give. We might think that the poor should be exempt from the temple tax. After all, they were poor and had little of this world's goods. But they were not exempt. So Jesus just stood there and allowed the poor widow to take ownership of the maintenance of the temple by doing that for which everyone was responsible and no one was exempt.

Jesus spoke concerning the widow's contribution, *"Of a truth I say to you that* ***this poor widow has put in more than all****"* (Lk 21:3). It was "more than all," because **it was all that she had**. Jesus said, *"She out of her poverty* ***has put in all the livelihood that she had****"* (Lk 21:4). Mark's account explains more of what the poor widow did. *"... for they* [the rich] *all put in out of their abundance,* ***but she out of her poverty*** *put in all that she had, even* ***all her living****"* (Mk 12:44). The poor widow was as the Macedonians, who would later after the cross, and out of their deep poverty, contributed beyond what was expected of them (2 Co 8:1-4). What makes poor people do this?

Jesus just stood there as the poor widow cast in all her livelihood. He did not tell the collectors to return her contribution. He did not because she was obligated to give, even out of her poverty. When one becomes a Christian, and considers what Jesus sanctioned in reference to the contribution of the poor widow, **poverty can never be an excuse not to contribute to the financial function of the body of which one has become a member**.

One does not become a member of the body of Christ in order to be financially supplied, but to supply the needs of others (see Ep 4:16). Those who cry out poverty in an attempt to exempt themselves from that which is their duty to do, need to talk to this poor widow. We would never consider robbing God by failing to return to Him what is rightfully His. The poor widow knew that in order to take ownership of her relationship (partnership) with God, she had to sacrifice all that she had. **No one else can pay for our partnership with God and fellowship with the universal body of Christ**. If we do not give our gift for our partnership with God and the body of Christ, then we are not manifesting our thanksgiving for what He has done for us. This is why the poor Macedonian disciples begged Paul to take their contribution for the famine victims of Judea (See 2 Co 8:1-4; more later).

Christianity is about being godly. And godliness is about giving. If we are not giving as the poor widow, then certainly we are not seeking to live godly after the God who gave His only begotten Son in order to give us something that was free, but so costly on the part of Jesus. Our sacrifice for the work of God, therefore, is our signal to God that we want to partner with Him in His universal ministry to take the message of the cross to all the world.

It is interesting that the poor widow gave all her livelihood without any knowledge of the grace of God that would later be poured out on the cross by the One who stood by her as she cast in her thanksgiving gift. If she so gave simply to assume her responsibility as a faithful Jew, then how much more should we be willing to give as faithful Christians who have a full knowledge of the cross? **Does her faithfulness in giving according to law bring judgment on our unwillingness to give in response to grace**?

As Jesus took Israel to the gift of the grace that was revealed on the cross, He not only taught on the subject of giving, but He also, through the example of poor widows, sought to reveal that which was coming. Those who could be His disciples in the future would not live under the limitations of the legal tithing of the Old Testament law. The motive for the giving of His disciples would be increased greatly because of the grace that would be revealed. They would experience in the cross of Christ something that was far beyond their imagination. God would work something wonderful through His Son that would draw out of people giving beyond their imagination. Those who would seek to take ownership of the new covenant they have with God would no longer make their offerings according to law, but according to grace. And once one realizes his salvation by grace, there is no limit to what he will give, and thus, no limit to the joy of offering to God in response to what God has done for us through the cross. This is the secret to cheerful giving.

When we study through all the instructions in the New Testament concerning giving, the secret to understanding the Holy Spirit's instructions is discovered in the reason why the poor widow was willing to give all her livelihood in order to take ownership of God's business. The Christian does not now give according to law. He gives in order to take ownership of the new blood-bought covenant of grace that he now has with God. It is not that we are trying to buy legally into this covenant relationship with God. The opposite is the truth. Because we have come into this covenant through our obedience to the gospel, we now *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Ph 2:12). Since we have been saved by grace (Ep 2:8), we are now God's "workmanship" (Ep 2:10). It is as someone said, "**Man**, you are now on the **ship**, so get to **work** with your contributions."

In order to take ownership of the ship we are now on (the church), as the poor widow took ownership of her covenant relationship with God through the old covenant, we must understand that we are only stewards of all that we possess. Her sacrificial giving was a manifestation of her appreciation, not for the purpose of paying for an entry fee into the covenant, but in thanksgiving for the covenant. She gave in thanksgiving of the covenant that she and all Israel had with God. As the poor widow, the Christian manifests his appreciation through sacrifices in order to take ownership of the house of God, of which he is a part (See 1 Tm 3:15).

No matter how poor one might think he is, if he desires to be a part of Jesus' ministry, and to show thanksgiving for the covenant of grace, he must respond to grace with a free-will offering according to how the grace was freely and lavishly poured out on him. However, **if we seek to respond to the free and indescribable grace of God through law giving, then we have not yet discovered the spirit of cheerful giving**. When preachers cry to the people to give their tithe (tenth) according to law, they are actually cheating the people of cheerful and appreciative giving according to grace.

Chapter 4

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF ONE'S OWN LOAD

The letter to the Galatians may have been the first letter of inspiration written to the early Christians. It was written to the disciples in the region of Galatia where Paul and Barnabas went on their first mission journey (At 13,14). If the letter was written early, then we assume that the teaching of the letter was directed to new Christians. They may have been less than five years old in the faith. This fact is important because it gives us an idea of what God expects of His children even from their early years in the faith. In the letter, Paul not only ad-

dresses the threat of legal religiosity, but also exhorts the disciples concerning the responsibilities they must assume as God's children.

In the first chapters of the letter, Paul addressed the doctrinal challenges that faced these new Christians. In chapter 5 he gave a final exhortation to stand free in Christ as opposed to being brought into the bondage of legal religiosity (Gl 5:1,2).

It is in chapter 6 that the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Paul, reveals some very practical responsibilities of our function as members of the universal body of Christ. In 6:4 he admonished that each disciple must take ownership of his or her own work by not claiming ownership of the work of others. The disciples should not behave as some in Corinth who took glory in the work of others (See 2 Co 10:13,16). On the contrary, *"... each one will bear his own load"* (6:5). Paul laid the foundation for what was coming. When it comes to taking ownership, "each one" must assume the responsibility of being a disciple. Every disciple must take ownership of that which one should assume as a productive member of the organic body of Christ. Christians cannot pass off on others their responsibilities. If one would be a Christian, and thus a disciple of Jesus, then he cannot assume that someone else will bear his load. Christians seek to give physical things freely as they were freely supplied with spiritual things (See 2 Co 8:14). A disciple of Jesus simply cannot ask someone else to bear the load that God expects him to bear.

In the context of Galatians 6, Paul led his readers to the responsibility of verse 6. *"Let him who is taught the word* ***share*** *in all good things with the one who teaches."*

The word "share" is from the Greek word *koinonia*. The meaning is "joint partnership." We hear of many unfortunate definitions throughout the world of the word "partnership." To many, partnership means, "Give me the money and we will do the work of spending it." This is one's "cuffed-hand" culture speaking. But this is certainly not what Paul was saying in the context of Galatians 6:6. The ownership that is expressed in 6:5 must be continued into verse 6. "**Each one**" must join in partnership to support the teacher. **The student must take ownership of his teaching by supporting his teacher**. Whether his teaching comes through the person of the teacher, or through the book a teacher might write, the student has the responsibility of personally paying the teacher or buying the teacher's book. Disciples who do neither are simply walking contrary to the instructions of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 6. They walk as dysfunctional members of the body, and thus in violation of fellowshipping those who are teachers of the word. One cannot expect to grow spiritually in study of the word of God if he seeks to acquire his knowledge of the word without taking ownership of his source of teaching.

In the use of the word *koinonia* in 6:6, money is involved. Obligation and responsibility are incurred. Each student has the responsibility to pay the teacher. The student cannot sluff off on another his or her responsibility to pay his or her Bible teacher. Any disciple, therefore, who does not pay his teacher is behaving in a manner that is contrary to Paul's instructions in Galatians 6:6. He is trying to come to his teacher empty handed. He sins while trying to grow spiritually by being taught the word of God without paying the teacher. It is a spiritual contradiction. And thus, we now understand why those of some societies who have freely received too many contributions find it difficult to grow to the spiritual levels of true discipleship in stewardship. **The culture of their outstretched hand always hinders them from taking ownership of their responsibilities to be Christians who give**.

Any student who would walk out of a Bible class, without feeling his responsibility to make sure that the teacher was supported for his labors in teaching, has certainly left the class to walk disorderly. Anyone who would seek a free spiritual book written by a teacher is working against the spiritual nourishment that he would receive from the book. We are dysfunctional disciples when we expect a free ride in reference to the sources of our being taught.

It would be good to offer some suggestions on this point since this fundamental teaching of the word of God leads us into many of the texts that we will discuss later. We remember in the early 1980s when we went as evangelists to the West Indies (Caribbean). We lived on the island of Antigua. In the first few months of going from shack to shack in teaching, we were pleasantly surprised by the giving of the people. These were truly "Third World" (developing world) residents. According to Western standards they were very poor, living in shacks across the island and eating from their own gardens. But in every house we entered and taught the word of God, after the class the people of the house, the students, would collect up some fruit in the house to give to us, for they had no money. We graciously accepted their "pay" for the class, and went on our way thinking, "These folks got the point. Someone in the past taught them well." There were no cuff-handed people on the entire island.

Their history had taught them a great lesson about ownership. In the early 1950s, the general population, which was held in economic bondage by the land owners, went on strike. In doing so, the people had to struggle for themselves to survive. During those years of trying

to feed their families, the people ate anything to stay alive. In all their struggles to survive, they learned a great lesson of life. They learned to take ownership of their own lives and their own destiny. And when some foreign teachers later came by, they would not take something (teaching) for nothing. The West Indies people could teach the post-colonial, post foreign-aid cultures a few things about financially taking ownership of oneself by paying their teachers. People look at the West Indian culture with respect because of who they are. But people will always look down on a cuffed-hand culture. The word "partnership" has a difficult time being understood correctly in such cultures.

Chapter 5

THE JOY OF FINANCIAL FUNCTIONALITY

Most all of the members of the early body of Christ functioned organically from the time when they were still dripping wet from the waters of baptism. Even on the birthday of the ekklesia (church), *"all who believed were together and had all things in common"* (At 2:44). The members of the body were not only connected to the Lord in a covenant relationship through obedience to the gospel, they were also connected to one another in service to the physical needs that prevailed at the time, especially to the support of those who went forth to preach the gospel they had obeyed.

The beginning of the ekklesia in Acts 2 sets the model for everyone who would later obey the gospel. As a result, the organic function of the early obedient went forth out of Jerusalem to all the world, even to us today. Growth of the church happened because others followed the example of those first disciples. Growth happened in Antioch (At 13:1-3). Growth happened in Ephesus (At 19:8-10). It happened in Thessalonica (1 Th 1:6-10). And it happened in Philippi (Ph 4:15,16). It was simply understood that when one freely received the gospel, **he was to make sure that it was freely preached somewhere else**. One of the greatest examples of this was the sacrificial giving of a few Christians in the city of Philippi.

A few years after their conversion, Paul wrote to the Philippians, *"Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only"* (Ph 4:15). The Philippians' partnership with Paul in preaching the gospel to other places through him began when they were new Christians. In fact, they were only a "few days" old as Christians when they began their support of the evangelists who went on to Thessalonica, for Paul, Silas and Timothy stayed only a few days in Philippi (See At 16:12). These were not "taker Christians," *"for even in Thessalonica,"* Paul wrote, *"you sent once and again for my needs"* (Ph 4:16). When Paul went on from Thessalonica in Macedonia, the Philippians, who were in Macedonia, even continued their financial partnership with him in preaching the gospel in Achaia. He later wrote to shame the Corinthians, *"And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone,* ***for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied****"* (2 Co 11:9).

The fascinating function of the Philippians, as well as the Thessalonians, who both resided in the province of Macedonia, **is that they contributed to reach out with the gospel to other areas from the very beginning of their walk in Christ**.

As the Philippians, the Thessalonians went to work, both locally and regionally, by sending support to Paul while he was in Achaia (More later). But what is strikingly awesome about the behavior of the Philippians was that from their very beginning as new Christians, they *"sent once and again"* unto Paul's needs while he was in Thessalonica, and then in Achaia. We wonder why they did this? Was it something that Paul taught them? Or, was Paul one who preached for money? From what Paul did in both Thessalonica and Achaia, the answer to these questions was that he worked with his own hands in order not to beg off the brethren (See 2 Co 11:9; 2 Th 3:8). Both the Philippians and Thessalonians witnessed his sacrificial behavior, and thus, they were moved to help support him in order that the gospel go beyond the borders of their province.

Now as we study through these examples of supporting evangelists, we must not forget one very important point. **The evangelists were going forth**. They were not "stay-at-home" preachers who misappropriated the work of an evangelist. They were on the move preaching to the lost in other areas, not preaching to the saved at home. This does not mean that the local brethren should not support their teachers. This is not the discussion of this chapter. The point here is that those

who obey the gospel must make sure that the gospel is preached to the lost in every nation of the world.

So the next question would be, Was what the Philippians believed and accepted inherent in the gospel that Paul preached? This would be our conclusion. God is a giver. He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). Therefore, anyone who would truly accept the message of God's love, seeks how he or she can get this message of love out to others. **Godly people want to give as God gave good news to them** (1 Jn 4:19). This is the beauty of the gospel. When one obeys this message of love, he must give, even when one is in poverty circumstances as the Philippians. Listen to the Holy Spirit's testimony of the disciples in Macedonia where Philippi was located:

> *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,* ***begging us*** *with much urgency that we would receive the gift and* ***the fellowship of the ministering to the saints****"* (2 Co 8:1-4).

The only begging that should ever come from a disciple of Christ is his begging that someone take his contribution. Why have we reversed this to an outstretched hand that is always looking for a gift? If one becomes a disciple of Jesus, then his begging from others must stop. If it does not, then the person **never** really believed the message of the free gift of grace that moves believers to be givers. Godly people do not beg for themselves. They only beg that the needy receive their contributions of love. Now we can understand why Paul wrote that the Thessalonians must withdraw their fellowship from any person who would seek to beg off the church. He wrote to the disciples who had some beggars among them, *"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).

Paul did not behave disorderly among the Thessalonians (2 Th 3:7). He, Timothy and Silas **did not** eat *"any man's bread without paying for it"* (2 Th 3:8). Their "orderly walk" and example was that they *"****worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you****"* (2 Th 3:8). So if there are any among the brethren who are *"not willing to work neither let him eat* [beg]*"* (2 Th 3:10). Christians are not beggars off one another. They are partners together in Christ. If there are beggars among us, then Paul states that these beggars are walking disorderly. And because they are walking disorderly, two things must happen: First they must not be allowed to continue to beg off those who work, and second, if they persist in their begging, then they must be disfellowshipped from the family of God. The church is not a fellowship of beggars, neither is it a welfare society for those who can work when there is work to be done, but will not work.

Christians who beg off other Christians are walking disorderly in reference to their function as members of the organic body of Christ. If one would be a member of the same church to which the Thessalonians were added, then he cannot be a beggar off his fellow brothers in Christ. If they continue such begging behavior, then they cannot be in fellowship with the organically functioning body of Christ.

The Philippians, as well as the Thessalonians, saw a different culture in the message of Jesus, and thus, they established a culture of giving. They could not compare themselves with other disciples in their region, for there were no other disciples in their region to which they could look for an example. The only example they had was reflected in the behavior of the sacrificial living of Paul, Timothy, Luke and Silas, which example was an emulation of the sacrificial behavior of Christ. *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.* ***But He made Himself of no reputation*** *..."* (See Ph 2:5-8). As an example to the Thessalonians and Philippians, Paul, Timothy, Luke and Silas worked with their own hands (2 Th 3:9). So Paul could write to the financially dysfunctional Corinthians, *"****Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ****"* (1 Co 11:1). The Philippians and Thessalonians had imitated the behavior of Paul. Now it was time for the Corinthians to enjoy the sacrificial life of Paul by doing the same.

In the area of physical things, one does not come to Christ to see what he can get. If one does, he will not experience the pure joy of being a godly giver for Jesus. Simon came to Christ to see what he could get, but when Peter said he could not buy it for himself, he became bitter. (Read carefully At 8:18-23, specifically verse 23. Simon became bitter because he could not make a profit out of laying hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit.)

The Philippians saw what they could give, not what they could get. As a result, their standard of living came down because of their giving out of their deep poverty. And they did this with *"****the abundance of their joy*** *and their deep poverty"* (2 Co 8:2). We once said, "Give until it hurts!" We were wrong. The truth is that we

must experience the abundance of the joy of Jesus until we give. There should never be any "hurting" in giving. It should simply be as natural for the Christian as eating to preserve our natural body. This is why the Philippians could joyfully give out of their deep poverty. Therefore, the conclusion from our study of the example of the Philippians is that one does not really understand the message of the gospel of joy unless he comes away from the waters of baptism looking for something on which he can pour out his joy. Doing such is inherent in the message of the "good news" (gospel) that we have obeyed. Giving, therefore, should be an occasion of just pure joy, not "hurting."

Chapter 6

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF THE GOSPEL

Speaking of taking ownership, consider some of the leading (rich) sisters of Thessalonica. We remember standing in a prayer circle with a group of men. All of us were praying. When it came time for one brother to pray, he prayed, "God, forgive us men of arguing over who is in control. Thank you for our women, for all they say is, 'What's next.'"

Sometimes we need to follow the example of the women. Lydia was in Philippi (At 16:11-15) and there were leading women in Thessalonica (At 17:4). Both the church in Philippi and Thessalonica were financially functional when it came to supporting evangelism. We wonder if the Christian sisters in both areas did not have some influence over what the disciples as a whole should be doing?

A. Ability to do and send:

When Paul, Timothy and Silas went to Thessalonica for the first time, they went straight to the religious center in town, which was the synagogue of the Jews (At 17:1). What was unique about this synagogue was that there were a great number of Gentile converts (proselytes) who met in the synagogue. From these *"a great multitude of the devout Greeks and* ***not a few of the leading women****"* were obedient to the gospel (At 17:4). We would assume that these "leading women" were possibly quite wealthy. At least for some reason, many years later Demas was possibly attracted to their wealth when Paul wrote of him while he himself was in a Roman prison, *"... for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world,* ***and has departed to Thessalonica*** *..."* (2 Tm 4:10).

If the leading women in Acts 17 were indeed wealthy women, then they did not give themselves into poverty. By the time 2 Thessalonians was written, the Holy Spirit had to write a letter through Paul that these women not be begged into poverty by some among the Thessalonian disciples who had quit their work. 2 Thessalonians was written less than a year after these leading (wealthy) women became disciples. Then also consider the fact that when Paul wrote of the behavior of Demas, we might assume that the leading women were still wealthy at the time Demas forsook Paul and went to Thessalonica. 2 Timothy 4:10, where Paul spoke of Demas' behavior, was written several years after the conversion of the leading women in Thessalonica in Acts 17. **The point is that the New Testament teaches nowhere that the wealthy should contribute themselves into poverty**. Doing such is simply not good stewardship on the part of the wealthy. Neither is it beneficial for the evangelism of the church. Paul wrote the "disfellowship" context of 2 Thessalonians 3 to protect the wealthy. Those who are gifted in making money are encouraged to give, but they are not encouraged to give themselves into poverty. We have always asked churches that are in developing world environments if a wealthy person could be a part of their fellowship. If the wealthy could not be a part of a fellowship of disciples, then the disciples have a problem, not the wealthy who are giving. If the local disciples beg the wealthy members into poverty, then from where will the funds come to preach the gospel to the world? The poor must acknowledge the fact that there are some in the body who are gifted with the ability to make money. We must not envy this gift, but give glory to God. This is a grace by which some can truly praise God. *"But as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all diligence, and in your love for us,* ***see that you abound in this grace also****"* (2 Co 8:7). This is the grace of giving. And we encourage one another to abound in the grace of giving.

B. Desire to be a doer and sender:

Now consider the Thessalonians. Since the majority of those who were converted in Thessalonica were Gentiles, and very devout, we would assume that their

desire would be to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The result of what the Thessalonians did in the months that followed their conversion is a testimony to their devout convictions, as well as their desire to take ownership of the mission of the body of Christ. As the Philippians, they were financially functional as active parts of the one body.

After Paul left Thessalonica, he traveled on to Achaia. What is interesting to note is what he found in the region of Achaia when he arrived. It was about six months after he had left Thessalonica that he wrote back to the new converts the following testimony of the fact that the Thessalonian Christians had taken ownership of the gospel they had obeyed:

> *And **you became imitators of us** and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that **you were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia**. **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. **For they themselves report about us**, what manner of entry we had to you, **and how you turned to God** from idols to serve the living and true God ..."* (1 Th 1:6-9).

Notice carefully the Holy Spirit's witness to the evangelistic function of the Thessalonian disciples. They became **imitators** of the evangelistic zeal of Paul, Timothy and Silas who came to them working with their own hands to support themselves, while also receiving once and again from the functioning disciples in Philippi (Ph 4:16). The example of the Philippians even influenced the Thessalonians. In fact, when contributions came from the Philippians, the Thessalonians may have felt somewhat embarrassed. If they were to take ownership of the preaching of the gospel in their own region, then they had to financially come to the party. And such they did in an overwhelming manner.

As the Philippians, the Thessalonian disciples became "***examples** to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia"* (1 Th 1:7). It was a phenomenal contagion of evangelistic enthusiasm. Philippi inspired Thessalonica and Thessalonica inspired the whole provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. The enthusiasm for evangelism spread like holy wild fire from one obedient heart to another.

C. The result of doers and senders:

The testimony of the Thessalonians' zeal was in the fact that "***the word of the Lord has sounded forth from**"* them (1 Th 1:8). Such is the identity of a functioning organic body. The Philippians sounded forth the word from Philippi by sending support once and again to the evangelists Paul, Timothy and Silas in Thessalonica. The Thessalonian disciples sounded forth the word in Achaia, specifically Corinth. But the Corinthians? They were financially and evangelistically dysfunctional. They became a dead-end in the function of the body to sound forth the word of the Lord. And now we know why most of the Holy Spirit's teaching concerning the support of evangelists is found in the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians. As members of the universal body, they were dysfunctional in supporting evangelism.

"***We do not need to speak anything**"* (1 Th 1:8). This is the testimony of a functional body of disciples. This is the Spirit's testimony of the organic body at work, both in the local area where body members reside, as well as in areas beyond where they live. When local Christians take ownership of the gospel where they live, there need be no more evangelists coming by to do the job of preaching the gospel. If an evangelist cannot make this statement to those where he has preached, it is possible that he planted the wrong seed, or he failed in his work to disciple those he first taught. He may have failed Jesus when Jesus instructed, *"... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28:20). Or he may have failed the Spirit when the Spirit said through Paul, *"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).

However, the problem is usually with the soil in which the evangelist plants the seed of the word of God. Remember the dysfunction of the Corinthians on this matter? Paul chastised the Corinthians. It was the Corinthian soil, not the Seed, that was the problem.

> *For no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will be manifested, for the day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test each man's work to determine what quality it is. If anyone's work endures that he has built, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss. But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Co 3:11-15).

Paul's efforts with the "Corinthian soil" was about to be burned if they did not repent of their immature ways. If they did not turn from their dysfunctional ways, he would suffer loss because he was their father in the faith (1 Co 4:15). But he would carry on and receive his

reward for his labors as an evangelist. The Corinthians, if they did not repent, would become smouldering ashes.

The Corinthian situation was certainly a different story from the Thessalonians and Philippians, as well as those in Antioch, Ephesus and Jerusalem.

When Paul wrote the 1 Thessalonian letter, he stated, *"**They** themselves report about us"* (1 Th 1:9). Who is the "they"? It was not the Christians in Achaia. There were no Christians there when Paul arrived. By the time Paul reached Achaia, word-of-mouth, the "bush telegraph," had already communicated the phenomenal conversion and dedication of the Thessalonians. The whole region was talking about the conversion of the Gentiles and leading women in Thessalonica. The point is that we should ask ourselves the question, "Was our conversion so radical that the whole province is talking about it"? Admittedly, the Thessalonians had the fire and conviction of new converts. We must not let that fire of conviction be extinguished from our lives. The only way to keep it burning in our hearts is to continually be in the presence of the newly converted. But if we stop preaching the gospel to the lost in our local areas, we will have no newly converted in our presence to keep our fire going. When we stop preaching and converting the lost, we have set a course for our fire to be extinguished. Is this what Jesus meant when He spoke to the church in Ephesus many years after they were new converts, a time when they had lost their first love (Rv 2:4).

Chapter 7

HAVE WE NO RIGHTS?

When we think of the Corinthian disciples we think about dysfunctional disciples. In our study of the problems that prevailed among the Corinthians, we must understand that the letters of both 1 & 2 Corinthians were written to all the disciples in all of Achaia (See 1 Co 16:15; 2 Co 1:1; 9:2; 11:10). However, it seems that there were some power struggles among the disciples, specifically in the city of Corinth. These struggles led to the same dysfunction that was happening among those to whom John wrote in 3 John. The problem among the disciples to whom John wrote was about Diotrephes who loved to be first, and thus in his narcissistic behavior, he disrupted the evangelists who came through the area, for he refused to receive and support the evangelistic function of the body of Christ (See 3 Jn, more later).

In Corinth the problem was a group of puffed up leaders masquerading themselves as children of light (2 Co 11:12-15). In their arrogant attitudes, they challenged the authority of the inspired instructions of Paul. They refused to take note that what Paul wrote was the commandment of the Lord (1 Co 14:37). They were seeking to dismiss the influence of Paul by challenging the authority of his inspired words (See 1 Co 2:6-16). All this disruption led to a financial dysfunction of the church of God in Corinth. And because of this financial dysfunction of the Corinthian disciples, we have the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians that reveal a great detail of information concerning the financial function that should be characteristic of the body of Christ, especially in the area of supporting evangelists.

A. The right to eat.

In the context of correcting the Corinthians' dysfunction concerning the support of evangelists in 1 Corinthians 9:3-14, Paul began by asking if he had a right to eat and drink. He presents his argument in this context on behalf of the support of those who go forth in travels to preach the gospel. It is an argument that is based on John's deductive conclusions of 3 John 7 that we should financially support those who are going about preaching the gospel to unbelievers.

John's deductive argument is that the evangelists went forth to preach the name of Jesus. But in their preaching, they did not take up contributions from the unbelievers to whom they preached. Since they had a right to eat and drink, then the believers, not unbelievers, should support them because it is the work of the church to preach the gospel. Paul argues that this is particularly true if he and Barnabas were married and their wives traveled with them as the other apostles. He wrote, *"Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, even as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"* (1 Co 9:5).

Paul and Barnabas worked with their own hands in order to support themselves. Paul supported himself while in Corinth, though the believers from Macedonia also sent support to him (2 Co 11:7-9). However, he had a right to be supported by the Corinthian disciples while he labored for a year and a half in the city (See At 18:11). But the Corinthians did not support him, even when he

was in need. It appears that in his need, they did not so much as offer to help him. Such was a manifestation of their spiritual immaturity, and their financial dysfunction as members of the universal body of Christ.

B. Laborers are worthy.

Paul then asked the Corinthians if it were not right for a soldier, farmer and shepherd to receive pay for their labors. *"Who as a soldier serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of the fruit? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock"* (1 Co 9:7). Who would serve to protect the people if he were not paid? Who would farm if he were not allowed to eat of his own produce? And who would be a shepherd if he could not drink of the milk? These are logical questions that Paul asked the Corinthians, for he knew that they knew the answer.

Paul was speaking from the point of view of spiritual dignity. Unbelievers would reason that support is rightfully given to soldiers, farmers and shepherds. But in their behavior toward him, the Corinthians were not doing that which the unbelievers would naturally do for the laborer who was worthy of his wages. In giving these principles of payment, Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians that these same principles were based on what God commanded in the Old Testament. *"For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You will not muzzle the ox while he is threshing'"* (1 Co 9:9; see Dt 25:4). It seems that the Corinthians considered the rights of an ox to be fed more important than feeding the preacher. If God is concerned for oxen, at least those who claim to be His people should be concerned for His evangelists.

C. Partake of one's hope.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that Deuteronomy 25:4 was also written for our sakes. *"Or does He say this altogether for our sakes?* ***For our sakes, not doubt, this is written so that he who plows should plow in hope, and that he who threshes in hope, should be partaker of his hope****"* (1 Co 9:10).

The evangelist lives in hope of partaking of the fruits of his labors. He does not take contributions from the unbelievers. Therefore, the church must support him. This is especially true if the evangelist is functioning locally as a teacher. In 1 Corinthians 9:10 Paul teaches that the teacher of the body must expect to be paid by the body. And thus, disciples who do not pay their teachers are as dysfunctional in the area of finances as the Corinthians.

Paul rebuked the stingy Corinthians. *"If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?"* (1 Co 9:11). No disciple has a right to plead poverty when he or she has been taught spiritual things by a teacher. If one has no money, but a garden of fruit, then the material fruit must be paid to the one who teaches spiritual things. The widow who gave her last two coins knew this principle. Any group of disciples who do not do likewise are sinning against the mandate of God that he *"who is taught the word share* [support] *in all good things with the one who teaches"* (Gl 6:6). This is what is right and according to the word of God. So we ask the question again: When was the last time you paid your Bible teacher?

We must not be too harsh on the Corinthians. After all, they were at least financially supporting those who were working against Paul (1 Co 9:12). Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 9:12 is that if they supported the arrogant and puffed up teachers among them who spoke against him, then he had more right to their support because he fathered them in Christ (1 Co 4:15).

While in Corinth Paul did not use his right to be supported because he did not want to be accused of preaching for money (1 Co 9:12). But he reminded the Corinthians of the right of the priest under the Old Testament law to be supported by the people. The people offered the sacrifices, but the sacrifices were shared with the priests (1 Co 9:13). This was the law even before the Old Testament was written. For example, Abraham paid a tenth (tithe) to the priest Melchizedek (Hb 7:1,2). Such was Abraham's duty. And in case the Corinthians, or anyone else throughout history did not get the point, Paul wrote, *"****Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel****"* (1 Co 9:14). For the disciple who seeks to follow Jesus, this is all that is needed to be said. If one does not support the one who is preaching the gospel, then he is disobedient to the commandment of the Lord. He sins against God. We must be as clear as Paul on this point. If one would be a faithful and functioning member of the church, it is his or her responsibility to make sure that both evangelists who go about preaching the gospel are paid, and those teachers who labor locally are also paid.

Since Paul's mandate of 1 Corinthians 9:14 is very direct, we must understand the context of the statement. Preaching is the work of proclaiming the good news (the gospel) to **unbelievers**, not believers. In fact, when the word "preach" is used in the New Testament, reference is to the gospel being proclaimed to unbelievers. Christians **preach** to unbelievers, but they **teach** among themselves to believers. Now consider what John said in 3 John 7, that the evangelists did not take up a collection

from unbelievers when they went forth to preach the gospel. John's argument was that the believers must therefore provide the evangelists with the right to eat and drink while they preach to unbelievers. Therefore, Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 9:14 is that it is the mandate of the believers to support the evangelists who go forth to preach to the unbelievers. The context of Paul's 1 Corinthian 9:14 statement is that the Corinthians should have been doing what the Philippians and Thessalonians did when he came to Corinth. The Corinthians should have given Paul the right to live from his preaching the gospel when he left Corinth to preach to unbelievers in other areas. 1 Corinthians 9:14, therefore, is a mandate to support the preachers who are going forth to preach to unbelievers. This is not the passage to use when discussing support of local teachers who are teaching believers. That passage is Galatians 6:6.

Chapter 8

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT TO FINANCIAL FELLOWSHIP

We must give credit to the brethren in Achaia for being zealous to make promises to support the famine victims of Judea. At least, by the time Paul came to the end of the 1 Corinthian letter, the Corinthians had been rebuked enough for them to take action for the poor saints of Judea. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, he stated that before he came, they must take up a contribution, for when he was there he did not want any contributions taken. They must take action, therefore, to make sure that the contribution for the famine victims for Judea be gathered before he arrived.

There was also a practical reason why Paul wanted the contribution taken before his arrival. The contribution was committed by all the saints in all the province of Achaia, the disciples in Corinth being one area of the house meetings throughout the province. Therefore, since the disciples in all Achaia promised to make a contribution, it had to be gathered from all the disciples of all the province. This would take some time, time which Paul evidently did not want to waste on this particular visit to Achaia, for He was on his way to Jerusalem.

A. Special needs:

Paul stated, "*Now concerning the collection for the saints ...*" (1 Co 16:1). We must keep the "poor saints of Judea" in mind as we survey through the instructions that Paul gives to conclude his exhortation to the Achaia disciples in the 1 Corinthian letter. Because this contribution was for a particular situation, then we would conclude that this was a special contribution for a special purpose. In fact, it seems that all the contributions we read about in the New Testament were contributions for specific needs. Whether the need was for an evangelist that came short in his self-support, or for Christians who ran out of money when they visited Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast, the contributions were made to meet special needs. Such is the case with the contribution about which Paul speaks in the context of 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

B. The Sunday collection:

"*On the first day of the week ...*" was a statement of practicality, not a command to establish a time for all contributions. In order to make a common collection, the obvious time to do this was when there was a common time of meeting of those who would contribute. And since the disciples met in their homes on Sunday, then this would be the obvious time for a collection to be made. The practical reasons are obvious. This was a common time of meeting. It was a time when there would be witnesses concerning what was contributed. It would be a time when each member could be known for taking ownership of his or her responsibility to give to the poor saints of Judea. No one was to be exempt from the contribution. Everyone was obligated to help the suffering saints in Judea.

We could not make the first day of the week a legal time for all contributions of the disciples to be made. Such would not be logical or practical. We must keep in mind that this was an occasional need when a contribution was made. Paul's instructions were made in the historical context of a special need. And because he instructed a time when the contribution was to be made, **then we must assume that the Corinthians were not regularly having a contribution on the first day of the week before he wrote the instructions**. They had not though He had ministered among them for over a year and a half (At 18:11,18).

Paul's statements must be understood in the context of the special need, the famine in Judea. The first

day of the week was certainly a practical time to have a special contribution, but we would not conclude that Paul was mandating a legal time when all contributions are to be made. If a need arose in the life of a Christian in reference to the need of someone on Monday, could the Christian say to the one in need that he must wait until Sunday in order to receive a contribution for his need? If a widow needed the rent paid on Tuesday, does this mean that she could receive funds for her house rent only on Sunday? If an orphan needed to be fed on Saturday night, would the orphan have to wait until Sunday? We must keep in mind that most of the world does not have church bank accounts in which to accumulate funds, and then serve needs throughout the week out of these funds. Most of the world Christians must go to their gardens and get some food to give immediately to immediate needs. Sometimes a little common sense will dispel a lot of nonsense in legalistic theology, and thus, give us a better understanding of the Scriptures.

C. Individual responsibility:

Paul continued, *"... let **each one of you** ..."* (1 Co 16:2). A stingy and unloving Christian cannot hide among the faithful contributors. "Each one" means that **every individual must assume his or her responsibility to join in the financial fellowship of the functioning organic body**. If one would not contribute something to the special fund, then that person has excluded himself from the fellowship of the body. Making the contribution is the signal that the universal organic body is functioning. And if one does not get in on the functioning body, then he is a vestigial organ that is worthless in the function of the organic body. "Each one" means **everyone**.

1. *Every disciple in all Achaia must contribute.* We must not forget that the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians were written to the same people. The letter of 1 Corinthians was directed to the "church of God" at Corinth (1 Co 1:2). However, when we read 2 Corinthians, others are also included. Corinth was a city, but Achaia was the province. So 2 Corinthians begins with the statement, *"... to the church of God that is at Corinth, **with all the saints who are in all Achaia**"* (2 Co 1:1; 9:2; 11:10). Interesting! So when Paul speaks of "each one," he means all the Christians in all the province of Achaia. **Paul was not speaking to a single assembly of Christians who met at the same place at the same time on Sunday morning**. His instructions of 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 must be understood in the context that there were Christians meeting in homes throughout the province of Achaia. These were the Christians who had promised to make a contribution for the famine victims (See 2 Co 9:2). It was not just those in Corinth, but individual disciples who were meeting at different places and different times throughout the province of Achaia.

2. *"Each one" means equality.* When Paul discussed the contribution in 2 Corinthians 8, he made a statement that each individual was not to be burdened while others hid from their responsibilities of giving to the need. *"For I do not mean that others be relieved and you burdened; but **by an equality** ..."* (2 Co 8:13,14). Equality means everyone. If someone tries to skip out of the contribution, then he has burdened someone else. Every disciple must take ownership of his or her responsibility to give. No one person is to be left out, and no one person can hide out. The Philippians understood this point very well, for they begged Paul to take their contribution in order that they work in fellowship with the universal body of Christ (2 Co 8:4). We would conclude, therefore, that if any disciple did not give something to special needs, then that disciple is not fellowshipping the universal body of Christ.

D. Bountiful giving:

Paul instructed that each member of the body in Achaia give *"as he **may** prosper"* (1 Co 16:2). This statement certainly informs us that there is a difference between the tithing system of ten percent under the Old Testament law and what the Christian is to give. Those preachers who beat the sheep for ten percent have certainly violated the principle of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 16:2. They overlook the word "may" by enforcing ten percent. However, in this statement, the Holy Spirit put no percentage on what a Christian must give. And considering the circumstances and purpose for this very contribution, there could be no percentage mandated. **Christians do not give according to percentages, but according to principles**. The contribution was for famine victims in Judea. These famine victims could certainly not give ten percent. They prospered nothing in famine, and thus, they had to be Christians to whom Christians were obligated to give. And because they did not prosper, the contribution was being made by those in other regions of the world where parts of the organic body had supplies. Ephesians 4:16 is about the principle that the whole body functions to take care of the whole body.

> *... from whom* [Christ] *the whole* [universal] *body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies* [throughout the world], *according to the effective work-*

ing of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love.

"As he may prosper" regulates the amount one gives. The more one receives, the more one gives. If one does not increase his giving with the increase of his income, then he would not be contributing liberally. Our challenge is to understand how much one should give in order to be considered a liberal giver. In the statement, *"as he may prosper,"* there is no percentage indicated. We certainly cannot use Old Testament laws on tithing in order to determine what percentage must be given in order to be considered a liberal giver under the New Testament covenant.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6 Paul made the statement, *"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."* This statement does not help much in determining how much one should give in order to feel that he is a liberal giver. It does, however, infer willingness to sow much in order to increase one's harvest. The metaphor certainly encourages one to sow as much seed as possible in order to have a great harvest. But how much seed one must sow is not specified. All that we can conclude from Paul's metaphor is that one should sow as much as possible. If he expects a great harvest, then he must guarantee such by sowing much.

"As one may prosper" and *"sows bountifully"* lead us to Paul's statement, *"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). The cheerful giver purposes, or plans his giving. His giving is not spontaneous. As the farmer plans for a great harvest, he purposely sows a great amount of seed. As one has prospered, he plans to give more. From what Paul said in the above statement, we can determine whether we are cheerful givers. One is cheerful in his giving when he comes to the appointed time of contribution with a plan as to how much he will give. If he has not planned, then at the appointed time to make the contribution, he grudgingly reaches in his pocket to see what is there to give. **We can identify cheerful givers, therefore, by their planning to give out of that which they have prospered**. The planning giver has sowed much in order to have the ability to give much.

In the phrase, *"God loves a cheerful giver,"* the Greek word for "cheerful" is *hilarious*. We derive the English word "hilarious" from this word. God loves a "hilarios" giver. When one gives out of hilarity, then he knows there is no grief, no duress or constraint, about his giving. He has simply learned that *"it is more blessed to given than to receive"* (At 20:35).

So what would be the basis on which one could determine how much he should give? The answer to this question should be answered upon the foundation of the following statement:

> *But now He* [Christ] *has obtained a* ***more excellent ministry****, by as much as He is also the mediator of* ***a better covenant*** *that was established on* ***better promises*** (Hb 8:6).

Christians have a more excellent minister for their sins than the Levitical priest of the Old Testament. Christians have a better covenant with God than Israel's covenant with God. Christians have a better promise of eternal life than the Jews of the Old Testament. Would it not be reasonable to conclude that Christians should give "better" than what was required of the Jews of the Old Testament?

Jesus continually ministers at the right hand of God on our behalf. In order for Him to have ascended on high to be our eternal mediator, He had to be given to us as God's only incarnate and begotten Son (Jn 3:16). And to be this minister on our behalf, He made Himself poor for our benefit (2 Co 8:9). If one who supposes to be a disciple of Jesus, but is not moved to give beyond measure as the Philippians, then certainly he has not fully understood the nature of what was done for him by the Father and Son on the cross.

We have a better covenant relationship with God than the nation of Israel. The covenant that God had with Israel was with that nation alone. His covenant that He has with His people now is worldwide. It is a spiritual Israel of God whose borders are far beyond Palestine. The greatness of the covenant is that one can come into a covenant relationship with God anywhere in the world. This means that those in a covenant relationship with God in Macedonia and Achaia had a responsibility toward those who were in a covenant relationship with God in Judea. The global nature of the organic body of Christ means that each member of the body has a responsibility toward every member of the body anywhere in the world.

Israel had the promise of the coming Messiah. But Christians have the promise that because the Messiah came, they can look forward to His coming again and eternal life. With such a better promise, every disciple must determine that he will not be in eternal heaven with a feeling of guilt. That guilt will be that after a billion, trillion, mega-trillion years in eternal heaven, and if we could remember, we would be so ashamed of how little we gave in our contributions to get other people where we would be. Now we know why the Macedonians did

what Paul said of them concerning their contributions. *"... that 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). **We would conclude that contributions that are truly sacrificially given out of a joyful spirit, are truly honored by God.**

E. Special giving:

As previously stated, the context of 1 Corinthians 16 was a contribution for a special occasion. What Paul mentions in the context of verse 2 teaches several lessons, some of which were generated in the context of the Corinthian disciples' problem concerning the support of teachers. Paul stated, *"... that there be no collections when I come."* When Paul and others came to receive the famine contribution about which he spoke in this context, he certainly stayed in Corinth long past arriving on Monday and departing on Saturday of just one week. We must notice this simply because 1 Corinthians 16:2 is not a mandate for a regular contribution on every Sunday. If Paul stayed in town past just one Sunday, **then they were not to take up any contribution**. We assumed he stayed past one Sunday, and thus, on that Sunday they did not take up any contributions.

Sunday is a convenient time to take up contributions, but doing so is not a commandment outside taking up a contribution for a special need. The one who receives his paycheck at the end of the month and gives all that he has purposed to give the first Sunday of the next month, should not feel guilty about not putting something in the collection for the rest of the Sundays of the month. The point is that there is no legal requirement for Christians to make a contribution every Sunday of the year. 1 Corinthians 16 just does not teach this.

When Paul was in Corinth through at least one Sunday on this visit, the Corinthian church did not take up any contributions. They did not on the basis of exactly what he instructed in 1 Corinthians 16:2. The reason he did not want them to take up any contributions was because he did not want to be accused of preaching for hire. His rebuke of their dysfunctional support of false teachers among them, without supporting him, would have been nullified if it were perceived that he came to receive contributions from them for his personal support. And in order to make sure that no one assumed that he was going to reach his hand in the contribution bag, he wrote, *"And when I come, whomever you may approve by letters, these will I send to carry your gift to Jerusalem"* (1 Co 16:3). Paul wanted witnesses of the fact that he did not take any money from their contributions. He would later explain in his second letter to them, *"And in all things I have kept myself from being* [financially] *burdensome to you, and* ***so I will keep myself****"* (2 Co 11:9).

The Lord's business must be supported by the Lord's people. We assume that the Lord's people, as faithful Israel, understood that all that they had belongs to the Lord. They therefore return to the Lord that which has been entrusted to them as good stewards. This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot contribute to the Lord's business. Though the unbeliever may not understand the responsibility of the Lord's people returning to God that over which they have been made stewards, they are in actuality returning to the Lord that which is His. We would certainly teach the willing unbeliever a wrong lesson if we refused his contribution. However, we cannot obligate the unbeliever in order that he assume our responsibility to support the Lord's business. He has no obligation to do so. Christians are obligated, not unbelievers. Christians are responsible, not unbelievers.

The Christian's life is based on the principle of Matthew 6:33. *"But seek* ***first*** *the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* It is not that the disciple of Christ considers his own needs first, and then gives to God the leftovers. If God is to be first in his life, then what one gives to God must be determined first, and then we live off the leftovers. In doing this, we honor God through our substances (Pv 3:9,10). **The liberal giver does not adjust his giving by his standard of living, but his standard of living by his giving**. It is not his function as a part of the organic body to maintain a certain standard of living, and then give leftovers. On the contrary, he purposes what he will give, and then, he adjusts his standard of living by what is left.

Chapter 9

FINANCIAL FELLOWSHIP OF THE ORGANIC BODY

In his first letter to the Achaians (1 Corinthians), Paul dealt with the dysfunction of the Achaian brethren in reference to their support of evangelists who were going forth to preach the gospel. In the second letter it

seems that their dysfunction in reference to supporting these evangelists poured over into their failure to fulfill a promise to function as a part of the universal body of Christ where parts of the body were in need because of famine. They had made a promise to fellowship in the famine contribution for Judea, but they were negligent in fulfilling what they had promised. We are not told why they were negligent, only that the second letter was written in order that the contribution be made before Paul arrived in Achaia with some brethren from Macedonia.

The Achaians were financially dysfunctional in reference to the universal body's responsibility to take care of itself in physical needs throughout the world. Though Paul admonished the Achaian disciples in 1 Corinthians 9 concerning their lack of support of preachers of the gospel, in the second letter he turned to the dysfunctional attitudes of some of the Achaian members toward the famine contribution. He felt that if they had promised to financially function in fellowship with the global body, then they needed to perform what they promised.

In the context of **2 Corinthians 8:10-15** Paul moves into the function of the universal body of Christ and the members' care for one another. The background of his statements in this chapter was a famine that affected the members of the body in Judea. When the Judean members began to suffer from a famine, the whole worldwide body went into action to manifest the global oneness and equality of the body in supplying what was needed where the body was hurting. The members of the body manifested their oneness of the body by making a special effort to send relief funds to needy parts of the body in Judea. This universal response of the body of Christ manifests that those who are truly of the body will join in with any effort where there is a disaster need of the whole body. This is the spirit of Ephesians 4:16. Those groups of disciples who cannot think outside their own assemblies or villages have cocooned themselves in their own isolation and withdrawn their fellowship from the body of Christ. They have become a functional denomination within themselves.

Paul's exhortation of the Achaian members on this matter certainly proves one very important point concerning the organic function of the one church of Christ throughout the world. **If any individual member, or group of members of the body, wants to remain in fellowship with the one universal body, then they must financially join with the whole body as the body seeks to care for itself**. Of course this is based on the fact that individuals and churches must be knowledgeable of a disaster need. But if they have been informed, then every disciple should first think of how he or she can assist in the disaster. Whether through contributions or personal involvement, Christians must marshal to the need of helping the body where the body is hurting (See Gl 6:10).

A. Fellowshipping the one body:

When Paul wrote the 2 Corinthian letter, he was in Macedonia and on his way to Achaia, in which province was the city of Corinth. He had boasted to the Macedonian disciples that the disciples in Achaia had a year before promised that they would give relief funds to the Judean disciples (2 Co 8:10). This commitment to share in the matter of fellowshipping through giving encouraged the Macedonians to also give, **for they did not want to be left out of the fellowship of the one universal body**. So they too went into action to make a contribution, so much so, that Paul boasted of their sacrificial giving:

> *Moreover, brethren* [in Achaia]*, 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).

The Macedonian disciples not only gave, they went beyond what would be expected of them. They *"**went beyond their ability**."* These were not wealthy disciples. Paul explained to the Achaian members that the Macedonians gave out of "great affliction" and "deep poverty." Because of their deep poverty, Paul must have been very apprehensive about taking their money for the famine victims. Their willingness to give in their poverty moved them to impoverish themselves even more. And when Paul saw their destitute economic situation, he was quite hesitant to receive their gift. But he wrote of their earnest desire to remain in fellowship with the one body of Christ. Paul wrote that the Macedonian disciples kept on *"**begging us** with much urgency that we would receive the gift ..."* (2 Co 8:4).

The Macedonians understood the nature of the fellowship of the universal organic body of Christ. They knew that they had to partner with all disciples in this outreach to help the famine victims. They realized that in order to remain in fellowship with the one universal body, they had to partner with everyone in the matter of giving.

In their poverty, the Macedonians were not beg-

gars to receive something for themselves, for being such would be a disorderly walk as members of the body. **If they were beggars off the body for themselves, then they would disfellowship themselves from the fellowship of the saints** (See 2 Th 3:6). They were "beggars," **but they were begging Paul and his company to receive their contribution**, which was their *"**fellowship** of the ministering to the saints"* (2 Co 8:4).

The Macedonian disciples knew that if they did not join in on this brotherhood contribution, **then they would not be in fellowship with the universal body of Christ**. The context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, therefore, **is the biblical definition of partnership**. Partnership in Christ means that all the members of the body of Christ must financially share in the matter of giving and receiving both spiritual and material blessings. This is a function of the body of Christ that is inherently natural for those who have obeyed the gospel of grace. Those who would seek to be a part of this body, therefore, must manifest their membership through godly giving. There is no other way for a disciple to manifest that he or she understands the nature of the grace of God that was poured out at the cross.

The sin of sectarianism (the desire to be set apart from the whole) is that individual assemblies of disciples exclude themselves from the whole. Churches sometimes become so autonomous and independent from the whole, that they have little concern for any "poor saints of Judea." They have no desire to cooperate with the whole in order to fulfill the needs of the whole in any one part of the world. **One of the clear evidences of a sectarian spirit is the unwillingness of any member, or group of members, to fellowship financially with the whole**. This was a problem with some of the disciples in Achaia who were manifesting their own sectarian spirit to denominate themselves from one another over personalities (See 1 Co 1:10-13).

Church leaders often sin by discouraging the church they seek to lead from financially partnering with the needs of the worldwide church. From the behavior of the Macedonian disciples that Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, at least one point is glaringly clear. If any group of disciples (a church) does not financially share with Christians in other areas of the world when there is a natural disaster in which parts of the body are suffering, **then they are not fellowshipping the universal body**. They have denominated themselves from the whole. They are a denomination because of their lack of concern and action to fellowship with the whole in accomplishing the function of the body of Christ. This is what the Macedonian disciples realized, **and for this reason they begged Paul to take their contribution for the poor saints of Judea**. In the disciples' actions of contributing to the needs of the saints, therefore, they should make every effort through their contributions to manifest their solidarity with the global body. If any group of Christians do not globally function financially with the whole, then they are manifesting a sectarian spirit and a desire to function apart from the one body. In doing such, they establish themselves as a denomination.

We must keep in mind that the universal sharing of the body is only in reference to making sure that Christians be relieved during times of natural disasters where there is a physical need. The natural disaster contributions continue until the urgency of the disaster has passed. The same is true of the spiritual nourishment of baptized believers. The Macedonian disciples sent aid to make sure that the gospel was preached in Achaia. But when the Achaians obeyed the gospel, **then it was time for them to take ownership of their own spiritual nourishment by supporting their own teachers**. The Achaians made Paul a "church thief" only after they became Christians. He did not, and would not expect support from them while they were unbelievers. But when they obeyed the gospel, then they were to do as the Philippians to send once and again unto the needs of those who go forth to preach the gospel (Ph 4:16). Churches that continue to have their teachers paid by "the Macedonians" (foreigners) are making their teachers "church thieves." They are as the Corinthians who have not taken ownership of their own spiritual edification, as Paul instructed in Galatians 6:6. Though they may not be able to pay all that is necessary for one to work in a full-time capacity, they should be paying something to their teachers. If they are not paying their teachers completely, then they cannot expect their teachers to work solely with them. Paul's instructions establish the principle that when one is working with those who are Christians in a local area, then those local Christians must be supporting their teachers. If the local members are not doing this, then they are spiritually, and thus, financially dysfunctional as members of the body of Christ.

B. Common contribution manifests common function:

Because the preceding point is so vital to the unity of the one body of Christ, Paul explained in detail in the context of 2 Corinthians 8 the nature of the fellowship (partnership) we have in Christ in reference to our contributions.

In our study through his instructions, it is impera-

tive to note that Paul **is not** viewing the one universal body to be composed of many autonomous groups of disciples who are functioning in cooperation with one another. On the contrary, he is viewing the individual members collectively as one body. He is speaking of individuals whose desires are reflected through the "assemblies" of the individual members. Their assemblies did not denominate them from one another. It is important to notice this lest any individual member would seek to neglect his or her personal responsibility of giving by hiding in the crowd of some autonomous assembly (church). When the collection is taken, therefore, if one individual part of the body does not give, while the brother sitting beside him does give, the stingy individual cannot find partnership with the whole body through the contribution of his brother. **The contribution of the entire assembly does not negate the responsibility of each individual member to give his or her share**. Collection plate contributions are not an excuse for neglecting one's personal responsibility to give to any need.

It is imperative to understand Paul's instructions as the one universal body functioning as individual members, regardless of where they sit on Sunday, cooperate with one another to fulfill special needs. In the entire context of his discussions on this matter, he is arguing against groups of disciples declaring their autonomy from one another, and then, relieving themselves of their global responsibility to function as a part of the one body of Christ. The individual saints of Macedonia understood this, but the Achaians may have still harbored some of their sectarian behavior that Paul addressed in the 1 Corinthian letter (See 1 Co 1:12,13). **But if there is any behavior of the body of Christ that brings every member together as one in the universal body of Christ, it is when every member gives together for a common cause**. If church leaders would seek to unite those who follow, then they would do well to educate and organize common causes that everyone agrees should be supported for the preaching of the gospel to the world.

This principle of unity is so important that Christians must look for opportunities where they can manifest their solidarity by financially coming together to support a common cause. Though a natural disaster may be an occasional opportunity to manifest our common unity and partnership in the universal body, we should seek for other opportunities to manifest our oneness in Christ. Throughout the New Testament, **this common opportunity that is ongoing is the support of evangelists as they go forth to preach the gospel**. This is where Gaius, as an individual member of the one global body, was doing well (3 Jn). When individual Christians join together to support evangelists who are moving about the world preaching the gospel, they are manifesting the fact that they are functioning members of the one universal church.

The dysfunction of many of the Achaian disciples that Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 9 was that they were not fulfilling their promise to support the collective need of the famine victims, and in particular, the fellowship of supporting evangelists as Paul and Barnabas as they went about as evangelists preaching the gospel. Ironically, they were willing to support Paul's critics who were locally working among them (1 Co 9:12), but they were not supporting those evangelists, as Paul and Barnabas, who were moving among both believers and unbelievers in their work as evangelists.

Chapter 10

EMULATING THE NATURE OF GOD

We must never forget that the nature of the church of Christ is identified by love, **and love needs no commandment, for the commandment is love** (Jn 13:34,35). Therefore, in order to introduce his instructions in the context of **2 Corinthians 8:10-15**, Paul stated to the Achaian brethren, *"I do not speak by commandment"* in the matters concerning their completing their promise to give to the famine victims in Judea (2 Co 8:8). This principle in reference to contributions is vital in order to understand the nature of the body of Christ. Love simply needs no commandment to act. Love is the action.

God is love, and those who would be godly after His nature will be identified by their love for one another (See 1 Jn 4:7-11). God needed no commandment to initiate redemption on our behalf. In like manner, we need no commandment to act on behalf of our brothers. This is exactly what John wrote: *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.* ***And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren****"* (1 Jn 3:16). John wanted this point clearly understood. So he continued, *"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). This

is the foundation upon which the whole universal body of Christ functions. Love makes the body organic. And this is the reason why Paul did not need "to speak by commandment" in these matters.

Giving that is forced by commandment is not giving out of love. Giving out of commandment is not joyful giving. This is the major mistake of those who seek to bring over the percentages of giving of the Old Testament law (tithing) into the loving behavior of the body of Christ. **When we start pressuring people to give according to a law of percentages, we have robbed them of the opportunity to give out of a heart of love**. Until one learns to give out of a heart of love, he has not yet learned the joy of giving. Neither has he discovered the true nature of love of the body of our Lord Jesus. If he is still focusing on percentages, and not principles, then his giving will always be grudging giving according to some self-imposed law.

We should repeat here a note to those who still believe that giving is some type of selfish investment plan, that is, giving in order that God give us more material things. These folks seek from God a return on their investment. But godly givers do not think this way. God loved us unconditionally through His grace. In order to emulate God in our lives, we too must give unconditionally. We are not expecting a return on the investment of our love for our brother. The love that identifies the body of Christ is unconditional. It is not selfish. Jesus pointed this out when He said to His disciples,

> *When you prepare a dinner or a supper, do not call your friends or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return* ***and you are repaid****. But when you prepare a feast, call the poor, crippled, lame and blind. And you will be blessed* ***because they cannot repay you****,* ***for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just*** (Lk 14:12-14).

Disciples do not seek material repayment in this life. Their "repayment" will only be when they are raised to walk on "streets of gold." **Godly giving is not in hope of carnal rewards in this life**.

A. Held together by love.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. ***And everyone who loves is born from God and knows God****"* (1 Jn 4:7). *"Beloved, if God so loved us,* ***we ought also to love one another****"* (1 Jn 4:11). By this, Jesus said, *"****all men know that you are My disciples****,* ***if you have love for one another*** (Jn 13:35). Therefore, in giving to the needs of other disciples who are suffering from a natural disaster, **a body of loving people have no need for a commandment to give**. Giving to others is simply the nature of a loving body. The body organically functions because it is a body of lovers.

We now understand why the Philippians gave "once and again" unto the evangelists Paul, Timothy and Silas (Ph 4:16). This is the secret as to why the Macedonians gave out of their deep poverty (2 Co 8:1-4). They simply could not help themselves. The disciples of all Macedonia were functional in their love for the whole body of Christ because this was who they were, a body of loving people. Therefore, the Achaians' follow-through on their promise to give to the famine victims in Judea would manifest to others what Paul wrote, *"... **the sincerity of your love**"* (2 Co 8:8). In other words, if the Achaians did not come through on their promise to give to the famine victims, then they would manifest that they were not a part of the loving body of Christ. It would be revealed that they could not walk their talk.

In the context of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul explained the sacrificial grace of Jesus that manifested the unconditional love of God on the cross. Jesus was rich in heaven as the creator of all things (Cl 1:16). But because He is identified as love, Jesus' grace (gift) to man was manifested in an action of love by giving up His riches for the salvation of man (See Ph 2:5-11). God is a giver. Jesus was the unmerited gift given out of love (Jn 3:16). If we would be disciples of a loving God who gave a loving gift (Jesus), then the mind of Jesus must be our mind. *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus ..."* (Ph 2:5). This is true discipleship.

Jesus' giving was an act of unconditional love for our sakes, and our giving must also be an act of unconditional love for the sake of others. He became poor for us, and thus we must become poor for others. This was the grace that the Macedonians had learned that was the sign of true discipleship. In their deep poverty, they *"abounded in the riches of their liberality ..."* (2 Co 8:2). Therefore, when one seeks to be baptized into this body of loving disciples, he must be cautioned. The standard of living of the prospective disciple will come down upon obedience to the gospel, as it did with the Macedonians.

Disciples sometimes do too much talking about doing something, but do too little about walking their talk. **Talk without performance brings our integrity into question**. This was what Paul was trying to prevent by writing these things to the Achaian disciples who had talked a year before that they would give. But talk without contribution would bring their sincerity into question. John recognized this among some disciples.

He instructed, *"Let us not love in word ... **but in deed** ..."* (1 Jn 3:18). One must walk his contribution talk. So in order that the Achaians not embarrass themselves by not walking their talk about giving a year before, 2 Corinthians was written. Paul wrote these words that they fulfill the promise they made (2 Co 8:10). *"**But now finish doing it*** [the promised giving] *so that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also a completion out of what you have"* (2 Co 8:11).

In 2 Corinthians 8:12 Paul said that we must not promise beyond what we have. The Macedonians knew this. This explains why they went "beyond their ability" to make a contribution to the famine victims. All God expected was that they give out of their ability. But the Macedonians had discovered the joy of discipleship. *"If you know these things,"* Jesus had said to the disciples after He washed their feet, *"**happy are you if you do them**"* (Jn 13:17). The secret that the Macedonians had learned is that **happiness is generated out of loving sacrifice for others**. This should not be a secret among the disciples of a loving God. It is, however, a secret among those of an unloving world.

The Macedonian disciples could not help but go beyond their ability because of their love for those who were of the body of Christ. The standard of living for loving people always comes down when they become Christians. All those things we consumed on our own lusts as unbelievers are sacrificed for others when we become believers. We can discover, therefore, the extent of our own discipleship by our performance in giving to others. It is for this reason that true discipleship is often revealed by the passing of the collection plate.

B. Held together by mutual sharing.

In the context of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul moves into explaining the universal function of the body of Christ in reference to our fellowship in giving. *"**For I do not mean that others be relieved and you burdened**"* (2 Co 8:13). This one statement defines the organic financial function of the universal body of Christ in reference to contributions to special needs. Every disciple throughout the world has the same responsibility in the matter of contributing to the needs of the whole body. When there is a physical dysfunction in the lives of the members in one part of the world, then those who can supply those needs must go into action. Every member who has supplies must seek out of love to supply those members who need supplies. Paul explained to the Ephesians how it works:

> ... *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).

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul was saying that it was now time for the Gentile Achaians to return the favor to the Jewish Christians in Judea. The Achaians now had an abundance of physical things that they could supply the Judean Jews who were suffering from famine. Now the Achaian Christians needed to remember that they were saved in a covenant relationship with God because the Judean Jewish Christians originally had an abundance of spiritual things (the gospel) that was formerly sent out and shared with the Achaians through the preaching of the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1-4). When Christians share worldwide the abundance of either their physical or spiritual things, then the body is held together by what every part supplies (See Ep 4:11-16).

There can be equality among the parts of the body only when there is fellowship in supplying both the spiritual or physical needs of the body. If a group of people determine to stand independent from the whole body by their refusal to share when parts of the body are in need, then they can only compare themselves with themselves as they work within the cocoon of their own fellowship, which thing some in Achaia were trying to do (See 2 Co 10:12). An unwillingness to fellowship in supplying the needs of the body manifests a sectarian spirit that is carried out by denominating a group of disciples from the whole body.

If Christians seek to remain in partnership with the one organic body of Christ, then they must financially partner with one another. This is the concept that moved the Macedonians to beg Paul to take their physical supply for the Judean saints (2 Co 8:4). If we would seek to remain in this worldwide fellowship, and thus be in an equality (partnership) with all the parts of the universal body, then we must seek every opportunity to share in giving to the financial function of the body of Christ.

If we continually see ourselves in need of something, and thus expect others to give to us, **then we will never take ownership of our fellowship with the universal body of Christ**. It is for this reason that those who view themselves continually as unfortunates who should be supplied by the whole are those who can never feel that they are in partnership with the members of the one body of Christ throughout the world. If churches continually have their hands held out to others for financial help, then they cannot financially join in fellowship with the worldwide body of Christ. It is through giving to evangelists to preach the gospel to the lost, and to disaster needs of the body, that the first century

church was bound and held together in the unity of the faith. Their unity was not only a matter of believing and obeying the one gospel, but also in their cooperation with one another as individuals who had been brought into a common loving fellowship in Christ.

C. Held together through partnership.

The partnership passage of the New Testament church is **2 Corinthians 8:13,14**:

> *For I do not mean that others be relieved and you burdened;* ***but by an equality****, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their need, that their abundance also may be a supply for your need,* ***that there may be equality****.*

No better words could have been written to explain the partnership (fellowship) that all Christians of all the world have with one another in Christ. This one passage at least teaches the following:

1. Christians cannot live estranged lives from one another.
2. Christians are their brother's keeper.
3. No Christian is to be burdened while others neglect their responsibility to fulfill the needs of others.
4. When one has a supply of that which another is in need because of a natural disaster, then there must be supplying on the part of the one who has the supplies.
5. No part of the body is to be neglected in having the opportunity to share his or her supply with those who are in need.
6. The body must heal itself through the sharing of what every member can supply during times of natural disaster.
7. The whole body must work as one body in order to supply the parts of the body that are suffering from disaster.
8. No one part of the body is to be burdened in fulfilling a need while other parts of the body sit idle and do nothing.
9. Except for those who are suffering from a disaster, no one part of the body is exempt in the matter of supplying the needs of the suffering.

One would ask to what extent must our partnership go in sharing in times of calamity? Paul answered, *"As it is written, '**He who gathered much had nothing left over and he who gathered little had no lack**'"* (2 Co 8:15). The one who has abundance from his labors gives the leftovers for those in need. And because some shared their leftovers, he who gathered little from the harvest could still feed his family from the leftovers of the one who gathered much (See Ex 16:18). What Paul is saying is that if one does have leftovers, he needs to be looking around for someone with whom he can share his abundance. He needs to seek some opportunity where he can share the abundance of his harvest. **Before we became Christians, we consumed our abundance upon our own lusts of the flesh. But when we became disciples of the sacrificial Servant of the cross, we allowed ourselves to be consumed by the needs of others**.

Chapter 11

STOPPING CHURCH THIEVES

When dealing with the financial relationship of the taught with the teacher, this is often not a comfortable subject to discuss because the taught are often so negligent in this Christian responsibility. Nevertheless, because we as disciples seek to live after the mandates of God, we must seriously study these matters. Therefore, we must examine ourselves in order to determine if we are wayward walking in reference to our responsibilities of taking ownership of our spiritual growth.

The subject of this chapter is a continued discussion from previous studies on this matter of which Paul wrote in the 1 Corinthian letter. Paul repeated some of his principles in the second letter that were revealed a year before when he addressed what was a problem among the Achaian disciples. It is important for us, therefore, to repeat with Paul some of the important principles where the same disciples seemed to lack in reference to stewardship responsibilities. These principles are important to study simply because the duty enjoined upon disciples that is discussed by Paul in the context of the 2 Corinthian letter is often ignored by many who are, as some Achaian disciples, still spiritually immature in these matters.

A few examples might illustrate the problem that often prevails. For example, we received an email from a preacher who was complaining. He said he had been

preaching for over thirty years. He had visited a Bible Resource Center in his country and spent some time with the director of the Center. Upon his departure, he asked for a free study Bible, to which the director responded, "There is nothing free. You must pay for them." The preacher went away frustrated, as we suppose the rich young ruler did when Jesus said that he should sell everything he had and come and follow Him. *"But he was sad at this saying* ***and went away grieving*** *..."* (Mk 10:22), as did the preacher. But the director of the Center was right. He would not be a "church thief" for the sake of one who should take ownership of his own spiritual responsibilities in paying for a Bible he would use in his ministry.

A Bible printing group once sent over US$1,000 worth of books to a group of church leaders in a particular city. The books were faithfully delivered on the basis that the recipients promised to pay later. But the payment never came. The recipients thus made the senders church thieves in that they expected something free for their own use. Such cases reminded one of Psalm 37:21. *"The wicked borrows and does not repay."*

We had a seminar where the *Teacher's Bible* was made available, but no contributions were made, either to the teachers of the seminar or the materials. One student in the seminar drove away in his US$60,000 Hummer with a "free" *Teacher's Bible* and other materials. We were made church thieves because other poorer brethren paid for the printing of the materials for the seminar, as well as all the teachers who paid their own expenses to travel to and teach the seminar.

But then there are those beautiful stories of faithful brethren who take ownership of their spiritual growth. We labored in teaching for ten hours a day for three days in Lilongwe, Malawi. After the seminar, the delegation of over one hundred preachers who attended the seminar selected a humble fellow laborer of their group to bring, in his ragged clothes and worn shoes, a contribution to buy petrol to get us on to the next seminar. These brethren were mature functional partners in the body of Christ. We went away without being made church thieves, but praising these brethren for their spiritual greatness in Christ. Sometimes, the most poor are the ones who are the most willing to assume their responsibility to fellowship in the ministry of the word to the world. We are reminded of the poor brethren in Macedonia who, in their deep poverty, went beyond their ability to sacrifice for others (See 2 Co 8:1-4).

We are now ready to delve into the financial dysfunction of the Achaians, specificially those in Corinth, whom Paul admonished in **2 Corinthians 11:7-10**. In this context, Paul sought nothing less than to shame the Corinthians for making him a church thief. He began his shaming of them with an embarrassing question for them to answer:

> *Have I committed an offense in humbling myself* [by making tents] *so that you might be exalted* [by your opportunity to receive the gospel I preached], *because I have preached to you the gospel of God without charge?* (2 Co 11:7).

Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla as tentmakers when he preached the gospel in Corinth. After many Corinthians had obeyed the gospel, he taught them for a year and a half before going on to Ephesus (See At 18:1-3,11). He humbled himself through physical work in order that the Corinthians hear and obey the gospel. And because he worked, they could not accuse him of preaching for money. Paul was no Balaamite. However, after they obeyed the gospel, and thus were brethren in Christ, their financial relationship with him had to change, but it did not.

So as he stated in 2 Corinthians 11:7, did Paul commit an offense? If the Achaians answered the question correctly, then he did. His offense was that he did not receive wages from them after they became Christians. Within only a few days after their conversion, the Philippians were sending support once and again to Paul, Timothy and Silas when they preached in Thessalonica (Ph 4:16). After only a few weeks in the faith, the Thessalonian disciples were doing the same. But the Achaians were still not supporting Paul during the year and a half that he taught the disciples throughout Achaia. Neither did they support him when he, Aquila and Priscilla, went on to Ephesus. The Achaians made the trio church thieves by their necessity of having to receive contributions from the saints in Macedonia. In allowing this financial struggle to happen in the life of Paul, the Achaians manifested their dysfunctional behavior in reference to the support of their father in the faith.

They made Paul a church thief while he ministered to them the word of God. Paul supported himself and took wages from others in order to minister the word of God to the Corinthians without their support. *"**I robbed other churches**,"* He shamed the Corinthians, *"**taking wages from them, in order to serve you**"* (2 Co 11:8). They made Paul a church thief by not partnering with him in his ministry of teaching them.

Paul's physical situation in Corinth was not good. He was truly in need of food. He, Aquila and Priscilla were simply not making enough money from their tentmaking business. His situation eventually reached the ears of the sharing and loving Christians in all

Macedonia. And these Christians took action. They poured out their hearts to partner with Paul in all his physical needs. Paul shammed the Corinthian Christians by saying, *"And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone,* ***for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied****"* (2 Co 11:9; see Ep 4:16).

Because of the slanderous actions of some in Corinth who accused Paul of enriching himself, though they enriched themselves by the support of the Corinthian church, Paul rebuked them further: *"And in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself"* (2 Co 11:9). After shaming them for their lack of consideration for a servant of God, Paul said that now he would not take their support if they offered it. He would not because of the messengers of Satan who were masquerading themselves among them to supposedly be messengers of righteousness (2 Co 11:12-15).

In all his preaching in the province of Achaia, of which one city was Corinth, Paul could boast that he preached the gospel without receiving money from the unbelievers to whom he preached the gospel. But he went beyond this. He did not receive wages from the unbelievers who became believers through their obedience to the gospel. None of the masqueraders could say this. Such is not unlike some preachers today who masquerade as ministers of righteousness, when really they are Balaamites selling their gift for money. If a preacher would prove his sincerity before the people, it might be a time to do what one Malawian businessman said to a group of local preachers who were complaining about not being supported. He said to them, "Get a job!"

So Paul had a job. But this was not the problem with those in Corinth. The problem was that Corinthians had not yet fully understood that when one becomes a Christian, he has assumed the responsibility of supporting the preaching of the gospel to unbelievers, and also supporting the teachers who teach the believers. This is God's manner to preach the gospel and edify the saints.

What the context of 2 Corinthians 11 teaches is that when one becomes a disciple, he is under the obligation of Galatians 6:6. He must take ownership of his own spiritual growth by supporting those who teach spiritual things. Some brethren still have not understood their responsibility that is explained in 1 Corinthians 9:11. *"If we* [Bible teachers] *sowed to you spiritual things,* ***is it a great thing if we reap your material things****?* If a group of disciples allow a Bible teacher to stand before them week after week without supporting the teacher, then they need to pray over Galatians 6:6 and 1 Corinthians 9:11. They are violating a principle by which God meant for the teachers of His word to be supported.

Chapter 12

BALAAMITE PREACHERS

It was stated of the sons of Eli that *"****they did not know the Lord****"* (1 Sm 2:12). The fact that they did not know the Lord was revealed in what they did to the people of the Lord. The sons of Eli were taking advantage of the people concerning that which was required by the Lord in reference to sacrifices. The people were to come to the Lord with their sacrifices, but the sons of Eli wanted more than what the law required for the support of the priests. They were greedy, and thus, **they took advantage of what the people were obligated to do** (See 1 Sm 2:12-17). The Holy Spirit thus recorded of them, *"Therefore,* ***the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord****, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord"* (1 Sm 2:17). That which the people should willingly do, that is, give their sacrifices, they despised because the two priests, the sons of Eli, were taking advantage of their offerings. **When preachers take advantage of that which the people of God are obligated to do to serve the Lord, then the preachers are doing an evil thing**. They "do not know the Lord."

Those whose who preach for money are usually, according to Solomon, identified by two things. *"The leech has two daughters, crying, '****Give! Give!****'"* (Pv 30:15). We can know those who are constantly after the contribution with their hands out. They cry from pulpits across the land, "Give! Give!" They continually, as the sons of Eli, stand before the people and cry out for the offerings that the people are obligated to give. The people, therefore, "abhor the offering to the Lord."

The supporters are not always the problem when it comes to the function of money in order to propagate the gospel. We live in a world of Balaamite preachers who take advantage of the innocence of the sheep of God. They abuse the obligation of the church to give their offerings. These profiteers often drive in fine new vehicles before the poor, promising that "God will bless

you, too if you will give to the Lord [actually, 'give to me']." Their mansions on earth reveal that their minds are on the things of this world.

When Paul was in Corinth, he did not take support from the Corinthians. He was planning to visit them again after he wrote the second letter. But even on this visit he said he would not take their money (2 Co 11:9). It seems that the Corinthians in general had a tendency to accuse people of teaching for money because there were so many profiteers in the Corinthian society. If this were not a problem in the Corinthian society, then Paul would have willingly accepted their support on his visit after writing the second letter. But Paul did not want to be accused of being a Balaamite preacher, as so many are today in the world of Christendom. We would advise that preachers gain some wisdom from Paul on this matter. Since it is often the case that immature brethren are too quick to accuse preachers of preaching for money, then preachers should be cautioned in reference to the money of the offerings of the brethren. Preachers must never forget that the One they preach had only one robe and no owned place to lay His head at night (See Mt 8:20).

Unfortunately, there are too many preachers in the religious world who are like Balaam. Balaam was minding his own business, doing the work of God. He was known for his work throughout Pethor. But Balak, king of Moab, had another agenda for Balaam. He had money and a list of sermons he wanted preached to a people he feared. He was afraid of the blessed people of God, the Israelites, who were coming his way (Nm 22:3,11). He thus sought for a preacher to hire to carry out his agenda against Israel.

Balak had the support, the sermons to be preached, and the audience to whom he wanted them delivered (Nm 22:5,6). So with cash in hand, he went looking for a preacher he could tempt with purse and position in order to carry out his mission. He knew that there were preachers out there who would sacrifice their freedom and principles for the sake of a salary. Paul knew that there were a host of these hirelings in Corinth who were masquerading themselves as messengers of light (2 Co 11:12-15).

Balak knew how to approach religious hirelings. He went looking for a dynamic and successful religious leader. He said of Balaam, *"I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed"* (Nm 22:6). His method of tempting Balaam to preach his agenda was to send an important delegation of elders to the preacher. With the delegation, he sent the greatest temptation to acquire a hireling preacher. He sent "the diviner's fee," a handsome salary (Nm 22:6). So with an impressive delegation from a foreign land, and the temptation of great support, Balaam was tempted to accept the agenda of someone other than God, and to preach what the supporters demanded.

At first Balaam held out against the temptation of salary and fame by refusing to compromise his principles. He would not allow his faith and freedom to be bought with foreign support from those of a foreign country who had their own agenda. He even consulted God concerning the request of the delegation of elders. And he initially followed God's command not to go with the delegation of elders, or to accept their support (Nm 22:8-12). He was following God's ultimatum. It was not to be changed under any circumstances.

But Balak was relentlessly persistent. He thus sent a greater number of influential people who were more noble and numerous than the first delegation. These were political people who would appeal to the political ambitions of Balaam (Nm 22:15-17). With the temptation of the high salary he initially received from the first delegation, this time Balaam was tempted by the foreigners with a great position and any request he might have from the nation of the foreigners (Nm 22:17).

Balaam again held out. He refused to go with the political delegation that was sent from the foreigners (Nm 22:18).

But Balaam weakened. He again asked the political delegation to spend the night. God knew Balaam's heart, and thus, he accommodated his carnal desires for gain. He thus allowed Balaam to be ensnared in his own greed for gain and fame (Nm 22:19,20). *"So Balaam rose in the morning ... and went with the princes of Moab."* The mold was then cast for the hireling preacher to sell his gift to another for the sake of support. Balaam wrote his own legacy that the Holy Spirit recorded in Jude 11, when Jude wrote of some who run *"**greedily in the error of Balaam for profit**"* (Jd 11). Balaam established a "way" of behavior that would always be identified with his name and would describe those who compromise their principles for the sake of a salary as Balaamite preachers. Peter defined this behavior: *"... the way of Balaam the son of Beor, **who loved the wages of unrighteousness**"* (2 Pt 2:15). The angel to the church of Pergamos condemned those who *"hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality"* (Rv 2:14).

How could a preacher who was minding his own business establish forever a legacy of greed and selfish ambition? Simple. **We must never underestimate the temptation that comes with a delegation of elders**

from a foreign country who come with a great "diviner's fee" in order to hire those who would preach their agenda of sermons. It takes men of great spiritual integrity and dignity not to sell themselves to such great temptations. When preachers live in great poverty, it is not difficult to understand why some would be tempted to sell their gift for a salary. We must always remember the life of Paul in Corinth: *"And when I was present with you* ***and in need****, I was not a burden to anyone ..."* (2 Co 11:9). Paul did not sell out his gift even when he was in poverty. He did not because he had crucified to himself the carnal things of this world (Gl 2:20). When preachers sell out their gift by preaching whatever the supporters demand, then they have not crucified themselves with Christ. They are Balaamite preachers who will, with smooth and fair speech, tickle the ears of those who sign their pay checks. When we read the following concerning the ministry of Timothy, we conclude that Timothy preached what was necessary, for he did not sell out his gift to supporters:

> *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.* ***Reprove, rebuke, exhort*** *with all longsuffering and teaching. 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* (2 Tm 4:2-4).

Chapter 13

THE SIN OF COVETOUSNESS

Balaam met death because he was tempted with covetousness. He sold his gift for money, and thus paid the ultimate price. Covetousness is the desire of those whose minds are focused on the things of this world. When Paul wrote, *"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth,"* he had the sin of covetousness in mind (Cl 3:2). Every time the collection plate comes by, many people have a brief struggle with the sin of covetousness. The emotion that encourages one to hold back in his contributions is the feeling of having to give up that which one can consume on his own lusts.

A. Definition of Covetousness:

The Greek word of covetousness is *pleonexia*. It is a word that has a wide variety of equivalents in the English language. It can mean greediness, avarice, a desire to take more than one's share, or a desire to take possession of that which belongs to another. Those who do not give according to how they have prospered are certainly covetous disciples. They hold back on giving according to their prosperity because they realize that they are relinquishing the right to consume upon themselves that which they release to the church.

Throughout the Bible, a variety of subpoints fall under the definition of covetousness.

1. ***Covetousness is a desire to possess more than one has.*** This was the problem of the rich man about whom Jesus referred in the parable of Luke 12:13-21. Jesus introduced His illustration of the covetousness of the rich man by saying, *"****Take heed and beware of all covetousness****, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses"* (Lk 12:15). The fact that Jesus cautioned the disciples about the sin of covetousness should be a warning to everyone that this sin can creep into our lives, bringing with it a desire to possess the things of this world. In the preceding statement, Jesus helped us to examine ourselves. We are covetous if we think that life is to be focused on possessions. Jesus' explanation of covetousness is the love of possessions.

2. ***Covetousness is a desire to acquire material things in an evil manner.*** It is the desire to acquire through unfair, dishonest or unscrupulous means the material things of this world. Because of the temptations that come with covetousness, Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians, *"For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know,* ***nor a cloak of covetousness*** *..."* (1 Th 2:5). Since his focus in life was not to possess the things of this world, his relationship with the Thessalonians did not have the ulterior motive of taking possession of their things. But this could not be said of some of the shepherds of Israel when the nation was in a state of backsliding from the Lord. God said of them, *"For with their mouth they show much love,* ***but their heart goes after their covetousness****"* (See Ez 33:30-32).

3. ***Covetousness is the love of money.*** This was the sin of the religious leaders of Israel during the time of Jesus. The Holy Spirit stated that the Pharisees were *"lovers of money"* (Lk 16:14). In the context of his statements in 2 Timothy 3, Paul seems to indicate that covetous religious leaders would arise within the body of Christ. *"Know this also, that in the last days perilous*

times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, covetous ..." (2 Tm 3:1,2). We can understand why Paul was so cautious about this sin. Because of the covetous world in which he preached, he worked with his own hands to support his needs, even paying for everything that he ate. Such behavior seems to indicate that he wanted to shun all appearances of covetousness (2 Th 3:8). He reminded the elders of Ephesus that when he was among them that he *"coveted no man's silver or gold or clothes"* (At 20:33). Peter also knew that covetous brethren would take advantage of the church. When in a state of apostasy, Peter warned, *"And through covetousness* ***they will with deceptive works exploit you****"* (2 Pt 2:3).

B. The curse of covetousness:

Paul wrote, *"****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). No greater truth could have been said concerning what seems to be our natural desire to acquire and possess. This urge can be so strong that it can lead one to great dishonesty and the destruction of one's integrity. It is not the money in and of itself that is evil. It is the love of the money that corrupts the very soul of a man. It is for this reason that the Bible is filled with exhortations to guard oneself from the sin of covetousness:

- *"You will not covet your neighbor's house. You will not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's"* (Ex 20:17).
- *"Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to covetousness"* (Ps 119:36).
- *"He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house ..."* (Pv 15:27).
- *"Woe to those who join house to house, who lay field to field until there is no place, so that they may be placed alone in the midst of the land"* (Is 5:8).
- *"Woe to him who increases that which is not his ..."* (Hk 2:6).
- *"But now I have written to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother if he is a fornicator, or covetous ..."* (1 Co 5:11).
- *"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints"* (Ep 5:3).

C. The consequences of covetousness:

The insidious nature of covetousness is that the one who is covetous often has no idea that he is such. To consume upon one's own desires has simply become the culture of his life and the life of his neighbors around him. Such people often judge themselves as nice people, for they are not drunkards or thieves. They are simply trying to maintain a life-style similar to their neighbors. They often present themselves as good community leaders, and often present before the church a cloak of piety and spirituality. They are faithful in being with the disciples for prayer and Bible study. But when the collection is made, they reveal their covetous culture. This is the one about whom John wrote. *"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother"* (1 Jn 3:10). And how does one know he loves his brother? John further explained, *"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren"* (1 Jn 3:14). But how does one know that he has passed from death to life, and thus, loves his brother? John explains, *"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).

Now we understand why Paul was so hard on the Corinthians in reference to their fufilling of their promise to help their brothers in famine in Judea. But in reference to his personal needs, he reminded them, *"And when I was present with you* ***and in need****, I was not a burden to anyone ..."* (2 Co 11:9). Paul simply suffered alone, but later in this and other statements, shamed the Corinthians for their lack of love toward him because they did not help him in his need. Their lack of care for him when he was in physical need revealed a flaw in their understanding of the concept taught in Galatians 6:6. They were thus not yet perfected in righteousness.

When we are covetous, we will not feel the need of those in need, and thus respond with a heart of love. In the context of the preceding words of John about those who would not manifest their love of the brethren by making sure that physical needs are covered, John concluded, *"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"* (1 Jn 3:15).

Sins of the flesh as drunkenness are clearly evident to all. But the sin of covetousness can reside undetected in the heart of one for years without being clearly manifested. As the rich consume upon their lust, and give only a token when the collection plate is passed, they can hide behind the cloak of a secret contribution. When the poor widow gave all her livelihood, it was known to all. But when the rich gave, **their comparatively large contribution was actually a cloak that disguised their covetousness**.

Liberal giving is the very core of Christianity. It is the revelation of the heart of the one who truly knows God, and thus seeks to be godly. One has simply deceived himself if he thinks that token contributions can identify him with the God who loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son for our sins.

It is the curse of legalism that allows the covetous person to hide behind his token contributions (Lk 21:1-4). The legalist deceives himself into thinking that since he gave something, then he has fulfilled the law of giving. But he has conveniently created a religion after his own covetous desires. He has failed to see that we are not under a law of tithing percentages, but under a new commandment of love that moves us to give as we have been given to by the God who owns all things. Unfortunately, the legalist will go down in condemnation crying out that he gave, but never realizing that he did not give himself wholly over to the Lord. His tokens will take him into total destruction from the presence of the One who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

D. Character of the covetous:

The covetous person is actually denying the one true and living God. He does so because he substitutes another god for God. In the city of Ephesus, Paul was confronted by the adherents of an idolatrous religion (See At 19). Theirs was a religion of idols, and idolatry is creating a god after one's own image and own desires. Therefore, when Paul later wrote to the Ephesian Christians, he identified the nature of the covetous person. He wrote that the covetous man *"is an idolater"* (Ep 5:5). The covetous man is an idolater because covetousness *"is idolatry"* (Cl 3:5). Covetousness is worship of the creation over the Creator. It is elevating the created things of this world above the One who created the world. Jesus explained,

> *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).

David said of those who made idols, *"Those who make them are like unto them* [idols], *as is everyone who trusts in them"* (Ps 115:8). The ones who idolize the things of this world are like the things of this world. They are worldly.

A servant is of no value to his master if he serves another master, while pretending to be totally dedicated to his master. When one becomes the servant of wealth, then he cannot be totally committed to God. Not only does the covetous man trouble his own house, he troubles the house of God (See Pv 15:27; 1 Tm 3:15). In the case of Achan, covetousness caused the death of his entire family (Ja 7:21). He saw; he coveted; he took; he died. The idolatrous man can never give his entire devotion to God. *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Mt 6:21).

It seems that the heart of Demas was on the things of this world which he loved. Paul urged Timothy, *"Be diligent to come to me soon, for Demas has forsaken me,* ***having loved this present world*** *..."* (2 Tm 4:10). As Demas, and Gehazi, many good men have fallen to the idolatrous nature of covetousness (See 2 Kg 5:22-25).

The sin of covetousness became so grave in Israel that the princes of Israel were known for their bribes by which they exploited the people, even to the point of shedding innocent blood to receive them (Ez 22:12). We must never underestimate the sin of covetousness. We must never fail to identify such as sin. And considering all that is stated in the word of God about the sin, we would do well to be on guard in our lives that we do not deceive ourselves that this sin cannot turn us away from God. Covetousness leads to the destruction of the spiritual life we have in Christ. Because it is a relentless curse to the soul of the Christian, it eventually turns one into a hard-hearted person who is void of empathy for the needs of his fellow man.

Through our obedience to the gospel, we have *"escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Pt 1:4). It is our struggle to stay away from lusts that lead to spiritual death. Those disciples who would persist in their way of covetousness seriously challenge themselves through personal studies of the eternal sacrifice that Jesus made for us (See 1 Co 5:9-11). Those who with smooth and fair speech prey upon the disciples for gain, must also be challenged (2 Th 3:6). God is serious about the sin of covetousness because such is a character that is totally contrary to the godly nature of Christianity.

> *For this you know, that no fornicator, nor unclean person,* ***nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God****. Let no man deceive you with empty words, for* ***because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*** (Ep 5:5,6).

The covetous person needs to remember the words of Jesus that were spoken in reference to the rich man who was concerned only about laying up riches on earth

for himself: *"So is he who lays up treasure for himself* ***and is not rich toward God****"* (Lk 12:21). Remember, covetousness comes to light when the collection plate is passed. One member boasted, "If I had US$1,000 I would give half to the church." His fellow brother sitting beside him said, "What if you had two pigs?" The man responded, "That's not fair. You know I have two pigs."

E. Repentance from covetousness:

We must remember what the Holy Spirit said of the religious Pharisees. *"They were lovers of money"* (Lk 16:14). And when religious people who are lovers of money are denied their money by the preaching of the gospel, trouble is unleashed on the preachers of the gospel.

1. ***Simon the sorcerer loved, but lost his money.*** When Philip went to Samaria, he encountered one who was not unlike some preachers today. Simon was a preacher who was well known throughout the city of Samaria. For a long time he had *"practiced magic and astonished the people of Samaria,* ***claiming that he was someone great****"* (At 8:9). As we said, he was not unlike some preachers today who like to stand before the people with great pomp. And in order to guarantee his right to stand before the people, he worked his "miracles," which were only magical tricks. And we assume that he was known for the two things that Solomon said would identify the leech: (1) Give! (2) Give! (Pv 30:15).

Simon certainly gained a great deal of money from his "miracle services." He had the respect of the people he fooled. Luke recorded, *"They all, from the least to the greatest, gave heed to him, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'"* (At 8:10). The people gave heed to the "miracle working" preacher *"because he had for a long time astonished them with his magical arts"* (At 8:11). But then there came to town a preacher of truth. Philip showed up with the message of the gospel. *"But 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"* (At 8:12). The religious profiteering of the "miracle" working preacher was shut down.

But when religious profiteers are shut down, they do not go down peacefully. Simon lost his source of income. Nevertheless, the text says that *"Simon himself also believed ... and was baptized"* (At 8:13). But when he saw the miracles that were done by the apostles, he possibly saw another "angle" by which he could get back into the religious money-making business. So *"when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money"* (At 8:18). Simon saw where he presumed he could cash in on the religious business of miracle working (At 8:19). But notice what Peter said to the covetous preacher Simon, *"****Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money****"* (At 8:20). The reason Simon sought to financially invest in the "laying-on-of-hands" business was because of what Peter pronounced was in his heart. *"****Your heart is not right in the sight of God****"* (At 8:21). Peter identified the problem when he said to Simon, *"You are full of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity"* (At 8:23). Bitterness originates out of a heart of one who craves something so much, that when he loses it, he is bitter. Simon lost his position as a "miracle worker" among the people, and thus, he lost his source of great financial wealth. Though he was baptized, he was still in the "bondage of iniquity." When covetous preachers lose their source of income when their iniquity is discovered, their heart of iniquity will move them to lash out with all sorts of nonsense.

2. ***Demetrius loved and lost his religious money-making business.*** In the city of Ephesus, another religious profiteer was endangered by the preaching of the gospel. The occasion was the conversion of people away from idolatry to Christianity. The mass conversion was so great that those who were into the idol-making business became somewhat disturbed. *"Then about that time there arose a great disturbance concerning the Way"* (At 19:23). The problem was that *"a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines for Artemis, was bringing no little profit to the craftsmen"* (At 19:24). So Demetrius called the craftsmen together and said, *"Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth"* (At 19:25). The problem was that a preacher of the gospel came to town and said *"that gods made with hands are not gods"* (At 19:26). And so the market for idol gods took a hit, and the wealth of the idol makers had a bad day on the stock market. Consequently, Demetrius sought to stir up opposition against Paul by appealing to their belief in the idol god Artemis [Diana], that she was in trouble of being *"dethroned from her magnificence"* if this is continued (At 19:27). So what happens when the wealth of religiously covetous people is endangered? There is mass confusion and opposition against those who preach the truth (See At 19:28-41). One must never underestimate the culture of religious covetousness.

The repentant journey out of covetousness is painful. Sometimes it is so painful that one becomes, as

Simon, bitter. To some, as Demetrius, wealth is far more important than truth, and thus, people as Demetrius are willing to stir up a riot against those who endanger their religious profiteering. But for those who seek to serve God, these are those who are willing to endure the pain in order to gain the crown. Those who are wealthy, and who bring their standard of living down for the needs of others, will certainly be blessed with great riches in eternal glory. We must keep in mind that money cannot give itself away. It takes a sincere and godly heart to do that.

Chapter 14

WELL-DOING DISCIPLESHIP

When discussing the sin of covetousness, we must review the life of one who lived in total contrast to a covetousness life-style. Gaius was an unselfish disciple who understood the purpose of discipleship, and thus, through the apostle John's letter, the Holy Spirit gave him an overwhelming testimony that he was walking in the truth by his well-doing sacrifices to partner with evangelists in the preaching of the gospel to the world.

Romans 10:14 explains the mandate of Gaius' obedience. This statement of Paul explains the organic function of the body in reference to the financial partnership that members have with those who go forth to preach the gospel. It explains the well-doing of Gaius.

> *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?*

The sending forth and support of preachers is a function of the body of Christ to take the gospel into all the world. This is what the body does. When this function is either ignored by the members of the body, as in the case of the Corinthians, or disrupted by dominating leadership, as in the case of Diotrephes, then the body is financially dysfunctional. In the context of John's letter to Gaius, if this responsibility is ignored by any individual Christian, then that Christian is dysfunctional in reference to his or her responsibilies to send forth preachers to preach the gospel to the lost. Such was the case with the disciples in the area where Gaius lived. The problem was so grave that Gaius may have been in doubt concerning his financial responsibilities to support preachers. For some reason, he wrote to John concerning one who was disrupting the organic function of the body in reference to what Paul stated in Romans 10:14,15.

John subsequently wrote a comforting letter to Gaius in order to reassure him that what he was doing in supporting evangelists was walking in the truth. *"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). In this context, Gaius' walking in truth was his financial support of the preaching of the gospel. From what John said of Gaius, therefore, **we would conclude that one is not walking in the truth unless he is doing that which Gaius was doing in supporting preachers to go forth to preach the gospel**.

Supporting traveling evangelists was a faithful work and walk in the truth. *"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and especially for strangers"* (3 Jn 5). Those who had been helped by Gaius on their journeys reported his faithful work to other disciples wherever they went. The extent of Gaius' hospitality of those who came by his way is revealed in the fact that some were not formerly known by Gaius. They were strangers to him. But the fact that they were preaching the gospel was reason enough to warrant his support. John commended Gaius, *"... who have borne witness of your love before the church"* (3 Jn 6).

Gaius' support of the traveling evangelists was a manifestation of his love, and thus, in John's statement of 3 John 6, one definition of Christian love is identified to be one's support of those who go forth to preach the gospel. Gaius' godliness was revealed in his giving. *"You will do well to* ***support*** *them* [the preachers] *on their journey in a manner worthy of God"* (3 Jn 6). In order to be worthy of God, individual Christians as Gaius, should support those who are going forth to preach the gospel. The other side of the situation is also true. If one does not support the preaching of the gospel through the support of preachers who go forth, then he is not worthy of God. He does not know God, for God is love, and love manifests itself in the support of those who go forth to preach the gospel for God's love of the world through Jesus (Jn 3:16).

The word "support" in 3 John 6 comes from the Greek word *propempo*. It means to set one forward on his journey with whatever it takes to get the evangelist on to his next location. The word assumes, therefore,

that the evangelist is not staying at home. He is gone! He has gone into all the world to preach the gospel. The context of John's discussion of 3 John is not the passage to be used for those who want to stay at home, and yet be supported according to John's instructions. There are other passages that teach the church's responsibility to support their teachers (See Gl 6:6).

In the evangelistic function of the early church, there were evangelists going throughout the world preaching the gospel. Paul, for example, sought to go on to Spain after he visited the disciples in Rome. When he wrote to the disciples in Rome, he hoped to be supported by them in his travel on to Spain. *"... whenever I make my journey into Spain, I hope to see you in my journey* ***and to be supported on my way there by you*** *..."* (Rm 15:24).

In 3 John, John explained the reason behind Paul's statement in Romans 10:14. It is the responsibility of every disciple to do what Gaius was doing in supporting those who would go forth to preach the gospel. In 3 John 7,8, John gives three reasons why each individual member of the body should do this.

1. ***The evangelists went forth to preach Christ***. If we would claim to be "of Christ" (Christian), then it is our obligation to support those who preach the One in whom we believe.

2. ***The evangelists did not take contributions from the unbelievers.*** We should support evangelists in order that they and their families can live, and not bring shame upon the gospel message by living in need of material sustenance (1 Co 9:14).

3. ***We must be fellow workers for the truth that the evangelists preach.*** We join in with those evangelists who go forth by supporting them on their journeys. We partake of the fruit of their labors when we partner with them through our giving of support (Ph 4:17).

The preceding evangelistic function of the body was disrupted by one man in the vicinity of Gaius. The case here is similar to that in Corinth. There was a group in Corinth who were puffed up and arrogant, and subsequently hindered the Corinthians from supporting Paul, whom they accused of all sorts of nonsense. The same happened with Gaius when Diotrephes, who was puffed up, disrupted the financial function of the body by slandering the evangelists and John with malicious words. One of the evils in which some involve themselves in order not to support a certain preacher is to make slanderous statements to others of the church about the preacher.

The financial disruption caused by Diotrephes was enshrined in one simple statement made by John: *"Diotrephes,* ***who loves to be first among them****, does not receive us"* (3 Jn 9). Diotrephes did not receive and send forth even John, the apostle of love. In his actions to dominate a group, or area of house groups, he disrupted the function of the organic body that was explained by Paul in Romans 10:14,15. Gaius could not send forth the beautiful feet of those who preached the gospel because Diotrephes wanted to dominate the church, and thus, present himself to be first among the disciples.

John's letter to Gaius was meant to encourage Gaius during this unfortunate time of financial disruption of his evangelistic outreach through the support of evangelists. *"Beloved,* ***do not follow what is evil****, but what is good. He who does good is from God. He who does evil has not seen God"* (3 Jn 11). That which Diotrephes was doing was evil. If Gaius submitted to what Diotrephes was trying to impose on the church, then he would also be doing evil and not walking in truth. The Holy Spirit takes a very dim view of anyone who would disrupt the financial support of those who go forth to preach the gospel.

When any member of the body of Christ disrupts the outreach of the body, then that member is a cancerous evil. His behavior will lead to the death of the body in any particular region where the body is not allowed to preach the gospel. If the other members of the body allow a dominant member to disrupt the evangelistic outreach of the body, then they have fallen victim to the cancerous evil of the autocratic leader. We enable evil when we say nothing about these matters, nor refuse to confront the evil of those who would dominate our desire to send forth those who preach.

When the leaders of a group of disciples do not allow a traveling evangelist to speak to the members of the body about the function of the body in evangelism, then they have fallen victim to the cancerous evil of Diotrephetic leadership. When a preacher blocks the coming of a traveling evangelist to speak to the members of the body, then he has become a cancerous evil to the evangelistic function of the body of Christ. When churches as a whole are not receiving and sending forth those who preach the gospel, then they are indeed dead with a cancerous evil. When John wrote to Gaius about Diotrephes' hindering of the evangelistic financial function of the body, He wanted all of us to know that such is evil, and should be avoided.

We must not ignore or consider lightly the Holy-Spirit inspired words of John in reference to the behavior of Diotrephes in his efforts to block the evangelistic function of the body. Diotrephes was hindering the func-

tion of the body to preach the gospel by not receiving and sending forth those who grow the body into all the world. His actions were contrary to the existence of the church, and thus, his actions were evil. It is for this reason that every disciple, as Gaius, must be assured that receiving and sending evangelists is the function of every member of the body of Christ. Paul concluded his letter to the dysfunctional Corinthians in this matter: *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Do you not know your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are disqualified?"* (2 Co 13:5). An old Persian proverb is, "What I kept I lost. What I spent I had. What I gave I have." Someone wrote, "If you want to be rich, give; if you want to be poor, grasp, if you want abundance, scatter, if you want to be needy, hoard."

Chapter 15

GIVING WITH PURPOSE

If we could learn anything from the negligent Achaians, specifically those in Corinth, it would be to put our money where our mouth is. They at first had good intentions to do what was right in reference to contributing to the famine victims of Judea. However, their performance certainly lacked. It lacked so much that it took the Holy Spirit, through the inspired mind of the apostle Paul, to correct their financial dysfunction. In His instructions to correct their procrastination, the Holy Spirit gave some points that we must seriously consider in order that we too not fall victim to the same procrastination.

Among all the instructions that were given in the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians, there are some points that will help us to get on with getting the job done in reference to our contributions. If any of these points are ignored, our contributions and collections for any ministry of the body of Christ will certainly be an indication of our lack of concern for God's work through the body, or at least our procrastination in doing what we have promised to do.

A. Purpose our contribution:

Paul instructed, *"Let each one give according as he **purposes** in his heart ..."* (2 Co 9:7). Contributing to the work of God is not something that is done nonchalantly. It is determined before the act of giving actually takes place. The Greek word for "purposes" is *proaireomai*. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. It seems that the Holy Spirit looked throughout the Greek dictionary in order to choose a specific word to enjoin upon Christians a life-style of intended sacrificial giving. The word means "to prefer," "to choose," or "to purpose with considerable intent." The passage could be translated, *"Let every one give as he has determined before hand."*

The use of the Greek word indicates that one should make a heart-determined plan to make his contributions. When one is purposing in his heart, he is forming his life around his contributions. The contributions, therefore, are the indication of one who has the Lord's work at heart. When one has given his heart to the Lord, then his offerings are intentional, directed and planned. There is no sporadic action on his part. On the contrary, with great consideration, he sets aside that which he intends to give. There is no "spur of the moment" contribution with the one who has purposed in his heart.

Because we are to plan beforehand what we intend to give, then purposing our contributions is a sign of faithful discipleship. Making plans as to how we will return to God that which is His is simply the behavioral pattern of a faithful disciple. If one is not giving anything, then certainly his discipleshp of Jesus would be questioned. But in the context of Paul's instructions concerning planned giving, we might question whether one truly has the heart of a disciple if he is not planning his giving. Disciples plan to give, for they understand that giving is a part of being a disciple of the One who gave us all. As the Father planned to give His Son before the creation of the world, so Christians must plan their giving before the collection is taken by the church.

B. Promise the purposed giving.

Paul introduced his instructions on making a purposed contribution with the words, *"Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren so that they go before to you and make up beforehand **your previously promised generous contribution** ..."* (2 Co 9:5). What he was saying to the Corinthians was that they needed to fulfill what they had promised in reference to a special contribution for the famine victims of Judea. For a variety of reasons, they had fudged on their promise. And

since he was on his way to them with some of the brethren from Macedonia, Paul was writing in order that they not be embarrassed about making promises and not keeping them (See 2 Co 9:3,4).

The Greek word for "previously promised" in 2 Corinthians 9:5 is *prokatangello*. The word means "to announce beforehand." A year before, the disciples of Achaia made a promise to give to the collection that was being made for the famine victims in Judea (2 Co 9:2). They had made a public declaration that they too would give to the need, which promise Paul had announced to other disciples in order to spur them on to likewise contribute. In Paul's instructions concerning what they had promised, there are a great number of lessons to be learned concerning contributions. Read carefully what he instructed them in 2 Corinthians 8:10,11:

> *And in this I give advice: For this is advantageous for you who were the first* ***a year ago*** *not only to do, but also to* ***desire to do this thing*** [contribution]. ***But now finish doing it*** *so that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also* ***a completion*** *out of what you have.*

Desire without completion means nothing. Talk without the financial walk of what one has promised manifests a lack of integrity. We must commend the Achaians for their desire. But desire means nothing if there is no performance. At least the Achaian disciples were better than the person who makes no commitment at all to give, or the one who says he just cannot afford to make a promise.

The disciple who has given his heart to the Lord, has also given his promise to do the business of the Lord. Before one becomes a disciple, therefore, he must seriously consider how he will purpose in his heart that which he is going to give to the Lord, as well as, make a promise that he will complete his planned giving. Jesus reminds all of us,

> *For which one of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him.* (Lk 14:28,29).

C. Perform the promise:

The Achaians had the desire. They evidently made a promise of giving a substantial amount, for Paul used their promised contribution as an example for the Macedonians (See 2 Co 9:1,2). But now they had to perform, as Paul wrote, "***But now finish doing it*** *...*" (2 Co 8:11). The Greek word that Paul used here is from the root word *epiteleo* which means "to bring to completion." What Paul was now asking of the Achaians was that they execute that which they had previously purposed and promised a year before.

The contribution about which Paul was writing was a special contribution for a special need. We have discovered that people will often do well in making such contributions. In all their dysfunction as members of the body of Christ, the disciples in Achaia at least responded to the special needs of those who were suffering from a famine in Judea. We cannot fault their desire to help, though their performance somewhat lacked. Nevertheless, they did make the contribution. They purposed in their hearts to get the job done, and with some encouragement from the Holy Spirit through Paul, the deed was done. If disciples make such promises today, but procrastinate, then the leaders need to be teaching the exhortations of 1 & 2 Corinthians.

We feel it is also significant to mention that when the Achaians made their promise to give the special contribution for the special need of famine victims, **they were probably less than five years old in the faith**. We mention this because we know of disciples who are decades old in the faith, and yet, they have never been challenged to make a special contribution to a need **outside their local area**. They have never given to mission efforts outside their local area. They have never given to any disaster relief needs outside their local area. Their contributions have usually been for those things they could personally enjoy. Consequently, the selfish motive for their contributions has led them to never being blessed for their contributions. Giving to our "building fund" has its selfish ulterior motives. Giving to increase our comforts in worship is not sacrificial giving.

The Achaians had no New Testaments in their possession to read these instructions as we have today. We might fault them concerning their delay in performing the deed of unselfish contributions, but we cannot fault them on their response to the instructions of the Holy Spirit to contribute to needs outside their local area, and thus to something that they would not personally enjoy. Now we have no excuse if we have failed to purpose in our hearts to give. We have no excuse because we can simply pick up a New Testament and read the instructions that moved the Corinthians to get the job done. The godly giver seeks to live after the One to whom he has given his life. He reads with interest every instruction concerning that must be done to follow the God who owns everything. There is thus only joy in the heart of the one who seeks to be as Jesus who gave all for us.

Chapter 16

SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Since money is an indication of our life, it is a part of our Christian living. We give our time to produce money, and thus, the money is a symbol of our time. When we contribute our money unselfishly, it is the same as giving our time unselfishly to a specific cause or individual. This was Paul's point in Philippians 4:17 when he stated that the fruit of his labors went to the Philippians because they had supported him once and again when he preached in Thessalonica. They were blessed with the fruit because they did not personally reap from the contribution. Giving to the evangelist in his preaching somewhere in the world was what the Philippians were doing. They were not supporting a local preacher, or purchasing song books for themselves, or doing building repairs where they would personally benefit. Theirs was unselfish giving for something from which they would not receive personal benefit. We do not say this because it would be wrong to support something from which we receive personal benefit. It is simply a fact that in the New Testament the giving was directed to someone or some famine victims from which the givers did not receive any personally benefit. New Testament giving was always for someone else, not for self. It was as God gave unselfishly to us, we give unselfishly to others.

There are other financial responsibilities where contributors can share their time, and thus reap fruit from their sacrifices. These opportunities to produce fruit identify the nature of our discipleship, which is to say, they are opportunities to manifest our love. They are also manifestations of the nature of the church of our Lord.

A. Enrolled widows:

James identified "pure religion" with the statement, *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction ..."* (Js 1:27). Taking care of orphans is simply being a part of the human race. There need be no commandments in reference to this ministry. James' statement of James 1:27, therefore, is simply a declarative statement, not an imperative. But when it comes to taking care of widows, the Holy Spirit knew that the disciples needed some special instructions in order that their love not be abused by those women who might become Christians just to get on the payroll of the church.

In the early days of the existence of the church, one of the first points of identity of the church was a common distribution to widows. What is interesting to note is that we have this event recorded in the New Testament, not in reference to making this ministry a mandate, but simply as something that Christians did. In the case of Acts 6:1-7 there were some problems with the distribution. But we must keep in mind that as preaching the gospel to the lost was normal for a disciple, so was caring for widows.

But as this behavior of the church progressed throughout the first century, there was some abuse of the sharing love of the disciples in this matter. By the time Paul wrote the first letter to Timothy, the Holy Spirit had to lay down some qualifications for the church's support of widows. When we study through these qualifications for a widow to be supported, it is interesting to note that the church does not have the responsibility of supporting all widows.

Paul wrote, *"**Honor** widows who are **truly** widows"* (1 Tm 5:3). The word "honor" here means to support financially, or to provide for all their needs. By using the word "truly," Paul was instructing that the church must support only those widows who are defined to be true widows according to the instructions that he was about to give. The word "truly" excludes some widows who are not qualified to be supported according to the limitations that he gives. The church is not obligated to support every Christian widow. The following would be the defining qualifications that would warrant a widow to be supported by the church:

1. *A childless widow:* *"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). But if a Christian widow does not have children or grandchildren, then she must be considered by the church to receive church support.

2. *Spiritually minded:* *"Now she who is truly a widow and desolate trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day"* (1 Tm 5:5). The widow who is not continuing in supplications and prayers has no right to be supported by the church. If she is "desolate," and she has no other means of support, then she is eligible for the support of the church. Being "desolate" would be subjective, and thus, the church must

make a decision if a widow is truly desolate. If she is living in a mansion that was left to her by her husband, then she probably is not desolate. The church should ask her to sell the mansion, bring down her standard of living, and then she would be considered to be enrolled as a widow to be supported by the church. An older woman is not truly a desolate widow if she has a retirement plan or pension that will service her needs. A Christian widow must always remember what Paul added, *"But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives"* (1 Tm 5:6). The church is under no obligation to support a widow who is spiritually dead and unfaithful to the Lord.

3. *Children first:* *"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). The word "household" in the first century context meant more than immediate children. A household included the immediate children, husband and wife, but also servants and relatives. What Paul was instructing in the above statement was that relatives first have the responsibility of taking care of the widows within the household. This would mean that a Christian family who had employed a Christian servant, has the responsibility of taking care of the widow of a Christian servant. If the head of a household does not take care of the widows of his household, then he is worse than the unbelievers who feel no obligation of taking care of widows. The heads of families cannot obligate the church to do that which is their responsibility. Therefore, if a head of a household is negligent in carrying out this responsibility, then it is the responsibility of the church to approach such a person, for he has denied the faith.

4. *The limitation of sixty:* *"Let no one be enrolled as a widow who is under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man"* (1 Tm 5:9). No widow under sixty can apply for support from the church. If she is sixty and older, then she must have been the wife of one man, and thus not a polygamist. If she was a polygamist, then she was not living a faithful Christian life. It could be argued that she may have been a polygamist before she became a Christian, but remained with one man after her baptism. Thus the phrase, *"having been the wife of one man"* could apply only to the time she was a faithful Christian. We would assume that this would be the proper interpretation simply because some young woman may have lived a rebellious life in her younger years as an unbeliever, having more than one husband. Such a person may have been as the woman caught in adultery, to whom Jesus said, *"Neither do I condemn you. Go. From now on sin no more"* (Jn 8:11). If this woman went and sinned no more by having only one husband and living a faithful Christian life, then we would conclude that she would be enrolled as a widow when her husband died because she was faithful at the time of her husband's death.

5. *A reputation for good works:* Paul now lists a series of things that the church must follow in order to register a widow to receive support from the church. The prospective enrolled widow must have ...

> *... a reputation for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work* (1 Tm 5:10).

From what Paul states here as qualifications for support from the church, we would assume that a problem prevailed where Timothy was located. The problem was probably in the area of widows of the community lining up for support from the only people in town who took care of widows. Since it was the obligation of the church to support widows, the word got out to everyone in the community that the local church puts widows on a pension plan. In all these qualifications, one point is very clear: **If a widow has not been a faithful Christian for some time, then she has no right to be supported by the church.** In other words, those widows who would seek to be members of the church in order to be supported by the church have no hope of support. The church is under no obligation to take care of any widow who has not become known for being a faithful servant to the saints.

6. *No young widows need to apply:* *"But refuse the younger widows ..."* (1 Tm 5:11). If a widow is under the age of sixty, then she is not to be supported by the church. Because of the temptations that face young widows, Paul said, *"I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house ..."* (1 Tm 5:14). Paul's qualification of one being a "young widow" would be a woman who still had the ability to bear children. This would be a young Christian woman who was relatively young, and thus had the opportunity to marry and bear children.

Paul's final instructions concerning the care of widows is significant. *"If any believing man or woman has widows, let them assist them, and do not let the church be burdened, so that it may relieve those who are truly widows"* (1 Tm 5:16). A Christian man has the responsibility of taking care of his widowed mother. A younger single Christian woman also has the responsibility of taking care of her widowed mother. If those of the household do not support the widows of the household, then

the church would possibly have to neglect those who were truly widows. This is the organic body of Christ functioning properly in order to make sure that every faithful widow is cared for in the fellowship of love.

B. Supported elders:

In reference to the support of elders, Paul wrote, *"Let the elders who direct well be counted worthy of* ***double honor****, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching"* (1 Tm 5:17). This statement needs little explanation. "Double honor" refers to double pay. When Paul said in a previous verse of this chapter, *"honor widows ...,"* he meant the same thing as he means here. Reference is to support, not giving respect, though the young are taught to respect their elders. We say this because some have tried to excuse themselves from supporting elders by interpreting Paul's use of the word "honor" in this text to mean giving great respect. Such would be an inconsistent interpretation, and in being inconsistent, one might neglect his responsibility of supporting worthy elders.

Paul's instructions to support elders is based on the Old Testament principle, *"You will not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain,"* and *"The laborer is worthy of his wages"* (1 Tm 5:18). Paul explains two worthy works of those elders (shepherds) who should be supported by the church. These are those elders who choose to work in the area of preaching the gospel to the lost and those who seek to teach the saved. However, he uses the word "especially" to refer to the specific ministries of some elders. In general, the elder is to be supported, but specifically, those who labor in preaching and teaching must be supported if they do not have any other livelihood.

The elder must be supported with "double" wages. If one truly understands the nature of a godly elder, then he will have no difficulty understanding what is meant in this statement. Godly elders are with the people. And when the people are in need, the elder reaches into his own pockets. A godly elder will never consume upon his own lusts, and thus will always die a poor man. The church has the responsibility of ministering to the poor through the elders who are with the sheep, ministering aid when aid is needed. Worldly minded and greedy people have no understanding of what is meant in the double pay of elders. And thus, the church should under no circumstances allow the twisted minds of greedy people to discourage the church from obeying the mandate of the Holy Spirit in reference to the double pay of elders. When elders are ministering in growing the church through the preaching of the gospel, and edifying the converts through teaching the word of God, then they must be encouraged to continue their work through double pay lest they give themselves into poverty.

C. Concerning orphans:

Outside the statement of James 1:27, there are no instructions in the New Testament concerning the care of orphans. As previously recognized, there is a great deal of information concerning the support of widows. In the past chapters, we have studied at length the support of evangelists who go forth to preach the gospel. There is also a great deal of information in the New Testament concerning the contribution of funds to those brethren who are suffering from a natural disaster. We have the instructions of the previous point in reference to the support of elders. But there is nothing about the support of orphans. Nevertheless, James stated that pure religion is identified by people who take care of orphans.

Since there are no instructions concerning orphans, then we can make only one conclusion. **Taking care of orphans is simply a natural thing to do as a citizen of the human race**. There need be no instructions, no commandments. To turn away from an orphan is to deny the very principle of humanity.

But one might reconsider the context of James 1:27. In this chapter, we have reviewed the church's responsibility of taking care of widows. However, the church does not have the responsibility of taking care of all widows. Only those widows who have been faithful Christians are to be listed for support. We would not come to this conclusion in reference to orphans, for orphans would have no life history of service that would qualify them for church support as the widows. We could conclude, therefore, that when James spoke of orphans, he spoke of any orphan. It is simply the responsibility of Christians to do the best they can in taking care of orphans. No qualification is needed on the part of the orphan in order to be supported. Taking care of orphans is a way by which we can determine if we are still citizens of the human race.

Book 58

Thirsting For Word From God

The existence and survival of our faith depends entirely upon the Bible. Any faith that is based upon any other foundation is simply religious superstition. If one seeks to understand the true and living God apart from the Bible, then he will create a god after his own religious inclinations, a god who will bow to his own will. If we carried out such idolatry of our imaginations, then we would be emotionally wandering people to be pitied by the world of unbelievers. We would be such if it were not for God's providential work of bringing into our hands a copy of His inspired road map into eternal dwelling. Therefore, if one would seek to find his way out of the religious quagmire of a religiously misguided world, and into the eternal presence of God, then he must find direction through the word of God. If he does not seek this source for direction, then at the end of his life he will find himself at a destination that is far from that for which he hoped. Since we all have this spirit of idolatry within us to do it our way and go our own direction, it is imperative that all of us conclude that since God exists, then certainly our way into His eternal presence must be prescribed by Him alone. And since we are often masters at creating a supposed religious reality after our own imaginations, then it is crucial that we seek for guidance into eternity only from Him whose existence can guarantee that for which we so earnestly yearn. We seek to live forever, and thus, we must thirst for that which will lead us into the presence of Him who can grant us eternality. We must seek for God's message into eternity, which message is revealed through His word. There is no other way.

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is Your servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Psalm 23 would be the appropriate introduction to a study of this subject. David began the psalm by stating that *"**the Lord is my shepherd**."* Jesus explained, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep"* (Jn 10:11). The Lord is not only our good shepherd, He is our great shepherd. He is *"that great Shepherd of the sheep"* (Hb 13:20). He is great, and thus, the Chief Shepherd we seek. *"When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that does not fade away"* (1 Pt 5:4). It is this Shepherd about whom Isaiah spoke: *"He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom. And He will gently lead those who are with young"* (Is 40:11). What better picture could have been painted to illustrate God's leading and feeding of His sheep through His word?

The Lord *"**makes me to lie down in green pastures**,"* therefore, we will have no lack of rest (Ps 23:2). In Him we find that grassy oasis in the middle of a desert. Our souls desire rest, but not laziness. We seek tranquility from the struggles of this life, but not escape into isolation. *"There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered into His rest has also ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Therefore, **let us labor to enter into that rest lest anyone fall** ..."* (Hb 4:9-11). Our final rest will come when He comes. It will be as John wrote, *"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). But until that time of His coming, or the end of life's journey, we must remember the words of Paul, *"And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"* (Ph 4:7). This is the emotional oasis that Jesus promised.

> *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).

He leads us *"**beside the still waters**,"* therefore, we will not lack the direction from His counsel (Ps 23:2). God gives us tranquility in the midst of the white waters of a rushing river. He takes us through the tension of the rapids in order to bring us to quiet waters of peace. It is from these quiet waters that we, as His sheep, peacefully drink of the refreshing taste of His word.

*"**He restores my soul**,"* therefore, we will never lack His forgiveness to bring us back when we stray (Ps 23:3). He revives the fainthearted. He brings times of refreshing to the repentant (At 3:19). When we are lost, we find our way back to Him through the guidance of His inspired Road Map.

He leads us *"**in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake**,"* therefore, we will never lack His guidance as long as we trust in His guiding word (Ps 23:3). Without a guiding word from our Shepherd, we as His sheep would be tossed from one pasture of error to another. For this reason, the word of God is ministered to the sheep that they *"no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching ..."* (Ep 4:14). Our guard from being tossed to and fro by the twisted doctrines of crafty men is to walk in the light of God's word. And *"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). Therefore, *"as newborn babes"* we crave the sincere milk of the word so that we may grow up to the salvation that is in His presence (1 Pt 2:2).

And though we *"**walk through the valley of the shadow of death**,"* we can always know that He is there for us (Ps 23:4). We will go forth in our Christ-commanded mission with strength, for we know that He is with us always (Mt 28:20). We can remember the words of Isaiah,

> *"Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness* (Is 41:10).

*"**Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me**,"* therefore, we will never lack direction through His word because through His correction we are led to and on the right path (Ps 23:4). His word is the rod of defense and the staff of help. It is as Jude wrote,

> *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 and Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord ...* (Jd 24,25).

He prepares *"**a table before me in the presence of my enemies**,"* therefore, we will never lack security and a sense of assurance (Ps 23:5). There is a great deal of conflict in this world to make us afraid, but there is more in a faith that is founded upon the word of God to make us unafraid. So in order to be free from the fear that the world presents, we must fear God more than anything of this world. This would even include our fear of death. Jesus will come to deliver *"those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Hb 2:15). With this promise, we can face the fear of death, for we know through the revelation of God's word that we will be raised to walk in a new existence (See 1 Th 4:13-18). We grow in His promises of eternal life to the point that we can follow the example of Paul when he spoke to those who feared for his safety, *"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).

He *"**anoints my head with oil**,"* therefore, we will never be far away from the joy of His comfort (Ps 23:5). *"**My cup overflows**,"* and thus, His blessings are showered upon us without measure (Ps 23:5). We have been anointed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. So *"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). Through obedience to the word of God we have come into a covenant relationship with the One who can do that for us which is far beyond what we can fully understand. Paul was right: *"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).

*"**Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life**,"* therefore, we will not live outside His presence, nor fail to be sustained on our journey of this life (Ps 23:6). And finally, *"**I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever**"* because we have faithfully walked according to the guidance of His word (Ps 23:6). A life with Christ is a life with an endless hope. But without Christ, there is only a hopeless end. Our conclusion

would be as Peter wrote:

> *For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil* (1 Pt 3:10-12).

Someone once beautifully explained Psalm 23 in the following unique manner:

Possession: The Lord is my shepherd.
Provision: I will lack nothing.
Position: He makes me to lie down in green pastures.
Progress: He leads me beside the still waters.
Personal: He restores my soul.
Progression: He leads me in the paths of righteousness.
Purpose: For His name's sake.
Parting: Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
Peace: I will fear no evil.
Protection: For You are with me.
Pilgrimage: Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.
Participation: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
Preparation: You anoint my head with oil.
Plenty: My cup overflows.
Preservation: Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.
Place: I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Chapter 1

"BURN THE BOOK"

King Josiah was a restorationist king of Judah. He was only eight years old when he began to reign in Jerusalem (2 Kg 22:1). *"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord"* (2 Kg 22:2). In the eighteenth year of his reign, the book of the law of God was found during some reconstruction work on the temple. The message of the book was one of doom if Judah continued on its present moral course of rebellion against the law of God. The words of the book struck the young Josiah so deep in his heart that he set Judah on a radical course of national restoration to the word of God (2 Kg 23). It was a restoration so radical that all places of worship to pagan gods were destroyed throughout the land. This all transpired because one leader responded to the power of the written word of God. Unfortunately, this radical restoration through repentance because of a reading of a "Bible" was not passed on to Josiah's son, Jehoiakim.

A. Burning the Bible:

Jehoiakim did not respond to the written word of God as his father. At the beginning of his reign, God instructed Jeremiah, *"Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah ..."* (Jr 36:2). Jeremiah subsequently called Baruch, his scribe, and he *"wrote all the words of the Lord"* (Jr 36:4). Jeremiah then instructed Baruch to go to Jehoiakim and *"read from the scroll that you have written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people in the Lord's house on the day of fasting. And you will also read them in the ears of all Judah who come out of their cities"* (Jr 36:6). Baruch was to do this because *"great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people"* (Jr 36:7).

Everything went well with the reading of the words that Jeremiah wrote, until the matter came to the king's court. The king's men had enough sense to fear when they heard the reading of the words of the scroll (Jr 36:16). They then instructed Baruch that he and Jeremiah should go and hide themselves, for they knew what the reaction would be from the king when the scroll ("the Bible") was read to him. And they were right. *"So it came to pass when Jehudi had read three or four columns* [of the scroll], *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). Why this response to the reading of the word of God? *"Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words* ***were not afraid****, nor did they tear their garments"* (Jr 36:24).

When people in sin read of the eternal destruction that will eventually come upon them, but do not fear, then they are beyond response. They react with rage. When there is no longer any fear generated in the hearts of men to what the Bible says, then we know that people are long past restoration to obedience of their Creator. We live in such a world today. The reason why so few people study their Bibles today lies in either one or more

of the following truths: (1) They are so traditionally set in the ways of their own religiosity that they are afraid to discover that their religious traditions might be contrary to the word of God. (2) They are traditionally set in their own behavior that is contrary to the word of God, and thus, do not want to change their ways. (3) They have handed their brains over to a religious leader who knows little or nothing about the Bible, but with a gifted tongue of smooth and fair speech is able to charismatically lead them astray through his crafty speaking. In the case of Jehoiakim, it may have been all the preceding. But whatever the case with any individual, one can know if he has any respect for the word of God by the level of fear that is in his heart when he reads his Bible.

B. Obedience to the word of God:

As time progressed after Israel appointed her first kings, the kings themselves led the people into a disrespect for the word of God. As these kings began to trust in their own power, they trusted less in the power of God. Uzziah was such a king. *"When he was strong, **his heart was lifted up to his own destruction**, for he transgressed against the Lord his God ..."* (2 Ch 26:16).

When religious leaders start trusting in their own skills, their hearts are often lifted up against God. We have witnessed that those preachers who are blessed with a gift to speak often start trusting in their ability to persuade people with their words, rather than with the word of God. We live in a time wherein there are thousands of churches that are built around some gifted speaker or personality to whom everyone has given their allegiance. People come before the altar, not to hear the word of God, but to have their hearts excited by a cheerleading preacher, who, in ignorance of the word of God, has the ability to exhort the people with his own words.

When Uzziah lifted his heart up against God, he did that which was contrary to the word of God. He *"**went into the temple** of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense"* (2 Ch 26:16). But Azariah the priest went in after him, *"with eighty priests of the Lord who were valiant men"* (2 Ch 26:17). What Uzziah was doing was that which only the priests could do according to the law of God. But at this point in Uzziah's arrogance, he cared nothing for the law of God. Azariah said to Uzziah, *"It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense"* (2 Ch 26:18). Then Azariah rebuked Uzziah by saying, *"Go out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed. **You will have no honor from the Lord God**"* (2 Ch 26:18).

In his arrogance, Uzziah *"was angry with the priests"* (2 Ch 26:19). But then God stepped in and took control of the matter. As a result, *"the leprosy broke out on his* [Uzziah's] *forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar"* (2 Ch 26:19). Then the priests *"**threw him out from there**. And he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him"* (2 Ch 26:20). Because of his disrespect for the law of God, Uzziah *"was a leper to the day of his death"* (2 Ch 26:21). We can learn a great lesson from the rebellion of Uzziah. The lesson is that God is serious about us keeping His law. We often deceive ourselves into believing that a little rebellion will be overlooked through the grace of God. But in Uzziah's case, God intends that we follow His law. God seeks obedience, for it is through obedience to His will that we manifest that we are His children.

When religious leaders allow themselves to become ignorant of the word of God, they will sin. The point is this: **If one would assume to be a spiritual leader for the people of God, then he must be a student of the word of God**. He cannot lead people to follow God if he does not know where God wants His people to go. Willfully ignorant leaders of God's children will lead the people to destruction. The scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel, were judged by Jesus to be such leaders. Jesus said of them, *"They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch"* (Mt 15:14). **Religious leaders who do not study their Bibles manifest their arrogance and rebellion against God**. They know they should be Bible students for the sake of the people they lead. But because they, as Uzziah, trust in the strength of their own abilities, they are rebellious against the word of God by leading the people to also be ignorant of their Bibles. When the blind lead the blind, the ditch is their destiny.

We must not think that the followers of misguided religionists will sidestep the ditch of destruction because they were innocently led astray by the biblically ignorant. Jesus said that the followers will also fall into the ditch of destruction because they did not seek after those who were preachers of the Bible, nor did they study of their Bibles. They allowed themselves to be *"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 time is always present when the audience *"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). Those who preach in ignorance of the word of God will be judged for their failure to preach the truth

of God's word. Those who listen to preaching that is not the word of God will be judged because they did not seek the word of God. Both have burned their Bibles, for they have no thirst for what God seeks to reveal. There are more ways to burn a Bible than by throwing it into fiery flames. An unread Bible is as worthless to the owner as a Bible in ashes.

Chapter 2

GONE ASTRAY FROM HIS WORD

One of the most scary passages for any civilization is Hosea 4:6. Movies are made about giant meteorites headed toward earth that would destroy all life on earth. But when the destructive force of moral degradation hits civilization, life as we know it ceases to exist. Hosea 4:6 was a statement by God concerning a people who had given up a knowledge of their Bibles. And because they had become ignorant of the word of God, they had assigned themselves to national doom.

> ***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, 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***.

Destruction often comes slowly ... without notice and without pain. Our present generation may be fine, but the statement says that the "children" will pay the price. The children will be doomed to eat the sour grapes from the vines that their fathers planted. *"In those days they will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge.'* ***But everyone will die for his own iniquity. Every man who eats the sour grape, his teeth will be set on edge"*** (Jr 31:29,30). If the fathers forget the law of God, they will give their children sour grapes to eat. And so here we are in a worldwide Christendom that has little or no knowledge of the word of God. There are billions of religionists throughout the world, but few Christians.

If you think we are prophets of doom, then we would challenge you with some sociological norms that you must consider. Our work is among the masses of religionists in the developing world. Our frustration is that among the religious leaders of many churches, there is little Bible knowledge. We are not talking about novice believers, but about those who are standing before church groups throughout the world pretending to be ministers of the word of God. These preachers are often shallow students of the Bible, and subsequently, shallow teachers of the Bible. In the context of their little knowledge of the word of Christ, one might ask why such people would be preaching to groups who seek to be "Christian" when actually they are not preaching the word of God. The answer is that they are great speakers, and being great speakers is their curse. A great speaker needs no knowledge of the Bible in order to gather a crowd. The people follow the speaker's great oratory, but not the word of God. And thus, those who are gathered before such speakers are usually not there because they want to hear the word of God. They have come to be tossed to and fro by every wind of teaching that comes forth from a gifted speaker. In many churches today, many people follow speakers, not teachers of the word of God.

Because there are so many gifted speakers who know little Bible, there are audiences throughout the world who are being destroyed for the lack of knowledge of the word of God. The result is that we live in a world of churches that are not based on obedience to the word of God, but on a social fellowship wherein lonely wanderers have found religious friends. What sparks one's religiosity will define who he is in his relationship with God. If something of this world draws us to assemble with one another, then our assembly is not the serendipity of being drawn to Christ. We have thus missed the focus of what Jesus said, *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth,* ***will draw all men to Me"*** (Jn 12:32).

In the absence of a focus on the word of Christ, another catalyst is being used to draw and retain audiences. We have heard more than one prospective preacher say, "I wanted to start a church, and thus, I knew that I needed to learn how to play an instrument." So in the absence of people being drawn to assemblies wherein the word of Christ is the drawing power, audiences are developed around the sound of orchestras or bands. Many assemblies, therefore, have become religious concerts of noise, during which it is no longer sung, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." Assemblies are moved to cry out "Lord, Lord." The people are drawn to the assembly by the sound of mechanical noise, not the preaching of the word of God. The appeal for assembly is to our ears. It is not

to our hearts. We seek to assemble in order to be comforted by the word of God. Nevertheless, there are too many of those to whom Jesus would say, *"Not everyone 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). **One cannot claim that he is doing the will of the Father if he is drawn into assembly by the noises of men and not the word of the Father**.

In the Qur'an, Muhammad wrote of the "people of the book." To many Christians today, they have no idea to whom he was referring. If Muhammad were living today, he would probably never make such a statement concerning many Christians. He would probably write, "people of the assembly," or "people of their cellphones," or maybe, "people of their concerts." But by the seventh century when he had the Qur'an written, Christians were still known to be who focused on a "book." His statement was a testimony of the identity of Christians. They were "people of the book."

Because Muhammad realized that a "book" must be the center of authority in any religion, he also needed a book for his beliefs. And today, "Christians" who are no longer of "the book" cannot understand why Muslims are so reverent to their book, the Qur'an. Muhammad made sure that Muslims not be drawn away unto other books. He thus instilled within his theology an iconic worship of his book, the Qur'an. Christians today cannot understand why religious/political organizations can assemble such a radical group as ISIS around a militant interpretation of the Qur'an in order to promote their national agenda. Since most Christians have long lost their respect for and obedience to their "book," they wonder why any religious group can be so committed to the writings of "a book." Since the masses of Christendom have given up any reliance on "the book," they wonder why any religious people could be so dedicated to a book of words. We are often more dedicated to the sound of instruments than the reading of the Scriptures. We have gone astray further than we think.

So you might think that we are somewhat off course in our judgment of present dangers of planting vines that will set the teeth of our children on edge. Therefore, we would challenge you to walk into a classroom wherein a teacher is conducting a Bible class, especially in a classroom wherein there are assembled a young generation. Count the Bibles of paper and ink, and then count the cellphones and Ipads on which people are following an electronic version of the Bible. There will probably be more electronic Bibles than paper Bibles. There is nothing wrong with this. After all, did not Paul exhort Timothy, *"Give heed to reading"* (1 Tm 4:13). But we wonder if this is the only time the attendees have read their Bibles throughout the week?

We recently attended an assembly of a particular religious group in our area. It was the first time we had ever visited this particular religious group. But something impressed us about the people. It was not that almost everyone in the group was gray-headed, for it was an assembly of older people who continue to be faithful to their beliefs. What impressed us was that they had open Bible study, during which everyone had their Bible opened and were going through a chosen text verse by verse. This was a group that desired to stay on course with God because they sought to stay close to the road map of His word.

Our argument is that when one is a Bible student in his home, he seeks to use paper and ink, not exclusively electronics. People are moving away from personal Bible study with personal Bibles. And there is a vast difference between Bible reading and Bible study. If one does not know the difference, then herein is the problem. We have moved from a generation where every attendee at a Bible class was a Bible scholar with a marked personal Bible, being directed by a teacher who was also a Bible scholar. Now the classroom is filled with Bible readers who have not opened (sorry, "turned on") their Bibles for a week. We are in the slow process of turning from a respect for the Bible. If you do not believe this, then when was the last time that you memorized a Bible verse?

In a Christendom wherein people are only "cellphone students" of the Bible, we have found it incredibly hard to encourage people to print and distribute Bibles for the world. The First World has long forgotten that it is the business of the church to get the word of God spread throughout the world, and thus, it is one of the prime objectives of the church to print "the Book" wherein is the message of the gospel. It is ironic that those who once built their heritage on the basis of Bible authority in all matters of faith now feel little compulsion to print the Bible for others to build their faith.

We have gone further away from our Bible heritage than we think. Military general Robert E. Lee of nineteenth century American history once said of one of the spiritual fathers of early America,

> If I were asked to select a representative of the human race to the inhabitants of other spheres in our universe, of all men I have known, I would select Alexander Campbell, then I know they would have a high impression of what our humanity is like.

In fact, a former nineteenth century president of the

United States once said of Campbell, "He was the ablest and most original and powerful expounder of the Scripture I have ever known."

Campbell was from Ireland, and later immigrated to America. The son of Thomas Campbell, Alexander became a model religious leader because of his devotion to the word of God. His spiritual lineage was from the Seceder Presbyterians who required that each family have daily Bible classes in their homes. The children were required to memorize passages of Scripture everyday that were to be quoted in the nightly family Bible class. All the memorized scriptures during the week were to be repeated on Sunday. In Campbell's spiritual legacy, he once wrote in gratitude for his father and mother,

> To my mother, as well as my father, I am indebted for having memorized in early life almost all the writings of King Solomon, his Proverbs, his Ecclesiastes, and many psalms of his father David.

The religious heritage of America was built on people as this. It seems almost strange for us today to believe that our forefathers had this great respect for the word of God, when we ourselves are so far away from the Bible being the central focus of our lives. If Hosea were here today, would he pronounce over our generation God's judgement of 4:6, *"**Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children**."*

The problem, or danger, with spiritual apostasy is that one never realizes where he is if he has forsaken "the book" of the One to whom he has supposedly given allegiance. Apostasy is rarely recognized by apostates. In fact, it can never be recognized if there is no reverence for the word of God. After one forgets "the book," then the spiritual fervor of the individual must substitute other "spiritual placebos" in order to maintain some sort of religiosity. Ask any idolater and he will explain this. He will explain that when carvings of gods that we have created after our own imagination replace cravings for "the book" of the One who created all things, then we have satisfied ourselves and become content in our religion. Add a paid clergy to this religion and we are doomed to no return, for the clergy seeks to guarantee the existence of the constituency for the sake of a salary. See if you can see this in the following words of "the book"?

> *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* (2 Tm 4:3,4).

Apostasy from the word of God will go to the extreme of what one young man called us up on the telephone and asked concerning some of our writings. He asked, "What is apostasy?" If one does not realize what it is, then he does not know that he is there. We live in an age wherein there is more discussion going around about the latest "share" on Facebook, than the spiritual fruit that one has gained from hours of Bible study. If some people would spend as much time in their Bibles as in their Facebook, we would experience a worldwide spiritual revival.

Chapter 3

BIBLE OBSESSION VERSUS ITCHING EARS

We need only one exhortation from Jesus to be obsessively focused on study of His word. This exhortation came immediately before His departure from this world, and in prophecy of the consummation of national Israel. Jesus warned His disciples, *"**Take heed that no one deceives you**"* (Mt 24:4). The reason for this warning is obvious. *"For there will arise false christs and false prophets. And they will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, **even the elect**"* (Mt 24:24). The "elect" is all of us. We are Bible students because we do not want to be *"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).

A. Prevalent deception:

We live in a world where *"Satan masquerades himself as a messenger of light"* (2 Co 11:14). This statement of Paul is as true today as it was when he first wrote it to all the disciples in Achaia. There are all sorts of self-entitled religionists who are going forth with little or no knowledge of the word of God. And because of their charismatic personalities and gift of smooth and fair speech, they are able to speak perverse *"things to*

draw away the disciples after themselves" (At 20:30). This is the present world of Christendom. In Ghana there is the pastor who sells his wizardry. In Haiti there are "Christian" witches who practice sorcery. There are "money-for-miracles" masqueraders going about seeking profit for preaching. They are no different than Demetrius, the silversmith, who, with those in the same business, made their money by making idols to Artemis (At 19:24). But when the truth of God's word was preached in Ephesus, the religious stock market crashed. So Demetrius called those of his idol-making trade together and complained, *"Sirs, you know that by this craft* [of making idols] *we have our wealth"* (At 19:25). The "money-for-miracles" preachers would say the same if the Holy Spirit were here today to pronounce the same over the miracle masqueraders of today. Nothing has changed as the ignorant and innocent desperately seek some hope in their world of despair.

But we would be Bible students in order to identify those who preach truth and those who are pompous religionists as Simon the sorcerer. He was one who *"practiced magic and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great"* (At 8:9). Such is the great temptation of so many who would stand before the people and proclaim to be somewhat. And when such men present themselves as kings dressed in pastoral robes, the people *"from the least to the greatest"* give heed to such presumptuous masqueraders, claiming, *"This man is the great power of God"* (At 8:9,10).

Nothing has changed since Philip walked into Samaria and Paul stepped into Ephesus. Because the people are ignorant of the word of God, there is no lack for fertile soil for false teaching and marvelous signs and wonders to be believed as supernatural works of God. So we continually remind ourselves of the precious words of Jesus, *"**Take heed that no one deceives you**"* (Mt 24:4). There is absolutely only one guarantee that one not be deceived. It is his knowledge of and obedience to the word of God.

B. Made for deception:

The inherent curse of a free-moral individual is the freedom to choose all sorts of nonsense. God knew that for His justice to stand without accusation in the condemnation of the wicked, He had to give man the freedom to make decisions. In this way, every person who will stand condemned in judgment can blame only himself, for he alone made a choice to rebel against God. God gives the law, but men can make a free-moral decision to ignore His law, or simply be ignorant thereof. Because God knew that it was not within man to make his own laws for correct moral living, He not only gave man law, but He also gave man the opportunity to rebel.

We rebel by creating a god in our minds who will condone our rebellion. We create a god for whom we can make laws, which laws justify our moral degradation. God knew this would happen. And because He knew that this was within the nature of a free-moral being, He placed signposts of warning throughout His word that those who love Him should be reminded that they must not follow after that which they can create in rebellion against Him. He was serious with Israel. He warned,

> *If there is found among you ... anyone who does wickedness ... and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them ... then you will bring forth to your gates that man or that woman who has committed that wicked thing, even that man or that woman, and you will stone them with stones until they die* (Dt 17:2-5).

God ruled that *"there will not be found among you anyone who ... uses divination or an observer of times or an enchanter or a witch, or one who casts a spell or a medium or a spiritist or one who consults the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord"* (Dt 18:10-12). How is it that we can read these strikingly clear warnings, and at the same time, allow ourselves to believe in such imaginations as Christians? Is it because we have so little knowledge of the word of God that we cannot determine what is truth and what is a lie? And because we have been so cleverly deceived, we must judge ourselves to be 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.* ***And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables*** (2 Tm 4:3,4).

When one hears of a supposed resurrection of one from the dead, and believes it, then he has itching ears. When one hears rumors of demons, and believes it, then he has itching ears. When one hears of those to whom he can possibly go for miracles, and believes it by making the trip, he has itching ears.

Why cannot we simply obey what God commanded Israel: *"Do not turn to mediums or spiritualists.* ***Do not seek them out to be defiled by them"*** (Lv 19:31). If one would be so inclined to follow after those things about which he knows nothing, or has those itching ears to be convinced to believe in that which is not real, then he should read again Leviticus 20:6:

> *And the soul who turns to mediums and to spiritists, or plays the harlot after them,* ***I will even set My face against that soul and will cut him off from among his people*** (See Lv 20:27).

We would assume that if one seeks to be a Christian in belief and behavior, he will make every effort not to be led astray by the supposed prophets who masquerade to be pastors for God. At least God asked that if one would claim to be one of His children, then certainly that person should not be seeking those who would lead them astray from the word of God. Isaiah wrote,

> *And when they will say to you, "Consult those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,"* ***should not a people consult their God****? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?* (Is 8:19).

And we would ask, Should not a Christian consult the word of God and not those who would lead them astray after the desires of their itching ears? **We know we are in difficult times when people follow their itching ears rather than seek out the word of God and read**.

So why are we so obsessed with the Bible? The answer is obvious. It is our only hope of finding our way through the quagmire of religious confusion that is so prevalent in our world today. If we are not so obsessed, then certainly we have become fertile soil for those who masquerade themselves as messengers of light. We have set ourselves up to be deceived. We must keep in mind that itching ears are always looking for something outside the word of God. In fact, "itching ear" people are never satisfied with the Bible alone as a foundation for their faith.

Chapter 4

SEEKING TO BE "BIBLICAL"

Have you ever heard the statement, "We must be biblical"? Or maybe you have stated, "That is not biblical." These are common statements that are made in reference to our efforts to be obedient, or lack of obedience, to the word of God. But these statements can often reveal a great misunderstanding, if not, inconsistency on the part of the one who makes them. For instance, we seek to establish the authority of God in our lives by doing what we believe God requires of us. But in our zeal, we often misunderstand the authority of God in our lives by developing our own conclusions to what is "biblical." By stating that we are "biblical" in doing what we believe God requires of us to do in obedience to His word, we are often revealing inconsistencies on our part in our judgment of others who also claim that they are "biblical."

In being "biblical" it is assumed that we are "doing Bible things in Bible ways." But in the realm of our obedience to the word of God, doing Bible things in Bible ways sometimes leads us into being somewhat inconsistent, if not ignorant of the freedom by which God expects us to have in reference to our obedience to the principles of His will. A legalist may try to convince himself that he is being "biblical" by attaching a supposed prooftext to everything he does. But the reality of his response to the word of God reveals something very different. What does he do religiously when he has no prooftext? His legalistic approach to obedience leads him into all sorts of contradictions, if not hypocritical behavior in reference to his claim to be "biblical." For example, one might claim to be "biblical" in reference to using a songbook to carry out the mandate to sing and make melody in one's heart (Ep 5:19). The singing from the songbook is "biblical," but the use of the songbook is nowhere found in the Bible, and thus, there is no prooftext. We are doing something "biblical" by using something that is "unbiblical."

Another example may help. Suppose we seek to build for ourselves a building in which to assemble. The assembly of the saints is certainly "biblical," for we read about such in the Bible (Hb 10:24,25). But the building of a facility for assembly is nowhere found in the Bible, and thus, the building of such an edifice would be "unbiblical" according to legal thinking. There would be no Bible verse to build a church building to carry out the mandate to assemble. And so for the legalist who needs his prooftexts in order to be "biblical," he is stuck with a theological inconsistency, if not hypocrisy, if he accuses others for not being "biblical" in the absence of prooftexts.

So do Christians have the freedom to use "unbiblical" songbooks to sing and "unbiblical" facilities for assembly? Certainly. Doing such is in the realm of freedom, regardless of the lack of "prooftexts" for doing such. Christians have the freedom to do that which is "biblical" in principle by using "unbiblical" things or

means in order to carry out the "biblical" principles. Simply because either songbooks or church buildings are not mentioned in the Bible does not make them "unbiblical." Since there is silence in the Scriptures concerning both, then we correctly conclude that Christians can work in the area of freedom to use both, and yet be in obedience to the word and will of God. Silence of the Scriptures on many things allows freedom, not condemnation.

We would suggest, therefore, that one be very careful about condemning something with which he may not agree on the basis of it being "unbiblical." If one does, he will find himself playing the part of a hypocrite. Upon close examination, he will be found to be doing several religious things in his own life for which he has no "biblical" authority. In his "unbiblical" behavior he will be found to be a judge and lawgiver of those he believes are doing "unbiblical" things or methods according to what he judges to be "biblical." However, he himself would be judged "unbiblical" by his own standards by which he judges others. And because he makes arbitrary judgments, he will be the one who causes division over differences that he has made matters of faith. Simply because someone does something religiously that is not found in the Bible does not mean that he is "unbiblical."

Simply because someone does something traditionally, does not mean he is "unbiblical" if he has no prooftext for his traditional way of doing something religiously. We can count numerous things we do traiditionally for which we have no prooftext. Are we "unbiblical" to do things traditionally for which we do not have a Bible verse? Certainly not! As long as we do not bind as law that which we do traditionally, then we can carry on with our traditions, for we are all humanly traditional in almost everything we do.

Chapter 5

IN SEARCH OF AUTHORITY

When we speak of Bible authority in matters of faith, we must be careful. If we are not, we will be binding laws—our laws—where God has not made any law. If we are honest, we will wake up one day and see our own inconsistencies, and then discover that we have been behaving hypocritically. At the same time, however, if we do not use the Bible as our sole authority in matters of faith, then we manifest our disrespect for the word of God, if not our rejection of its teaching, which thing the religious leaders of Jesus' day did. He said to them, *"All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition"* (Mk 7:9). Therefore, though there are many areas of freedom in which we have the right to determine how we can carry out the mandates of God, our source for obedience in matters of faith must always be the word of God.

Everyone has a reason for their religious beliefs and behavior. We believe and do according to that for which we have authority. We seek authority from God for our beliefs and behavior simply because we want to do what we feel God wants us to believe and behave. There are several sources of authority that religious people use as the foundation upon which they establish their beliefs and behavior. All of the following sources of authority **are not rooted in the word of God, and thus, they are sources of authority that lead one away from God**. They do so because they are authorities that seek to have priority over anything that is revealed in the word of God. One may have the Bible in his religiosity, but if the Bible is not consulted as a reference for determining final authority, then one is led away from God by that which he considers to have priority in his life.

A. Subjective authority:

Subjectivism in the realm of religion is when one considers his emotions or feelings as validation for his religious beliefs. In other words, "if it feels right, then it must be right." One may firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is directing his feelings, and thus, he assumes that the Spirit is validating his religiosity by a direct manipulation of his emotions. Take the Holy Spirit out of the religious experience, or one's claim to believe in Jesus, and thus in the "non-Christian" world, subjectivism would be the authority for witches and sorcerers. Through emotional incantations, such people have subdued themselves and others to what can be conjured up in the mind. And by doing such, they have sought to impose their beliefs and behavior upon their followers. When Paul and Barnabas passed through the island of Cyprus, they encountered such a person. *"They found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus"* (At 13:6). Philip also encountered a subjec-

tivist in the city of Samaria by the name of Simon. Simon *"practiced magic and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great"* (At 8:9). As a result, Simon became the authority of their religiosity. *"They all, from the least to the greatest,* ***gave heed to him****, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'"* (At 8:10).

Religious authority that is based on the subjective feelings and emotions of man is one of the most difficult systems of authority to change in reference to our subjection to the mandates of the word of God. Subjectivism is narcissistic in that man is the center of reference for one's religious faith as opposed to the influence of God through His word.

Inevitably, subjectivism leads to religious anarchy and division among fellow subjectivists. It produces religious chaos in that everyone seeks to do that which is right in his own eyes. It is the same religious chaos that is pictured in Judges 17:6: *"In those days there was no king in Israel,* ***but every man did what was right in his own eyes****."* When Israel initially went into the land of promise, God warned them concerning this religious behavior. *"You will not do after all the things that we do here this day,* ***every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes****"* (Dt 12:8). In order to guard them against moving into subjective religiosity, God condemned the practices of divination, spiritism, witches and similar practices among the Israelites (See Ex 20:4,5; Lv 19:26,31; Dt 4:15-19; 18:9-14).

The reason subjectivism is not a valid authority in matters of faith is that it is simply *"not in man who walks to direct his steps"* (Jr 10:23). Those who would subject themselves to their own emotions in reference to religious authority, will certainly lead themselves astray from God (See 2 Tm 4:3). If one would serve God, then he must seek that which is from God. For this reason, the will of God was written in order that we have a validation for our faith that is above and beyond our own selves.

B. Autistic authority:

The dictionary defines "autistic" as "a state of mind characterized by daydreaming, hallucinations, **and disregard of external reality**." In reference to the reality of what the Bible says, the autistic individual continues to believe exactly what he wants to believe, regardless of what the Bible says. This tendency to see, hear and believe what we want is to some degree characteristic with everyone. If one has little regard for the Bible, then the autistic thinking of the individual is out of control in reference to any authority that comes from God through His word. Autistic authority places man at the center of his source of authority.

What people perceive to be reality, or that which they accept as the authority for their faith, depends a great deal on their spiritual and emotional needs. It is for this reason that reality is often masked by what one wants to see and hear. This is a particular problem in reference to the preceding point concerning emotional subjectivism. If one concludes that his emotional experiences are directly caused by the Holy Spirit, then it is almost impossible for that person to have an objective understanding of any statements of Scripture that might contradict either his beliefs or behavior. The subjectivist is often autistic in that he rejects scriptural reality for the sake of emotion, or allows emotion to override reality.

What usually occurs is that the autistic interpreter submits his understanding of Scripture to that which he seeks in order to fulfill personal needs. If the Scriptures state something that is contrary to his desires at the time, then he concludes that he is not properly understanding a particular passage. Since the authority of his faith is based on what he personally desires, then he sees only that which conforms to his desires. He will often randomly open the Bible at any location, and from reading a random passage, conclude that the Scriptures were speaking directly to him concerning his need at the time. What often happens in this case, is that he will twist the passage to conform to his desires or needs at the time of reading.

The autistic interpreter inherently twists the Scriptures. This would be the interpreter about whom Peter wrote concerning things that Paul wrote *"in his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand,* ***which those who are untaught and unstable distort to their own destruction****, as they do also the other Scriptures"* (2 Pt 3:16). **Autistic interpreters always find the Bible hard to understand, and thus, they continually twist the Scriptures**. The Bible is difficult for them to understand simply because that which they desire is often not plainly taught in the Scriptures. When one approaches the word of God with the desire to find a solution for his own problems, then certainly he will often read into a passage that which a particular passage may never have stated. The autistic interpreter simply reads into the Bible what he wants to know. He is not objectively reading the Bible in order to discover solutions for his situation. He comes to the Bible with preconceived conclusions without allowing the Bible to reveal God's conclusions. He speaks for the Bible instead of allowing the Bible to speak for itself.

When a particular statement of Scripture is pointed out that contradicts the beliefs of the autistic interpreter, he will often respond to the one who points out the correct understanding, by saying, "**Are you saying** ...." The autistic interpreter seeks to dodge what he wants a scripture to state by assuming that the correct teaching of the scripture has originated from the one who pointed out the inconsistent interpretation. It is very difficult for the autistic interpreter to allow the Bible to mean what it says and say what it means. His first source of authority for what the Bible says is his own self-seeking beliefs and desires.

C. Traditional authority:

We seek to show our respect for our fathers by keeping the traditions of their faith. This is only natural. In fact, the authority of the traditions of our fathers is almost always stronger in our faith than any mandates of the word of God. This is certainly true when those of any religious persuasion stop studying their Bibles. Or, it is true when the adherents of a particular religion turn their knowledge of the Bible over to the clergy of the group whom they have programmed through seminary training to maintain the traditions of the fathers.

This was the problem that the disciples of Jesus encountered with the religious leaders of the Jews. On one occasion, the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus, complaining, *"Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ..."* (Mk 7:5). What the disciples had failed to do was wash their hands before they ate. Jesus used the occasion to judge the authority of the religious leaders' beliefs and behavior. He first identified the authority of their religion by saying, *"In vain they worship Me,* ***teaching as doctrines the commandments of men****"* (Mk 7:7). The problem with teaching "as doctrines the commandments of men" is that the doctrines of men almost always override the doctrines of God. Listen to what Jesus said: *"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ..."* (Mk 7:8). This system of religious authority does not stop with the binding of the authority of the fathers. Jesus continued, *"All too well* ***you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition****"* (Mk 7:9).

The Jewish religious leaders manifested their disrespect for the word of God by elevating the religious traditions of their fathers over the word of God. The traditions became doctrine, and then the doctrine of men led them to reject the commandment of God. At this time in their digression from the authority of the word of God that Paul referred to their faith as the "Jew's religion," (Judaism) a religion in which he excelled before he came to Jesus (See Gl 1:13,14). When men allow the traditions of the fathers to become the doctrines of men, then they can no longer claim that they are of Christianity, for the validation of their faith is not the word of Christ, but the word of the fathers.

D. Apostolic succession authority:

This source of authority supposes that Jesus gave personal authority to the apostles, particularly Peter. This personal authority was then passed on from the apostles to those the apostles personally chose. These chosen men personally passed on the authority from generation to generation through the ordained officials of the church. The church, and the officials thereof, became the authority for belief and behavior of the members.

The supposed authority that was given to the apostles by Jesus was passed on to their successors, and eventually, it has arrived in our day as the authority of the church. This is a similar principle of religious authority as the preceding point, wherein the religious leaders of the Jews established authority according to the traditions of the fathers. But the added emphasis of apostolic succession authority is that the living officials of the church have the right to establish mandates for the church today. What the officials of the church teach according to their majority vote, therefore, becomes the official mandate for obedience by the church. This means that the teachings of the church can change throughout history as circumstances and culture change.

The fallacy of the teaching that authority is established by the church lies in the fact that the Bible can never be a final authority. The faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints must change (See Jd 3). Those who promote this teaching suppose that church officials today have a right to change the word of God. In fact, this system of religious authority places the Bible in a time warp wherein its principles are not applicable outside their relevance in the first century. A good example of this is revealed in the change from immersion to sprinkling in reference to the mode of baptism. Cardinal Gibbons, in his book, *Faith of Our Fathers*, wrote,

> 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.

What happened was that the Catholic Church assumed

the authority to change the mode of baptism to sprinkling. And since the officials of the church are supposedly functioning from "authority by succession" from the apostles, then they have the right to change the mandates of the Bible.

Before anyone becomes somewhat irritated with this system of establishing authority, he should look around and make a note of all the traditional practices and particular names of various churches that are commonly accepted among the networks of churches that adhere to common doctrines and names of men. If one sought to change something that is commonly practiced among a particular denomination, the statement could be made, "That is just not the way it has been done." This too, is a system of allowing the majority of "the church" to have the right to establish authority in matters of belief and behavior.

E. Autocratic authority:

This system of establishing authority is centered around either an individual or group of individuals. It is usually oriented around one specific group. Peter explained in 1 Peter 5 the origin of this system of authority that would arise among the people of God. He exhorted the shepherds not to be *"lords over those entrusted to you ..."* (1 Pt 5:3). This is a system of authority of which Paul spoke to the shepherds of Ephesus during his final visit with them. *"Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (At 20:30).

Individuals who assume authority over a particular group of disciples are behaving autocratically. Such was the autocratic behavior of Diotrephes who loved to be first among the disciples (3 Jn 9). In order to maintain his position of authority, he slandered those whom he thought would be in competition with him (3 Jn 10). In fact, he threatened to excommunicate from the fellowship of the disciples those who would not submit to his authority. Those over whom he had assumed authority, therefore, submitted to his authority in fear of being disfellowshipped from the body. When one rules with autocratic authority, he steals away from the people their total submission to God.

When any system of authority is brought into the church from the world, and bound on the disciples, then the disciples are headed into apostasy, if not already there. Since religious authority that originates from man is determined by man, then those who submit to such authority are headed in the direction to which the group of men are going, or in the case of a single person, the people are moving in the direction of that one person. Notice that this was behind the words of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he was speaking to a group of disciples who had allowed themselves to be brought under the influence of some arrogant leaders: *"Be imitators of me* ***even as I also am of Christ****."*

The fact that we do not call ourselves Paulites today proves that Paul was successful in directing the minds of the disciples in the direction of Jesus Christ. We know numerous churches today who are called after the man who originated the group. Some even identify a particular group to be, for example, "Pastor John's church." But when preachers allow others to call themselves after them, then they have failed to be leaders for Jesus.

We must keep in mind that when men start following the authority of men, then the followers are on their way away from God. It was for this reason that Jesus mandated one very important principle when it came to establishing the leadership of His disciples. We respect the word of Jesus because we do not overlook this point.

> *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).

Chapter 6

FINDING GOD'S AUTHORITY

If one would seek to be a disciple of Jesus, then he must be willing to submit to the authority of Jesus. Jesus said, *"**If you continue in My word**, then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). In order to know that one is submitting to the authority of Jesus, then he must know that to which he is submitting. He must know the word (commandments) of Jesus. It is imperative, therefore, that any true disciple of Jesus will know the will of his Teacher if he claims to be a disciple of Jesus.

A. Discipleship means relinquishing oneself totally to Jesus' authority.

The application of this point was illustrated by Jesus

on one occasion during His ministry. There were great multitudes following Him because He fed them with fish and bread, and healed their sick. So at the time this event happened, Jesus wanted to separate the true followers from the takers. Notice carefully what happened. *"Now great multitudes went with Him.* ***And He turned and said to them*** *..."* (Lk 14:25). It was was at this point in His ministry that He called on the great multitudes who would follow Him to reveal their commitment to being His disciples. In order to do this, He turned around and said to the great multitude, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother ... does not bear his own cross ... does not forsake all that he has,* ***cannot be My disciple****"* (Lk 14:26-33).

Jesus' condition for discipleship was extreme commitment to Him. If one could not put Jesus before family relationships, survive under the persecution of the world, and be willing, if necessary, to relinquish the material possessions of this world, **then he simply could not be a disciple**. All these things would distract the individual from allowing Jesus to have authority over the totality of his life. Jesus could not be the head of anyone who was not willing to allow Him to control their destiny.

Upon His departure from this world, Jesus wanted to make it clear that He had to be the final authority in the lives of all those who would seek to be His disciples. So He gave to His immediate disciples a message that was communicated to us through them, *"**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth**"* (Mt 28:18). If Jesus now has all authority, and He does, then He must have all authority in the lives of those who would be His disciples. When we submit to His word, therefore, we reaffirm the fact that He has authority over all things.

B. Discipleship means submitting to the authority of the truth.

If one would be committed to Jesus, **then he must be committed to the truth that comes forth from Jesus**. Jesus promised the apostles that *"when He, the Spirit of truth, has come,* ***He will guide you into all the truth****"* (Jn 16:13; see 14:26). The truth first came orally to man through the inspirational guidance of the apostles of Jesus. One's response or reaction to this truth would determine his discipleship to Jesus. So Paul wrote, *"The presence of the lawless one is according to ... 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 2:9,10). If one does not love the truth, then it is conclusive that he is not a disciple of Jesus, for Jesus is the origin of the truth.

If a person does not love the truth of God that came through the apostles, then he is simply a religionist who will be judged by the works of his own religiosity. Such a person would not be a "Christ**ian**", a follower of Christ. He is not a Christian because he is not following the truth that the Holy Spirit revealed through the apostles. It is imperative, therefore, that one study the truth in order to determine if he is a disciple of Jesus by submission to it. Those who do not love and know their Bibles can never determine if they are true disciples of Jesus. They cannot because they can never be sure that what they believe or do is according to the truth of God. If one is simply walking in what he believes to be truth, then he is a religionist who may have blended his desires with some truth from the word of God and error that he does not recognize as error. It is for this reason that true discipleship is validated only by the word of God.

C. Discipleship means doing the commandments of Jesus.

Jesus reminded those who would be His disciples, *"You are My friends,* ***if you do whatever I command you****"* (Jn 15:14). He said to His immediate disciples, *"If you love Me* ***you will keep My commandments****"* (Jn 14:15). Discipleship means loving the commandments of Jesus and doing them. Commitment to Jesus, means commitment to what He says. Being a disciple of Jesus means learning His commandments in order that we not be deceived, and thus tossed to and fro with every wind of teaching (Ep 4:14). **When people say that they love Jesus, then it is assumed that they are diligent students of His commandments. Those who say they love Jesus, but do not seek the authority of His word in their lives, have deceived themselves into thinking that they are "Christian."** They are actually disciples of their own religion that they have invented after their own desires. We must never forget that if we claim to be a Christian, but refuse to study and know the commandments of Jesus, then we reveal our unwillingness to be Jesus' disciple. Discipleship is determined by one's love of the word of Jesus.

D. Discipleship infers Bible study.

Christendom is cluttered with the calamity of misinterpretations of the word of God. Religionists often stumble over their ignorance of the Bible in order to maintain a following. We would conclude that the most severe onslaught against the word of God in these days is an ignorance that is based on the twisted theologies of

those who know little or nothing about the Bible. It is not that the Bible is difficult to understand. This is far from the problem. The problem is that few people in these times have any love for the truth of the Bible. In a narcissistic world wherein most people want to do that which is pleasing in their own minds, there is little desire to *"seek out the scroll of the Lord and read"* (Is 34:16). The little love for the truth that many have is revealed by a world population that has little desire to study the Bible. We know this simply because of what the Holy Spirit recorded of those who were true Bible students.

> ***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).

This is the Holy Spirit speaking about good Bible students. These Bereans loved the truth, and thus, they searched their Bibles in order to make sure that what Paul and Silas preached was true. We do not love the Bible as the Muslims reverence the Qu'ran as an icon. Christians love their Bibles because of the truth of God therein revealed, and the message of the gospel. Give a telescope to a monkey and he beats it around as a toy. Give it to a man, and he sees the wonders of the universe beyond the telescope. Give a Bible to an intellectual who does not consider it to be the word of God, and he reads it as simply a good piece of literature. Give it to one who seeks to bring his life under the authority of God, and he searches for the message of the God that is beyond the book. And it is herein that one establishes the word of God as the authority of all matters of faith in his life.

E. Discipleship means active love in obedience to the word of God.

Using the Bible as the authority of our faith does not mean using it as a catechism to establish legal laws. Paul helps us understand this in 1 Timothy 1:5,6.

> ***Now the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart****, and a good conscience and a sincere faith, which some, having swerved, have turned aside to meaningless discussion ...."*

The "commandment is love." But what is the commandment to those who are identified by their love of one another (See Jn 13:34,35)? Keep reading 1 Timothy 1:

> *Knowing this, that* ***the law is not made for a righteous man****, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murders of mothers, for murderers ..."* (See 1 Tm 1:9,10).

The person who sees his brother in need, needs no law to tell him to help his brother. Love is the "law." Love as law needs no subpoints as to how it goes into action. When one loves his brother, all that is necessary to fulfill a brother's need goes into action. Love is the action that brings the behavior of Jesus into the lives of those who seek to serve one another. John explained this clearly in 1 John 3:10. *"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God,* ***nor the one who does not love his brother****."* So John questioned, *"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). Therefore, *"let us not love in word or in tongue,* ***but in deed and in truth****"* (1 Jn 3:18). Love in action is bringing the authority of the word of God into one's life. Our love in action is evidence that we are the disciples of Jesus.

Among loving disciples there need be no commandment to care for one another. It is simply the nature of true disciples to make sure that needs are fulfilled when a fellow disciple is in need. The legalist can sleep well at night because he has concluded that he has fulfilled all his self-imposed laws. The loving disciple sleeps well at night because he trusts in the grace of God to cover his lack of ability to love people more.

Chapter 7

LEGALLY LED ASTRAY

Those who approach the Bible as a legal code of laws to be followed as precept upon precept cannot understand the authority of the word of God that is brought into one's life through love. They simply cannot understand why the law was not made for the righteous, but for the ungodly. The righteous need no law to take ac-

tion if their brother is in need. Love is their action. But the legal oriented religionist needs a law before he acts. He prides himself in the fact that he has kept all the law. He has done his duty. But he has forgotten what Jesus said to those who would act upon the basis of legal obedience to law, *"So likewise you, when you have done all those things that are commanded you, say, '**We are unprofitable bondservants**. We have done that which is our duty to do'"* (Lk 17:10). This statement is explained by Jesus' response to the rich young ruler who had legally acted according to law by keeping all the commandments (See Lk 18:18-21). He had done all things that he was commanded to do. But Jesus responded to his supposed legal perfection, *"**You still lack one thing**. Sell all that you possess ..."* (Lk 18:22).

When a legalist realizes that he still lacks something after doing all the commandments, he will do as the rich young ruler whom Jesus said still lacked. *"Then when he heard this, **he was very sorrowful** ..."* (Lk 18:23). The young man was sorrowful because his performance of law did not qualify him to be a disciple of Jesus. The legalist deceives himself into thinking that he has submitted to the authority of God by submitting to a code of laws. But the problem with this theology is that in some point of obedience we will always lack. There is some commandment we may not have obeyed. Keep in mind that the rich young ruler was not sorrowful when he initially came to Jesus. He was sorrowful only after he heard the pronouncement that he was not perfect in all his legal obedience.

The first and great commandment is still to *"love the Lord your God will all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"* (Mt 22:37). When one loves God in obedience to this commitment, then all the commandments of behavior are covered. Our love of God brings the authority of God's instructions into our lives for we seek to do His will. *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19). The authority of God's word in our lives, therefore, is not based upon defining laws by which we can determine if we are legally performing perfectly according to His will. The Christian is not as the rich young ruler. Because the Christian loves his Lord above all, it is inherent in his love that he keeps the commandments of God.

Remember what John said? *"**For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments**"* (1 Jn 5:3). John added something that no legalist will ever understand. *"And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 Jn 5:3). For those who are moved by their love of the authority of God's word in their lives, obedience is a pleasure, not a burden. And when the loving obedient lack perfect obedience, they do not question their own salvation because they failed to keep all the commandments perfectly. They are driven to the grace of their Father in thanksgiving for His forgiveness.

It is imperative to understand this paradigm of the authority of God in our lives. When most theologians speak of the authority of the word of God, they are speaking of a legal catechism by which the religiosity of man is judged. This catechism is often written and published, and thus, it becomes the catechism by which churches and individuals are determined to be "of the truth." If some individual or group does not perform exactly according to the catechism of prooftexts, then often the judge becomes almost unloving in his relationship with anyone who would fail to be obedient to every point of the catechism. The problem with this system of religiosity is that the disciples of Jesus are not being identified by their love. They are being identified by legal points that they have drawn up as an outline by which to judge others either faithful or unfaithful to God.

If we move ourselves into the preceding system of religious authority, then we will have to determine who has the authority to produce the correct outline by which everyone is to be judged. And now we have moved ourselves into a most contradictory and condemning predicament. If we must have authorities on earth to produce the correct catechism by which we would judge others legally correct, then we have moved from the authority of God to the authority of some man or group of men. In all this wrangle of theology we have moved from a foundational principle of being identified by love to being identified as those who are exclusively adherent to their self-imposed outline of laws. We have forgotten that the love by which we are to be identified is not presenting our self-imposed legal code of laws to others. It is our love that should draw others to us (See Jn 13:34,35). It is our love that encourages others to ask why we are what we are. Is this not what Peter meant in the following words?

> *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).

There must be something in the life of the true disciple of Jesus that draws others to ask concerning his hope. It is love that draws others to ask. Peter would conclude, *"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion one for another. Love as brethren, be kindhearted, humble"* (1 Pt 3:8). When people see Jesus' disciples behaving according to the principle of love, not law, then they are drawn to ask concerning their hope. They are

drawn to ask because they seek freedom from the bondage of law that they have often imposed on themselves.

We would advise the noble-minded Bible student to be as the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily (At 17:11). Keep in mind the one who was bringing them the teaching that sparked their study. **It was the apostle Paul** (At 17:10). The Scriptures that they searched was the Old Testament. Paul had sparked their thinking concerning Jesus being the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah (See Lk 24:44). When Paul pointed out the prophecies, they searched the prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament. They sought the authority of the Old Testament in order to come to the conclusion that what Paul was saying was true. Paul was not their authority. The Scriptures were.

We live in a world today that is flooded with theologians who would come our way to proclaim what they believe to be the truth of God. Too many people have accepted as truth from God those who do not preach the word of God. They have consequently submitted to the authority of the speaker and not the word of God. **But we must remember that all great minds are subject to some error somewhere, though not all minds are subject to the same error**. When truth is sifted through the minds of men, it sometimes picks up some baggage of past theologies, or is often reflected to us through the theological prejudices of the presenter. The nobility of the Bereans was in the fact that they did not accept what Paul said because Paul said it. Their authority was in the written word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures. What Paul said, therefore, was sifted through the written word of God, not through the next tele-evangelist who might come through town.

Silas was also with Paul, speaking the same thing as Paul. But the Bereans would neither accept a company of preachers as authority, as they would not accept a powerful preacher. They still went to their Bibles. Simply because a company of authorities might be spouting the same thing does not determine that what is said is true, and thus to be accepted as authoritative. **God gave no council of men on earth the authority to be authorities on behalf of Him**.

The serious Bible student will make use of all the pronouncements of a host of preachers, or commentaries, or books, but he will never give his brain over to "what the pastor says." Those who have determined what they believe to be truth because of the proclamation of some religious authority, or some quote from a respected book, have placed themselves on a road to apostasy from the word of God. Those who believe something on the foundation of an accepted authority on earth, or group of supposed authorities, have condemned themselves to be tossed to and fro by the passing of one preacher after another. We are now in such a world of theological chaos. Our time is as Paul wrote to Timothy:

> *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* (2 Tm 4:3,4).

Someone once wrote an acrostic on how a good Bible student will search for the authority of God in his life.

S – eriously (At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15)
E – arnestly (Ja 1:8; Ps 119:11)
A – nxiously (Jn 20:31; Ps 119:9)
R – egularly (At 17:11; Ps 1:2)
C – arefully (Lk 24:27; 2 Tm 3:16,17)
H – umbly (Lk 24:45; Js 1:22)

Chapter 8

WE YEARN FOR THE WORD

Have you ever studied through Psalm 19:7-11? If we would use one context of statements in Scripture to describe the awesome nature of the word of God, it would be this context. It seems that David came to climax in these statements concerning his appreciation for the word of God. In these inspired words, he also wanted us to appreciate the impact that God's word should have on the hearts of the faithful. Therefore, we must take this journey through his metaphors as he seeks to reveal his heart of appreciation for all that would come from the mouth of our Creator.

As David progresses through Psalm 19:7-11, he uses several words to refer to the word of God: law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear, judgments. Every word presents a different angle of definition of the word of God and its effect on the beliefs and behavior of

the faithful. Through the use of so many words in reference to the word of God, David seeks to apply the word of God to every conceivable aspect of our lives.

A. Identity of the word of God:

"***The law of the Lord is perfect ...***" (Ps 19:7). When one feels that the word of God was dropped from heaven into his hands, then there is response from the heart of the believing receiver. The response is in the fact that one seeks to mold his beliefs and behavior around to what he reads in the Bible. He is transformed. His life is as that which the Holy Spirit has exhorted, *"And be not conformed to this world,* ***but be transformed by the renewing of your mind****, so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Rm 12:2). God's law is perfect for transforming the character of the obedient. Paul wrote, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ...* ***so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work****"* (2 Tm 3:16,17).

"***The testimony of the Lord is sure ...***" (Ps 19:7). The word of God is steadfast and unchanging. It is such because it originated from One who is of an unchanging nature. God is of the nature and behavior as that which was expressed by the Hebrew writer. *"... 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"* (Hb 6:18). Because God assures us of His promises, our trust in His word is not only wise, but it makes us wise because we so trust in Him. Therefore, we ask wisdom of God. *"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). The most common (simple) person can trust in God's testimony simply because God comes through on His promises.

"*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights,* ***with whom there is no variation nor shadow of turning****"* (Js 1:17). God's word makes common people wiser than the most educated man on earth who has no knowledge of God. This is true because the common believer has invested his soul in the testimonies of God. It is as James wrote,

> *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruit, without partiality and without hypocrisy* (Js 3:17).

"***The statutes of the Lord are right ...***" (Ps 19:8). When in any dilemma to make a decision, one can always have confidence that making a decision based on the directions of God's word is right. When one lives in such a manner after the instructions of God's will, then he can rejoice in the satisfaction that he is being led by His Father. The obedient Christian seeks to bring glory to God by living in harmony with divine instructions. Paul wrote of such in 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).

"***The commandment of the Lord is pure ...***" (Ps 19:8). As opposed to the darkness that comes with a life of sin, the word of God brings pure light. It is the light that shines in the darkness. It is the light in which we walk (1 Jn 1:7). And because we walk in the light of His word, the blood of Jesus keeps us pure of sin. Though some may claim to be enlightened by the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of the world is only darkness if not possessed by one who has allowed the light of the word of God to brighten his way. Psalm 119:105 is still true. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

"***The fear of the Lord is clean ...***" (Ps 19:9). In this context, the word "fear" refers to the word of God. This is an appropriate word since those who believe in God should respond with fear in reference at what He says. Because the "fear" (word of God) comes from God, then it is eternal as God. God's word exists without end. *"The word of the Lord endures forever"* (1 Pt 1:25).

"***The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether***" (Ps 19:9). The word of God is inerrant, and thus, when the Lord speaks, what is said is true and right (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). Our God cannot speak against Himself, neither can He speak that which is false (Ti 1:2). It would be superfluous to say that "God is good for His word." God is God and what He says is always truth. What He promises will always come to pass. He does not act in any way that would bring His being or character into question.

B. Desire for the word of God:

Newborn babes cry for the milk that sustains their lives. It is only natural for them to yearn for nourishment when they are hungry. It is the same with Christians. Peter wrote, *"... as newborn babes,* ***desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation****"* (1 Pt 2:2). Though gold is precious, and can buy many possessions and activities, the word of God gives eternal life. And because it gives life, its taste to the soul of man is sweet.

Obedience to the word of God brings both warning

and reward. Through His word, God is warning of impending destruction that will come upon all those who do not obey the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9). But in being obedient to the instructions of our Father, there is the coming fulfillment of the promise of which Jesus spoke. *"Come, you blessed of My Father,* ***inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world****"* (Mt 25:34).

Anyone who would claim to be a believer in the existence of God must conclude that this God in whom he believes would communicate to His creation. There would be no sense in believing in a god that would not communicate with man. Only false gods are mute. But the true and living God seeks to reveal His presence, not only through that which He created (Rm 1:20), but also through words of instruction. This He did through the prophets of old. *"For the prophecy did not come in the old time by the will of man, but holy men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Pt 1:21).

God revealed His instructions for His creation in order that we not wander aimlessly in a world which we could not understand. Once we conclude that the Creator has communicated, then it should be the yearning of every person to seek out this communication as the newborn babe thirsts for the sustenance of life. It is only natural for all of us to so yearn. Once we set our course to know God, then the Bible becomes our source of life. The true believer cannot help himself but to search the Scriptures daily. As there is no need to exhort an infant to drink the sustenance of milk, there need be no exhortations to the true believer to study his Bible.

There is one statement made in Scripture that separates the one true and living God from all other gods that are created after the imagination of man.

> *"****He who does not love does not know God, for God is love****"* (1 Jn 4:8).

Chapter 9

LET GOD IN

This one statement should make the rebellious person lay down his life in humble reverence for God. It should make the religious terrorist lay down his gun. The suicide bomber will wake up after the blast and discover that his god sent him to the wrong place, and that place was not a land of virgins, but a realm of vengeance by a just God who must work according to the law of an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

The fact that God is love necessitates justice, for there is no love where there is no justice. Love without law is a frivolous mockery of God. Love without law would be creating a god after our own desires to do that which we want without any chastisement. The one true and living God would say to those He loves, *"For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives"* (Hb 12:6).

We desire to be received by a loving God, and thus, we understand that we must be disciplined when we fail to allow His instructions to permeate the entirety of our beliefs and behavior. We do not desire discipline, but we understand that when we are rebellious children it is because of God's love that He disciplines us to keep us close to Him. His discipline is proof of His love for us. It is for this reason that we accept the Bible as the only road map into the presence of our Father. We consider the Bible to be this road map simply because our loving Father would never leave His creation without instructions on how to find and stay close to Him.

A. Direction from God:

We would logically conclude that if God is love, then as our Creator He would certainly reveal instructions as to how we would avoid His discipline. So Paul said, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ...* ***so that the man of God may be complete****, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tm 3:16,17). Essentially, Paul was saying that Scripture must be God's authority in all aspects of our lives because all Scripture came from God.

Jesus referred to Scripture as the word of God (Jn 10:35). Daniel referred to it as the "Scripture of truth" (Dn 10:21). Since the Bible claims to be Scripture from God, truth revealed to man, then it must be concluded that the word of God must have authority in our lives in order that we avoid the discipline of our Creator. Therefore, any word we would have from our Creator must be considered the final authority in all matters of belief and behavior.

B. Understandable direction from God:

One of the most preposterous accusations of those who seek to avoid the authority of the word of God over their lives is that God revealed Scripture (the Bible) in a manner by which it cannot be clearly understood. Some go as far as to say that the Bible cannot be our guide to heaven simply because there are so many different interpretations, some even contradicting one another. They conclude that certainly God would not demand that His word be the final authority for those who seek eternal life, since it is supposedly so difficult to understand.

The problem is not the Bible, but the lack of sincere students. Because there is so little study of the Bible by those who make the preceding statements, we would expect nothing less on the part of those who find the Bible difficult to understand. **It would be correct to state that the less one knows the Bible, the more he will accuse the Bible of being a book that is not possible to understand in a way that will bring unity among believers, and subsequently, be our road map to heaven**. We have found it interesting that men will read the daily newspaper and clearly understand it, but when it comes to the Bible, they accuse it of being difficult to understand. The Bible is always difficult to understand by those who seek to create a religion (their own road map) after their own intellect or emotions. The Bible is always difficult to understand by those who are simply Bible readers, but not Bible students.

So why do so many quote from the same Bible, but come to different conclusions? If two people come to different conclusions of the same passage, then we would first say that someone is not interpreting the Bible correctly. There cannot be two differing correct conclusions from the same passage. Someone, or both parties, has to be wrong. Or one party is right and the other is wrong. Both parties may be wrong, but both parties cannot be right. For example, the Sadducees interpreted Deuteronomy 25:5 to mean that there would be no resurrection (See Mt 22:23-33). The Pharisees believed in the resurrection (See At 23:6-8). In Jesus' personal conversation with the Sadducees on this subject, He said, *"**You are in error, not knowing the Scriptures** nor the power of God"* (Mt 22:29).

It was important to Jesus, therefore, that we interpret the Scriptures properly. But some do not, for Peter said that some twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16). Peter also identified why some err in their twisted interpretations of the Scriptures. They do so because they are ***"untaught and unstable"*** (2 Pt 3:16). Both Jesus and Peter were giving us a word of caution. If we sign off the Bible as impossible to understand, then we have judged ourselves to be "untaught and unstable," and subsequently, in error in reference to our interpretations.

We must keep in mind that our attitude toward the Scriptures is critical. If we have twisted motives in our study of the Bible, we will end up with twisted interpretations. If we are unstable in our moral life, we will end up with twisted interpretations of God's instructions for moral behavior. On the other hand, a desire to search the Scriptures daily from a sincere and obedient heart will lead us into understanding and using the Bible as God meant it to be for His children (See At 17:11).

C. The message of the Bible.

The message of the Bible is Jesus Christ. No matter what translation one may have, this message comes through loud and clear, without any contradictions or misunderstandings. If one cannot understand the message of God's redemption of man through the cross, then certainly he is not a willing believer. Though this gospel message was hidden from man for centuries, it was revealed in the fullness of time, and subsequently recorded for those who did not personally experience the cross and resurrection. The good news was recorded for us through the inspired hands of the New Testament apostles and prophets. It was of this message that Paul wrote,

> *... how that by revelation He made known to me **the mystery**, as I wrote before in few words. Therefore, 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, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets** ...* (Ep 3:3-5).

The Holy Spirit used Paul and the other New Testament prophets to reveal the mystery, which is the message of the good news of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (See 1 Co 15:1-4). This message was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets who wrote of what was to come after them.

> *"Of this salvation the* [Old Testament] *prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow. To them it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you ...* (1 Pt 1:10-12).

Though the message of the gospel was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets, it is not to us who live this side of the revelation of Jesus and the event of His atoning sacrifice. Anyone can pick up a New Testament and understand this message. This was Paul's affirmation of Ephesians 3:3-5. His readers did not have to have a commentary of what he said he clearly revealed through writing. If one wants to understand what was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets, then all that is needed is to pick up a New Testament and clearly read the fundamental facts of the event of the gospel. No commentaries are needed.

Since the gospel has been clearly revealed through the Bible, it is no longer a mystery. It was a mystery to those Old Testament prophets who first wrote of it in prophetic writings. But it has now been revealed to all mankind through the New Testament. It is for this reason that Peter and John could stand up and say to the unbelieving world the following words:

> *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).

The salvation that comes only through Jesus is for all men, and thus if one would be with God for eternity, then this gospel message must have authority in one's life. One must submit in obedience to the gospel. If one does not allow the message of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, to have authority in his life through obedience thereof, then the Holy Spirit's message of his end was clearly revealed through Paul.

> *... and to give you who are afflicted rest with us when 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****. These will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power* (2 Th 1:7-9).

If one would allow the authority of God's salvation (the gospel) to come into his life through obedience thereof, **then we must conclude that obedience to the gospel is absolutely necessary to bring one into the eternal presence of God**. Now one should be asking, How can I obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that took place over two thousand years ago? This was what thousands on the day of Pentecost asked when the message of the gospel was revealed and preached for the first time in human history. In response to Peter's preaching of the good news of Jesus in Acts 2, the people *"were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, '****Men and brethren, what will we do****?'"* (At 2:37). There was only one answer that Peter could give to this repentant response of the people.

> *Then Peter said to them, "****Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins****."* (At 2:38).

And how would they obey the death of Jesus for their sins and His resurrection for their hope? Paul explained:

> *Or do you now know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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****. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection"* (Rm 6:3-6).

And now we know why Jesus said to all humanity in His parting words before He ascended into heaven,

> ***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).

Book 59

Following Jesus Into Glory

It seems like it is easy to be a Christian today. This is true because there are so many religious people who claim to be Christians, but live after their own desires, believe whatever they want to believe, and live in spiritual apathy. It is supposed that anyone can be a Christian and believe anything of this world, or follow any religious charlatan who would claim some miraculous mystery. The religious world is convinced that one can be a Christian by simply calling himself a Christian. It is so easy today to profess that one is a Christian, and then live a lifestyle that is pleasing and in tune with the norms of the society in which one lives. So if one says that he is a Christian, then such he is supposed to be, regardless of how he behaves or what he believes. There is no pressure, no judging, no trying to convert someone to "his church." One can simply sit idle and say that he is a Christian.

It is true that names can be deceiving. But being a disciple is something different than being a self-proclaimed Christian. There is action involved in the definition of the word "disciple." "Christian" has digressed to being only a name, but not disciple. If one claims to be a disciple of Jesus, even the unbelieving world knows that he is a hypocrite if he does not live up to the name of Jesus. It is for this reason that many people would just as soon settle for being called a Christian instead of being a disciple of Jesus. However, they can do such, but they will have to take their chances with questionable behavior and the sin of apathy (lukewarmness). But if one is determined to follow Jesus (discipleship), then he or she must get on with the task of breathing Jesus every moment of one's life. And this is not easy. It is a struggle. It is a struggle since we live in a world where there are so many people who call themselves Christians, but have created a religiosity after their own desires, and a lifestyle that is contrary to what Jesus lived. The challenge about being a disciple of Jesus in the world today is that there are too many "Christians" around who want the identity, but not the lifestyle.

Chapter 1

THE THEFT OF A DISCIPLE

The Bible is saturated with exhortations about not stealing material possessions from another person. The commandment "Thou shalt not steal" deals with the thief who would endanger human relationships (Ex 20:15). The thief is such a personality that he must be cut off from the people because he cannot be a part of society (Zc 5:3). In the relationship Christians have with one another, the Holy Spirit exhorted, *"Let him who steals steal no more ..."* (Ep 4:28).

Stealing that which belongs to one's neighbor will certainly terminate a relationship one would continue to have with his neighbor. But what if we allow "spiritual thieves" to steal personality characteristics that will endanger our relationships with one another? If we allow spiritual thieves to prevail in our lives, we too will endanger our relationship with others. But most important of all, we will endanger our relationship with God. Look out for the following thieves:

A. Procrastination:

Procrastination is not only the thief of our own time, but also the thief of opportunity. On the hallway of a university were written the words,

> On the plains of hesitation lie the blackened bones of countless millions, who, at the dawn of victory, sat down to rest, and resting died.

After Paul presented the opportunity to escape the second death, Felix responded, *"Go away for now. When I have a convenient time, I will call for you"* (At 24:25). Felix procrastinated. He never called for Paul. Opportunity was lost. He should have responded according to the meaning of what Paul wrote in the following statement:

> *I have heard you in an acceptable time, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Co 6:2).

In reference to the salvation of men, procrastination is Satan's best weapon to keep lost men lost. Tomorrow is always the worse enemy for seizing the opportunity to obey God. But most of us are like the procrastinator who complained about the noise that was created when opportunity knocked so loud at the door. We must always keep in mind that tomorrow is like a postdated check. Today is cash. If we are in the habit of putting off that which should be done today, eventually tomorrow will have so many things that need to be done that we will continually live in frustration about what must be done. The common phrase used by the procrastinator is, "I should have ...."

In reference to our salvation, Hebrews 2:3 is a question that every disciple must answer. *"... how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who have heard?"*

Have you ever heard the statement, "Wait a minute"? Now have you ever considered what you would lose if you waited for a minute? If you were making R100,000 a year (or, whatever your local currency would be of the value of 100,000), you would be losing R1,00 a minute. Procrastination will cost you. An old Japanese proverb states, "Saying 'It is too early,' makes it too late."

We must keep in mind that one of the greatest labor saving devices for today is tomorrow. Alexander the Great gave a simple answer to one who asked him how he conquered so much of the ancient world in such a short time. He simply responded, "By not delaying." Calvin Coolidge stated, "We cannot do everything at once, but we can do something at once."

We must remember that rolling stones gather no moss, and thus, in order to accomplish our dream for God, we must simply keep on rolling. There are those who dream about doing great things for God, and then there are those who just do it. Dreams are useless unless the dreams are put into action. There is an old French proverb that reads: "Young people tell what they are doing, old people what they have done, and fools what they wish to do."

We would conclude as Paul in reference to our salvation. *"Knowing that it is already time to awaken out of the sleep because now our salvation is nearer than when we believed"* (Rm 13:11). *"Awake you who sleep and arise from the death, and Christ will give you light"* (Ep 5:14). Everyone harbors the spirit of procrastination in some area of his life, especially in those things we do not like to do. The only way to overcome these fault areas is **just do it**.

B. Anxiety:

When we allow anxiety to take control of our emotional well-being, we allow our peace of mind to be stolen away. Stress is probably one of the greatest emotional battles to conquer. We have this almost incurrable urge to dream up something about which to worry. Pessimism almost rules the day when we consider our future. It is as someone said, "The pessimist never worries about tomorrow. He knows that everything is going to turn out wrong anyway."

Jesus knew this spirit about ourselves. This was the emotional background for His statement in Matthew 6:34: *"Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

We must always keep in mind that worry and stress are like a rocking chair. It gives your mind something to do, but it will get you nowhere. The Philippians seemed to be in a state of anxiety when they learned of the condition of Paul in a Roman jail. Because they lived in a Roman colony, Philippi, they knew that being in a Roman jail was not a good situation. They were subsequently very anxious about the circumstances of Paul. Paul realized that they were anxious for him when Epaphroditus come from Philippi to Rome to see Paul in prison. Paul wrote the Philippian letter to calm their anxiety. He thus saturated the letter with statements of joy. *"Rejoice in the Lord always,"* he reminded the Philippians, *"And again I say, rejoice!"* (Ph 4:4). And just in case this exhortation was not sufficient, he followed it with a mandate from God. *"**Do not be anxious for anything**, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"* (Ph 4:6). Paul practiced what he preached. At the same time and in the same jail, he also wrote, *"For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers ..."* (Ph 1:19). Even in the worst of situations, Paul refused to allow his difficult environment to determine his state of mind.

Paul did not stress about the future. He wanted the

Philippians to know that their prayers for him would not go unanswered. He would prevail over imprisonment through the power of God that was released upon those who held him captive. We do not know how God would do this, but we do know that Paul's deliverance from prison would not be the result of a merciful court. It would be through the power of God. And thus, Paul could from prison write of his future.

> *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. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, have this mind* (Ph 3:13-15).

We simply must not forget that ulcers are what we get when climbing over mole hills as if they were mountains. We simply must never forget what George Muller said, "The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety." Just remember, if you let anxiety prevail in your life, you can end up on a psychiatrist's couch. You will subsequently spend a great deal of money for the couch, but will never own it.

C. Covetousness:

This spiritual thief will steal away from the disciples of Jesus the spirit of generosity. This is why Paul referred to covetousness as a "member of this world." So in reference to this member, he wrote, *"Therefore, put to death your members that are on the earth ... covetousness,* ***which is idolatry****"* (Cl 3:5).

The story is told of Fredrick the Great who was about to launch war against a neighboring country. Fredrick subsequently called his secretary to write a declaration of war against the country. The secretary dutifully began to write the dictated words of Fredrick, "Whereas in the providence of God ...." Fredrick abruptly stopped the secretary and said, "Just write, Fredrick wants more land."

In the parable of the sower, we must keep in mind that the seed that was sown on the thorny ground lost its purpose and destiny as seed because of covetousness, that is, the cares of this world (Mt 13:22). It was the same covetousness that caused Demas to forsake his destiny. *"... for Demas has forsaken me,* ***having loved this present world*** *..."* (2 Tm 4:10). Jesus knew that the spirit of covetousness would steal away some of His disciples. For this reason, during His ministry He forewarned His disciples, *"Take heed and* ***beware of all covetousness****, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses"* (Lk 12:15).

A Sunday school teacher had just explained to her young students the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. She concluded by asking the young students, "Which would you want to be, the rich man or Lazarus?" One of her students quickly replied, "I would want to be the rich man in life and Lazarus when I die." Sorry, it cannot be that way.

D. Lusts:

Here is the problem:

> *Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God." For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man.* ***But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed****. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death* (Js 1:13-15).

It is for this reason that Paul wrote, *"But I discipline my body and bring it into subject, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified"* (1 Co 9:27). Our humanity lends itself to doing that which would lead us away from the spiritual. Since lust is of the world, then when we follow after that which is of this world, we are led further away from God who is not of this world. John wrote, *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world"* (1 Jn 2:16).

When we have the urge to obsess over the lust of the flesh, we must remember that this *"world is passing away with its lust"* (1 Jn 2:17). If we would allow our lives to be controlled by the lust of the flesh, then we too will pass away from God with the passing of this world.

In order to guard ourselves from passing away with this world by our obsession to fulfill the lust of the flesh, Paul exhorted the young Timothy, *"Flee also youthful lusts"* (2 Tm 2:22). And the only way to flee lust is to pursue that which is opposite to lust, that is, righteousness, faith, love and peace (2 Tm 2:22). If one does not follow the way of righteousness, faith, love and peace, he will be detoured from the way to heaven.

Since the lust of the flesh is of this world, then when we fulfill the lust of the flesh by losing sight of righteousness, faith, love and peace, we will lose our soul. This is the meaning of what Peter wrote, *"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and pilgrims,* ***abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul****"* (1 Pt 2:11).

The great spiritual leader Paul knew what he was talking about when he continually disciplined his body in order not to be disqualified from a heavenly home. He knew that if temptation were not continually resisted, it would become a life-style. He knew that life was like the statement of a Malay proverb, "If you value your corn, pluck out the grass." We must confess that many of the problems that we have in developing our spiritual life is that we say "yes" too quickly to too many lusts, when we should be saying "no" more. Spiritual growth is always held up by the fulfillment of the lust of the flesh.

E. Apprehension:

If there were a personality characteristic that would steal away our hope and vision for the future, it would be apprehension about the future, or the fear of moving forward. For the apprehensive, Psalm 46:1-3 is a passage for encouragement.

> *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.*

Christians 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). And we must not forget that the lake that burns with fire and brimstone is reserved for *"the cowardly and unbelieving ..."* (Rv 21:8).

We must keep in mind that the future frightens only those who find comfort by living in the past. But for those who realize that they are more than conquerors through the power of God that dwells in us (Rm 8:37), they will willingly walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear (Ps 23:4). Those who truly know that God is working in their lives for good, will not be apprehensive about the future. The reason they are not apprehensive about the future comes from just one statement of the Holy Spirit:

> *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose* (Rm 8:28).

Chapter 2

THE HOLY DISCIPLE

Discipleship means that one is different from that which is common in this world. If a disciple is not different, then he has conformed to the life-style of the world. Peter defined this sacred life-style as a holy priesthood. *"... you also, as living stones, 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; see vs 9).

Now here is the challenge to everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus. *"But as He who has called you is holy,* ***so you be holy in all manner of behavior****, because it is written, 'You will be holy, for I am holy'"* (1 Pt 1:15,16). The meaning of the word *hagios* (holy) defines one who is morally good. And since the holy are morally good, then they are different from those of this world. The holy ones are "sacred," "sanctified," and "set aside" from that which is common and ordinary of this world. There is something very uncommon about the saints of God when we judge them in reference to the moral standards of the world. And since the holy priesthood of God is *"holy in all manner of behavior,"* then this priesthood of disciples does not conduct themselves after the manner of this world.

Peter makes 1 Peter 1:15 a command. *"Be holy in all manner of behavior."* If holiness is enjoined upon disciples as a command, then there is more to holiness than being cleansed and sanctified from sin. It is through the blood of Jesus that we have been cleansed of sin. When we walk after Him as His disciples, we continue to be cleansed when we mess up (1 Jn 1:7). So there is something about holiness over which we have control through our behavior. Our sin is cleansed by the blood of Jesus, but our separateness from that which is of this world is our choice. The basic meaning of holiness is to be "set apart." The holy, therefore, set themselves apart from the activities and things of this world that are contrary to God. When we choose to live according to the instructions of the Spirit in the word of God, then we are being set apart from the world by our obedience.

A. Be holy as God.

God is set apart from the world, and thus, He is not of this world. The sin of idolatry is an effort to steal away the holiness of God. The idol worshipers bring God down to a god who is created after the imagination

of the one who is of this world. If God can be created after the likeness of man, then He is not a God separate from the thinking of man who is of this world. It was for this reason that God strongly condemned Israel when they ventured into idolatry. They were destroying the holiness of God by making God to be something of this world. This is the meaning behind God's condemnation of Israel in Amos 5:21-23:

> *I hate, I despise your feast days. And I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies. 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. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.*

What Israel had done was to develop a syncretistic religiosity. They mingled the ceremonial rituals of the law of God with what they believed the gods they had created after their own imagination would desire. Amos continued to write, *"But you have borne the shrine of your king and the pedestal of your images, the star of your god that you made for yourselves"* (Am 5:26). When they performed the ceremonies that were required by the Old Testament law, they were thinking of the gods they had created after their own imaginations. It was a time when in their minds they had dethroned God to a god, and thus assumed that they could manipulate the behavior of their gods by their own desires. They sought to remove the one true and living God from His separation from the world in order to make Him conform to the wishes of their own thinking.

If the disciples of Jesus seek to be holy as God is holy, then they should make every effort that they do not dethrone God from His holiness in order to conform to their own imagination. Unfortunately, we see this idolatrous religiosity being played out as worshipers assemble for meetings that please themselves. They assemble in order to see what they can get out of an assembly, instead of seeing what they can give in worship. Israel tried this man-made religiosity. But God judged them with the statement: *"Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments"* (Am 5:23). In their idolatrous concept of God, apostate Israel assumed that if the melody of their songs and instruments was personally pleasing to them, then certainly it must be pleasing to the god whom they had created after their own imagination. There is something very subtle about idolatry for which worshipers must be very cautious. When we start believing that which we personally like for ourselves, it is time to search the Scriptures lest we be guilty of "will worship," that is, forcing our worship on God (See Cl 2:23).

The purpose for the giving to Israel all the ceremonial laws concerning cleanliness was to separate them from the nations around them. It was God's mandate to Israel, therefore, that they maintain their separateness (holiness) from the nations around them through their obedience of the ceremonial laws He gave them. This was the reason why God commanded,

> *For I am the Lord your God.* ***You will therefore sanctify yourselves and you will be holy, for I am holy****. Neither will you defile yourselves with any kind of creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God.* ***You will therefore be holy, for I am holy*** (Lv 11:44,45).

If a disciple is to be holy as God is holy, then it is necessary that he clearly understands the holiness of God. God does not exist according to the imagination of man, but is separate from the world. He is uncommon according to the behavior of those who live after the manner of this world. Those who do not understand the separateness of God from that which is of this world, cannot be holy. An idolater can never be holy simply because he has created a god in his mind that conforms to his wishes that are of this world. One is as holy as his understanding of the holiness of God.

B. Called to be holy

Concerning the holiness of the disciple, the Holy Spirit proclaimed that the obedient were called into holiness. *"For God has not called us to impurity,* ***but in holiness****"* (1 Th 4:7). If one would reject this call, he rejects God who is holy (1 Th 4:8).

1. ***Motivation for holiness:*** Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have been sanctified by His blood offering (Hb 7:27). And because we have been made holy through the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God, it is only reasonable to do what Paul exhorted the Roman Christians: *"... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service"* (Rm 12:1). It is only reasonable service to remain separate from the world in view of the fact that Jesus separated us from our sin through His incarnation and the cross.

As His holy priesthood, God assumes that we will respond to His grace by keeping our lives separated from the behavior of the world. *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is ...* ***to keep oneself unspotted from the world****"* (Js 1:27). It is grace that teaches this lesson of discipleship.

> *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"*** (Ti 2:11,12).

This simply means that we *"**not love the world nor the things in the world**. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 Jn 2:15). So Paul reminded the Roman disciples how this is accomplished in the life of a disciple. *"And be not conformed to this world, but* ***be transformed*** *by the renewing of your mind ..."* (Rm 12:2). Disciples continue to renew their minds through the word of God in order that they not lose their way in this world of unholiness. The only direction by which the disciples of Jesus can renew their thinking is in saturating their minds with the word of God. There is no other way to know Jesus.

2. *Follow the pattern:* The pattern is Jesus. *"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). We can find those "steps" only in the word of Jesus.

Jesus did not behave as the world behaves. He went to what we would consider an extreme in setting an example for us to follow as His disciples. As the Creator, and sacrificial Son of God, He washed the dirty feet of the disciples. After the foot bath, holy living is inspired by His sacrifice for us. He said, *"For I have given you an example* ***that you should do as I have done to you"*** (Jn 13:15). Holiness is "other world" behavior. It is not of this world. If we would be holy as our Father is holy, then it is imperative that we follow the example of the One who came from the Father in order to illustrate the holy behavior of the Father. He will stoop to wash our dirty feet, and then hang on a cross to wash our dirty souls.

3. *Holy action glorifies God:* Our holiness is meant to bring glory to God. Whatever we do, we must *"do all to the glory of God"* (1 Co 10:31). This means that our lives must be patterned after the holy example of Jesus. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, *"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).

C. Being unholy.

We can better understand holiness by the Bible's description of the unholy life. Notice where Paul grouped the unholy person in 1 Timothy 1:9:

> *Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for* ***unholy*** *and profane, for murders of fathers and murders of mothers, for murderers.*

The unholy person is not in good company. But this is not the end of the crowd of unholy people. Paul continued:

> *Know this also, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful,* ***unholy*** *...* (2 Tm 3:1,2).

Those who would live unholy lives have put themselves in the company of those who would be rejected from eternal dwelling. They have either rejected being set apart for Christ in obedience to the gospel, or if they have obeyed the gospel, then they have agreed to walk the sanctified life in submission to Jesus.

Under the Old Testament law, the priests of God were to keep themselves from that which was unholy (Lv 10:10). As priests of God, we too as the disciples of Jesus must keep ourselves from that which is unholy (1 Jn 5:21). Jude exhorted, *"... keep yourselves in the love of God"* (Jd 21). In view of the termination of all that we now behold, Peter wrote, *"Since all these things will be dissolved,* ***what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness*** *...?"* (2 Pt 3:11).

As the unholy have no fellowship with the holy of this world, the same is true in reference to eternal dwelling. In the context of the judgment of God upon the unholy, John encouraged the saints by saying, *"And he who is holy, let him still be holy"* (Rv 22:11). The interpretive meaning is that the holy must continue in their holiness, without involving themselves in that which is unholy of this world. The Hebrew writer explained, *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness,* ***without which no man will see the Lord"*** (Hb 12:14).

Since no man can claim to be holy from sin on the basis of his behavior—for we all sin—then our sanctification from sin was made possible through the blood of Jesus. Our holiness in reference to sin, therefore, is the gift of God. It is the gift of the shed blood that came through the cross. This gift of grace is our motivation. We were set apart from the world through our obedience to the grace of God in order to be holy for God's purpose in this world. Jesus' sacrifice to make us holy from sin inspires us to keep ourselves holy from the unholy things of this world.

Chapter 3

THE DISCIPLE'S TONGUE

In one statement, Jesus ripped the mask off every person who would presume to hide within his heart evil things. *"**For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks**"* (Mt 12:34). The greatest fool on earth is the one who thinks he can hide his true character from others. Only mute people can do this. But even those who cannot speak will eventually reveal their true character by their actions. Jesus continued, *"The good man brings good treasure out of the good things. And evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things"* (Mt 12:35). We separate good men from evil men by what comes forth from their mouths and how they behave. In fact, Jesus assured us that what comes out of our mouths will determine our eternal destiny.

> *But I say to you, that every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment.* ***For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*** (Mt 12:36,37).

There are those who would presume to be religious, but their heart is full of evil things. They offer a good presentation to cover a host of inward evils. But if such a person does not control his speech, then he has already judged his supposed religiosity to be useless. *"If any man among you seems to be religious, **and does not bridle his tongue**, but deceives his own heart, **this man's religion is useless**"* (Js 1:26). It is interesting that this statement says that one "deceives his own heart" when he pretends to be religious, but harbors evil. With this statement, James introduced one of the most profound pronouncements from the Holy Spirit in the Bible. **James 3:1-12** is a dissertation from God that should exhort any disciple to engage in a lifetime of struggle to control that which cannot be tamed, that is, his speech.

A. Little is too big.

James introduced the impossibility of controlling that which would declare useless our discipleship. *"If anyone does not stumble in word, the same is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body"* (Js 3:2). These are not encouraging words. Those disciples who would be puffed up in their own "spirituality," should remember that they are continually brought down by a slipped word. If one would think that he can always control his speech, then he should consider the fact that the strength of a horse is controlled by a very small bridle (Js 3:3). If one would think that he is spiritually strong, then he should reconsider the small member of the tongue that can bring one down to humanity.

A large ship may stay afloat on the ocean and take the blows of the waves, but it is turned about by a very small rudder (Js 3:4). An unguarded word spoken in jest can wreck a life. And then consider the strength of standing trees in a forest. No matter how strong the trees may present themselves, they can be burned to the ground with the flame of a small match (Js 3:5). A life of discipleship can be burned to the ground with a harsh word. A mighty automobile engine can produce tremendous power, but be brought to silence with a very small particle in the jets of the carburetor. James' metaphor is direct. Though the tongue is small, it can bring down lives. A businessman of our acquaintance once said that he had an investor come to him in order to invest 1.5 million dollars in his business. But during the discussions, our friend said that he made one statement as a joke, which the investor considered offensive. So the investor gathered up his papers and walked out. A word made in jest cost our friend 1.5 million dollars.

The curse of the careless word is in the fact that one can spend a lifetime making friends that can be destroyed with a few careless words. We wish we could thank the author who wrote,

> A careless word may kindle strife,
> A cruel word may wreck a life.
> A bitter word may hate instill,
> A brutal word may smite and kill.
> A gracious word may smooth the way,
> A joyous word may light the day.
> A timely word my lessen stress,
> A loving word may heal and bless.

James was right. If we could only control our tongue, then we could really control our whole body (Js 3:2). Being a good disciple could be easy if it were not for the tongue. The tongue can never be completely controlled, and thus, discipleship will always be a struggle. And for this reason, we are always on our knees before God, asking that we be forgiven of all the senseless words that may have caused damage to our relationship with others. The struggle to be the type of disciple we want to be begins with the small member, the tongue.

B. Division is caused by words.

Since the tongue cannot be completely controlled, then James cautions,

> *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature. And it is set on fire by hell* (Js 3:6).

It is true that much gossip that is aired among the members should also be fumigated. The tongue is never on the sidelines when there is division among the members of the body. This is true, as someone said, because there are always three types of gossips among the members in times of turmoil: (1) vest-button gossips, those who are always popping off nonsense, (2) vacuum-cleaner gossips, those who are always picking up dirt, and (3) liniment gossips, those who are always rubbing it in. These are gossips with "hoof and mouth" disease. They are always hoofing it from one member to another, mouthing off those things they should not. Paul reminded us that there are those *"wandering about from house to house ... gossips and busybodies,* ***speaking things which they ought not****"* (1 Tm 5:13).

Why is it that when there is turmoil among the disciples that there are more people run down by gossips than automobiles. In times of controversy among the children of God—and there will always be those times because we cannot control our tongues—there are some who never know **what** to talk about, only **who** to talk about. We must never forget the wisdom of the sage who said, "Gossips are people who put 2 and 2 together and always get 22." These are those people who have things go into their ears, but get mixed up before they slip out of their mouths. It is people as this who never seem to be interested in the work of the church until there is trouble. They will not show up at the assemblies of the disciples to discuss the work of the church until there is trouble. Sometimes it is as someone said, "Some people never get interested in anything until it is none of their business."

The story is told of a young man who made a statement to several people, which statement he later found out was totally false. He asked advice from one of the elders, who instructed him to take a feather and lay it on the front step of the front door of every house where he stated the falsehood. He was then instructed to later go back the following day and collect up all the feathers. The young man replied, "But the feathers will be blown all over town." Right.

Someone wisely said, "The worst indigestion one can have comes from having to eat one's own words." The poet was right:

> Two ears and but a single tongue,
> by nature's laws to man belong.
> The lesson she would teach is clear;
> Repeat but half of what you hear.

For this reason, James exhorted, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, let everyone be swift to hear,* ***slow to speak****, slow to wrath"* (Js 1:19). Have you ever noticed the things in Proverbs 6 that God hates, things that are an abomination to Him? Just in case you have not, they are, among other things, *"a lying tongue"* and *"a false witness who speaks lies"* (Pv 6:17,19). Delmar Andrews probably revealed in a very precise manner the evil of slander.

> The sin of slander is one of the most vile and wicked sins in the realm of iniquity. It is a devil's caldron, brewed in correction, flavored with filth, spiced with deadly venom, and stewed over the fires of hell. Its stench is nauseating and repulsive to the nostrils of the decent and respectable.

The sin of slander could not have been better described. When dealing with our tongues that cannot be tamed, every disciple should make the control of his tongue top priority. If one would involve himself in slander, he has used his tongue in the most evil way it can be used. James exhorted, *"Do not speak evil one of another, brethren. He who speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law* (Js 4:11). The slanderous person sets himself up as the law, and thus his slanderous speech speaks evil of the law of God. He judges the law of God to be inadequate to lead people, and thus, he slanders in order to manipulate people to follow him and his law. Such was what the church leader, Diotrephes, did in reference to the evangelists, and the apostle of love himself. So John wrote to Gaius, *"Therefore, if I come I will remember his* [Diotrephes'] *deeds that he does, unjustly accusing us with malicious words"* (3 Jn 10). If someone would so slander the apostle of love, then certainly disciples who step forward to be the type of leader they should be, should expect slander from those people who love to be first (3 Jn 9).

C. The untamable is among us.

James is emphatic about the untamable tongue. There is no bird or beast that cannot be tamed by man (Js 3:7-9). *"****But no one can tame the tongue****. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison"* (Js 3:8). It seems to

always be true what someone said, "Some use language to express thought. Some use language to conceal thought. But some use language instead of thought." It is true that if you speak when you are angry, you will make the best speech that you will ever regret. A poet said it right.

It is not so much what you say,
As the manner in which you say it;
It is not so much the language you use,
As the tones you use to convey it.

Paul instructed concerning the tone we should use in our speech: *"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone"* (Cl 4:6). In reference to our demeanor concerning our speech, Paul also instructed,

> *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* (Ep 4:31,32).

We must always keep in mind that kind words will always echo back to us in kind words. How we speak to others is how others will speak to us.

D. A loose tongue manifests a hypocritical heart.

James concludes his exhortation concerning the tongue with words none of us want to hear. A loose tongue will reveal our hypocrisy. *"Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren,* ***these things ought not to be so****"* (Js 3:10). The challenge in one's use of his speech is to be consistent. And in being consistent, one must always speak good consistently. We must not forget that our manner of speech is an indication of our manner of behavior. Jesus was right. *"The good man brings good treasure out of the good things. And an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things"* (Mt 12:35). Someone once defined dignity as "the capacity to hold back on the tongue what should never have been in the mind in the first place." But if there is evil in one's heart, it cannot be concealed. It will be revealed through the tongue.

James uses two illustrations to explain that true disciples are consistent in their speech. A spring does not give forth sweet and bitter water. No disciple should be spouting forth sweet and bitter speech out of the same mouth. A fig tree does not produce both olives and figs. Neither should a disciple produce good and bad speech. It is simply true what James earlier said in his epistle, *"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"* (Js 1:8). If one is double-tongued, then he is not stable. He is not conducting himself with dignity. Maybe we should write out and place on our refrigerators the words of the Holy Spirit of Ephesians 4:29: "***Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for edification, so that it may give grace to the hearers****."*

This is more than advice from the Holy Spirit. It is a mandate to be obeyed. The Holy Spirit said in another place, *"****Death and life are in the power of the tongue****, and those who love it will eat its fruit"* (Pv 18:21). Is this not what Jesus said. *"****For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned****"* (Mt 12:37). As disciples of Jesus, we must never forget that our eternal destiny lies in the control of our tongues, that little member that is simply too big in our lives.

Chapter 4

THE PATIENT DISCIPLE

The control of our tongue is governed by the amount of patience one has with people. The less patience one has with his neighbor, the more harsh he will be with his tongue. Therefore, if we work on our patience, we will be working on our ability to relate with others through the control of our speech. The use of our tongue will either drive others away, or draw friends close.

Someone once said that patience is "the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears." But in reality, a chronic lack of patience is a form of despair, and despair leads one to be impatient with others. The impatient person is simply depressed about the environment in which he lives, or the circumstances he is facing in his life. He is often discouraged about life, and thus takes out on others his inward frustrations. If one is narcissistic in his impatience, then he is seeking to project upon others his inability to cope with his social environment. He reasons that if the world is about himself, then certainly the rest of the world is out of order because it is not measuring up to his desires. Things are not going his way. Narcissistic church leaders always sink into bitterness when people reject their

leadership. Such was the case of Simon the sorcerer when the people turned from him to Peter and John (See At 8:12,18,22,23).

We have found that people are very patient in some areas of life, and very impatient in one or more other areas. One can be patient in the transactions of his daily business at the office, but in the vehicle going home from work he turns into an impatient monster. His impatience manifests a personality disorder. He is seeking to control the traffic as he may have controlled his office staff. The impatient person, therefore, must look inward in order to determine if his problem is a problem with control issues. Regardless of the cause of impatience, disciples cannot function in their relationships with others unless they exercise patience.

A. In search of patience:

It is interesting that Christians seem to be those who realize their impatient behavior first, and thus, seek to correct their impatience in all areas of life in order to enjoy the fellowship and friendship of others. This desire is only natural because in their struggles to be a disciple of Jesus, they see no impatience in the One they seek to follow.

Sometimes we disguise impatience with self-initiative. But there is a difference between taking the initiative and being impatient. We would define self-initiative as the ability to respond to a need or goal for which one patiently strives. If one is not patient in his response to opportunity, then he will find himself chasing dreams that are never fulfilled. If one does not take the initiative to do the work of the disciple, then he will fall into the sin of lukewarmness (Rv 3:15,16).

It is for this reason that the Christian has a completely different world view concerning the environment in which he lives. Those who are worldly see the world as an opportunity for self gratification. To these people obstacles to success are seen as "bad luck," and thus, occasions for frustration. The Christian, however, views the tribulation of the world as a means for character development for eternal dwelling. This teleology is in the words of the Holy Spirit in Romans 5. *"... we also glory in tribulations,* ***knowing that tribulation works patience****, and patience, experience, and experience, hope"* (Rm 5:3,4). We cannot get much better than this in viewing the world around us. Obstacles are an opportunity for development in patience.

James moves this building of a world view one step further. Because the Christian accepts tribulation as the builder of a patient character, James graduates us to the next level of the fulfilled life. *"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). When the Christian falls into "various trials," he concludes that these "tribulations" will produce patience in his character. He can thus count it with joy that his character is being prepared for eternal dwelling through the struggles he must endure. It is for this reason that the patience that is produced by "various trials" is working to prepare us for eternal dwelling. The trials work for our benefit. So James added, *"****But let patience have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing****"* (Js 1:4).

The tribulations (trials) of this world are working the Christian to heaven. And since we will be there for eternity, each one of us is praying that we will be patient enough with people so that other saints will not consider us an eternal thorn in the flesh in heaven because of our impatience. No one wants to be around an impatient person. So certainly, none of us would want to be in eternity in the presence of an impatience disciple in heaven. We can endure all social environments of this world, knowing that our character is being fine-tuned for eternal dwelling.

B. Areas of intense focus:

Because each person is impatient in different areas of life, then each one of us must target in our character those areas where we are the most impatient. As we do this, we must work on our general demeanor to be more patient. If one has a difficult time determining which areas of impatience on which to focus, then ask a close friend. Husbands can ask their wives. We are certain that wives are often a good judge of those areas where their husbands suffer from impatience. When James said to confess our faults to one another, he at least meant that it was time to confess up to those areas where we are the most impatient (Js 5:16).

It is one work of the fellowship of the family of God to help one another prepare for eternal dwelling with one another. One of the reasons why "church" often fails the people is that "church" becomes something that is relegated to a legal system of ritualistic assemblies, while the attendees have no social contact with one another. When Paul said, *"Let all things be done for edification"* (1 Co 14:26), he meant more than bringing order to chaotic assemblies. When Christians come together in assembly, the assembly should be of such a nature that each member can work in the development of the character of each member. This is the foundation for the statement: *"And let us consider one another to stir up love ..."* (Hb 10:24). The purpose of the assem-

bly of the disciples is to produce an environment of contact and edification. If there is no contact, then there can be no true edification through interpersonal communication. One of the dangers of the "social media" today is that there are too many Christians who are substituting social media for personal social contact. Facebook is depriving people of face-to-face contact in assembly wherein disciples can exhort one another to stir up love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25).

There are three general areas where dedicated members of the family of God must focus in reference to becoming more patient with one another. These are areas where disciples of Jesus function in their social (assembly) contact with one another in order to develop their personalities.

1. *Patience for deliverance:* It is not fun to struggle through tribulations and trials, especially if we try to struggle alone. And because it is not fun, we would just as soon the trials pass as soon as possible. James was dealing with some disciples who were struggling through their trials. They were possibly complaining somewhat because of the trials they were having to endure. On the background of a social environment that was not being kind to his readers, James gives some very helpful instructions in **James 5:7-11**.

Now before we look at the passage, it is imperative that this passage be understood in its historical context. James uses the phrase "coming of the Lord" in the passage. When this phrase is used in the Bible, Bible interpreters seem to jump up and down that the Bible is always speaking about the final coming of the Lord. It is true that the phrase "coming of the Lord" is used in reference to the final coming of Jesus to deliver us from the tribulations of this present world. **But this is the exception to the interpretation of the phrase. This is certainly not what the meaning of the phrase is in the context of James 5.**

James was writing to Jewish Christians, and these Christians were living in the trying times of hardships immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Notice the context. James said to the rich persecutors of the poor, *"Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you"* (Js 5:1). James certainly was not speaking of "miseries" that would come upon the rich Jewish persecutors that would come over two thousands years after he wrote this note of encouragement to his immediate readers. If he did have the final coming of the Lord in mind, then he would have been deceiving the first readers into believing that Jesus was coming in His final coming within their lifetimes. But we are sure that the Holy Spirit, through James, did not deceive these persecuted disciples into believing that Jesus was soon coming to relieve them of their persecution.

The context of James 5 is the deliverance of the just Christians who were being unjustly treated by the rich in their economic environment. And since James was writing *"to the twelves tribes who are in the Dispersion,"* then we rightly conclude that he was writing to those Jewish disciples of the Jewish dispersion who had obeyed the gospel. The obedient Jews were being unjustly treated by the rich Jews.

James was making a prophecy of the deliverance of the obedient, which prophecy would be fulfilled in their lifetime. When the Roman armies cracked down on Jewish insurrection throughout the world from A.D. 67 to the final outcome of the crackdown in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then the righteous were delivered from the persecution of Judaism. The rich oppressing Jews lost everything, and thus, their persecution of the just was terminated. So James wrote to the righteous,

> *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 5:7,8).

As previously stated, **James did not deceive these early readers into believing that they had to wait until the final coming of Jesus at the end of time in order to be delivered from their tribulations**. Their deliverance was "near." And since it was near in their lifetime, **then when we are personally enduring tribulations, we too, as James' immediate readers, do not have to wait for our deliverance from tribulation until the final coming of Jesus**.

The deliverance from our personal tribulation can also be "near." Jesus can come "in time" in order to deliver us. This is not the final coming of Jesus in person, but a coming of Jesus in time to deliver us from persecution. James was simply using the judgment language of the Old Testament to refer to the "in time" coming of the Lord to deliver His people out of tribulation (See Is 19:1; Jr 4:12,13; Ez 30:3; Dn 7:13,14).

"In time" Christians need to know that they can be delivered from their "in time" trials by Jesus who can come "in time" for their deliverance. This is the clear and explicit message of James to his brothers and sisters, who were at the time of his writing, suffering trials and tribulations from the hands of those who were un-

justly treating them. James' readers needed help right then, not two thousand years later. And when we are suffering from the oppression of trials and tribulations, we too need to find comfort in the fact that Jesus can deliver us immediately. Our prayers for deliverance can happen immediately. We do not have to wait over two thousand years for an answer.

Our tribulation will produce the work of developing patience, but there will come deliverance. If James promised that his readers would soon be delivered from their immediate trials, then when we are on our knees in prayer, we must be confident that we too can be delivered from our immediate trials. We can thus do as Paul stated, *"glory in tribulation"* (Rm 5:3). Now read Romans 8:24,25 again.

> *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* [patience] *wait for it.*

If we could paraphrase what Paul was saying it would be, "Just hang in there!" If we hang in there, we will imitate those faithful Old Testament people of God who waited for the coming of the Messiah.

> *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, so that you not be sluggish,* ***but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*** (Hb 6:11,12).

The simple message of the Hebrew writer is that we must not become discouraged in times of tribulation. We must not allow tribulation to discourage us into inactivity. We must continue to work as disciples of Jesus until we are delivered, whenever that deliverance will come. Jesus promised, *"In your endurance you will gain your souls"* (Lk 21:19). Just remember the words of John in the book of Revelation.

> *He who leads into captivity will go into captivity. He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword.* ***Here is the patience and the faith of the saints*** (Rv 13:10).

2. ***Patient with people:*** Shake-speare wrote, "How poor are they who have not patience. What wound did ever heal but by degrees." Winston Churchill once said to an impatient general, "Sir, you do not posses your emotions. They possess you."

When discussing patience, it is almost always our impatience with people that affects our relationships with others. We struggle in our relationships with one another because we struggle with one another's differences. Two Irishmen had just reached the top of a long hill on a tandem bicycle. The one on the front seat said over his shoulder to the one on the back seat, "Pat, that was one stiff climb." Pat replied, "It sure was. If I hadn't kept my foot on the brake we would have rolled backwards down the hill."

The goal that is set before all of us is what Paul wrote to Titus, *"... an overseer must ... not be quick-tempered ..."* (Ti 1:7). He added that Titus *"teach that the older men be ... self-controlled ... in patience"* (Ti 2:2). To succeed in this struggle over our impatience, we must exercise ourselves in self-discipline in order to be forbearing of others (1 Tm 3:2,3). This is not just an option to discipleship behavior. According to what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, it is a mandate of character. *"Now we exhort you, brethren ... be patient toward all men."*

3. ***Patient for the reward of our labors:*** Thomas Edison was asked how he could justify about 1,000 unsuccessful experiments on a particular project. He simply replied, "Why? Now we know 1,000 ways it won't work." We must always keep in mind the old Chinese proverb, "Nothing is so full of victory as patience." This was Paul. In prison he wrote,

> *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).

We can be patient for the reward of our labors if we keep our minds focused on the reward. In a *Reader's Digest* article entitled, "The Power of Patience," Norman Vincent Peale wrote in the April 1972 issue:

> Why can't people make better use of patience in their lives? Mainly, I think, because it has three great enemies: discouragement, that white surrender flag that makes people give up too easily; frustration, generating anger that clouds your judgment and wrecks your timing; and the tendency to over react under stress, hit the panic button, lose your cool.

Patience for reward should be the character of the disciple. God worked from the time of creation to bring the cross into the existence of earth history a little over two thousand years ago. He patiently endured until the fullness of time in order to accomplish His plan of redemption (Gl 4:4). We seek to be godly after this patience, for such was in the mind of the Holy Spirit when He wrote,

> *Therefore, seeing we are also surrounded by so great a cloud of* [faithful Old Testament] *witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us,* ***and let us run with endurance*** **[patience]** ***the race that is set before us*** (Hb 12:1).

C. The cause of impatience:

No one can become patient unless he focuses squarely on those things in his life with which he has little patience. Our focus must be on those areas of the human spirit that lead one to be impatient with circumstances and people.

1. ***Lack of mercy:*** Remember the statement that was said to a surrounding crowd of unmerciful and self-righteous judges who were about to stone to death a woman caught in adultery? *"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to cast a stone at her"* (Jn 8:7). Goethe said, "Tolerance comes with age; I see no fault committed that I myself could not have committed at some time or other." We must never forget what James said in James 2:13: *"For judgment will be without mercy* ***to the one who has shown no mercy****. And mercy rejoices over judgment."* This was the theme of Jesus' parable concerning the unmerciful and unforgiving servant. A certain king brought his servants before him and exercised mercy through the forgiveness of their debt. One servant was forgiven ten thousand talents. But this servant was himself unforgiving, and thus, he went out to extract a debt of a few denarii from one who owed him. His debtor pleaded with him, *"Have patience with me and I will pay you"* (Mt 18:29). But there was no mercy from the oppressing servant, for he took the debtor *"and cast him into prison until he should pay the debt"* (Mt 18:30).

We wonder how many people we have cast into our mental prison of exclusion from our presence. Because they owed us so little in comparison to what God has forgiven us, we have cast them forth from our presence because of an offending word. They are out there in our "mental prison," banished from our presence until they pay us with an "I am sorry." The arrogance of our way is revealed in our self-righteous comfort that we will somehow be rewarded by One who forgave us all (See Mt 18:21-35). Some people have very little mercy for others, but a lot of mercy on themselves in reference to their debt to God. They have forgotten what Jesus taught those who would be His disciples: *"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"* (Mt 6:12).

2. ***Too much anxiety:*** Blessed Mary, the mother of Jesus, was normal. When she discovered that her Twelve-Year-Old was not in the presence of the returning caravan of relatives from Jerusalem, she and Joseph headed back to Jerusalem. After three days of anxiety, they finally found Jesus where all twelve-year-old young people should be, that is, in the temple talking about the Bible. In exasperation Mary said to Jesus, *"Behold, Your father and I have anxiously sought You"* (Lk 2:48). Whether it calmed their nerves or relieved their frustration with Jesus, we will never know. Nevertheless, their Twelve-Year-Old calmly replied, *"Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"* (Lk 2:49). And how can an anxious mother be angry at that?

We know what Jesus said the latter part of His ministry. *"... do not be worried about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, what you will put on"* (Mt 6:25). That is easier said than done. Nevertheless, this is the struggle of the disciple. Jesus concluded an exhortation on anxiety in Matthew 6 by saying, *"Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Mt 6:34). In order to deal with our impatience, we must work on our worry about tomorrow. Our impatience reveals our inability to trust in God today for tomorrow's blessing.

Now in this context, Jesus would say to us pointedly, *"And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his life's span?"* (Lk 12:25). If there is nothing within our power to change that which is in the future, then Jesus is simply saying, "Chill out." It is still true that a person is about as big as that which annoys him. And if the present and future is not under our control, then we must relax. One might argue that this is impossible. But growth in the discipleship of the early Christians proves the contrary. In fact, while in a Roman prison facing death, one disciple wrote,

> ***Do not be anxious for anything****, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* ***And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*** (Ph 4:6,7).

When we are anxious in everything, then we need some peace from God in everything. We need the "peace of God that keeps our hearts and minds." And since we all seek for peace of mind, then all the struggle that it takes to get to that peace is worth it. The story is told of a young Chinese student who in frustration about his difficulty in learning a particular point, threw down his books and ran from his teacher. He later encountered an old woman patiently rubbing an iron bar on a stone. He asked the old woman, "What are you doing?" She qui-

etly responded, "Making a needle."

Paul had written to Timothy, *"But you, O man of God ... **follow after patience** ..."* (1 Tm 6:11). And Timothy had surely got the message and preached such to those disciples in Ephesus with whom he worked. Jesus later addressed the disciples in Ephesus with the words, ***"I know ... your patience. And you have perseverance and patience. You have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary"*** (Rv 2:2,3).

The Ephesian disciples evidently listened to the teaching of Paul that came to them through Timothy. In another situation, there were some disciples who had not yet learned what the Ephesian disciples had learned. The Hebrew writer exhorted, *"For you have need of endurance* [patience], *so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise"* (Hb 10:36). The first step on the road to patience is made when we confess that we have need of patience. We will determine to stay on this road in this life when we thirst for the reward that comes to patient disciples. One is considered patient, not because he is patient in all areas of life, but because he stays on the road of struggling for patience longer than others. Jesus would encourage all of us in reference to our patience, *"But what you have already, hold fast until I come"* (Rv 2:25). Just remember, snails did eventually reach the Ark in time.

Chapter 5

THE VICTORIOUS DISCIPLE

In our struggle to be a disciple of Jesus, one of the most scary passages in the entire Bible is this: ***"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus"*** (Ph 2:5). The Holy Spirit then proceeds to explain what this "mind" was that was in Christ Jesus. He was before the incarnation *"equal with God"* (Ph 2:6). But *"He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death,* ***even the death of the cross"*** (Ph 2:8). It is the extremity of His will to do the will of the Father that amazes us. It was so extreme that, as God incarnate, He was willing to humiliate Himself on our behalf. If we would be His disciples, therefore, it seems that He has placed the "humility bar" so high that we could never achieve what He would expect of us. And this is where there is good news. *"For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"* (Ep 2:8). If one who is seeking to have the mind of Christ within, does not understand the grace of God that was poured out from the cross, then he will live in endless anxiety concerning his salvation. When it comes to having the mind of Christ, we must have a strong appreciation for the grace of God.

The greatest struggle of the disciple is humility, for such a character seems to work against our innate desire to be somebody and to do things our way. We see such among so many religious leaders throughout the religious world today. Every effort seems to be used to set one's self apart to be someone who is somewhat. Fine suits are purchased. Gold chains are worn. Polished new shoes are paraded before the people. Collars are turned around and robes put on. The religious world is cluttered with pompous preachers, priests and popes who would parade themselves over and apart from the people. Many have forgotten that the bigger one makes himself before the people, the less God can use him as a servant of the people. David Livingstone once wrote, "God had an only son, and He was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation of Him I am, or wish to be." It is the spirit of both the missionary and the physician to focus on others. There are few missionaries or physicians who come from the class of pompous preachers who masquerade themselves as servants of the people. We have too many "boardroom leaders" among us whose fingers suffer from paper cuts by handing out dictates from behind boardroom doors. If one seeks to be the director of slaves, then he must always stay humble by remembering that little men who try to wear big hats are always blinded.

We must not forget that the blessings for humble character development are not placed on shelves one above another, and the greater we think we are, the more we think we can reach. On the contrary, the blessings are on descending shelves one below another. And the lower we get the more blessings we can access. There are no smooth-handed leaders among the disciples. All our leaders' hands have callouses. We must not make the mistake of thinking that humility comes by thinking low of ourselves. Humility comes by being honest with ourselves, and thus thinking truthfully about who we are. The humble disciples among us are discovered in the fields of toil, not in boardrooms.

We would not be as the man who was given the badge for being the most humble man in the world, and then having it taken away from him when he wore it. We would seek to allow God to "put us in our place." He did such with His only Son when He placed Him on

a cross. This is what He also did with Israel when they exalted themselves to the point that they left Him. Isaiah spoke of the humiliation that they would experience in captivity. But once they were humbled, he spoke of their exaltation. God promised,

> *I dwell in the high and holy place with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit in order to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones* (Is 57:15).

Our desire to take the initiative on the road to humility is inspired by what both James and Peter wrote concerning the proud. James warned the proud, *"**God resists the proud**, but gives grace to the humble"* (Js 4:6). And then Peter defines the quest of every disciple who would seek to have the "mind of Christ":

> *... 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 ...* (1 Pt 5:5,6).

What Peter seems to be saying is that the road to the grace of God is named "Humility Street." No proud person can access the grace of God if he seeks to go down "Pride Street." The reason the proud can never access grace, is that grace can be accepted only by those who know they can never make it on their own. When we seek to exalt ourselves, we cannot reach the grace of God. And without the grace of God we cannot dwell with Him in eternity, for only those of a contrite spirit will be there with the One who did not count Himself be equal with God a thing to maintain, but He humbled Himself even to the point of finding His predestined place on the cross for our benefit. It was on that old rugged cross where victory was found. Jesus became victorious over death in order to lead His disciples to be victorious over life. And thus, *"this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith"* (1 Jn 5:4).

Chapter 6

THE SUBMISSIVE DISCIPLE

The first verse of the old Gregorian chant stated the point:

> When I survey the wondrous cross
> On which the Prince of glory died,
> My richest gain I could but loss
> And pour contempt on all my pride.

When one truly experiences the Jesus of the cross, there is always revival. In throwing ourselves prostrate before the cross, spiritual revival springs into life. It will continue until our last breath leaves our body.

There is no force more powerful to change our characters than to comprehend our Creator dying through crucifixion on a cross. If in the business of our activity-oriented lives we forget this, we are doomed to harbor attitudes that are simply contrary to those that are necessary for eternal dwelling. Therefore, we must call ourselves to the cross. And as we weep there with sorrow and thanksgiving, we must begin a revival in our spirit to the humility that moved Jesus to go there for us.

A. A humility revival through wilderness wandering:

David wrote, *"My soul will make its boast in the Lord. The humble will hear of it and be glad"* (Ps 34:2). The time would come in Israel after David's death that the nation would exalt itself against God. God knew that the children of Abraham would eventually become a proud people. And being proud, they needed to be shown the way to humility. Before Moses left the nation, God, through him, explained to the nation why they had to walk forty years in the wilderness before being given the promised land:

> *And you will remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, **to humble you and to prove you**, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. **And He humbled you and allowed you to hunger*** (Dt 8:2,3).

If God's work with Israel in the wilderness is an indication of how He works with us individually today, **then He will allow the proud to walk in the wilderness until they learn humility**. One of the first questions that one should ask himself when he finds himself in the wilderness is if his pride got him there. It may be that God has allowed one to walk in the wilderness in order

to develop one's character for dwelling with the contrite in eternal heaven. If after his time in the wilderness, we would ask King Nebuchadnezzar how he got there. He would be the first to confess that pride led him to eating grass in order to survive his time in the wilderness (Dn 4:25,32).

Moses said that God allowed Israel to walk in the wilderness for forty years in order to know *"whether you would keep His commandments"* (Dt 8:2). It may be easy to keep the commandments of God when everything is going great. But when one enters a wilderness, it is then that we determine if we are truly disciples. For this reason, during His ministry, Jesus cried out to the multitudes, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* (Mt 11:15; 13:9,43; see 7:26). Jesus was crying out for those Israelites of faith who would be willing to follow Him out of the wilderness of Jewish religiosity and into the truth of the gospel. It would be only the humble who would heed His call. Therefore, it would be only the humble who would enter into the kingdom through their obedience to the commandments of Jesus.

Remember this statement of Jesus: *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). If one would be a disciple of Jesus, then it is imperative that he humbly and obediently hear the commandments of Jesus and continue therein. If one finds himself in a wilderness of struggle, it may be that God has allowed one to be there for the same reason that He allowed Israel to walk for forty years in the desert sands of the Sinai Peninsula. If we would conclude that God is thus working on our pride in order that we humbly submit to His commandments, then we can understand what the Hebrew writer stated:

> *My son, do not despise the disciplining of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him.* ***For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives*** (Hb 12:5,6).

Remember, our trip through the wilderness may be a confirmation that God loves us. And because He loves us, He will allow us to struggle through the wilderness. But as God did with Israel, we must always remember that He will not forsake us in the wilderness, neither will He leave us there.

B. A humility revival through humble service.

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders for the last time, he said to them, *"You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility ..."* (At 20:18,19). Humble people seek to serve, but proud people seek to be served. The proud sometimes pass off their responsibility to serve with the practice of "delegating responsibility." It is true that good leaders know how to delegate responsibility, **but they only delegate that which they cannot personally handle themselves**. It was for this reason that Paul instructed Timothy to instruct the rich that they not try to pay their way out of personal humble service.

> *Charge those who are rich in this world that they not be high-minded .... Teach that* ***they do good****,* ***that they be rich in good works****, ready to distribute, willing to share* ... (1 Tm 6:17,18).

No disciple can buy his way out of personal involvement in serving others. It was in service to others, especially evangelists, that Gaius was identified by the Holy Spirit as one who was doing well (See 3 Jn). He not only financially supported the evangelists who were traveling on their way to preach the gospel, he was also receiving them into his home. Paying for an evangelist's hotel bill is not receiving the evangelist into one's home.

1 Peter 5:5 says to *"**be clothed** with humility."* The meaning of the Greek word in this text is to "tie on." In other words, the humble tie on an apron in order to serve the needs of others. If one is too proud to tie on an apron and get his hands dirty by walking in the wilderness of struggle with and for others, then he has need of humility. There are no leaders among slaves who sit, watch and command from boardrooms.

We would not be as Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon when the kingdom fell to the Medo-Persians. He knew what was right, but he did not put into action through obedience that which he knew he should do. Therefore, it was said of him, *"And you his son, O Belshazzar,* ***have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this****"* (Dn 5:22).

The character of Belshazzar was, *"... you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven"* (Dn 5:23). Jesus admonished the religious leaders of Israel with the same judgment that was brought down upon Belshazzar. In judgment of His generation of religious leaders, Jesus said of them, *"And whoever will exalt himself will be humbled. And he who will humble himself will be exalted"* (Mt 23:12). This was Jesus' call for repentance from the religious leaders of His day. These would be good words for every young preacher to remember.

Immediately after Jesus made this introductory statement, He started into a condemnation of the character of the scribes and Pharisees. *"Woe to you,"* He continued to say in judgment of their arrogant character and behavior.

There is a religious community today wherein are a host of those who have lifted themselves up. They have puffed themselves up to be political leaders who would parade themselves on behalf of One who counted not being on an equality with God something to be grasped. We can always know when a preacher does not have the mind of Christ by how he would proudly present himself before the people. Pompous leaders can never represent the Prince who had not even a fox hole in which to dwell.

We sometimes forget that God desires those who will walk humbly with Him with a contrite heart (Mc 6:8). He commands that we put on a heart of humility (Cl 3:12). We must remember that we are the disciples of the one who humbled Himself to wash the feet of those whom He had created (Jn 13:4,5), and then died for His creation (Ph 2:5-8). We follow no person who would claim to be a leader for Jesus who does not have a dirty towel in his hands.

If we find ourselves in the wilderness of God's discipline, we must do as King Rehoboam of Judah. *"And when he* [Rehoboam] *humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him so that He would not completely destroy him"* (2 Ch 12:12). If one would seek to get out of the wilderness of discipline, then he must search for "Humble Street." As Rehoboam, Hezekiah also became somewhat arrogant as the king of Judah. His pride was about to bring down the nation of Israel. Thankfully, he came to his senses.

> *"Hezekiah humbled himself from the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah* (2 Ch 32:26; see 12:12).

We must not forget that *"by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life"* (Pv 22:4). The fear of the word of the Lord will always result in humility. It is for this reason that those who walk in pride usually have little concern for the word of God. Even wicked Ahab had enough sense to fear the pronouncement of God's word upon his prideful behavior. God pronounced that he would not escape punishment for this behavior (1 Kg 21:21-26).

> *Now it came to pass when Ahab heard those words* [of Elijah]*, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body. And he fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about depressed* (1 Kg 21:27).

There was still enough fear of the Lord in Ahab to bring him to his knees. The Lord said to Elijah who had delivered the judgment of the Lord to Ahab,

> *"Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?* ***Because he humbles himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days****. But in his son's days I will bring the evil on his house"* (1 Kg 21:29).

It may be that in the wilderness of the discipline of the Lord we humble ourselves. But we must keep in mind that we may still have to reap the consequences of our own sin while living in arrogance. *"Be not deceived. God is not mocked,* ***for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap****"* (Gl 6:7). Wilderness walking does not mean that we will not reap from our past wild ways. However, while we reap the harvest of wild seeds that we have sown, we can be assured that we can endure the reaping with a heart of humility. Reaping from wild seeds sown sometimes is a constant reminder never to return to the sowing of any more wild seeds.

Chapter 7

THE GOAL-MINDED DISCIPLE

In all the struggles one has to be a disciple of Jesus, this one area is the most difficult of all. When Paul wrote, *"And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the* ***renewing of your mind****"* (Rm 12:2), he was mandating something through which he had also struggled (Rm 12:2). "Renewing our minds" is not easy. But when we go on a journey with Saul and end up with Paul, we are encouraged by the fact that this journey can be made by everyone. The extremes between Saul and Paul is evidence of the fact that **God expects the journey of transformation to be made in the life of every disciple**. It may be that God chose Saul in order to prove that it is humanly possible to renew one's mind, regardless of how far our mind may be from the mind of Christ. We seem to be able to identify with the struggles of Paul in this area while we consider Jesus the ideal. But our minds can change for Jesus, for we must change in order that we be His disciples.

One of the most difficult aspects of our thinking that must be changed in order to be a disciple is how we view the future. If we allow our thinking of how we viewed the world in the past to distort our view of the

world in our future, then the past becomes a curse to our future. If we are encumbered with our past worldly baggage in dealing with the present, then our thinking and behavior in the present will be stifled. It is our goal to stop stumbling over past baggage by kicking the baggage out of our way to spiritual growth. "Renewing our minds," therefore, is not an option in discipleship behavior. It is a mandated necessity. Baggage of the past must be discarded for the sake of the future.

When Paul wrote Romans 12:2 he was not giving a suggestion. He was telling us to get on with putting away the old way of looking at the world, and getting on with changing our thinking. If our thinking concerning the things of the world does not begin changing at the time we obeyed the gospel, then we never understood the mind of Christ in order to obey the gospel.

One of the most effective tools for mind changing in our "mental toolbox" is the tool of goal setting. We can be thankful to God that He put this shiny tool in our mental toolbox in order that we not live in the despair of the past, and thus, destroy our walk with Jesus in the present. Therefore, in times of discouragement, we must use the mental tool of goal setting in order to get ourselves out of the pits in order to fly as eagles.

Genesis 11:6 is a precious evaluation of the mental ability that God invested in man:

> *Behold, they are one people and they all have one language. And this they begin to do. And now,* ***nothing will be impossible for them that they have imagined to do****.*

In the historical context of this statement, the people were not fulfilling the Lord's command that the world's population spread throughout the world in order to populate the world. The people stayed together because they were of one language. The building of the tower of Babel gave them one goal in life. What is revealed in this statement by God is that men have been gifted by God with a mental ability to plan and execute, to the point that *"nothing will be impossible"* that they have imagined to do. This is the ability that God invested in man.

Now keep the preceding in mind when reading Paul's statement of Romans 8:37: *"**But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us**."* Now this is power! We have the natural power to unite and do great things. But add to this power the love of God that is in us. Those of the world have the natural ability to build great cities, fly to the moon, and organize strong governments. Now add to the natural God-given power the power of God that works in Christians, and we begin to imagine that within a group of disciples there is tremendous power that can be unleashed to the glory of God.

God did not forget how He created the mind of men. When it came to calling unique individuals to accomplish the task of world evangelism, He chose goal-oriented people who would stay the course until the job was done. He needed those who would be able to stand alone against all social opposition (Matthew, the tax collector). He needed those who had the thirst for freedom in order to preach the gospel of freedom to the world (Simon, the Zealot—Jewish insurrectionist). He needed those with self-initiative to boldly go where no man would go (James and John, the sons of thunder). He needed those who would just speak out what needed to be said (Peter, the impetuous braveheart). And He needed those who were determined to accomplish their course regardless of all the obstacles that Satan could throw in their path, those who had no inhibitions about standing before any man on any occasion (Paul, the leader against all obstacles).

In His call of Paul, Jesus informed Ananias that Paul was *"a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel"* (At 9:15). **Jesus knew that once the mind of Paul was triggered with the right mission, the mission would happen**. Jesus sees this in each one of us. By the renewing of our minds, we can pull the trigger, and see *"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). Once one pulls that mental trigger for Jesus, he can expect awesome things to start happening in his life to the glory of God.

A. Establish goals for God.

In the life of every new disciple, the renewing of one's mind must begin with the establishment of goals. Goals give vigor to one's life. Jesus saw this in the mind of Paul before he was called on the Damascus road. When studying this aspect of Paul's life, it is simply exhilarating to see what the mind of a human being can do with the ambition of one who seeks to do the work of God in his life.

Paul wrote to the disciples in Rome that they would be only one stop on his way to Spain. *"Whenever I make my journey into Spain, I hope to see you in my journey and to be supported on my way there by you ..."* (Rm 15:24,28). With the financial support of the "Department of Corrections of the Roman Empire," Paul accomplished his goal as far as a Roman prison, from where he wrote back to the Philippian disciples,

> *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*** [goal] ***of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*** (Ph 3:13,14).

There are so many exciting things in this statement. Every disciple should take notice: (1) In order to fulfill one's mission for Jesus, he must not let the past detour him. He must not let the past be an excuse for not moving forward. He must not let the past encumber his planning of goals for the future. (2) In order to fulfill our mission in renewing our mind in order to accomplish goals for God, we must simply keep on striving for the future. Christianity is not about bemoaning one's misfortunes of the past, but about rejoicing over those "exceedingly abundant" things that God has for us in the future. (3) Regardless of being in prison, one must, as Paul, press toward the accomplishment of one's destiny. Neither lamenting the past, nor idleness in the present, are an option. Every disciple of Jesus must press on.

One of the greatest emotional powers that is yet to be unleashed in the lives of some disciples, is the power of discovering one's personal destiny for Jesus. Paul's destiny was given to him directly by Jesus (See At 9:15). We, on the other hand, need the close fellowship of other disciples in order that we discover our destiny for God. What Paul wanted for the Philippians was that they too be of his mind. *"Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect,* ***have this mind****"* (Ph 3:15). Paul was not unique as a human being. The statement "have this mind" is the Holy Spirit saying that every disciple can do what Paul did in his life, once we have discovered our destiny for God. It is the way God made us so that nothing will be impossible for us if we determine to get busy for God.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus began to change the thinking of His disciples. He first sought to capture their imagination in reference to the task that He would set for them. *"Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields,* ***for they are white already for harvest****"* (Jn 4:35). The fields (people) were there. The harvest (souls from preaching) would happen. Now they just needed to start thinking about getting the job done. It took over three years for Jesus to change the thinking of the disciples. But they changed, and then got on with the task of accomplishing the mission of their Master.

The sense of urgency to give every soul the opportunity to hear the good news of the cross was what moved Paul. **Wherever Paul went, he was looking for somewhere else to go**.

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, and after they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them (At 16:6,7).

Get the picture. Paul was so determined to go wherever to preach the gospel that it took divine intervention to detour him to places God wanted him to go. What eventually happened—which thing Paul did not understand at the time in Acts 16—was that later in his travels he would go to Ephesus and teach in the school of Tyrannus. And from this two-year stay in Ephesus, *"****all those who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus****, both Jews and Greeks"* (At 19:10). So those of Bithynia of Asia, as well as all Asia, eventually heard the word of the gospel through the labors of Paul. In Acts 16 Paul did not know God would eventually lead him to preach the gospel to Asia through other men in Acts 19. Paul's goal for God for Asia was fulfilled, but not in the way that Paul initially dreamed in Acts 16.

The lesson from this account of Paul's ministry is that for one to fulfill his destiny, he must be perceptive to God's leading. And if one's initial plans are detoured, it may be the work of God, not Satan. God may be redirecting us to a more productive mission.

B. God gives power to goals.

The Holy Spirit made a statement in Romans 8:31 that a disciple must never forget. *"****If God is for us, who can be against us****?"* If as a disciple one tries to start thinking about who can be against him, then he has not yet figured out the mind of Christ. When one starts thinking that the whole world is against him, then he needs to start lifting up his eyes and see that God has put the whole world before him. It is then that he must straighten up and say, *"****I can do all things through Him who strengthens me****"* (Ph 4:13). Those who rely on their own strength will certainly cheat themselves of God's power working through them. They will not be able to "do all things," or at least when they finish their task, they will not be able to fully give credit to God for working in them.

When one starts depending on his own strength, then he cannot do all those things God intends for him to do. It is for this reason that the mind of Christ is what Christ said of His own ministry: *"My food is to* ***do the will of Him*** *who sent Me and to* ***finish His work****"* (Jn 4:34). When we start doing the will of the One after whom we claim to be a disciple, then the world opens up. Victories start coming our way. We are headed to mountain tops.

When we start allowing the will of the Father to be done in our lives, then His work on earth will be accomplished through us. This is exactly what Paul meant when in his latter life he wrote, *"I have finished my course"* (2 Tm 4:7). He had finished his destiny for Jesus. Every disciple must be able to say this at the end of his life. But in order to say this, one must be assured that he is allowing the will of the Father to be done in his life. Jesus gave Paul his earthly destiny (At 9:15). Because he was given his earthly destiny directly from Jesus, he stayed the course of his destiny in order to complete his mission. As a result, he could lay his head down in death knowing that he had accomplished the course for which he was called to do. He completed his business for God.

We can do the same as long as we allow God's power to work in us in order to accomplish His will. Victory is ours as long as we stay in the battle. The Holy Spirit writes, *"But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Co 15:57). The medium through which we accomplish the victory is our faith that Christ is truly working in our lives to bring about His ministry of reaping the white harvest. Remember this encouraging statement: *"**For whoever is born from God overcomes the world**. And this the victory that overcomes the world, **our faith**"* (1 Jn 5:4). This is a statement of fact, not hope. If one is born of God, then he will overcome all that the world has to throw at him. After about six months as new disciples who had been converted out of pagan idolatry, Paul gave witness to what can happen when a group of disciples have one mind and goal to accomplish great things for God. As we read the following testimony concerning the Thessalonian disciples, think about what God can do through one within six months after conversion to Christ.

> *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).

Discouraged? Then we need to remember that it is God working in us as we allow His will to be ours. When we remember that He seeks to work in us, then our mind begins to be transformed. When the world launches its discouragement against us, we need to raise an Ebenezer in our lives and move on. Such happened in the history of Israel when the Philistines were determined to destroy Israel. But Samuel stood before the discouraged Israelites, and after having raised a great stone, made the statement, *"Thus far the Lord has helped us"* (1 Sm 7:12).

We are where we are as His disciples because of the help of the One after whom we call ourselves. What would make us think that we will not be where we have determined to go for Him without His continued help? So we *"press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Ph 3:14). We will not be of those *"who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul"* (Hb 10:39). We will *"fight the good fight of the faith"* and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tm 6:12). This is the mind of Christ. This is the transformed mind that will take us through any discouragement of this world. And because we know that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4), then we can be determined that we will accomplish our destiny.

The victory has already been given to the Christian. We just need to claim it and continue in the battle. The beautiful thing about the psychology of Christianity is that it not only turns the world upside down, it reverses the sequence of battle and victory. In the world, battle first happens, and then victory. With Christianity, victory is first given, and then the battle ensues. It is great to engage in the battle with the enemy when you know that you have already won the victory.

Chapter 8

THE DETERMINED DISCIPLE

In order to accomplish any goal for God, our mind for God must be fine tuned. We must never forget that the bull's eye of the target of many peoples' lives is the last thing to wear out. One must be able to make a plan to accomplish great things for God, and then not fail to work his plan, knowing that God is working in our lives (Ph 4:13). But we must make our goals, knowing that in order to get anywhere, we must start somewhere. We thus plan our work and work our plan to the glory of God. We determine what we want to do, assume that there will be a great deal of striving in order to accomplish our goals to the glory of God, and then get on with the work.

James Allen once wrote, "The dreamers are the

saviors of the world." Now focus on how the Holy Spirit said we should use the examples of the Old Testament dreamers: *"Now these things happened to them **as an example, and they were written for our admonition** ..."* (1 Co 10:11). We could say the same about the Holy Spirit's record in the New Testament concerning the first century heroes of faith who dreamed of things far beyond this world. Their life's ambitions and walk by faith were not simply recorded for doctrinal studies, but as examples for life behavior. The Spirit seeks that we focus on how these great men of faith behaved their faith, and consequently, accomplished their dreams. A few examples will prove what the Holy Spirit is trying to encourage us to do in reference to living after the example of those who have gone on before us.

A. Solomon:

There was once a king who desired to build a great temple. After the initial start of construction, he walked among the workers. He asked one worker who was digging a hole what he was doing. The worker replied, "I am digging a hole." The king then walked further and asked another worker who was digging a hole what he was doing. The worker replied, "I am building a temple."

Once Solomon had settled into his reign, he set out to do the desires of his father, David. *"Now Solomon **determined** to build a house for the name of the Lord and a house for His kingdom"* (2 Ch 2:1). He first determined to accomplish a goal. He then, with *"70,000 men to bear burdens and 80,000 men to quarry stone in the mountains and 3,600 to supervise them,"* set out to accomplish his goal (2 Ch 2:18). And what happens when one determines to accomplish a goal which he has set for himself? *"And in the eleventh year* [of his reign] ... ***the house was finished** throughout all its parts, according to all the fashion of it. So it took him seven years to build"* (1 Kg 6:38). Remember Genesis 11:6?

B. Ezra:

Ezra was a teacher of God's word. As a teacher, he determined to teach the word of God to the people in captivity, as well as the returnees to the land of Palestine. So Ezra *"**prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach** in Israel statutes and judgments"* (Ez 7:10). In order for a disciple to be a disciple, he must get into the word of God, and then get the word of God into his heart and behavior. No one is a disciple of Jesus who does not know the word of Jesus.

Ezra's task was not easy. Profound ignorance of the word of God in the minds and hearts of the people lay heavy upon his heart. He knew that he had to first repent himself by seeking the law of the Lord. And then upon his repentance, he went to work teaching the law of God.

> *Now when Ezra had prayed and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled to him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children, for the people wept bitterly* (Ez 10:1).

Ezra, and all Israel knew, as someone said, that "the path to success is not paved with good intentions, but with good intentions that are carried out." If they listened to the word of God, then the Israelites knew that they had to do what they heard. In the context of Ezra's teaching of the law of God, the Israelites had married foreign women. If this marriage between the Israelites and Gentiles was allowed, then Israel as a distinct people of God, would pass away into history as nonexistent people. And if Israel did not exist as a distinct people by the time the Blessing promised to Abraham had come, then it would not be known if God had fulfilled His promises to the fathers. Both Ezra and his audience of Israelites knew that this was a serious matter. Their return from captivity to the land of promise was for the purpose of reestablishing the identity of Israel in order to receive the promises that were made to the fathers of Israel. But if they returned with their Gentile wives, then they would become as the Samaritans who had no identity with the fathers (Compare Jn 4:9).

The sincerity and respect of the people for the law of God was profound. According to the law, everyone knew what had to be done to preserve the identity of the children of Abraham for the fulfillment of the promises. And so they did what had to be done. Notice this determination to repent and do the will of God:

> *We have trespassed against our God and have taken foreign* [Gentile] *wives of the people of the land. Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born to them, according to the counsel of my lord, **and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God**. **And let it be done according to the law*** (Ez 10:2,3)

Would such obedience ever be done by one today who realizes that his behavior is contrary to the law of God? This is what discipleship is about. It is about loving Jesus more than any relative (See Mt 10:37; Lk

14:26). As Ezra, and the Israelites who had married Gentile women, if we discover something in our lives that is contrary to the commandment of God, then we must change our ways. Those who would be disciples of Jesus must remember what Paul wrote to Timothy: *"And if a man competes as an athlete,* ***he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully****"* (2 Tm 2:5). One cannot expect to receive what the law promises unless he is willing to strive for it according to the law.

Now before we commend the Israelite men too much for putting away their Gentile wives, we must also commend the wives who believed that this had to be done in order to preserve the identity of Israel. These were some well-taught women in the law and prophets. They understood that the hope of Israel, the Redeemer, would come out of Israel for their salvation also. We commend these wives for the part they played to preserve the identity of Israel. With their children, we would think that they made the greater sacrifice than their husbands who headed back to Palestine. At least they understood that God's plan to redeem mankind was more important than themselves. They loved God more than themselves, even the well-being of their children. In our claim to be disciples of Jesus, we should think on these things.

C. Jesus:

In His own life, Jesus established an example for His disciples to follow (1 Pt 2:21). He determined to do that for which He came into the world. He said to His disciples, *"And truly the Son of Man goes* ***as it was determined****"* (Lk 22:22). Jesus determined to do the will of the Father. He had an objective. And like Him, we cannot get excited about determining to accomplish an objective if we have no objective to be accomplished. Jesus' objective was to suffer for us. It was not a pleasant goal, but necessary on our behalf. Our's may not be a pleasant task, but it is necessary on behalf of the salvation of others.

In His final hour, Jesus cried out to the Father, *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless,* ***not My will, but Yours be done****"* (Lk 22:42). The cup could not be removed. The Son had to go to the cross. Was this objective easy? Luke recorded, *"And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Lk 22:44). His objective brought Him to sweat drops like blood. With the same agony, so should ours.

Some goals that we set for ourselves will be difficult to accomplish, but they are necessary in order to fulfill our destiny as His disciples. Peter recalled the sufferings of Jesus, and then made a proclamation concerning the cost of discipleship: *"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).

Jesus determined to go to the cross. With great suffering, He accomplished His destiny for our salvation. It is interested that during His ministry He reminded His disciples that there was destiny in His ministry for their benefit.

> *Behold, we are going to Jerusalem. And all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished* (Lk 18:31).

And from the cross, and in reference to all that was prophesied concerning His ministry, He said, *"It is finished"* (Jn 19:30). Paul said, *"I have finished my course"* (2 Tm 4:7). True disciples will be able to say the same on their deathbeds.

D. Paul:

There is no greater personality recorded for us that illustrates the example of Jesus with reference to striving for a personal goal to fulfill one's destiny, than the apostle Paul. When the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to make the statement, *"Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Co 11:1), He was pointing all disciples of posterity to the account of his behavior, as the New Testament writers pointed believers to the Old Testament heroes (1 Co 10:11). And from the inspired hand of Paul himself, we would not conclude that he was taking "literary selfies" of himself. The Spirit simply wanted the world of disciples for all time to understand that "here is one of you who can do such things as this" (See 2 Co 11:16-32).

Classic statements of commitment flowed from the end of Paul's pen. One of the best is Romans 1:14,15, which statement explains his motivation:

> *I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.* ***So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome****.*

This is a powerful statement as it is. However, as Paul progressed through his letter to the Roman disciples, he felt compelled to explain the intensity of his discipleship of Jesus.

> *I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience also bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have*

> *great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.* ***For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren****, my kinsmen according to the flesh* (Rm 9:1-3).

WOW! Paul was consumed with the destiny that every disciple has, that is, to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). *"Brethren,"* as if he were writing directly to each one of us today, *"my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved"* (Rm 10:1). If we would seek for one passage that explains the heart of the disciple of Jesus, this would be it. If there is no desire to save the lost, then one's discipleship has collapsed. His discipleship for the salvation of the lost, is useless. If there is no desire to give one's life for Christ, then what good is it to claim that one is a disciple of the One who died for us? With his own life Paul had to explain this to the disciples in Caesarea.

> *What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?* ***For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*** (At 21:13).

On the Damascus road, Paul was given his destiny directly by Jesus (At 9:15). Once he cleaned up the sin in his life by being washed in the waters of baptism, he was on his way for the rest of his life without ever the notion of giving up his discipleship. He reminded us, *"For this purpose I also labor,* ***striving according to His working that powerfully works in me****"* (Cl 1:29). What is powerful about this statement is the fact that he wrote it from prison. And if we would not believe the intensity of his passion for preaching the gospel to the lost, he wrote to the Philippians, *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Ph 3:14). It seems that he would never quit. The doxology of his life would be, *"And so I have made it my goal to preach the gospel ..."* (Rm 15:20).

So if one would want a personal testimony of true discipleship, then it would be necessary to study the life of Paul. We must ask ourselves why the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to write so much about his life in the New Testament? Our only answer is that the Holy Spirit wanted us to have a very personal, and human, witness of what true discipleship is all about. And if we do imitate Paul as he imitated Jesus, then we all can say at the end of our lives,

> *I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. 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).

E. Us:

The word we would now use in reference to ourselves is "reflection." Each disciple of Jesus must personally reflect on himself in reference to his commitment to be a disciple of Jesus. In reference to our financial commitment to the continued work of Jesus through us, Paul wrote, *"Let each one give according as he purposes in his heart ..."* (2 Co 9:7). If we could take this statement beyond coins that are cast into a collection coffer, **we must give our lives according to what we would purpose**, knowing that in the end, 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). Through our living as disciples of Jesus we must lay up treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19,20). We must fill up our treasure chest in heaven in order that Jesus has a great source of good from which to draw when we stand before Him in judgment.

Our commitment to be the type of disciple Jesus would have us be, takes a great deal of effort. In our discipleship in prayer, the Holy Spirit had recorded for our benefit the intense prayer life of Epaphras. In writing to the Colossian disciples, Paul reminded them that Epaphras was *"****always laboring fervently for you in prayers*** *..."* (Cl 4:12). The Greek word for "laboring fervently" in this text is the same word used for the labor pains a mother has in giving birth. Few disciples there are who have reached this level of fervent prayer. Nevertheless, it is a goal to which we all would aspire. The greater our labor, the brighter our light will shine for Jesus.

The central nature of our lives must be the gospel that we have obeyed. Christians are living the gospel because they walk in appreciation of God's grace. They are allowing the mind of Christ to be in them (Ph 2:5). And since they have the mind of Christ, then they are willing to go on the incarnational journey with the Son of God. This journey will lead them into all the world, or at least into the lives of those in their neighborhood who need to hear and obey the gospel. When one disciple tells another person about the Bread of Life, then that disciple is living the gospel of the One who came into the world for us. This is the nature of the true disciple of Jesus. He is simply not a disciple in name, but in action. A Christian is named by what he or she does.

Chapter 9

THE LIGHTHOUSE DISCIPLE

Have you ever asked yourself the question as to how much light you shine for Jesus? The only way to determine the intensity of your light is to start reading the New Testament. We must compare our "little gospel light" with those who were intensely evangelistic. Any other standard by which you would judge the light of your discipleship is misguided and twisted. One would certainly not judge his discipleship by the lives of other disciples, for other disciples are asking the same question of themselves. We must keep in mind that the discipleship of men as Paul was recorded by the Holy Spirit for our comparisons. Remember, *"Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Co 11:1)? We must not compare ourselves with ourselves as some arrogant disciples did in Corinth (2 Co 10:12). It was to these that Paul mandated that they follow him in his sacrificial life as a disciple. **Today, we must go to the source, straight to the dictionary on discipleship**. And in doing this, we come up with some distorted disciples in the first century, for the Holy Spirit also wanted us to see how others become lukewarm and twisted, thinking all the time that they were faithful. It might be good to review some of these disciples in order to guard ourselves from becoming the same. The Holy Spirit had the life-styles of these disciples recorded in order that we avoid being sidetracked to a religiosity that we have created after our own imagination, or the misguided behavior of those who claim to be "Christian," but are not.

A. "Candle disciples":

Ever blown out the candles on a birthday cake? Candles are easy to blow out, even when there is a group of them on top of a cake. They are easy to extinguish, because they are frail lights that give off little light by themselves.

There are a great deal of halfhearted disciples who give little light, and when times get tough, they are easily blown out by the trials of life. Remember this judgment of Jesus that He pronounced on the disciples in Laodicea?

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

In some disciples, Jesus is certainly present. But they follow Jesus only as it is convenient to their life-styles. And then in some, He is prominent. But He is usually preeminent in only a few Christians. The problem about being a lukewarm disciple is that when tough times come, there is not enough spiritual steam to take one up the hill. In the parable of the Sower, we must not forget the seed that was sown in stony places (Mt 13:1-23). One cannot miss the meaning of Jesus' interpretation of His own parable.

> *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).

B. "Kerosene lamp disciples":

Some might refer to this type of lamp as a hurricane lamp. This is the type of lamp that has a glass enclosure in which the flame burns. The problem with the lamp is that the glass becomes obscured by smoke, and eventually the lamp gives off little light. The glass must continually be cleaned for the lamp to accomplish its purpose.

Those to whom the Hebrew writer wrote were "kerosene lamp" disciples. They had burned for a lengthy time, but by the time of the writing of Hebrews, they were "smoked up." The Holy Spirit thus said of them, *"About whom we have many things to say, and hard to explain,* ***seeing you have become dull of hearing****"* (Hb 5:11). One becomes dull of hearing the word of God when his mind is turned to something else. His discipleship becomes religiously habitual. This is the curse of a legalistic system of theology. The adherents to such a theology simply accomplish their legal checks on what they are supposed to do, and then mentally check out.

When one becomes dull of hearing, he turns God off and follows after his own religiosity. He actually ceases to be a disciple, for discipleship means "to follow." No true disciple will become dull of following if he continually seeks to clean his soul with the word of God. However, Paul wrote of some disciples who would

turn away from the word of God. *"Now the Spirit clearly says that in the latter times* ***some will depart from the faith****, giving heed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons ..."* (1 Tm 4:1).

These are as dogs returning to their own vomit of sin, and pigs, after they have been washed, returning to wallowing in the mire of degradation (See 2 Pt 2:20-22). Peter identified these disciples.

> *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).

There is only one prevention from returning to the dirt of sin. Peter explained, *"... as newborn babes,* ***desire the sincere milk of the word*** *so that you may grow up to salvation"* (1 Pt 2:2). We have found that those who are not zealous Bible students are continually allowing their light to grow dim because "the glass is dirty." If there is no growth through the study of the word of God, then our glass is becoming dirty with our own religious smoke. Therefore, the Holy Spirit exhorts every disciple to *"grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18).

C. "Gas lamp disciples":

Much of Africa still lights up the night with a gas lamp. It burns for a period of time, and then needs to be pumped up again. Throughout its use for a period of time there is the necessity of pumping it up in order that it continually gives light.

Some Christians are like this. They need someone else to pump them up continually with enthusiasm before they will shine. There is no consistency in their lives as a light for the gospel. Though everyone needs to be pumped up with enthusiasm periodically, we must be on guard with ourselves that we do not need to be continually encouraged in order to be a witness for Christ. If we do, then we are probably thinking mostly of ourselves and not of those who really need encouragement. "Gas lamp disciples" have not assumed their responsibility to pump up others. Since they are always low on "spiritual pressure," they have nothing to offer to others.

Enthusiasm certainly inspires enthusiasm. We want to be around the truly optimistic individual who thrives with an optimistic and enthusiastic spirit. We want to be around such a person in order to have our own batteries recharged. If we are the type of person who inspires others, then the spirit of Christ is truly working in our hearts. The small pamphlet, *Attitudes Unlimited*, was once distributed among businessmen in America. It was circulated in order to identify and encourage successful leadership. In one issue the statement was made,

> As we examine the lives of those who have risen to great heights in their chosen fields of endeavor, we find a very definite indication that success is actually due less to one's ability than to the enthusiastic drive behind the objective.

And when we think of the objective that was set before the early disciples, we can understand Acts 5:42: *"And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."*

Paul was such a person. He was willing, with whatever thorn in the flesh hindered him, to accomplish the God-given destiny that was set before him.

> *I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.* ***So as much as in me is****, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome* (Rm 1:14,15).

Determination will result in goals accomplished. The accomplishment of our goals depends more on our earnest determination than on our skills. The truly successful person is not the one who has the most gifts, but the one who exercises the most enthusiasm in his life to use his gift.

Have you ever said of some energetic Christian, "He is sure 'pumped up' on Jesus"? Now how do you suppose he became "pumped up" on Jesus? It is true that when one finally realizes that Jesus is the Son of God, and then goes to the cross with Him, into the tomb of water, and finally out of the water of baptism, he is usually burning with zeal. But we have also noticed that some new disciples just run out of steam. They do so because they failed to implement in their lives the principle that Jesus taught in John 13:17. Jesus said to His disciples after He had just washed their feet, *"****If you know these things, happy are you if you do them****."* "Know" without "do" equals lukewarmness ... spewed out ... death (Rv 3:15,16). Those who are "pumped up" on Jesus are that way because they went to work as a disciple while they were still dripping wet from the waters of baptism. They were truly baptized "into Christ," wherein there is work to be done. *"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). If one does not do the work of a disciple, then he is not a disciple, for disciples find a towel and start look-

ing for dirty feet. We can always find a "pumped up" disciple by the dirty towel that is in his hand.

D. "Stop light disciples":

What driver is there who is not occasionally irritated with stop lights (robots). Once the traffic gets rolling, then the light turns to yellow, and then red. The entire flow of traffic must come to a stop at the command of a stop light.

Every disciple will encounter "stop light" resistance throughout his or her life. Stop lights usually come through those who turn aside from the truth of God's word. Paul identified two of these "stop light" characters in 2 Timothy 3:8: *"Now as Jannes and Jambres **withstood Moses**, so do these also resist the truth ...."* As Moses had men stand in the way of his ministry, so it will be with every disciple who seeks to carry out the will of the Lord in his life. Such resistance may come from a spouse, a friend, or those who are simply "on and off" as disciples. Some will simply oppose one's efforts to do good as Alexander opposed Paul in Ephesus. *"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil. May the Lord reward him according to his works"* (2 Tm 4:14).

Some "stop light" people are deceptive in their efforts to discourage others. Ever hear the statement, "Let me play the devil's advocate on this point"? We need no devils among us who hinder the work of God. Others will say, "I have some constructive criticism." What they really want to do is throw up a red light in order to discourage. It is like a woman who came out of a store and saw a car rolling down a hill. The door of the car was open, so she jumped in and hit the brakes. A gentleman came up from behind the car, and she said to him, "Well, I sure got it stopped." The gentleman replied, "I know. I was trying to push it to get it started." To such people who would act in such a way in reference to the work of God in the lives of others, we would repeat what Paul said to the Thessalonian disciples: *"Do not quench the Spirit"* (1 Th 5:19).

E. "Blinker light disciples":

These would be those disciples who are on and off in their work for Jesus. These disciples can always be identified by their attendance with the disciples. They are there and then gone, or there spasmodically. When the appointed assembly of the saints comes around, the church cannot depend on their presence because they may not be present. The "on and off" Christian has a problem with commitment to the family of God. He sometimes has a problem with living the disciplined life as a Christian. One unbeliever once said, "I think I would have become a Christian if I had not met so many people who said they were Christians."

If our lives reflect a lack of commitment and consistency as a disciple of Jesus, then our behavior actually turns people away from Christ. No disciple who truly understands what Jesus did on the cross is an "on and off" disciple. Someone once said, "Live as if Christ died yesterday, was resurrected this morning, and is coming tomorrow." We must be a consistent light for Jesus.

> *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).

Notice that the passage says "so shine." "So shine" means that there must be some quality to the light, which light must also be consistent before the world. It is not light that is placed under a basket on one day, and then on a lampstand the next day (Mt 5:14,15). It is consistent light. Blinker disciples do more harm than good for the kingdom because the world sees them as "half-hearted" disciples who pretend to follow Jesus.

F. "Lighthouse disciples":

What someone said about the disciple who shines forth the light of Jesus in his life, was true: "A Christian should be a breathing prayer, a living poem, a visible spirit, and a human lighthouse." This is the light that should so shine that others can see the glory of God through our spirit.

This was the life-style of the Thessalonian disciples, for less than six months after they were converted to Jesus, it was written of them:

> ***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).

No better example could have been given to every disciple than the preceding testimony. And no better advice could have been given than what someone once said below:

> Leave footprints of righteousness on the sands of time where you live so that other generations may have the lamp of truth by plain example.

Here are some questions to ask yourself: Does your school teacher know that you are a Christian? Do those

with whom you work know that you are a Christian? Do all your relatives know that you are a Christian? And if you had to go to heaven on the testimony of those who know you, would you make it? The *Reader's Digest* once repeated the quote, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" It is simply not what we profess that makes us a disciple of Jesus, but what we practice. Faith will bring us to Christ. Life will prove our endurance for Christ. And once we have been proved and tested, death will bring a crown from Christ.

Chapter 10

THE STRUGGLING DISCIPLE

Growth in discipleship is as a widening river that makes its way to the ocean of maturity. It feeds from small tributaries of substance as it meanders around curves and bends, over rocks and down waterfalls. But when it reaches the ocean, it can be, as the Amazon River of Brazil, over 250 kilometers across when it finally empties all its substance into the Atlantic Ocean. McGuffy's Reader gave the story of an old clock that ticked away every day until it started counting all the ticks it had to make: 120 a minute, 7,200 an hour, 172,800 a day, and in exhaustion of thought, it figured that it had to make 63,072,000 ticks to complete the year. So the old clock in mental exhaustion just quit. But then it began to consider that it would make just one tick. After that another was made, then another, and another, until it finally found itself ticking again one tick at a time.

Alcoholics Anonymous teaches the concept, "Don't try to stop drinking forever, merely say, 'I will not drink today.'" If in looking back in our lives, we compound past problems with present turmoil, we will simply stop ticking. Jesus knew this when He said to His disciples, *"No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Lk 9:62). Looking back is dangerous to discipleship. A Sunday school teacher once taught her class about Lot's wife who turned to look back at the burning of her former home. The teacher told the class that she then turned into a pillar of salt. One young boy threw up his hand and said, "Teacher, my mother turned back last week and she turned into a telephone pole." Someone once correctly said,

I have no yesterdays,
Time took them away;
Tomorrow may not be ---
But, I have today!

When Jesus called people to discipleship, He knew He was calling them to struggle in the present over their baggage of the past. He thus did not paint a verbal picture of a comfortable journey as the world who hated Him would eventually pour out their hate on them. *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you"* (Jn 15:18). And we would ask, as the disciples of Jesus surely thought to ask Him, "If we are to live in the world, why must the world hate us as Your disciples?" The answer is simple:

> *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*** (Jn15:19; see 17:14).

So Jesus reminded the disciples that the hate would not be directed to them personally, but in fact, it would be a hate directed against the Father. *"He who hates Me hates My Father also"* (Jn 15:23). Jesus comforted the disciples: *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you"* (Jn 15:18).

Because true discipleship involves living contrary to the way of the world, the life of the disciple is a living sermon of rebuke of the ways of the world. As a disciple of Jesus, the persecution that would come our way, therefore, will find its innocent victims. Jesus quoted the prophetic psalmist, *"They hated Me without a cause"* (Jn 15:25).

The irony of all this hate that was unleashed upon Jesus and His disciples lies in the fact that almost all the hate of Jesus and His disciples then, and our's now, originates from religious people, especially misguided religious leaders. When these leaders dragged Stephen outside the gates of Jerusalem, *"They gnashed at him with their teeth"* (At 7:54). They did stone Stephen, even as they tried to stone Jesus (Jn 8:59). They could not stone Jesus during His ministry, but He allowed them to crucify Him when His ministry was finished. When religious leaders seek to stone their opposition, then one knows that those who have stones in their hands are re-

ligiously misguided. Stones often reveal who is either teaching error, or behaving their erroneous teaching for the sake of pomp or purse.

When it is time to carry one's cross, it is time to lay our hands to the plow and not look back. It is time to look only for flying stones. Jesus knew this when He turned and said to the multitudes who were following Him, *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me"* (Mt 10:37). But discipleship would go far beyond loving Jesus more than one's relatives. *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me"* (Mt 10:38). Discipleship would go even further. *"He who finds his life will lose it.* ***And he who loses his life for My sake will find it****"* (Mt 10:39). Some will progress in their discipleship by leaving father and mother in order to follow Jesus into all the world. Some will even commit themselves to be Jesus' disciples by enduring the hardships of this life. But when the first gun shots are heard, then how many will scurry home in fear for their lives? We know of one disciple who did not, and thus, his life reminds all of us of the commitment that is needed to be a disciple unto death. Paul said to the Caesarean brethren, *"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). And so he did, not in Jerusalem, but in Rome at the edge of an executioners sword, so we are told through tradition.

The fact of discipleship is that *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tm 3:12). This is not news to those who truly understood this from the beginning of their walk with Jesus. They knew, as Peter instructed, *"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example* [of suffering] *that you should follow in His steps"* (1 Pt 2:21). Before one commits himself to discipleship, he must look straight in the eyes of Jesus, as *"He turned and said to them ..."* (Lk 14:25). Then listen: *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother .... And whoever does not bear his own cross .... So likewise, whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has,* ***cannot be My disciple****"* (Lk 14:26-33). Scary words! Emerson was right: "Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain." So Jesus would say to us,

> *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).

So *"seeing we are also surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses* [faithful believers], *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). We run the race of the disciple in order to obtain the prize (1 Co 9:24). But in order to stay in this race, we are *"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"* (Hb 12:2). We would remain faithful in the race, for we understand what Solomon meant in the words, *"Better is the end of a thing than its beginning"* (Ec 7:8). And, *"A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul ..."* (Pv 13:19). So it really comes down to one thing when determining whether we would become the type of disciple that Jesus expects of us. It is as someone said, "Many people have the right aim, but not enough courage to pull the trigger."

Chapter 11

THE COURAGEOUS DISCIPLE

So by this time in your journey through this subject, there might be some apprehension about being a disciple of Jesus. Because of the complacency of the "Christianity" with which we are often associated, the norm may now be a lethargic behavior of those who pretend to be disciples of Jesus. But one's discovery of true discipleship is always scary. We are never what we want to be. But do not fear, one only needs a word of encouragement to lay his hand to the plow of being the type of disciple that is pleasing to the One we all seek to follow.

One of those passages that one should put on his refrigerator is Psalm 46:1-3:

> *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.*

Courage is the answer to fear, for fear is the basis of a great deal of unhappiness. Fearful people never fully realize their ambitions. Fear is often the result of what we do not know. When Jesus came walking to the dis-

ciples on water, they did not know that it was Him. *"Now when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea,* ***they were terrified****, saying, 'It is a ghost!'* ***And they cried out for fear****"* (Mt 14:26). In response to taking ownership of his responsibility to produce, the one talent man relied on fear as an excuse. *"And* ***I was afraid*** *and went and hid your talent in the earth"* (Mt 25:25). Fear will endanger our discipleship to the point that if fear is allowed to control our behavior, then we have disqualified ourselves from eternal glory. Revelation 21:8 still states, *"But* ***the cowardly*** *and unbeliever ...* ***will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*** *...."*

The answer to fear is courage. Courage is based on faith, and thus fear is a manifestation of a lack of faith. The courageous Christian has nothing to fear but God. *"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 is not that we are fearless of things of this world. It is that those of faith have learned how to master their fears. It is the challenge of the disciple to control his fears in view of a world that would move the focus of our faith to those things that are of this world.

A. Old Testament courage.

We must look to those who have gone on before us. They are witnesses of true faith, and now they surround us in order to see how we will endure the race of life (Hb 12:1,2). In fleeing the murderous desires of King Saul, David penned the words, *"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,* ***I will fear no evil****, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me"* (Ps 23:4). If that is not enough, then we must be encouraged by the life and death experiences of those who truly walked by faith. Every disciple of Jesus must read through the following testimony of Old Testament men and women of faith who never had Christ in their lives. They walked by faith without knowing that Jesus Christ would eventually come into the world to give us hope of eternal life after death.

> *For the time would fail me to tell* [of those] *who through faith stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. From weakness they were made strong, became valiant in war and turned to flight foreign armies .... And others 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 in deserts ....* (See Hb 11:32-40).

Had enough? The men and women of faith before Christ stood by their faith and that which was right. They did not turn from God because of the harshness of what this world had to offer them. They were faithfuls, as William Penn wrote, "Right is right even if everyone is against it; and wrong is wrong, even if everyone is for it." And for the faithful righteous of the Old Testament, they stood their ground against all that could possibly turn one from God. And what is amazing about these people is not one person who struggled and died had any knowledge of Jesus. We often wonder today how many people would be hanging around if there were no such thing as Christianity, but only faith in God.

B. New Testament courage:

It is true that persecution is to faith as wind is to fire. It blows the little fires out, but fans the big ones on. John was right when he stated, *"And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith"* (1 Jn 5:4).

Nero was Caesar of Rome between A.D. 54 and 68. He had a personal vendetta against those who would not submit to him as lord. He lived a life of vanity and pomp. On one occasion he decided to amuse himself, so he burned a part of Rome to make some real estate available for his own desires. He then blamed the fire on the Christians, many of whom were arrested, and subsequently suffered the vengeance of Rome for the fire. But it was during this reign of terror of Nero that Paul was arrested, and eventually beheaded. But would Paul for fear refuse to preach Jesus in Rome? Not a chance. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul encouraged his readers by saying, *"All the saints greet you,* ***especially those of Caesar's*** [Nero's] ***household****"* (Ph 4:22). We have often wondered what Nero would have done if he knew that even some of his own household were baptized believers.

The exhortation of the Holy Spirit through His word is to be of good cheer in times of fear (Mt 14:27). *"Watch! Stand fast in the faith. Behave like men. Be strong"* (1 Co 16:13). *"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"* (Ep 6:10). *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"* (2 Tm 1:7). *"If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name"* (1 Pt 4:16). Is that enough encouragement?

Solomon wrote, *"The wicked man flees when no man pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion"* (Pv 28:1). Solomon was also right when he wrote, *"The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever puts his trust in the Lord will be safe"* (Pv 29:25). Disciples of Jesus must at least be as strong as those who walked by faith

in the Old Testament. And because we have the added advantage of Jesus, then we can conquer all fear. We are not speaking in ideals on this point. Paul is proof. He wrote from prison, *"At my first defense no one stood with me, but all men forsook me. May it not be counted against them.* ***But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me*** *..."* (2 Tm 4:16,17). And when the Lord stands by us, what will happen is what happened in Paul's life. *"**And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion**"* (2 Tm 4:17). He was not only delivered from death on more than one occasion, but his entire life was a deliverance from all peril (Read 2 Co 11:16-33).

Maybe it should be in our lives when faced with daunting foes, as the courage of General Ferdinand Fock at the battle of Marne, who was the head of the "Iron Division." He reported back to command, "My center is giving; my left wing is retreating; the situation is excellent; I am attacking." When called before the Deity of Worms by the Catholic Church to withdraw his heretical beliefs against some teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, Martin Luther boldly stated:

> Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by right reason, for I trust neither in popes nor in councils since they have often erred and contradicted themselves—unless I am thus convinced, I am bound by the texts of my Bible, my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither right nor safe to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

One reformer in those dark days of Reformation against the tyranny of religion was denounced with the statement, "All the world is against you." His bold reply was, "Then I am against all the world." To such we would add:

> Here we are, and here we stand,
> Dear Lord please lend a hand.
> We'll walk across the stormy seas,
> That thou in us might be pleased.

Someone correctly stated, "Our strength is shown in the things we stand for, our weakness in the things we fall for." Carlyle wrote, "The courage we desire and prize is not the courage to die decently, but to live manfully." At the end of our lives, it should be written on our tombstones that which was written on a monument in the memorials of Westminster Abbey in honor of Lord Lawrence,

> He feared man so little
> Because he feared God so much.

Book 60

The Seven Flickering Flames Of Asia

Lamps are often mentioned in the Bible, but there is no description of their shape. The only means by which we can understand the shape of an ancient lamp is through archaeological discoveries of various lamps that were made during biblical times. Many different shapes of lamps have been discovered, most being formed out of either clay or brass. Some had the form of a saucer-like bowl with two sides lipped over for the placement of a wick. Some had the form of a flattened jar with two holes, one for filling with oil or fat, and the other for the wick. Some of these had a handle.

Lamps had a small supply of oil to feed the wick, and thus the burning life was only for two to four hours. This meant that there always had be a supply of oil in order to fill the basin of the lamp.

Throughout the Bible the lamp is used metaphorically to signify many things. It is used to refer to the word of God (Ps 119:105), the guidance of God (2 Sm 22:29), the salvation of God (Is 62:1), and man's spirit (Pv 20:27). In Revelation, the lamp is used to symbolize the existence and influence of Christians in a particular city.

In the metaphorical use of the lamp to refer to the seven churches of Asia, or lampstand (some translations read, "candlestick"), two very important points are emphasized. The first is in reference to the influence of Christians in the communities in which they lived. When the lampstand was removed, so was the existence of the church, and thus the influence of Christians in the city.

The second reason the Holy Spirit used the lampstand as a metaphor was to teach the frail existence of the flame of influence the lampstand provided. The flame of the lampstand was open, and thus, there was no protection from any gust of wind, or even a small puff of breath. In fact, every night when the flame of the lampstand was extinguished in the house, it was puffed out by someone in the house. The flame was so fragile in its existence that even the children of the house were given the responsibility of snuffing out the lamp for the night.

And so it was with the influence of the disciples in the cities in which they lived. If they did not repent, they would be easily snuffed out by Jesus. In fact, some of the churches were so far gone, that their flame of influence was flickering, and thus, about to be snuffed out by Jesus.

We are wondering why Jesus really chose the seven churches of Asia as the disciples to who He would direct some of the most stern judgments since His final message the scribes and Pharisees before the cross. Could it be that what was happening among some the disciples of these seven city regions were sinful beliefs and behavior they needed to correct if they were to survive the impending tribulation what was coming? The revelation was delivered through the hand of apostle John. We are sure copies were immediately made and circulated throughout the church. Christians had tasted some persecution at the hand of the psychopathic Nero. But what was to come was far more intense and comprehensive than Nero's burning of Christians to light up his garden in Rome. What was coming was international, encompassing the entirety of the Roman Empire. Was it that Jesus needed to inform the members of His universal body that they needed to clean up their act if they were to survive what was coming. Possibly so. What we experience in our adventure through these seven messages is strikingly familiar. Though the names have changed, and our application is dated over two thousands years later, we are often in the midst of apostasy of belief and behavior that is so similar to these messages. The relevance of the messages, therefore, may make some feel uncomfortable simply because they are so relevant today.

We could probably have been sitting with some of the disciples in any one of the assemblies of the houses throughout the region of Ephesus. Or possibly, we may have been among the Christians in Smyrna or Sardis. At least in the Lord's message to the disciples in these cities, there is a message for each one of us. The message to the seven churches of Asia cuts to the heart of all

our presumptuous religiosity we might harbor. It does this in order that we repent and restore Jesus to our daily living. One of the primary lessons that we learn from a study of the seven messages to the Christians in the cities is what Jesus expects of Christians who claim to be His disciples.

• **Date:** The visions of Revelation probably occurred just before A.D. 70. This would make their revelation less than forty years after the joyous day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. Some would say that the visions were recorded the latter part of the first century. But we would disagree with this long held assumption. We would believe against all tradition in order to affirm that all the New Testament letters were written before the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70. It is traditionally assumed that the letter of Revelation was written around A.D. 96. But this late date does not seem to harmonize with God's work to terminate national Israel in A.D. 70. And then, we would also question why the Holy Spirit would wait so long to cap the New Testament at the end of the first century. We will argue for the conclusion that all revelation through Scripture, plus the work of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, were finalized by the time God used the Roman Empire to turn the final page of His work through national Israel to bring the Redeemer into the world. A.D. 70 was, according to Daniel, the consummation of national Israel.

What is significant about the early date for the addresses to the seven churches is that apostasy can come very quickly. Only one decade is enough time to slide into apostasy from Christ and into the situation that we witness among some of the disciples of western Asia Minor. If Revelation were written at the conclusion of the first century, then we could add another twenty or so years to the spiritual condition of the disciples that Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 & 3. However, such a short time is hardly worth discussion in reference to apostasy that can occur in one generation. What is important to remember is that from the beginning of a beautiful story in Acts 19, to the proclamation of the judgments in Revelation concerning the spiritual fall of some among the seven churches of Asia, **we have a frightening short period of time**. It is so short, that within the lifetime of the average disciple, the aged can look back in their lives and see if they have fallen.

It does not take generations to go into apostasy. One generation will do. And in the case of the seven churches of Asia, it seems that only one generation was sufficient to move so far away from Jesus that special visions had to come directly from Jesus to John, and then to the seven churches, in order to sort out some problems. At least, the visions were meant to inform the recipients of the message that they were in serious trouble of having their lampstand of influence extracted from the cities in which the disciples were located.

• **Roman Theocracy:** As students of the political history, we must not forget that religion and government were often combined in ancient nations. Theocratic leaders ruled the people by demanding allegiance to the king or Caesar as they would give allegiance to their gods. Rome capitalized on this as narcissistic Caesars began to arise in the Empire. Nero was one of the first, demanding that people believe that he was some deity. The people were to call him "lord," not as a manner of respect, but as one who would be reverenced as a god.

The sentiment that was to be expressed to the Caesar, was not simply patriotism to a head of state, but worship of a god on earth. If allegiance to Caesar as lord was not expressed, then the denial of such was viewed as insurrection against the state. And so, Christians who believed that there was only one Lord, were in trouble.

With the beginning in Nero, there were about 150 years of different levels of Caesarian claim to deity that prevailed throughout the Roman Empire. During this period, Christians suffered the persecution of a theocratic state that demanded both political and religious loyalty. Christians were headed into this era of persecution at the time Jesus gave His messages to the seven churches. Therefore, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, through the messages and visions of Revelation, prepared Christians for the trials that were coming, which trials had already begun under Nero.

As we study through the historical background of the seven churches, one can see in the community of the churches, that there was a great deal of intimidation by the community. This religious intimidation to conform to the religious ways of the community would grow. The book of Revelation was written by John for the purpose of giving encouragement to these Christians of the tribulations that would shortly come to pass.

Leaders: If the visions of this book occurred before A.D. 70, then Paul's Miletus meeting in Acts 20 posses the opportunity for some speculation to better understand the timeline from his meeting in Acts to Jesus' messages to the seven churches in Revelation.

We begin with Paul in Troas where he arrived in the company of Sopater, Arisarchus and Secundus (At 20:4). It is significant to notice that with them was also Gaius who was from Derbe and Timothy from the Derbe/Lystra area of Cilicia. But what is more interesting is that Tychicus and Trophimus are mentioned as being

from Asia, possibly the region of the seven churches. The date of the Troas meeting was around A.D. 59, only a few short years before Jesus' revelation of the spiritual condition of the seven churches of Asia as it is explained in His address to the churches in the area.

From Troas, Paul and his companions headed south. He sent his companions on the Assos, where he determined to be reunited with them after he himself had walked alone the distance from Troas to Assos (At 20:15). From Assos the team sailed together to Mitylene, and then the next day on to Chios. The next day they arrived at Samos, and then went on to the small town of Miletus (At 20:15).

In Acts 20:16 the travel log of Luke becomes interesting. Luke records that Paul *"**did not want to spend time in Asia**"* (At 20:16). Luke does not say that Paul did not want to spend time in Ephesus. When Paul stayed two years in Ephesus on a previous journey, "all Asia" from Ephesus heard the word (At 10:9,10). Therefore, we would assume that "all Asia" at least refers to the area of the cities of the seven churches of Revelation, for all the cities were but a short distance from Ephesus. And speaking from our own personal experience, if it was known that Paul was coming, the disciples of "all Asia" would want to come and listen to him, for he was the "walking Bible." Surely the word had gotten out that Paul was coming. When those who are hungering for the word of God hear that a teacher is coming through, you can assume the response. We have conducted seminars where brethren have walked up to five days, day and night, in order to attend.

Now consider the geographical location of the seven churches from Miletus, *"for from Miletus he* [Paul] *sent to Ephesus and called the presbyters of the church"* (At 20:17). Must we assume that these were only the presbyters of the city of Ephesus, or can we assume that the presbyters from the rest of the cities in the region had first assembled in Ephesus in anticipation of Paul's arrival? Luke states *"Now when they* [the presbyters] *came to him ..."* (At 20:18), the meeting began. Now consider this. (This is something that may be difficult for us as automobile-bound brethren to understand.) The average person in the "non-automobile world" walked 25-30 kilometers a day. This means that Ephesus was about a day's walk from Miletus. Smyrna was about a two-day walk. Pergamum about three days, or the leaders could have come from this port city by ship. Thyatira was about a four-day walk or about two days by ship. The furthermost cities of Philadelphia, Laodicea and Colosse were no more than a three-day walk from Miletus. There were other minor towns in the area, including Magnesia, Cibyra and Apamea that were only a short distance from Miletus.

Since Paul did not want to become involved in having to say "no" to countless requests to come to their city, he asked that the meeting (seminar) be held in Miletus. If advance word had been sent ahead, then we would assume that all the presbyters gathered to the homes of the brethren in Ephesus, and then waited for word of Paul's arrival.

After all the presbyters who had assembled in Ephesus eventually arrived in Miletus, Paul introduced his message to them by reminding them, *"You know, from the first day that I came **to Asia** ..."* (At 20:18). And from that first day he spent three years with the church **of Asia** (At 20:31). Could it be that we have wrongly assumed that only the presbyters of the city of Ephesus were in this meeting? Was this an exclusive meeting where everyone else of the other nearby cities of Asia were excluded? Such seems highly unlikely. If the word got out to the other churches of Asia that Paul was coming by, we find it hard to believe that all who heard did not set out immediately for Ephesus. In fact, it would seem that Paul would have been quite snobbish if he had not let the presbyters of the other cities know that he was coming through.

Since Paul wanted to speak to the leaders of the church in the region of Asia, we would assume that the presbyters of the region initially gathered in Ephesus, and then waited for the messenger to come and tell them where the meeting was going to be.

We make this assumption based on the fact of the reality of the events that transpired. But also, we make our assumption in view of what Paul said in his message, specifically the statements in Acts 20:29,30. Since the meeting took place around A.D. 59, and the visions of Revelation took place less than ten years later, the "grievous wolves" had already started to enter in among the seven churches of Asia. The Nicolaitans and Balaamites, and followers of Jezebel, were already arising among the disciples. They were drawing away disciples after themselves. And the sad thing about the warning was that Paul said that *"**from your own selves** will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (At 20:30). This was what was actually happening among some of the seven churches even as Paul spoke. And it is for this reason that we believe that Paul wanted a last word with all of them before going on to Jerusalem for his last visit.

It may have been that the reason Jesus had to make the judgmental addresses to the seven churches was because the leaders of some of the churches had gone after the perverse teachings of the Nicolaitans, Balaamites and Jezebel. It is a sad day in the history of the church when the leadership of the church forgets the commandments

of the Lord, and then seeks to control religious groups to follow them and not the Lord. Every self-proclaimed prophet should sit up and take notice of these warnings of Jesus. If one claims "this is my church," then he is a leader of an apostasy, and subsequently, will reap the condemnation that Jesus gives in His messages to the seven churches.

• **Ekklesia:** Now in moving into the visions of judgment, there is at least one paramount historical fact that must be understood about the disciples in these seven city regions. When the statement is made, "To the angel of the church of ...", **we must not make the unfortunate mistake of thinking that there was only one assembly of the disciples in any particular city on 1st Street and Main**. Because the word "church" (ekklesia) is used in the singular does not mean that there was only one assembly of the saints in each of the seven cities. If there were only one assembly in each of the seven cities, then we would have to conclude that in the years of the existence of the church in these cities, there was only minimal growth of the church. This would certainly be contrary to the nature of the early growth of the church in other areas. So we will not involve ourselves in such thinking, assuming that in the seven cities, as in all cities where the early church was located, the saints were meeting in the homes of the disciples throughout the region of the cities. This conclusion would be necessary because of the example of the growth of the church in Ephesus (At 19). There were simply no purpose-built church buildings in the early centuries of the existence of the church.

We must also keep in mind that there were no "city limits" of the first century cities. "City limits" is a modern-day border of demarcation in reference to the governance and public services of a city. Our understanding of the word "city" in the New Testament would best be interpreted to mean "city region." There were, therefore, disciples living in all the regions around Ephesus, or Corinth, or Philadelphia. And in reference to the meeting of the saints in the homes of the disciples, then there were house assemblies throughout each of the seven city regions.

When the word ekklesia (church) is used, therefore, reference is to the people of the city region, **not to the assemblies on Sunday**. Once we identify the church as the people, and not as the assembly of the people, then we are on our way to understanding correctly the organic function of the body of Christ throughout the first century world. This is especially true when we seek to understand the address of Jesus to the church (people) in each of the seven city regions. The problems that Jesus addressed were with the people, **not with the assemblies**. And because the people (the church) were scattered throughout a particular city region, then the address was to "the church (disciples) of ...." The exhortations of Revelation 2 & 3 were to people, not the assemblies of the people.

The fact that the disciples were scattered throughout these seven city regions helps us to understand better the messenger's use of the world ekklesia ("church") in reference to God's people. Most important of all, we understand that the use of the word in this context is in reference to people, not assemblies. Therefore, the corporate assemblies of God's people **do not** identify the existence of God's people in any geographical region.

Add to this the content of the messages. Jesus **was not** seeking to correct some dysfunctions in the assemblies of the saints. In fact, nothing is said about assemblies in any of the seven messages. All the exhortations of the messages focused on beliefs and behavior. And the fact that the exhortations were addressed to the collective of the disciples in each city region, affirms that no group of disciples within any of the city regions had a right to separate themselves from the rest of the disciples in that region. There were no autonomous assemblies of the disciples within any of the seven city regions. There were several assemblies of disciples who were meeting in numerous houses throughout the cities, but no one assembly in any house declared their independence from any other assembly of disciples in reference to the church (singular) of a particular city. There were no autonomous groups of disciples within any city who declared their autonomy from any other group.

The fact that Jesus did not address any divisive behavior among the disciples in any city, assumes that the practice of autonomous assemblies had not yet developed among the disciples at this time in the history of the church. The church was still functioning as one universal body.

Here is something for which to watch in these messages to all the Christians in any one particular city. In Pergamum, for example, there were "**those** who hold the teaching of Balaam" and "the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Rv 2:14,15). Does this mean that if there was only one autonomous assembly within Pergamum, then the call for repentance on the part of "those" who taught these teachings was directed only to those of one assembly? Because the members were meeting in several houses throughout the cities, did this mean that the shepherds, regardless of where they sat on Sunday, had the responsibility to deal with the teaching of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans wherever they sat on Sunday morning? According to the responsibilities of the

shepherds of the cities (At 20:28), we would certainly believe that they did not neglect their responsibility to teach the word of God to everyone in each of the seven cities. Any member or shepherd within a city had the responsibility to correct the teaching of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans. If one sat on Sunday morning in an assembly where there were no Balaamites or Nicolaitans, then this did not relieve him of the responsibility of exhorting with the word of God these false teachers, wherever they were in the city. Now when we consider this historical setting, we should review our beliefs concerning assembly autonomy. Those who seek to start and maintain their own independent and exclusive assembly should think on these things. We need to remember that whenever one is baptized into Christ, God adds that person to His people. Where this baptized believer shows up on Sunday morning does not determine whether God has added him to His people (At 2:47).

• **Seven Cities:** No one has any idea as to why Jesus personally addressed the Christians only in these seven particular cities. Some have supposed that this was a regular "mail route" of the early Roman Empire. However, it could have been that Jesus simply picked out seven representative cities of disciples that represented the falling away from the truth that was indicative of many other churches in the first century, or at least would occur throughout the centuries to come. It seems that the address of Revelation 2 & 3 is the follow up of Paul's prophecy to the elders of Asia, that *"from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things ..."* (At 20:30). If this assumption is true, then we would determine our definition of the "perverse things" by at least studying through the messages to the seven city regions. When we study the "perverse things" of these disciples, we may find ourselves either condoning "perverse things" or behaving perversely. This will especially be evident when we come to the sin of lukewarmness that is specifically targeted in the message to the disciples in Laodicea.

• **Teaching:** Many good teachers have taught on the moral and doctrinal character of the seven churches of Asia. Within Jesus' messages to these churches one will often find himself somewhere in one of the messages. We must not think, therefore, that the moral and doctrinal points of these messages that were revealed to the seven churches over two thousand years ago are not relevant for us today. These messages are significant for all disciples for all time, for we must believe that the Holy Spirit included this material in the New Testament in order to both discourage apostasy, but at the same time encourage the faithful with a promise of eternal life. Since the messages were directed to those who had been Christians for some time, it was difficult to call to repentance those who have lived in a religious culture of sin for so long. This is the reason why the lampstand would inevitably be removed from some of these areas. Too many had lived for too long after the behavior of what was too far from true discipleship.

Of course, there are those who simply ignore the warnings, hoping for the "closing prayer" so that they can write off the relevance of the messages. Regardless of our lack of appreciation for these messages, we will assure you of one thing as we study through the sins of the seven flickering flames. We will often find ourselves somewhere among these disciples. And when we find ourselves facing direct judgment from Jesus, we will have to make a decision as to whether we will be His disciple, or run out the back door of the church house.

• **Call for repentance:** But there is hope. Advance calls for repentance gave the disciples in the seven cities an opportunity to repent. If repentance came, then preservation of the influence of the body of Christ within the city regions would continue. The general pattern that Jesus followed in making His call for repentance began with a personal address that included a metaphorical description of who He was in reference to His universal body. This was followed by an initial commendation, and then, condemnation and judgment if they continued in their wayward ways. In order to generate repentance, exhortations were made that were followed by warnings. As a last admonition to repent, Jesus made promises what they would enjoy if they repented.

Throughout each message, there is hope of preservation. But if there were no repentance, then the influence of Christ in the city regions would be terminated. However, though their Christianity would have digressed to formal religiosity, there would be no positive influence for Christ to the unbelievers. And when this happens, the church ceases to exist, regardless of assemblies. Since a loving life-style identifies the existence of the church in any region (Jn 13:34,35), then when loving behavior for Jesus ceases, then the church of Christ has terminated in a particular region.

We must keep this very important point in mind as we study through the messages. Jesus is not talking about repenting and restoring some ritualistic assembly. He is talking about repenting of sin that destroys one's witness that he is a disciple of Jesus. The sins ("perverse things") that were happening among the seven areas of disciples was not some erroneous system or ritual of assembly, but error in reference to moral behavior and

beliefs. If some of the disciples among the cities did not repent of these things, then their influence for Jesus would be snuffed out. The flickering flame would be gone.

Chapter 1

MESSAGE TO THE EPHESIAN DISCIPLES

It seems that Jesus started with the city of disciples that had the greatest opportunity of all the other cities. The prominence and location of this city meant that the disciples in Ephesus had a great impact throughout western Asia Minor, which impact, they were in danger of losing. The Christians in key urban centers as Ephesus must keep this in mind. What they do will often affect the existence of the church through a region, if not an entire nation.

Ephesus had been given the greater privilege of having the apostle Paul teach and work in the city for three years (At 20:31). Therefore, the Christians in this city had the greater responsibly to maintain the flame of their lamp because they had the greater privilege of the personal ministry of a Christ-sent apostle. This may be the reason why we know more about the work of the early Christians in this urban center than we do of any of the other cities that are addressed in Revelation 2 & 3.

A. Ephesus was a commercial and religious center.

Ephesus (meaning "desirable") was a seaport city that was located on the Cayster River. The city was the largest port city of all Asia Minor, and thus roads directed trade to and through its port. It was a gateway port to the Mediterranean basin. It was also the gateway to western Asia Minor for political, religious and commercial influences. By the time Paul stepped foot in the city in Acts 19, the city was at least one thousand years old. Some have estimated that the population at the time of Paul's first visit was over 250,000. Since the city was a seaport city, it was the center of trading from inland Asia Minor, which made the city very wealthy and important to Mediterranean commerce.

What was unique about Ephesus is that it housed the great temple of the local god Diana (Greek, Artemis). This temple was once considered one of the seven wonders of the world. From the time of the beginning of idol worship in the city, there were actually five temple structures that had been destroyed and rebuilt on the site where the temple of Diana stood at the time Paul was in Ephesus. The fourth temple that was built on the site burned the night Alexander the Great was born in October 365 B.C. Construction was started on the fifth temple in 350 B.C. It took 220 years to complete this temple. This temple was about 25,000 square meters in size upon completion. It was eventually burned in A.D. 263. After the destruction of this temple, there was never again a temple built on the site.

Housed within the temple at the time Paul was in Ephesus was a large stone that some historians believe was a meteorite. Because it appeared to be multi-breasted, it became the idol of Diana, the goddess of fertility. The people were so fanatical about this idol, and the religion it represented, that when they recognized, upon his arrival at the temple, that Paul was a Jew, *"all with one voice for about the time of two hours cried out, 'Great is Artemis* [Diana] *of the Ephesians'"* (At 19:34).

Because of the location of the city of Ephesus, the temple of Diana became a banking center where the people entrusted their money to the priests. By the time of Paul's arrival, it was not only a center of worship, but a treasure house for the people, and a museum for many of the best pieces of art in the region. The temple was the heart and soul of the people of Ephesus. The fanaticism that was expressed against Paul upon his arrival in Ephesus in Acts 19 can be understood because of the people's zeal for the idol worship that was associated with the temple of Diana. The message that Paul preached was against everything the temple represented among the Ephesians. The message of his preaching not only attacked the idol worship of the culture, it also attacked the idol business that was associated with the temple.

In the messages written to the seven churches, it is possible that Jesus used the influence of the cities as a metaphorical prophesy concerning the future decline of the influence of the disciples in the regions of the cities. Ephesus, for example, would have been an example to define the religious, commercial and cultural influence of the city throughout the region of Ephesus. The other cities, in a similar way, were also influential in their regions. But the disciples' positive influence for the truth was declining. The flames of their lamps were flicker-

ing. In some cases, they were reverting to the behavior of idol worship from which they were originally converted.

When the influence of Ephesus began to wane, so did the influence of the church throughout the region of Ephesus. When the disciples saw the demise of the influence of the church throughout their region, they would remember what Jesus said about the removal of their lamp. When the influence of all the seven cities eventually came to an end, so did the influence of the church in the region of the cities. The lampstand was taken away as the cities, and the church in the cities, disappeared from history. The lamps of the churches eventually ran out of oil, and subsequently, flickered out.

B. Ephesus was formerly a focal point of Asian evangelism.

By the time Paul arrived in Ephesus, idol worship had been commercialized. Idols of the religion of Diana were on sale at great profit (At 19:24). When a great conversion resulted from Paul's preaching of the gospel, the people burned thousands of religious books that were worth a great deal of money (At 19:19). The people did not seek to synchronize their spiritualistic religious beliefs with the truth. On the contrary, they sought to eradicate pagan beliefs from their minds. Some historians believe that by the time of Paul's third mission trip to Ephesus, the worship of Diana was waning. The great conversion of idol worshipers through the preaching of the gospel certainly continued the demise of this religion. For this reason, the idol business was in serious trouble. And when men have commercialized religion, we can expect trouble when the truth endangers their profit.

It is certain that the preaching of the gospel to the city of Ephesus came long before Paul's arrival. There were surely Jewish citizens who returned before and after the Passover/Pentecost feast of Jerusalem in A.D. 30. Upon their return to Ephesus, they would have shared what they heard being preached throughout Palestine by both John and Jesus (At 2:9; See Is 2:1-4). This may explain the existence of a small group of about twelve disciples whom Paul found in the city who knew only the baptism of John (At 19:1-7). Since John's preaching took place six months before Jesus began His ministry, and before the Passover/Pentecost feast of Acts 1,2 took place in A.D. 30, then we could assume that these disciples Paul found had been meeting for approximately twenty-five years in their house before he showed up in Acts 19:1-7. Maybe such faithfulness will give us some idea of the religious soul of the Ephesians. They took their faith seriously.

As far as our knowledge of the formal establishment of the disciples in Ephesus, Acts places Paul, Aquila and Priscilla in the city after the trio left Corinth. Paul left Aquilla and Priscilla in the city, while he went on to Jerusalem (At 18:18-21). Apollos also preached in the city and was initially contacted by Aquila and Priscilla when he was preaching in the Jewish synagogue of Ephesus (At 18:24-26). He too only knew the baptism of John.

The presence of these two Christians, Aquila and Priscilla, in the synagogue does indicate that they as Jewish Christians continued their outreach to the Jews. Their meeting in the synagogue illustrates that Christians should not shun the opportunity to be anywhere with any religious person who might want to hear. We do know that Aquila and Priscilla, with other disciples, maintained a low profile while they met in the Ephesus synagogue, for when Paul came, and was more distinct in his message, *"some* [Jews] *were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude"* (At 19:9).

What Aquila and Priscilla were doing was waiting for any opportunity to speak privately with anyone who came along, and such they did with Apollos (At 18:26). Instead of creating opposition publicly, Aquila and Priscilla worked privately. Paul, however, went public and specific. As a result, the unbelieving Jews of the synagogue desired that it was time for the Christians to move on. So Paul *"departed from them and separated the disciples* [from the synagogue of Jews], *reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus"* (At 19:9). From his ministry of teaching in the school of Tyrannus, *"all those who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus"* (At 19:10). It was a classic example of God using opposition to move the evangelist on to a more fruitful ministry. This may have been when the disciples began to meet in homes throughout the city.

After the mass conversion that took place during Paul's two-year stay in Ephesus, he traveled on, eventually ending up in a Roman prison around A.D. 61,62. From prison he wrote to the disciples in Ephesus. He made some significant statements in the text of Ephesians 3:14-19 in reference to their personal relationships with one another. He wrote that he prayed that the Father would grant them strength in order that they be *"rooted and grounded in love"* (Ep 3:17). He prayed that they might *"know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"* (Ep 3:19). It seems from these exhortations in the letter that at the time he wrote to the Ephesian disciples, they were possibly having some trouble in reference to implementing the "love of Christ" in their lives. They were possibly falling from the love of Christ that

would motivate them to reach out to the unbelievers as they did in the beginning in Acts 19. By the time of the exhortations of Revelation, they had lost their "first love." It seems that they maintained their love of one another, but lost the love that motivated works, specifically evangelistic works.

When we define what the "first love" was, it is necessary to reflect on what Paul wrote in the Ephesian letter. Bible students have differed on what the "first love" was. When comparing the Ephesians' initial response to the gospel in Acts 19, and the exhorations in the Ephesian letter, there are two possibilities. First, the term "first love" may have been a relational love of the disciples for one another. Or second, it could refer to the love that was expressed by Paul in Galatians 5:6: *"... in Jesus"* it is *"**faith working through love**."* This statement was made in the context of some of the Galatian disciples who were seeking to be legalistically justified before God through their meritorious works of law. Such works could not justify one before God, and thus, legal works are useless in reference to our salvation (Gl 2:16). It is our opinion that the Ephesians had lost their works that were motivated by faith and love, and thus were continuing their legal works whereby they, as some in Galatia, were seeking to take pride in their works in order to be justified before God.

Since Jesus exhorted them to do the first works (Rv 2:5), then they had to restore the first love in order to do the works that came from love, not legal religiosity to merit their salvation or validate themselves as the people of God. One of the first works was fervent evangelistic outreach, the works that were manifested in those first years of the existence of the church in Ephesus.

In the context of Revelation 2:1 in which the statement was made that they had lost their first love, the exhortation would define the loss of this first love to be somewhat different from the love that Christians are to have for one another. The phrase "first love" seems to refer more to evangelistic outreach, than love among the disciples. They had the "first love" when they first became disciples during the Acts 19 event. When Paul wrote the Ephesian letter in A.D. 61,62, they seemed to have continued in their love for one another, for Paul said nothing in the Ephesian letter about their losing their love for one another. Neither did he say anything about losing their "first love." But by the time of the exhortation of Revelation, the "first love" was gone. So by the time Jesus addressed them, we also wonder how they were actually doing concerning their love for one another. When disciples begin to lose their love for one another, then we know that their love for the lost is flickering out. There is no desire to be evangelistic when Christians do not love one another. No one of an unloving fellowship of disciples has the desire to bring converts into an unloving fellowship.

C. Ephesus is admonished by Jesus.

Jesus is the One who is delivering the messages to the seven churches. There is a metaphorical description of Him in the address to each church. His address to each city church is sent through the medium of an "angel," which Greek word can also be translated "messenger."

In the introductory message to the Ephesus Christians, Jesus is pictured as the One who has ownership ("hold") of the disciples in all the seven city regions. And as the One to whom Christians belong, He is among His people. The fact that Jesus is among His people assumes that no man should seek to rise up and take the place of Jesus in His ministry among His people. There is no need for presumptuous men as Diotrephes to set aside the headship of Jesus in order to become the center of reference and controlling power for the disciples of Jesus. Jesus is the only needed head (Cl 1:18; Ep 1:22,23). Paul had warned the Ephesians that some elders would be so arrogant as to walk among the disciples, calling disciples after themselves (At 20:29,30). But Jesus' reminder here is that He only is the One who walks among His disciples.

It is significant to note that Jesus did not send a message to the elders of any of the churches, nor to some apostle, or prominent preacher. As the head of His universal body with all authority (Mt 28:18), the picture that is painted with words in each introduction is that He is addressing the members of His body directly. There were no authorities on earth through whom He had to go in order to reach the members of His body. There is no need of a pope or some authority or synod of men on earth who should direct the affairs of God's people. Jesus is capable of leading His people through the instructions of His written word alone. Since all authority resides with Jesus (Mt 28:18), who is the head of His universal body, then no universal institutional authority on earth is needed to take the place of Jesus' direct authority of His body through His word. If any authorities would set themselves up on earth to rule the affairs of the body of Jesus, then the "all" authority of Jesus would be minimized. Authorities on earth always seek to set aside the authority of Jesus over His body through His word.

1. *They worked and labored*: Jesus' first statements to these disciples was, *"I know your **works** and your **labor** and your **patience**"* (Rv 2:2). They were

still an active group of disciples throughout the region of Ephesus. Jesus did not want them to think that their labors were in vain, nor unnoticed. He knows the work of every active disciple, and thus He seeks to commend His people on the basis of their work (2 Co 5:10). The Holy Spirit had earlier written to them, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ..."* (Ep 2:10). They certainly continued that about which the Spirit reminded them through the Ephesian letter. However, if they could have been saved on the basis of their work, then there would be no problem. But in the context of reminding them that they were His workmanship, the Spirit also stated, *"For by grace you are saved through faith,* ***and that not of yourselves****, it is the gift of God"* (Ep 2:8). Could it have been that they were legally trusting in their works, and thus, had forgotten that no amount of works could save them? Churches that are motivated by legal performance alone, and not grace, soon run out of steam. As will be noticed later, disciples can work themselves into spiritual death (Rv 3:1). At least the flame of these disciples was flickering, even though they were working.

2. ***They resisted moral and doctrinal error***: Morally, the Ephesians were zealous to walk according to the standard of the word of God. They did not *"bear those who are evil"* (Rv 2:2). Neither could they bear those who professed to be messengers (Gr.: "apostles") of the church, but were liars (Rv 2:2). There were those coming through their area who said that they had been sent out by other Christians, and thus were seeking to validate themselves as church-sent apostles. But the Ephesian disciples tested these self-proclaimed apostles and found that they were only masquerading themselves as church-sent apostles (See 2 Co 11:13-15; 1 Jn 4:1,6).

The Ephesian disciples had certainly remembered the exhortation of Paul when he met with the presbyters of the church from Asia a few years before on his third mission journey. During that visit, Paul warned all the churches that men would arise and call the disciples after themselves (See At 20:28-31). It seems that it was not long after Paul's admonition that the false apostles were circulating among the assemblies of the disciples.

It is significant in our times to notice the existence of these self-proclaimed apostles as those who were also among the early churches. In this context, Jesus calls these self-proclaimed apostles liars in that they said that they were sent out by other disciples. But they had not been sent out by others, **but by themselves**. Since the Greek word *apostolos* means "one who is sent," then no man can send himself, and then claim to be an apostle. **Apostles are sent by someone else** (See At 18:27; 2 Co 8:23; Ph 2:25). Even Paul was cautious about claiming to be an apostle of Christ. He thus validated his apostleship by reminding the Corinthians that he had been personally called and personally sent out **directly by Jesus** (1 Co 15:9,10; 2 Co 10). He did not send himself.

When the self-sent apostles who came to Ephesus were tested with the word of God, the conclusion was that no other group of Christians had sent them because faithful Christians would not have sent out one who was teaching error. It is easy for a self-sent apostle to teach all sorts of error if he does not know his Bible. If he does not know the Bible, then he often sets himself up as his own authority. But when a church-sent apostle is tested by the word of God by a group of disciples (1 Jn 4:1), then it is less likely that such a person will be going about teaching error. Paul reminded the Corinthian disciples of self-sent false apostles who were circulating among the disciples. He wrote of such self-sent apostles, *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ"* (2 Co 11:13).

It is easy for a self-proclaimed apostle to send himself in order to live off the church. This was the problem. And because it was a problem in the first century, Paul supported himself when he went forth as a Christ-sent apostle (At 18:1-3; 20:33-25). But to claim that one is sent out by the church when he has sent himself, is to be a liar. According to this text, all self-proclaimed apostles would be liars, for they have been sent out by no one other than themselves. If they claimed to have been personally called by Jesus, as Paul, then they need to be reminded that Paul said he was an apostle who was born out of the time when Christ-sent apostles were personally called by Jesus (1 Co 15:8). Because of this untimely birth as an apostle, Paul said that he was not as the original twelve (1 Co 15:9). So where would this put all the modern-day self-proclaimed apostles? They would certainly not be as the untimely born Paul. And if they have not been sent out by the disciples, then neither are they "ones sent" (apostles).

Those who seek to go forth individually on their own, are encouraged to do so. But one should not claim to be sent out by the church if the church has not sent him. If one claims to be sent by the church when he was not, then he is masquerading as a church-sent apostle. They are as those in Corinth who were self-proclaimed apostles, for they were wanting to be somebody they were not.

3. ***They lost their first love***: Contrary to many disciples in various regions of the world, Jesus commended the Ephesian disciples, for they had *"labored for My name's sake and have not become weary"* (Rv

2:3). The Christians in Ephesus stood against that which was evil, hating the licentious evil taught by the cult of Nicolaitans (Rv 2:6). They were active and doctrinally able to test with the word of God those who came by and said that they were apostles sent out by other disciples (See 1 Co 12:10). They had not grown weary in their vigor to be cautious about maintaining their works. But something serious had gone wrong.

In verse 4 Jesus stated, *"... **you have left your first love**."* In order to understand that to which Paul refers in his use of the phrase "first love," it might be good to reflect on the time when he wrote to them a personal letter from Rome in A.D. 61,62. In the letter he wrote,

> *Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and **love for all the saints**, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers* (Ep 1:15,16).

It would seem unlikely that they had lost their love for one another and all the saints from the time of the writing of this statement in A.D. 61,62 to the time Jesus made the judgment of Revelation 2. In fact, Paul commended them in the letter for their reputation for loving one another and all the saints. Even if Revelation were written about thirty years later in A.D. 96, it seems unlikely that they would have fallen out of love with one another.

The "first love" that they had lost, was not a reference to their love for one another, but the love that is defined in verse 5 in Jesus' call for their repentance. Jesus exhorted, *"... remember from where you have fallen, and repent and **do the first works** ...."* When we recall the tremendous evangelistic conversion and explosion in Ephesus that was recorded in Acts 19, the "first love" would certainly have been their love for the lost, which love motivated them to work to save the lost. If they did not restore this love, then they, as an influence for our Lord in Ephesus, would flicker out of existence. This would be certain since the lampstand was about to be removed. Since the lampstand would refer to their light of influence throughout the city, then when it was snuffed out, the affect of the Ephesian disciples in Ephesus would be gone. In this case, the usefulness of the body in Ephesus as a light to the lost would have terminated long before the disciples stopped their assemblies and legal works.

When disciples lose their local evangelistic outreach to the lost, they start believing that their mission is to themselves. This seemed to be the case in Ephesus with all the labor among themselves for which Jesus earlier commended them. But once the zeal to locally preach the gospel fades away among introverted disciples that are active among themselves, they will continue to meet in order to validate their existence, but their preaching of the gospel to the lost is long gone. Dead churches often have exciting assemblies for themselves, but there are no new converts among them who have recently obeyed the gospel. Active churches, as the Ephesian church, give the pretense of being alive, but they are dead if they have no local evangelistic outreach to the lost.

These disciples were dead because they lost the love that motivated them in the beginning when they were first converted. The statement *"unless you repent"* means that it was not well with these disciples (Rv 2:5). Though they were an active people among themselves, they were in need of repentance to restore their first love of reaching out to others. They needed to change their direction of focus. Jesus' exhortation leads us to believe that churches that are active with themselves, but are not preaching the gospel to the lost, are in need of repentance.

D. Ephesus is given hope.

If they repented of their introversion, then there was hope for the future. *"To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life that is in the paradise of God"* (Rv 2:7). The word "overcome" would certainly be the right word to use in reference to repenting of losing our first love. Once the culture of apathy is established among the disciples in any area, it is a struggle to overcome the sin. It is a struggle to love again as one did when he first became a Christian. Restoring lost zeal is difficult, but not impossible. And from reading what Jesus said to these disciples, if we would be saved, and thus eat of the tree of life, restoring our first love is not an option.

The metaphor "tree of life" in this context finds its original meaning in Genesis 3:22. It was a literal tree, and the source of eternal existence (Gn 3:22-24). Reference in the context of Revelation is to the eternal life that one has if he continues as a repentant disciple who restores his first love. Those who are obedient until death will be able to have access to the tree of life (Rv 22:2,14,19). The Ephesian disciples were given the opportunity to repent from the walk of death in order to again be restored to eternal life, which life they lost when they lost their first love. This promise is a reaffirmation of 1 John 1:7: z'*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."*

Apathetic churches can overcome. It is difficult, but this statement of promise means that they can. The

Ephesian church started in Acts 19, which would have been in the early or middle 50s. When Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians in A.D. 61,62, he commended them for their love for one another and all the saints. By the time Revelation was written, however, they seemed to have continued in their love among themselves, but they had lost their love for lost souls. It does not take long for a church to die, especially when the members become consumed with good works for themselves.

Early numerical growth of disciples in any area is usually in the first ten years after the beginning of the church. After the initial spark of growth, the first converts settle down as they get older, and then reach a plateau of existence. They will continue on this plateau, baptizing some to replace those who fall away, die away, or just go away. But once the plateau of non-growth is established, and apathy sets in, those who come into the fellowship of disciples soon adopt the same culture of indifference. The church is thus doomed to slide eventually down the back side of the growth scale, and go into oblivion. Such was the case with the Christians in Ephesus. They were on the back side of the plateau. The lampstand of influence was eventually extracted, and the disciples in Ephesus were no longer of any use for the mission of Jesus. Such seems to be the history of too many churches. They grow, plateau, and then within thirty to forty years, they are dead, if not gone.

Those disciples who realize that they are caught in the sin of evangelistic indifference need to remember the promise: *"To him who overcomes* [his indifference] *I will give to eat of the tree of life that is in the paradise of God"* (Rv 2:7). The hope is that one can regenerate his enthusiasm for the lost. The "first love" can be reborn. We can overcome.

Jesus began this first message to the seven churches with an exhortation to listen to His warnings and instructions. They must heed His call for repentance. If those in Ephesus refused to hear, then puff. The flickering flame would be snuffed out.

Chapter 2

MESSAGE TO THE SMYRNA DISCIPLES

Only forty kilometers north of Ephesus, the city of Smyrna was the original seat of emperor worship in Asia of the Roman Empire. Long before the dominance of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, Smyrna had manifested its allegiance to Rome. As a port city, it grew to prominence during the growth of the Roman Empire and was known for its beauty and magnificent public buildings.

Located within the city was a temple that was built to honor Emperor Tiberius, one of the Caesars of Rome. As a seat of the *Dea Roma* (the goddess of Rome), this religion preceded Roman emperor worship. By aligning itself with Rome, Smyrna handed over its faith to Rome when the emperors of Rome began to demand total state and religious allegiance throughout the Empire. In A.D. 26, Smyrna was the first city to make emperor worship mandatory. And because Polycarp, an elder of the church in Smyrna, refused to recant his statements against state religion, he was subsequently martyred in Symrna around A.D. 155.

One major sociological point that modern-day Bible interpreters usually miss is the nature of the society of the small cities in which Christians lived in the first century. If a city had a population of 20,000 to 30,000, everyone in the city knew what was going on with everyone else in the city. No one could live a hidden life, especially when the whole city was given over to pagan religiosity. As Christians sought to preach the gospel, everyone in a city knew who the Christians were.

Now add to this the fact that these small cities politically gave their allegiance to Rome in order to be protected by Rome. Allegiance to Rome eventually meant calling Caesar lord, which was actually a confession of loyalty to Rome. Now if one could not conscientiously do this because he had only one Lord, then there were accusations of insurrection. And everyone in town knew those who would not give allegiance to Caesar by calling him lord. If one lived in a city of one million population or more, then he could possibly conceal his loyalty to Jesus only by meeting secretly in a house with fellow disciples. But other than Ephesus, the largest of the seven cities of Revelation, no disciple could conceal that he was a disciple of Jesus in the other cities. As the fervor of Roman religion grew, the pressure on Christians to bow down before Caesar intensified. And so, Rome eventually unleashed relentless persecution against Christians throughout the Empire because they were considered insurrectionists.

We would suppose that the gospel first came to Smyrna as a result of the outreach ministry of Paul

through his teaching in the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus during the middle 50s (At 19:10). Because of its close proximity to Ephesus, we would assume that zealous young disciples of the church in Ephesus saw Smyrna as an early mission city, and thus, they focused on the city in preaching the gospel. Their preaching subsequently led to the baptism of disciples in the city some time during Paul's two years of teaching in the school of Tyrannus.

A. The comfort and encouragement:

The message to the disciples in Smyrna by the resurrected Jesus begins with His acknowledgment of their faithfulness. *"I know your **works** and **tribulation** and **poverty**"* (Rv 2:9). In their work, it seems that everything was against them. According to the remainder of the book of Revelation, it may have been that they could neither get jobs nor retain jobs because they refused to recognize Caesar as lord (See Rv 13:16,17). As a result of their refusal, they were boycotted by pagan religionists who sought to manifest their allegiance to Rome by honoring Caesar as the only lord of the people.

1. *Tribulation*: It is believed that in his early years Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John. In A.D. 155 the Roman Proconsul of Smyrna demanded of Polycarp, "Swear and I will set you at liberty; reproach Christ." In his old age at the time, Polycarp responded, "Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He never did me injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" And so Polycarp was martyred for Christ in Smyrna by a local government official who did not have the sanction of the government of Rome to do so.

We are sure that Polycarp remembered the life of Jesus and His sufferings. He certainly remembered the prophesied state persecution that John said would soon come upon the Christians of the Roman Empire. In the years to come after Jesus' message, the Smyrna Christians needed to remember the words of the Hebrew writer: *"For since He Himself* [Jesus] *has suffered while being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted"* (Hb 2:18). And so Jesus left an example of suffering for His disciples to follow. *"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).

Therefore, when under tribulation, *"let us hold fast to our confession"* (Hb 4:14). It is certain that *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tm 3:12). Nevertheless, *"if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name"* (1 Pt 4:16). We must glorify God in our tribulation, for *"we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"* (At 14:22). The Christians in Smyrna had undergone tribulation in the past, but it seems that it was going to get worse before it got better. This tribulation would be coming from state religionists throughout the Roman Empire. John reminded the disciples in all the seven cities that the tribulation was soon to begin (Rv 1:1; 22:6).

Jesus promised the Smyrna disciples that they would suffer "ten days" (Rv 2:10). The number "10" signified that which was complete, and thus, there would be an end to the tribulation that was coming. This is the "little while" of suffering by which the readers of Peter's epistle were encouraged:

> *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a **little while**, if need be, **you have been distressed by many trials**, so that the proof of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is refined with fire, might be found to praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1 Pt 1:6,7).

Someone once said, "A religion that has to be heated in winter, air-conditioned in summer, dampened in dry weather and dried in wet weather, will take one where the temperature cannot be controlled." And indeed, a faith that is not worth dying for is not worth believing. Those to whom Peter wrote would have their faith tested as those in Smyrna. God would step back for a moment and allow Satan to refine as gold the faith of His children. It is for this reason that Christians can count it with all joy when they fall into different trials (Js 1:2). They know that their faith is being refined for greater things to come. Satan's efforts to discourage Christians through trials sifts out the weak, but strengthens those who endure.

In this message of Jesus to the Christians in Smyrna, He was laying a foundation for the theme of the unique visions of encouragement that were to follow in the letter. There was a great persecution coming. Since John was in the area, being on the island of Patmos (Rv 1:9), those in Smyrna would suffer the beginning of what Rome would later unleash as state persecution against Christianity. This persecution would carry on for over 150 years, ending only when Galerius issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311. Though the imminent persecution was coming upon these Christians, John called on them to remember the encouragement of the visions of the book. No matter how bad it would get, they must remember the outcome of the persecution:

> *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).

It goes without saying that the modern-day prognosticators of our times seek to steal away the encouragement of Revelation from these early disciples. They do so by making fanciful interpretations of Revelation that are supposed to be fulfilled in our times, things that they assume are in reference to the end of the world. If the encouragement that Jesus made to the disciples of Smyrna were actually meant for us today, **then He lied to the church in Smyrna, as well as to all the early Christians who were about to endure the wrath of Rome**. But it was as if John knew that there would come these false prophets, for in the very first verse of the book he reminded his readers, including the disciples in Smyrna, of *"things that must **shortly come to pass**"* (Rv 1:1). And "shortly" does not mean over two thousand years later. And as if one might forget by the end of the book that the fulfillment of the revelations would come to pass in the time of the first recipients of the letter, John closed the letter with the statement: *"And the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to show to His bondservants* [in Smyrna, Ephesus, Philadelphia, etc.] *the things that must **shortly take place**"* (Rv 22:6). "Shortly" does not mean "short time of persecution," for how can a century and a half of Roman state persecution be a short time of persecution? John was saying to his immediate readers that the trials they were personally about to endure were immediate. After the death of these immediate disciples, the state persecution of Rome against Christianity would carry on for over one hundred years. Those interpreters who believe that the "shortly" refers to the duration of persecution being brief, need to talk to those Christians who grew up in the catacombs of Rome and never saw the light of day because of the ongoing persecution of Christianity at the time. It is easy to make silly interpretations when one lives outside the immediate historical context.

It takes some awesome hermeneutical gymnastic of twisting Scriptures to contort the phrase "shortly take place" to mean a period of over two thousand years later. But such do the modern-day prophets who are so zealous to find some "sign of the times" in the book of Revelation in order to generate a following of those who are willing to be *"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).

2. *Poverty*: This is where disciples who consider themselves to be of the developing world sit up and listen to what Jesus has to say concerning the advantages of poverty. It seems that the Christians in Symrna could identify with the poor saints in Macedonia, about whom Paul wrote,

*... 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* (2 Co 8:1,2).

As the Christians in Macedonia, the Christians in Smyrna did not allow their tribulation and poverty to detour them from pouring out through works their appreciation for the grace of God. They were as Paul who experienced the grace of God in his own life.

But by the grace of God I am what I am. 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).

In our experience throughout the world we have found that poorer brethren are often more evangelistic than those who seek to consume the world upon their own lusts. Consumers have too many other things on their minds than what is most important in life. The poor have the advantage of not having their minds diverted to things and activities of this world, which things they cannot afford. Christians who have few things of this world on which to focus have more time to focus on those things that are not of this world. Disciples who do not have money to involve themselves in worldly activities have time to involve themselves in the activities that lead to the preaching of the gospel. At least all church historians agree on one principle of church growth: The more prosperous a society becomes, the less the church growth within the society.

Jesus knows the state of being of those who have little. But He also expects the poor never to use their poverty as an excuse not to go to work for Him. One may certainly be poor in the possessions of the world, but he must keep in mind what Jesus said to the poor saints in Smyrna: *"But you are rich!"* (Rv 2:9). What the disciples in Smyrna may have thought concerning their poverty is that they forgot to consider the blessing of not having material blessings. Those who bemoan their low economic state of being must remember their high state of being in Christ.

In their work for the Lord, the Smyrna disciples learned well from what Jesus said on the sermon on the mount:

> *... do not be worried about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?* (Mt 6:25; see 6:25-34).

The one who has put all his trust in God has learned the secret to the contented life. Jesus said that if one stores up goods to secure himself in this life, he will not be *"rich toward God"* (Lk 12:21). Those who are obsessed with the riches of this world need to remember that God has *"**chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom** that He has promised to those who love Him"* (Js 2:5). For this reason, we would follow 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).

4. *"The synagogue of Satan"*: It may be that the phrase "synagogue of Satan" is a play on words in this context. It is believed that the Jews persecuted Christians more in this city than the Romans. In fact, one tradition says that the Jews carried the wood to the fire to burn the body of the martyred Polycarp. Therefore, what should have been a synagogue of those who should have welcomed Jesus as the Messiah, was actually a synagogue of those who sought to destroy all that Jesus wanted to accomplish through His disciples in the region. While thinking that they were carrying out the will of God, the Jews were actually working for Satan.

The persecuting Jews of Smyrna illustrate those of all religious groups who believe they are pleasing their god by persecuting those who are the disciples of the incarnate God. But they are as Jesus said of the Jewish religious leaders who confronted Him,

> ***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 its father* (Jn 8:44).

It would certainly be a shocking thing to wake up one day and discover that all one's religious zeal was actually moving one to work against the will of God. It took Saul three days to morph initially into Paul as he agonized over the fact that he was actually a part of a "synagogue of Satan" worshipers. It is hard to imagine that a religiously obsessed person as Saul would eventually have to confess, *"I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious"* to God's people (1 Tm 1:13). Few religious leaders who work against God in their misguided religiosity are able to make such a statement, feeling that they would embarrass themselves before those they have led in rebellion against God for so long. But Paul made the confession. It was as if he could not forgive himself when he wrote to Timothy: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst"* (1 Tm 1:15).

We would suggest that everyone who would lift himself up to be a religious leader of the people of God take another look at what "Paul, the confessor" stated in 1 Timothy 1:13: *"I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. **But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief**."*

This would not be a comfortable passage for the arrogant religious leader who has discovered that he has been working against God. Paul's humble statement that he obtain the mercy of God was based on one major condition: *"I did it ignorantly in unbelief."* This one statement is profound in defining the character of a true leader of God's people. Paul confessed that his behavior was based on ignorance. He thought he was doing that which was true and right. He had always done the best he could with what he knew. How many religious leaders are there who are able, as Paul and Apollos (At 18:25,26), to confess up that they have been preaching error? When honest people learn more, they are willing to change and preach the new truth that they have learned. The mark of a true leader is his willingness to learn more truth, and when he learns more truth from study of the word of God, he believes and does what he learns. And because Paul counted pomp, position and prominence as rubbish to be discarded, he was in all good conscience before God (Ph 3:7,8).

How many religious zealots are there who claim to be working on behalf of their god by persecuting disciples as those Jews who were in Smyrna? Before one is too eager to condemn others to an eternal doom of destruction, he should first look to himself to see if he is not on the membership role at the local "synagogue of Satan." One can determine if his membership is with the "synagogue of Satan" by the level of harshness he has toward those who disagree with him on minor issues that are not fundamentals of the faith. We must not forget that there are "churches of Satan" out there who are sending their members out with judgments to pronounce upon everyone who does not fit into their legal pattern of religiosity. Those who are quick to pronounce condemnation upon a fellow brother with whom they may disagree should check the membership role of the local "church of Satan." They might find their names there.

B. Promise:

This is the context from which one of the most popular verses of the Bible is taken concerning faithfulness.

1. *Faithfulness*: *"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life"* (Rv 2:10). The phrase "unto death" is the same in the Greek text as in Revelation 12:11: *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. And they did not love their lives* ***to the death****."* Therefore, in reflecting on 2:10, we could assume the meaning that Jesus' encouragement to the disciples in Smyrna was that they should be faithful **even if it meant death**. Polycarp certainly believed this, and thus would not recant his statements in the face of death. Sweet on the lips of every faithful disciple should be the words, "*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). It was for this crown that Paul fought in order to finish his destiny. *"I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me* ***a crown of righteousness*** *..."* (2 Tm 4:7,8). So the faithful can endure tribulation because they know that *"when the Chief Shepherd appears"* they *"will receive* ***a crown of glory*** *that does not fade away"* (1 Pt 5:4).

It should at least be as an idolatrous Greek sailor prayed to his deity, "Father Neptune, you may sink me if you will; you may save me if you will. But, whatever happens, I'll keep my rudder true." It is correct as someone said, "True nobility is forged on the anvil of experience and fashioned on the battlefield of life."

Faithful Christians are engaged in a race, a race in which they must struggle to finish (Hb 12:1,2). Paul reminded the Corinthian saints, *"And every man who strives exercises self-control in all things. Now they* [athletes] *do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we an imperishable"* (1 Co 9:25). It is the faithful Christian who will be crowned. It will be those who have stayed in the battle who will appreciate the crown.

> *Blessed are those bondservants whom the lord, when he comes, will find watching. Truly I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them* (Lk 12:37).

2. *Overcome*: As was made to those in Ephesus, this promise of Jesus of reward for overcoming is made to the faithful in Smyrna: *"He who overcomes* ***will not*** *be hurt by the second death"* (Rv 2:11). What is interesting in the Greek text here is that a double negative is used. In English a double negative is not good grammar, for it would signify an affirmative. But a double negative in Greek is like saying, "Will never, never be hurt ...." It is an absolute. And in the case of the promise to the disciples in Smyrna, there is no chance whatsoever that they will lose their souls if they remain faithful even if it means death.

One may experience physical death as a result of his faithfulness, but he will never experience separation from the eternal presence of God. He will not because he has obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

Jesus seeks that we hear Him in order to walk with Him down a path of tribulation. And in view of the promises that are set before us, we seek to hear and walk that path. So it is as John wrote, *"We are from God.* ***He who knows God hears us****. He who is not from God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error"* (1 Jn 4:6). John was simply saying that we can know the disciples of Jesus who are on the path of tribulation. We can know by their zeal to study what he and the other writers of the New Testament were writing to the people of God. Jesus said, *"He who is of God hears God's words"* (Jn 8:47). This certainly means that those who are true disciples of Jesus are studying what God has to say. Good disciples are thus good Bible students. Both Jesus and John are saying that we can identify disciples of Jesus by those who are studying their Bibles. If one is not, then certainly he is not a disciple of the One who would lead him down a road of tribulation by the power of God's word.

Gospel-driven people know that the word of God is their only source for information about the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. They realize that the Bible is about the work of God to bring His Son into this world for our salvation. Therefore, gospel-driven people are obsessed with continually learning more about the gospel plan of God to send His Son for us. It is clear, therefore, that those who are not studying the Textbook on the gospel, are in the process of moving away from the gospel. They are moving in the way of religion, and thus creating a system of religiosity after their own desires. The first signs of apostasy of this move is identified in some of the seven churches of Asia. This was the reason why their witness of the gospel to their communities was about to be removed.

Those who are not studying the word of Jesus, are not listening. Jesus' message is an exhortation that the disciples of Symrna listen to what He had to say. If they did not, then puff. The flickering flame in Symrna would be gone.

Chapter 3

MESSAGE TO THE PERGAMUM DISCIPLES

Pergamum (KJV, Pergamos) was the capital of the province of Asia and was located in the Caicus Valley. It was the capital until 133 B.C. when the last of the Pergamum kings gave over the kingdom to Rome. This city subsequently became the first site for a temple to be build to the worship of Caesar. The temple was a commemoration to Rome and Augustus Caesar in 29 B.C. A second temple was later built and dedicated to Trajan.

Pergamum was a center for pagan worship. Worship of Asklepius and Zeus were principle gods that found their seat of worship in this city. The symbol of Asklepius was the serpent. This symbol was so prevalent that it was on Pergamum coinage. One coin pictured Caracalla saluting a serpent. The Pergamum citizens were obsessed with the image of the serpent. Because politics and religion functioned jointly in Pergamum, the cult of the Nicolaitans flourished in this region. Because of this close relationship between politics and religion, there was a great deal of pressure on Christians to compromise their faith by giving allegiance to Caesar as lord. When they did not in the years that followed the Revelation message, great persecution ensued.

With the ancient library in Alexandria, Egypt, the city of Pergamum housed a comparable library in the ancient world. It was a library that was composed of books that were written on paper made from the Papyrus plant of the Nile River in Egypt. Because Egypt maintained a monopoly on the production of papyrus writing material, parchment as a writing material made from leather, was eventually invented in Pergamum. We owe a great deal to this city because of the invention of parchment. Many great manuscripts of the Bible were preserved for us today because copies of the books of the Bible were written on parchment.

A. Word from the two-edged sword:

Since the phrase, "sharp two-edged sword" is a metaphor to refer to the word of God, then the power of Christ to attack the Balaamites and Nicolaitans was the word of God (See Ep 6:17; Hb 4:12). And indeed it would not be a happy situation to be at war with the Son of God through His word. If one finds himself in conflict with the "sharp two-edged sword," then he knows that he has already lost the battle. When sincere Bible-loving people find themselves in conflict with the sword of the Spirit, they will immediately surrender upon learning a new truth. Those who do not are not sincere, but rebellious against all that God would teach through His word. In Pergamum, there were "Balaamites" and "Nicolaitans" whom the Son of God hated because of their teaching and immoral behavior. The picture that Jesus gives in His introduction to these disciples is that He is at war with His word against all who would teach error.

The lesson that is vividly clear from Jesus' introduction to these disciples is that if one is going to deal with Jesus, he will have to deal with His word. Jesus had stated during His ministry, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). With the sword of the Spirit, Jesus is *"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). If one is not engaged against these powers of error with the word of Jesus, **then he is not a disciple of Jesus**.

B. Words of tough times:

It is always reassuring that Jesus knows our labors. Not only this, but he recognizes our labors under hard circumstances, for where the disciples dwelt in Pergamum, it was not easy being a Christian. It could be said that they labored under great duress. It was as someone said, "It is not success that God rewards, but faithfulness in doing His will." We are reminded of Paul's statement in Ephesians 6:10: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."*

The better we understand the environment in which the early Christians lived in the seven cities, the better we will identify with their hardships. The social environment in which the Christians in Pergamum lived was very hostile to Christian faith. Rome became a political/religious state. Caesar was the lord, and all subjects of the Empire were to reverence him as lord. Those who did not were considered insurrectionists. Antipas was evidently one of the first Christians to suffer martyrdom because he would not bow down to a self-proclaimed deity of a political/religious state that demanded total allegiance. Regardless of the threat of death, Antipas would not live contrary to that which he believed. He was willing to trust that his Lord Jesus would carry him through into eternity. Since this world is only

a momentary breath of existence for Christians, then those who make war against Christianity only transition members of the body on to their objective through martyrdom.

We have always thought the old preacher's story of the man who walked across a canyon on a tight rope something that well illustrated many soft Christians of today. After the tightrope walker had completed his successful walk across the canyon, one overenthusiastic spectator was overjoyed, and said to the tightrope walker, "That was just unbelievable! It was amazing! Spectacular!" The tightrope walker replied, "Well, do you think I could do that with a man on my shoulders?" The enthusiastic spectator answered, "You did it so well, I believe you could." The tightrope walker said, "Well, get on!" Spectator, "Ah ....." After the spectator caught his breath, the he turned to the audience and asked, "Is there anyone out there who would like to ride across the canyon on the shoulders of the tightrope walker?" Jesus walked the tightrope. He asks for us to climb on His shoulders (See Rv 17:14).

The Greek word that is used in this text for martyr is *martus*. Some believe that this was the beginning of the use of this word for those who would be martyrs for their faith. But in the context, it was originally used to refer to a Christian who died for his faith. Every other faith has plagiarized the word, especially those of non-Christian religions whose adherents would die for their faiths.

The phrase "Satan dwells" identifies the religious environment in which the disciples lived in Pergamum. Jesus' use of this phrase means that where Christianity does not dwell, Satan dwells. Satan, therefore, dwells among men through those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Any non-Christian environment would be a place where Satan dwells.

C. Words of condemnation:

Jesus' words of judgment of the disciples in Pergamum would make one sit up straight in his seat (Rv 2:3,4). Some of the disciples were harboring those who taught two abominations in reference to belief and behavior.

1. *The teaching of Balaam:* Balaam was a prophet of God until he was tempted with money to curse the coming Israelites (See Nm 22:7). This condemnation is based on the fact that he taught King Balak *"to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication"* (Rv 2:14). Balaam received the price of a hireling preacher in order to preach that which was asked by those who supported him. Balaam sold his ministry to anyone who would pay him a salary. Barak wanted the curse of God to come upon the Israelites, so he went looking for a preacher who would teach that which would cause God to rain down judgment upon the people. When preachers are in the ministry for financial gain, they will preach what their supporters demand. And often, they will not preach truth that runs people away who have no interest in the truth (See 2 Tm 4:1-4). Could this be the same apostasy that was described by both Peter and Jude when they wrote of the sin of Balaam prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? (See 2 Pt 2:15; Jd 11).

It is interesting that the serpent became an idol symbol of the pagan religionists of Pergamum. When Israel complained against God on their way to the land of promise, God sent serpents among the people to bite and kill the complainers (Nm 21:6-9). Moses made a bronze serpent and put it upon a pole. Everyone who looked on it lived (Nm 21:9). In the religious culture of Pergamum, however, anyone who would compromise with what the serpent stood for would spiritually die. Moses presented an opportunity to live with the symbol of the serpent. The false teachers presented the symbol as an opportunity to die. God will simply not allow His people to compromise their moral behavior through fornication, or His teachings through fellowship with idolatrous beliefs.

2. *The Teachings of the Nicolaitans:* This is the second time this cult is noted in the messages of Jesus (Rv 2:6). The Nicolaitans were also in the city of Ephesus, which means that their teachings were scattered throughout the region of western Asia Minor. It is significant to note here that Jesus said that some *"hold the teaching."* Jesus is very serious about what we believe, for it is erroneous beliefs that lead us to do those things that are contrary to moral behavior. And about this teaching, Jesus said, *"which thing I hate"* (Rv 2:15). Jesus hates certain teachings. He loves all men, but hates those teachings that corrupted good moral behavior.

From this exhortation we know why Christians study their Bibles with zeal. They do not want to be ignorantly believing a teaching that Jesus hates. If one would fear the judgment to come, then certainly he should check everything he believes with the words of Jesus, just in case he believes something that Jesus will eventually reveal that He hated. It is because of these two statements of Jesus in verses 6 and 15 that we study our Bibles. It is as a young granddaughter asked her grandmother why she read her Bible every day. The grandmother responded, "I'm just studying for the final."

It is significant to note that the Greek word "hold" (*kpateiv*) that is used in 2:15 means "to hold fast." In other words, the attitudes of those who believed the teaching of the Nicolaitans were so dogmatic that they would by no means give up the teaching. They were going to believe the teaching regardless of what scripture might be found to prove that the teaching was erroneous. It is for this reason that we might assume that the Nicolaitans promoted some teaching that led to immoral behavior. These disciples were caught up in something that had caught hold of their moral behavior. The faithful disciples could do nothing about it, since the "Nicolaitan disciples" were so dogmatic about their immoral behavior. We learn from their dogmatic spirit that error is not proven to be truth simply because one is dogmatic about his error.

D. Words of war:

When one holds a teaching that Jesus hates, then one should expect war. Jesus encouraged the faithful disciples who stood against the "Nicolaitan disciples" that *"**I will fight against them** with the sword of My mouth"* (Rv 2:16). The war would break out if the "Nicolaitan disciples" did not repent of their belief and behavior, for Jesus knew that if this infestation of sin was not eradicated from the fellowship of the faithful, it would force the removal of the flickering lampstand from Pergamum. It seems that Jesus lost this battle, for His conflict with sinful teachings is through the medium of faithful disciples who know and can effectively use the sword of the Spirit (Ep 6:17). If the faithful disciples become ignorant of the word of Jesus, then they have lost the battle for Jesus. We must never forget what the Spirit said in another context to the saints in a city a few kilometers away from Pergamum:

> *Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but 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 6:11,12).

This exhortation was given to the disciples over in Ephesus, for the Spirit knew that the teaching and behavior of the Nicolaitans was coming, if not already in Ephesus in A.D. 61,62 when Paul wrote the above message. It was an insidious teaching, against which the disciples needed special encouragement to stand against, both through letter and vision. But because the disciples dropped the sword of the Spirit through their ignorance of the word of God, they lost the battle for Jesus.

When disciples allow sinful behavior to remain within the fellowship of the body, the whole body is affected. Such was allowed to happen for a period of time among the disciples in Achaia (See 1 Co 5:1,2). There was fornication among the disciples. They had failed to purge out this leaven from among themselves. So Paul exercised his right as a Christ-sent apostle and said to all of them,

> *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are assembled, and with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord* (1 Co 5:4,5).

Paul had written to the Christians in Achaia that they not associate with anyone who was a fornicator (1 Co 5:11). His instruction was to *"put away the wicked person from among yourselves"* (1 Co 5:13). And such should Christians do in reference to any fornicator who would seek to remain in fellowship with the church. But in the case of the fellowship of the disciples throughout the city of Pergamum, they had a similar problem, but the problem had evidently become so common, that the faithful brethren had little influence over the matter. But in reference to moral sin among the fellowship of the disciples, it must always be as the Chinese proverb, "Master easy, servant slack." Their Master in heaven was not being slack with His servants in the Pergamum church. Discipline was going to be enacted. If the faithful were not vigilant about these matters, the whole fellowship will be corrupted. And if the fellowship was corrupted, then puff.

E. Word of promise:

Again Jesus used the word "overcome" to define the fact that Christians are in a spiritual struggle against the spiritual host of wickedness. For those who would overcome in this spiritual conflict, there were two promises given:

1. *The hidden manna:* During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of the manna that came down out of heaven to preserve Israel from death throughout their wilderness wanderings (Jn 6:27-32). He metaphorically applied the literal manna from heaven to Himself. *"**For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world**"* (Jn 6:33). During His ministry, the Jews to whom Jesus said these words did not understand. They could not get their minds off the lit-

eral and on the spiritual meaning of the metaphor. So Jesus explained further, *"**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). Because of the hardness of their hearts, the audience of religious leaders to whom Jesus spoke these words could not find in them the truth that Jesus was the "hidden manna" (bread) that came down out of heaven to give life.

We would take Jesus' definition of the bread from heaven in John 6 to the context of Revelation 2:17. The bread of life is hidden only from those who have no hunger for it. When one has no hunger for Jesus, then certainly Jesus cannot bring eternal life into his existence, for he will not do what Jesus says is necessary to have life. Those who are bent on living the immoral life are not looking around for any words of condemnation concerning their life-style. And so, the manna of life will always be hidden from those who seek to live after their own lusts.

2. *The white stone:* The Jewish disciples understood the symbolism of this metaphor perfectly. Stones in Jewish history represented different things. Because the stone in this context represented the object upon which was written a name, then the stone represented that name. On the breastplate of the high priest of Israel, there were twelve stones. Each stone represented one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In this context it is a white stone. White represents holiness, glory and purity (See 1 Pt 2:5,9). The new name written on the stone would be explained further in the message to the disciples in Philadelphia:

> *He who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of My God .... I will write on him **the name** of My God and **the name** of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him **My new name*** (Rv 3:12).

And then again the 144,000, which number is representative of the people of God in the Old Testament era and the people of God after the cross, are named before God. On these *"His name and His Father's name"* are *"written on their foreheads"* (Rv 14:1). And finally, another explanation in reference to the finality of all things and the salvation of the saints: *"They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads"* (Rv 22:4).

In the message to the disciples in Pergamum, Jesus simply begins the identity of the people of God that will be revealed through the book. Christians are identified by being named. The fact that the *"new name written that no one knows except he who receives it"* is not the nonsense of some who suppose that this is a "secret name." In this case, it is Jesus who gives the name, not the one who receives it. We must understand this in the historical context of the persecution of Christians by those who claimed that they were religious before their pagan idol gods. These persecuting idolaters were doing the will of their god by persecuting those they believed were against their god. In the historical martyr of Antipas in Pergamum, those who martyred the faithful Christian were doing the will of their gods. They did not believe that Antipas was actually claimed (named) by the one true and living God in which he believed. His murderers believe that his God was a false god. They did not know this God because they had created a god after their own imagination. They were thus doing the will of their god by martyring the one who was named by the true God.

The One who has numbered the hairs of every Christian's head (Mt 10:30), knows those He has named. The rest of the unbelieving world may not know the special relationship the baptized believer has with God, but the relationship is there and will result in eternal glory when they overcome.

Chapter 4

MESSAGE TO THE THYATIRA DISCIPLES

Jesus was giving the disciples in Pergamum the opportunity to hear and obey His instructions. If they did not, then puff. The flickering flame would be gone.

There is a lot said about the Christians in Thyatira, more than the Christians in any of the other six churches that were addressed by Jesus. However, there is no exciting history given about the city of Thyatira, as with the other cities. There is little mention of the city among the ancient scribes of history. Anatolian was the god of the city. He is pictured as a god mounted upon a valiant horse and armed for battle with a battle-ax.

The location of the city was strategic in reference to the movement of military forces along the road that passed from Pergamum to Laodicea, connecting the Hermus and Caicus valleys. Because of its location on a main road, Thyatira was a city of trade. In fact, ancient records suggest that the city had more trading businesses than any of the other cities that were addressed

by Jesus. In the city there was manufacturing in dyes for clothing, garment factories, with pottery and brass businesses. In order to trade in the manufactured goods of the city one possibly had to be a member of one of the many guilds (unions) that were associated with a particular manufacturer. Some have suggested that the festivities of these guilds were social gatherings of drunken behavior. Jezebel, which is possibly used metaphorically after the name of King Ahab's wife, is probably used to reveal the temptation that drew the Christians into participating in these drunken parties (1 Kg 16:30,3; see Js 1:12-15).

Because the city was a center of manufacturing, it is not surprising, therefore, that Lydia, a seller of purple dye made from the madder root, was from this city. This woman was on a business trip when she encountered Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke during a prayer meeting on a river bank outside Philippi (At 16:14).

What we would assume about the socioeconomic environment of the city would be that many of the citizens were employed. As employees of a particular factory in a small city, we would assume that there was a great deal of intimidation that workers conform to the social structure of a particular industry. At least this may explain why some of the Christians had given in to the immoral teachings and behavior of Jezebel in a small city where everyone knew everyone.

A. Description of the Christ:

In this metaphorical picture of the Jesus who walked in friendship with the disciples on the Galilean pathways, there is piercing judgment coming forth from the eyes of a Judge. He has *"eyes like a flame of fire"* (Rv 2:18). His eyes can pierce through our strongest defense to conceal our true self. Nothing can be hid from the One who will eventually judge all men.

> *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).

"His feet are like fine brass" of judgment against all those who would claim His name, but live contrary to their calling. The symbolism is of a judgment scene that will be revealed later in the book where ...

> *... books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life.* ***And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works*** (Rv 20:12).

B. Commendation for good:

The Judge was not unaware of their works, love, service, faith and patience. Their love may have been that compelling love about which Paul wrote, *"For the love of Christ compels us ..."* (2 Co 5:14). And indeed, they seem to have emulated in their lives that which was characteristic in the actions of God toward man: *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 Jn 4:19).

1. *Impending judgment on national Israel*: The Christians had also been made aware of the coming judgment upon national Israel. We must not forget that as the early evangelists went forth, they informed all the Jewish disciples of the impending judgment that would come upon national Israel in their lifetime. It would be an event from which everyone, who knew the Old Testament prophecies, would conclude that Jesus was reigning from heaven (See Mk 9:1). Such would be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24, thus again reconfirming the fact that He not only came for the salvation of the true Israel by faith, but also to consummate national Israel, the final consummation of which took place in A.D. 70.

Through faith, therefore, the disciples in Thyatira, as well as all Christians of the early church, waited patiently for the coming of Jesus "in time" (See Js 5:7,8). Jewish persecution would vanish away after the judgment, but state persecution was looming on the horizon. It is concerning this persecution that the book of Revelation prepares the minds of the disciples to endure.

2. *Commendation for their works:* In reference to their works, *"**the last are greater than the first**"* (Rv 2:19). The Ephesian Christians were called on to restore their first love, and thus, *"do the first works"* (Rv 2:4,5). The disciples in Thyatira grew in their works, and thus, there was no call for a restoration of the "first works." They had not given up their identity as disciples, for they continued to grow in good works.

We would assume that the disciples in Thyatira manifested their appreciation for the grace of God more than those in Ephesus. At least Paul may have been able to write of the Thyatira Christians as he did of himself: *"**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 seems that the works of the Ephesians became simply legal exercises in habitual churchianity. But with the Christians in Thyatira, there must have been something significant that energized them to grow in their works for the Lord. Because of the commendation for

their growth in their works, we would assume that Jesus expects growth in our works. The key to growth in works is growth in our appreciation for the grace of God. If there are no works, then there is no appreciation.

C. Judgment:

We suppose that the Christians in any city had *"a few things"* about which Jesus would pronounce judgment. If growing in good works could erase sin, then surely such meritorious atonement failed in the case of these Christians. Though the Christians in Thyatira grew in works, they still had to take ownership of the few sinful things about which Jesus here identifies. Their good deeds did not atone for these sins.

1. *Toleration of sinful beliefs and behavior*: *"You tolerate that woman Jezebel"* (Rv 2:20). Jezebel was probably the most notorious woman of Old Testament history. Her name became a symbol of idolatry, immorality and shame (See 1 Kg 16:31; 18:4,13,19; 19:1,2). Jesus here uses her name metaphorically to pronounce judgment against some of the disciples in Thyatira who were tolerating such an evil way of life. Their toleration of the evil she taught and behaved had great influence among the disciples. Jezebel's influence for evil was producing the reputation that the church of our Lord was no different than the local pagan groups.

In order to be a participant in one of the trades or businesses of the city of Thyatira, one probably had to be a member of one of the guilds (unions) of a particular manufacturer. Those of a particular guild would meet for feasts of gluttony and immorality. The problem was that if one were not a member of one of the guilds, then he could not trade the merchandise of a particular manufacturer. This may explain why the woman Jezebel had such influence over those Christians who participated in the immoral parties. It may have been that her participation in such feasts convinced other Christians that such indulgence was acceptable for a Christian. She possibly represented a sect among the disciples, for in verse 24 there were those who did not *"have this teaching."* Some in the church in Thyatira remained faithful to their moral standards by not participating in the immoral pagan feasts that were sanctioned by Jezebel.

There was a similar case among the Christians in Corinth, though not a sect that was influencing the body of Christ. The Corinthian Christians tolerated an individual who was living in fornication with his stepmother (1 Co 5:1-5). Paul said of that case that such was not even practiced among the unbelievers (1 Co 5:1). In the case of the fornicator in Corinth, whom the Corinthians tolerated, there seems to have been no influence in teaching that came from the immoral individual. However, his influence for evil was in his life-style. Paul reminded the Corinthians that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Co 5:6,7). But in the case of the fornicator who was being tolerated by the Christians in Thyatira, this woman was a self-proclaimed prophetess who was teaching others, and deceiving the servants of the Lord. The immoral person in Corinth may have been passive in promoting his sin, but Jezebel was proactive in spreading her teaching among the disciples. The disciples who had accepted the immoral life-style of Jezebel were encouraging others to participate in her sin.

It may have been that Jezebel was as Simon in Samaria (At 8:9-11). He amazed the people of the city with his practice of magic to the point that they proclaimed, *"This man is the great power of God"* (At 8:10). When Simon believed the gospel message that Philip was preaching, he too was baptized (At 8:13). But there was still wickedness in his heart. This was brought out when he offered to buy from Peter and John the power to impart the miraculous gifts (At 8:18,19). So Peter said to him, *"... repent of this your wickedness and pray the Lord that, if possible, the thought of your heart may be forgiven you"* (At 8:22). In baptism one's soul is cleansed of sin (At 22:16), but one's character is not miraculously transformed. This may have been the case with Jezebel among the disciples of Thyatira. She came into the fellowship of the disciples with a sinful behavior of which she had not repented.

2. *Punishment of sinful beliefs and behavior*: The case of Thyatira was similar to that of Simon. Jezebel possibly came into the fellowship of the flock of God, but brought with her the wickedness of her former religious and immoral life that was associated with pagan idolatry. Jesus had *"given her time to repent of her fornication,"* but the fact was that she did *"not want to repent"* (Rv 2:21). And now, her time had run out. We do not know exactly what the Christ-sent Peter said to Simon, but one thing is true, whatever he said it scared Simon stiff. He immediately and repentantly pleaded with Peter, *"Pray to the Lord for me so that none of **these things that you have spoken come upon me**"* (At 8:24).

In order to purify the church in her early beginnings, God would strike people blind through a Christ-sent apostle (At 13:10,11). Some were delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Co 5:5). Some were *"delivered to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme"* (1 Tm 1:20). And then some just dropped dead when they lied to the Holy Spirit (At 5:1-11). It was not a good thing to fall into the hands of a Christ-

sent apostle who could unleash the power of physical punishment upon one who was causing injury to the body of Christ. And in the case of the body in Thyatira, Jesus would work directly from heaven upon Jezebel. ***"I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her ways"*** (Rv 2:22). This is not all. *"And I will kill her children with death"* (Rv 2:23). Would God bring death upon the children of one whose children were possibly the result of her sin of adultery? This would not be the first time that He did. Ask David and Bathsheba (See 2 Sm 11,12).

"And all the churches" to whom Jesus was addressing this letter of Revelation would know that no one can hide sin. If one is harboring sinful ways in his heart, then he must remember that Jesus *"will give to each one of you according to your works"* (Rv 2:23). Simply stated in words that we can understand, when one is a disciple of Jesus, "he can run, but he cannot hide." One can run on a trip across the country, but he must remember that if he involves himself in sin, Jesus will know. Those who feel that they are further away from Jesus when they are on a trip far away from fellow Christians, need to remember that Jesus *"searches the **minds** and **hearts**"* of every disciple wherever he is in this world (Rv 2:23; see Ps 44:21; Lk 16:15).

The Greek word for "minds" comes from the word that refers to kidneys. In the thinking of those of ancient times, reference was to the inner most feelings of the individual. The word "heart" referred to the intellect. Thus God searches the inner most feelings and intellect of every person of His creation. It is certainly important for every disciple to know this, for this realization helps us to take ownership of our faults. Confession flows from the one who realizes that the One to whom he confesses already knows what is to be confessed. When we confess our sins to God, He knows that we are taking ownership for our most inner self. And if there is sin in there, He knows that we are owning up to and trying to deal with our sin.

(It is sometimes as the man who presented to the preacher his intelligent horse. The man carried on bragging about how intelligent the horse was. So he challenged the preacher, "Ask my horse a question." So the preached asked, "Horse, how many commandments did God give Moses on Mount Sinai?" The horse immediately stomped ten times on the ground. So the preacher asked, "Well, how many apostles did Jesus have?" The horse stomped twelve times on the ground. So the horse's owner asked his horse, "Horse, how many hypocrites are there in this church for which the preacher preachers?" The horse then went into a dance.)

E. The promise:

Beginning with the "morning star," we are encouraged by what Jesus here promised those who would overcome the teaching of Jezebel and her intimidation of the disciples to sin after her life-style (Rv 2:28). Jezebel was now meeting the One who had authority over all things for the sake of His faithful people (Ep 1:22).

The morning star "ruled the morning" horizon. The symbol is of royal splendor and dominion. The significance of the message here is in the simile "just as" in verse 27. The promise is that those who overcome will be given *"power over the nations"* to *"rule them with a rod of iron"* (Rv 2:26,27). The phrase *"just as I **received** from My Father"* clearly explains that at the time of writing, Jesus had already received power over the nations in order to rule them with a rod of iron. **This ruling is not something that will begin in the future**. "Received" is past tense. Jesus is not coming again in order to rule over the nations. He is already reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). When He does come again, He will return kingdom reign to the Father (1 Co 15:26-28).

When Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, He was given power over all things (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). He now reigns with all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). He is reigning over all things for the sake of the church. Paul wrote, *"And He* [the Father] *put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church"* (Ep 1:22). All means all. There is no more power in kingdom reign left for Jesus when He comes again. If He were to come and reign on this earth, then He would be dethroning Himself from His reign over all things that He now has in order to reign on a speck of blue dust among the galaxies. What sense would be in this?

Sometimes earthly thinking theologians have earthly and carnal interpretations of the Scriptures. For some to fulfill their carnal desires to reign over their fellow man, they seek a time wherein they can be kings on earth. Within the pages of the Qur'an, there is the world view that the entire world should be made to submit to Allah, and thus, become Islam. But submission to Allah means submission to religious leaders who are to enforce the submission. The purpose of the submission is worldwide domination by certain men who would rule through the power of Sharia law and those who proclaim it. Some Christians repel at such a theology, but at the same time, they simply delay their own desires to reign as authorities to a supposed one thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth where He will supposedly and forcefully conquer all powers on earth and when He reigns,

then it is assumed that He will set up Christians as authorities to reign on earth with Him. But such theologians need to read again the statement of Jesus that He made before to a Roman authority:

> ***My kingdom is not of this world****. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight so that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But as it is,* ***My kingdom is not from here*** (Jn 18:36).

We have always wondered what part of the phrase "not of this world" is so difficult for some to understand? Jesus said that His disciples would not take up arms and fight against the Jews, neither the Roman Empire. Neither will there be some time in the future when they will engage in carnal warfare in order to establish some earthly kingdom. They will not, *"for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink,* ***but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit****"* (Rm 14:17).

> *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,* ***but 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).

Since Jesus is now reigning over all things, then those who have given their allegiance to Him in obedience to the gospel, also reign with him.

> *For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness* ***will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ*** (Rm 5:17).

Christians now reign in the splendor of the Morning Star. They now reign over the nations with the power of the gospel, for there is no power on earth greater than the message of the cross. And as if we might question this power, Paul reminded the Corinthians,

> ***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).

This is one powerful statement. If our spiritual weapons are this powerful, why would we ever think that we need an AK 47 to advance the supposed reign of Christ on earth?

The faithful Christians in Thyatira would be greatly encouraged by the words that will follow in the book of Revelation. They just need to remember that the forces of evil *"will make war with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings"* (Rv 17:14). Jesus is at this time Lord and King over all things. Therefore, if it seems that everything is getting out of control, the faithful in Thyatira needed to remember that King Jesus had everything under control. We too trust that He is *"upholding all things by the word of His power"* (Hb 1:3).

Those in Thyatira who were trying to survive against the boycott of the trade unions and the influence of Jezebel, needed to take courage that they would overcome. They were not destined to spiritual ruin. They had a choice. If they made the right choice, the promise of Jesus was that they would be given the royalty of the Morning Star. If they listened to what Jesus had to say to the churches, then they would survive. If they did not listen, then puff.

Chapter 5

MESSAGE TO THE SARDIS DISCIPLES

Sardis was the former capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. The city became known for its great riches, particular wealth from the gold of the Pactolus River that flowed through the city. It was one of those cities that had a glorious past, but at the time of the visions of Revelation, it had lost most of its former wealth and prestige.

The original ancient city was strongly fortified. It was a fortress citadel that towered above the Hermus Valley. It was surrounded by treacherous cliffs of loose rock. But the city lost its prowess under Croesus when Cyrus, king of Persia, besieged and took the city in 546 B.C. Historians believe that under the cover of darkness, the Persians took the city by scaling the cliffs that the residents of Sardis thought to be their defense against any invaders. Ironically, the same tactic was used again by Antiochus the Great when he took the city in 215 B.C.

By the time Jesus addressed this city in the context of the visions of Revelation, Sardis was under the con-

trol of the Roman Empire. Though the city was located on an important trade route of the Hermus Valley, it never regained its glory and riches of former years. It is interesting that in A.D. 26, the city sought to construct an imperial temple dedicated to Roman religion. But the request was denied by Rome, who favored Smyrna as the location of the temple.

It is significant that this once glorious city of ancient times, today lies in ruins. There is only a small Turkish village named Sart near the ruins of ancient Sardis. The once glorious city was fading into history as John penned the message of Jesus to the Christians of the area. Though the residents once dressed themselves in the luxury of white robes, all the former glamor was gone in a city that was now economically waning away into history as the ink of John's letter was drying on papyrus.

A. Description of the Christ:

Jesus is now the One *"who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars"* (Rv 3:1). The meaning is control. He "has" the spirits and stars, and no one can take them from Him. Since He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3), then we could correctly assume that Jesus had control of the future of the churches. And since He has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18), then every member of His universal organic body can relax. The fact that Jesus is in control means that nothing is out of control. We live in a divinely controlled world. Therefore, we must never conclude that the evil that is in the world is a signal that Jesus is not in control. All those disciples of the seven churches needed to remember this as they transition through the great tribulations that were coming.

In order to protect our free moral ability to choose, Jesus must allow both social and physical law to exist. If He did not, then the world would not be the best of all possible environments in which to prepare free-moral disciples for eternal dwelling. And if the world was free of all misfortune and evil, then we would have no desire to go to a better place. Therefore, because Jesus is in control, the disciples of Asia Minor, and all those throughout the Roman Empire, must remain faithful, even though it will seem that the whole world was against them.

B. Commendation for good works:

As everyone in the small town of Sardis knew everyone in town, so Jesus knows everything about the members of His body throughout the world. And in this case, the body members in Sardis were working, but something was indeed wrong with the performance of their works.

1. *The working dead:* The disciples in Sardis seem to have trusted in their works to the point that they believed their works to be meritorious in reference to their salvation. This is in the statement of judgment, *"you have a name that you live,* ***but you are dead****"* (Rv 3:1). Could it be that they took pride in the works that they were doing in the community, of which works the community glorified the good they were doing? But spiritually, and in reference to their relationship with Jesus, they were dead because they meritoriously trusted in their works?

Someone correctly said, "There are few things that are better organized than graveyards, but there is little life there." The members of the body were organized in Sardis for good works, but it seems that the motive for their works produced deadness, not life. So we would throw up a yellow flag of caution before ourselves, lest we too be walking in the pride of our own activity, but dead in our spirituality. There will be no zombie disciples in heaven.

The disciples in Sardis may have become spiritually indifferent because they had little persecution in the city. In fact, their works gave them a name in the community as a group of people who ministered to the people. They had a name among the unbelievers in the community. They were certainly following the instructions of Jesus: *"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).

Jesus' statement of judgment to the church of Sardis, however, seems to conflict with His statement in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. The problem was that the good works of the church of Sardis brought glory to themselves, the church, and not to God. Christians need to be very careful about doing good deeds in order to bring glory to the church, that is, to themselves as the church. If the church of Sardis teaches any eternal lesson, it is the lesson that churches should never seek glory for themselves. If they do, then their good works are a sign of their narcissistic deadness.

In the following exhortations of Jesus to the Christians in Sardis, we must keep in mind that the **majority** was the problem. The minority "few names" were still faithful. But the majority were dead. They had a name that they lived, but they were dead (Rv 3:1).

Deadness comes in many forms. Before we leave the "living dead" problem of the Sardis disciples, we must insert probable causes of deadness that will help

us identify ourselves as being dead. When Christians meet and stare at one another Sunday after Sunday, but rarely have in their midst anyone who is dripping wet from the waters of baptism, then we are dead. When during the public prayers that are voiced in the assembly, no plea is made to the Lord of harvest to send "reapers into the harvest" throughout the world, then we are dead (See Mt 9:38). When excitement is generated among the men to attend the men's breakfast, but no encouragement is made to invite a friend, then we are dead. When we continually have lectureships to reaffirm our "old truths," then we are dead. When mission seminars are conducted and only former missionaries show up, then we are dead. When the church bulletin is filled with news about ourselves, but no mention is made of the gospel being preached to the lost, then we are dead. When no visiting evangelists are allowed to address the church in order to remind us of our mission, then we are dead. When all the programs of the disciples are for the purpose of "getting the members to know one another," then we are dead. Narcissistic religioisty is simply deadness playing itself out in church games. According to Jesus' definition of the deadness of the Sardis church, the flame had already flickered, but only a "few names" realized that darkness was looming over their existence.

As residents of Africa we would alert the rest of the world concerning the church of America that has a name that it lives. But according to the church growth statistics over the last forty years, there is a decline in "church attendance" every year. It is the "Sardis syndrome" being continentally played out in a movement that is running out of oil. There are, however, a "few names" still there. But our exhortation to the rest of the world is to get on with the work of Jesus to take the gospel into all the world. If we are looking for mission leadership from America, that lampstand is almost gone. As the flame flickers in America, we must burn bright in Africa, and India and China. The "Sardis syndrome" plays itself out over a century or two. In the American culture, it began in the early 1800s. It is now coming to an end as churches claim "to have a name that they live, but are truly dead" in reference to preaching the gospel to the world (Rv 3:1). We all remember the great mission force that came out of Europe. We also know how it died. America is on that same road. And if we might wonder why, then Jesus left a message for us with His evaluation of the Laodicea church that follows in Revelation 3:14-22.

2. ***Watch:*** "Watch" here may mean "wake up." Those who are caught in the sleep of spiritual death **do not realize that they are spiritually dead**. Since they have created a "Christianity" after their own desires, they believe everything is fine. But according to the standards of the One after whom they call themselves, they are dead.

In the admonition to watch, Jesus may have been reflecting on the past history of Sardis. On two different occasions the city was conquered by armies that scaled the cliffs around the city. And in A.D. 12 the city was destroyed by an inexpedient earthquake. The citizens had trusted in their location, but the irony was that their location on cliffs was what lured them into a sense of false security. The exhortation to *"be watchful,"* therefore, was certainly a reflection on their history, but also a reminder not to trust in the deception that one can hand over the security of his eternal destiny to a good name.

Christians must be alert. They must be aware of who they are and where they are going. They must not forget their purpose as the disciples of the first Missionary. Therefore, *"Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light"* (Ep 5:14). Later in the letter, John would say to all the churches, *"Behold, I am coming as a thief.* ***Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments****, lest he walk naked and they see his shame"* (Rv 16:15). The consequences of not being watchful would be as Jesus exhorted His disciples during His ministry: "*Now know this, that* ***if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come****, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into"* (Lk 12:39).

In reference to the coming of Jesus, either "in time," or at the "end of time," Christians must always be prepared. Jesus will come as a thief, which means that there is no possible way to determine when He is coming. The word "watch" simply means to be prepared at all times. The word "thief" means that we simply do not know when He will come. The point is that we should not become so involved in the affairs of this world that we are lured into complacency concerning the coming judgment of Jesus.

Jesus' exhortation in this context is similar to that which He gave to His disciples in reference to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which took place about forty years after the following statement: "*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).

It does not take a great deal of interpretation to understand correctly what Jesus meant when He used the word "watch." In the context of the statement above, Bible interpreters need to keep reading Matthew's record in chapter 24 of Jesus's statement. In verse 43 Jesus explained that if the head of the house knew when the

thief was coming, *"he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into* (Mt 24:43).

The exhortation to "watch" assumes that we do not know the time of the "coming of the Lord" in time, or at the end of time. "Watch" means that it is useless to speculate concerning times and seasons in reference to the coming of the Lord. All the senseless predictions concerning the imminent final coming of the Lord are simply the nonsense of prognosticators who seek a following through their challenged understanding of the Bible. What their predictions of a specific date of Jesus' coming does, is encourage people to live in sin until the day before the supposed coming.

The New Testament does not teach the imminent final coming of Christ. The word "imminent" means immediate. In other words, **no New Testament writer wrote that Jesus was coming in His final coming within the lifetime of the first century Christians**. If the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers to write such, then He wrote to deceive the people into believing something that was false. We know it would have been false because here we are today, over two thousand years later. Now if the Holy Spirit did not inspire the early writers to lead the immediate recipients of the New Testament letters to believe that Jesus was coming in their lifetime, **then the New Testament does not teach such today**. Therefore, if anyone would use the New Testament to calculate some supposed final coming of Jesus, **then we know that that person is truly a false prophet**. The next time we hear of someone using the book of Revelation to prognosticate some imminent final coming of Jesus, then we know that person is speaking nonsense. If we are eager to belief such self-proclaimed prophets, then we are immature children. At least this is what Paul said in the following statement concerning the reason why we study our Bibles:

> ***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).

3. ***Known for works:*** Too often, the good worker will trust in his works, thinking that he is accumulating points in heaven that will tip the scales toward his salvation. Deep inside, many people think that they can do good works in order to offset sin. But this cannot happen. No amount of good deeds can atone for one sin. The theology of works for sin cannot be true, for we would never know how many works we must do in order to atone for our sins. Therefore, since works cannot atone for sin, then we must rely on that about which Paul wrote, *"... knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ..."* (Gl 2:16). We must look to Jesus and the grace that He offers from the cross (Ti 2:11). Even if one has a good name he must be on his knees in thanksgiving for the cross.

Because no man can keep law perfectly, then by *"works of law no flesh will be justified"* (Gl 2:16). So if we cannot keep law perfectly because we all sin (Rm 3:23), and no good work can atone for sin, then on what basis will any Christian be saved? There is only one simple answer: ***"For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"*** (Ep 2:8). Could those in Sardis have forgotten this point?

4. ***Imperfect works:*** Were the good works of the disciples in Sardis driven by an appreciation for grace, or were they continued in order to maintain the good name for the church in the community? If they trusted in their good name because of the good works, then they were in trouble. The problem with a good name among those who are of the world is that it is the world patting one on the back. When one feels pats, therefore, it is often good to turn around and see who is doing the patting.

Jesus judged, *"I have not found your works completed before My God"* (Rv 3:2). The Greek word for "completed" means "brought to a full." It may have been that they did not complete what they started. Their good intentions never realized finality. It may have been that they were caught up in the activity, but forgot the purpose for which they were striving as disciples. Whatever the case, their works were not found to have completed that for which our good works are to accomplish in our spiritual mental attitude. If our good works digress into promoting a good name before the world, then we could be in fellowship with the church of Sardis.

C. Exhortations:

There is more than one exhortation to the disciples in Sardis. Each one explains an area of spirituality on which they must concentrate if they are going to prevent the flickering flame of their lamp from being snuffed out.

1. ***"Things ... ready to die"***: We are not told the things that were ready to die. But the implication is that they as a body of Christ were dying. The flame was flickering. Dead churches that trust in their works, are the walking dead in reference to their influence for Jesus in their areas. Spiritual strengthening is in order for legalistic workers to be restored to Jesus.

The legalist realizes that there is an emptiness to his efforts, for he is working for merit and not in appreciation of grace. Sooner or later, the meritorious disciple works himself into frustration, and then dies if he is not willing to step outside his box of legal theology. He burns out on his own zeal to accumulated what he believed were points upon which he could base his salvation. He is thus dead while he works, and will come to the second death if he does not return to the grace of God that was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11). Simply defined, legalism is one depending on his own performance for his salvation, whereas, grace means that one must depend entirely on God, and in doing so, work in appreciation of God's grace.

2. *"Remember"*: Remember how it was when you first came forth from the tomb of water with Jesus? If one's zeal at that time was more than his zeal in the present, then it is time to do what Jesus said, *"Remember how you had received and heard. Hold fast and repent"* (Rv 3:3). They had fallen from their spiritual zeal for the Lord. The exhortation is that they hold fast to what they had, and return to the zeal they had when they were new Christians.

This is especially a problem as disciples grow older. They lose their zeal. They start to lay back and trust in past deeds. They seek to die on couches. They need to remember that the Greek word "remember" in this text is present imperative in tense. In other words, Jesus was giving a mandate that they "keep on remembering" in order to keep on doing. There is no time now for rest. We must save our rest for heaven. We are certain that this exhortation from Jesus was not directed only to the youth among the Sardis disciples. The old must always remember the ministry of the eighty-some-year old Anna at the time of the birth of Jesus. She was not at home in a rocking chair, but at the temple where she was into the ministry of prayer and fasting (Lk 2:36,37).

There is no greater written commentary on the problem that faced the disciples in Sardis than that which was written to those of the Hebrew audience who also had been Christians for some time. They, too, had allowed complacency to creep into their lives. Every disciple who has been in the faith for some time, must carefully read through the following exhortation from the Holy Spirit:

> ***But remember the former days*** *in which, after you were enlightened,* ***you endured a great conflict of sufferings****, partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions with those who were so treated. 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 enduring possession. Therefore,* ***do not cast away your confidence****, which has a great reward.* ***For you have need of endurance****, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise* (Hb 10:32-36).

3. *"Repent"*: Repent means that they were wrong where they were. Repent means that they were once right, but now had gone wrong. They had fallen. Those who have lost their zeal for Jesus need to repent. Disciples who have laid down their desires to manifest their appreciation for the grace of God need to repent. Those who are trusting in their past works as a meritorious treasure by which they will buy their way into eternal glory, need to repent. One must ask himself if he is a "stony ground disciple."

> *Now these are the ones who are sown on stony ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness.* ***But they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a while****. Afterward, when affliction or persecution arise because of the word,* ***they immediately fall away*** (Mk 4:16,17).

Jesus' warning is that if they did not repent, *"I will come on you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come on you"* (Rv 3:3). Jesus can come in time as a thief on those who are not prepared for Him. Such was the case in His coming in time on the unbelieving Jews who did not accept Him as the Son of God. Listen to Paul's warning that he personally taught the disciples in Thessalonica:

> *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety,"* ***then sudden destruction comes upon them as birth pains upon a woman with child****. And they will not escape* (1 Th 5:2,3; see 2 Pt 3:10).

D. Commendation of the few:

Now here is something that should make all of us straighten up and pay attention. It is the phrase, *"a few names"* (Rv 3:4). So we are all personally thinking, "Am I in that 'few names'?" Jesus identifies the "few names" who are His. These can be assured that they are in good standing with Him.

1. *"Few names ... who have not defiled their garments"*: This statement is made on the background of a city that formerly prided itself in social aristocracy. Fine

clothing was a signal of high social standing, and thus, those who wanted to be of high social standing dressed themselves accordingly. But a garment that was stained would never be accepted. It would manifest to all that one was not what he or she pretended to be. In Sardis, the majority of the disciples, in contrast to "the few names," had stained their souls with spiritual death. They were not in "high social standing" with Jesus.

The church in Sardis had now digressed to the point that the norm was spiritual lethargy. "The few names" remained faithful, but they remained faithful among the majority who had given up their total allegiance to Jesus. When the majority of the disciples in any region have identified the "Christianity" of their area to be lukewarm, then it is difficult for the group as a whole to repent. And, it is extremely difficult for those Christians who are on fire for the Lord to survive among those who have fallen into the sin of apathy. The walking dead soon devour the living.

Nevertheless, "the few names" must remember that Jesus knows who they are. The "few names" need to remember the Holy Spirit's exhortation:

> *Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal. "**The Lord knows those who are His**." And, "**let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity**"* (2 Tm 2:19).

This was both the promise and call for repentance that Jesus makes personally in Revelation to those who have soiled their garments. The faithful few needed to remember that Jesus knew who they were. But the unfaithful many also needed to know that Jesus also knew who they were, and that they were in danger of being puffed out.

2. *"They are worthy"*: If "the few names" are worthy, then the unfaithful majority is not worthy. Grace covers a lot of sin, but in this case, those who do not repent of their deadness, do not stand worthy before God. Grace will not cover spiritual lethargy. Grace will not clean a stained garment that is willingly worn.

By the time John wrote what he saw in the vision of chapter 7, it seems that a sifting was about to take place among the seven churches of Asia. The tribulations to come were going to clean up the church. Only those who purified themselves through the blood of the Lamb would make it through the tribulation.

> *And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "**Who are these who are dressed in white robes**, and from where did they come?" Then I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "**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*** (Rv 7:13,14).

These were those of a *"pure and undefiled religion before God"* (Js 1:27). In order to remain white in the blood of the Lamb, there was a condition. John explained,

> *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).

If there is no "walking," then there is no cleansing by the blood. The call of Jesus to the majority of the church of Sardis was that they start walking in the light. They needed to return to obedience. Only the blood of Jesus will make one worthy. And one can access that blood only by an obedient walk in the light of Jesus' word. For the righteous who walk in the light, they must never forget where they are in the fold of God's people. They are safe, not on the basis of meritorious works, but on the basis of grace.

E. An endearing promise:

The "few names" must never forget the promise of God. They must remember, *"**I will not blot his name from the book of life**"* (Rv 3:5). It is within the assurance of this promise that the faithful few can find solitude, as Isaiah did concerning the promises of God:

> *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul will be joyful in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels* (Is 61:10).

In the finality of all things, we yearn to hear the words of Jesus: *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 25:34). And then, Jesus promises, *"I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels"* (Rv 3:5). This is what we want to hear. And for the "few names" in Sardis who had not defiled their garments with apathy, it seems almost superfluous for Jesus to say, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Rv 3:6). The "few names" want to hear Jesus. It is those caught in the religious quagmire of indifference who need to be exhorted to hear. We know now that the statement to listen was made directly to those who had defiled their garments. It was a call for their repentance. But for the "few names" who had not defiled their garments, the fact that their gar-

ments were not stained indicated that they were listening very, very closely to everything that Jesus, through the apostles, had said (See Jn 14:26:16:13). Jesus promised, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples"* (Jn 8:31). The "few names" were continuing in the word of Jesus.

Those who remained faithful in Sardis were promised *"I will not blot his name from the book of life"* (Rv 3:5). The two sisters in Christ, Euodia and Syntyche, were written in the book of life (Ph 4:3). The "book of life" was a Roman register of the citizens of a particular city. It was a register of the living citizens, and thus, when one died, his name was taken off the register. The book of life was used metaphorically by Jesus to reassure the faithful disciples that they were safe. The promise to the faithful Christian is that his name is written in the book of life. When he dies, his name in the book of life is the guarantee that he will transition into eternal glory. At the final judgment, if one's name is not found in the book of life, then Revelation 20:15 will transpire: *"And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*

The metaphor of the book of life is significant in reference to understand that if one is saved through his obedience to the gospel, then his name can still be blotted out of the book of life at any time he might become unfaithful. The fact that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life is totally contrary to the teaching of some who say that once one is saved, then he is always saved regardless of his behavior. We must keep in mind that the Revelation 20:15 passage states that **one's name must be there at the time of the final judgment**. But the Revelation 3:5 teaches that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life **before** he gets to the final judgment. It is crucial, therefore, that once one is saved at the washing of the waters of baptism (At 22:16), then he must remain faithful in ministry in order to remain among "the few names."

"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly," but He also knows how *"to reserve the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment"* (2 Pt 2:9). There were some in Sardis who had *"escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,"* but they were *"again entangled"* in the affairs of the world (2 Pt 2:20). Their garments became stained with sin. Peter wrote of such Christians, *"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 2:22).

If one would deceive himself into thinking that once he is saved through the grace of God, that this grace gives him a license to stain his garment, then he should seriously consider the fact that there will be no stained garments in heaven. We must always be cautious. *"For certain men have crept in* [the fellowship of the church] *unnoticed ... ungodly men* ***who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness*** *..."* (Jd 4). Lest we fall from this grace, we must commit ourselves *"to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ..."* (Jd 24). Those in Sardis whose garments were stained were in danger of being erased from the book of life, and thus, snuffed out.

Chapter 6

MESSAGE TO THE PHILADELPHIA DISCIPLES

The name of this city is certainly unique. Many cities throughout the world can find the origin of their name in this text of scripture. The reason the name has been used to name so many other cities throughout the world is in the fact of what the name means. The name is composed of two Greek words, meaning "bother lover," or "brotherly love."

Philadelphia was probably founded by King Eumenes of Pergamum sometime in the second century B.C. His brother, Attalus II (159 - 138 B.C.), was very loyal to him, and thus, the city was given the name, Philadelphus.

The area where the city rested was subject to a great deal of earthquakes. In A.D. 17 a severe earthquake completely destroyed the city. Because of reoccurring earthquakes that prevailed throughout the area after the A.D. 17, the residents of the city set up dwellings outside the collapsed city ruins. With a grant from Tiberius in Rome, the city was later given the new name, Neocaesarea in appreciation for the relief grant from Rome to rebuild the city. Under Caesar Vespasian, the city was given another name, Flavia. But when Jesus addressed the city in Revelation, He addressed the city as Philadelphia, the original name that the local residents certainly continued because of the history from which this name was derived. They wanted to be known historically as a people of brotherly love.

The culture that the name Philadelphia developed after the relationship of Attalus II with his brother, seems to have been perpetuated throughout the history of the residents. The citizens sought to live up to the name of the city, and for this reason, there is no condemnation of the disciples of Philadelphia. As the culture of the Philadelphia residents influenced the character of the church as a whole, so through the church was reflected the exhortation of Peter to his audience: *"Love the brotherhood"* (1 Pt 2:17). The church also sought to live according to the name that had been with the city for over 200 years.

A. Description of the Christ:

What better way to express the loyalty of Christ to His people than to use the loyalty of Attalus II to his brother. So this address comes from the One *"who is holy and true"* (Rv 3:7). Jesus set Himself apart ("holy") from the eternal God in order to provide redemption for His creation (Ph 2:5-11). And thus, He is true to those who join with Him on the cross, in the grave and resurrection (Rm 6:3-6). The word we would use to explain the behavior of Christians is reciprocity. Jesus first gave Himself for us, and now, we have reciprocated by giving ourselves to Him (Gl 2:20). We love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). And since we have reciprocated His love and sacrifice, He will stay true to His promises that He has given to us.

In order for us to find assurance in His promises, we are informed that He *"has the key of David"* (Rv 3:7). "Key" is metaphorical of "authority." And for those of His Jewish audience, Jesus here reminds them that He received this key in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: *"Then the key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder so that he will open and none will shut. And he will shut and none will open"* (Is 22:22).

It is significant to understand that the tense of the verb "has" in 3:7 is past tense. At the time the message was given, Jesus already had David's key of authority. It was not something yet to come in the future, but was in the possession of Jesus as John wrote these words. There would be no encouragement for the local recipients of the letter if the key of authority were something that was yet in the future. As disciples of Jesus, we have great confidence because we know that Jesus has been given all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). The Father has placed Him in authority above all authorities on earth for the sake of His people (Ep 1:20-23).

> *And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,* ***so that in all things He might have the preeminence*** (Cl 1:18).

If one would assert that Jesus will in the future assume some reign on this earth, then he must also believe that Jesus must give up the authority He now has in order to reign on a small particle of dust in one galaxy of the many throughout the universe. There is something discouraging about such a theology. Those who teach such have a hard time understanding the encouragement that Jesus here gives to the Philadelphia disciples. The encouragement was that at the time the message was stated by Jesus in the context of their history, He had already received the authority of David that was prophesied in Isaiah 22:22.

The authority of David has now gone galactic in Jesus, the Son of God. It was never prophesied that Jesus would reign over some parcel of land here on earth as King David did over Israel in Palestine. Those who think Jesus' reign would be exactly as that of David, have certainly missed the extent to which the metaphor "key of David" was to signify the reign of the Messiah. We must remember that in the use of metaphor, something spiritual and **greater** is being signified. Jesus' reign was to be far greater than the reign of David. It was prophesied that the Messiah would reign over the world from a heavenly throne (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). However, this reign of Jesus as the Messiah now extends far beyond this world, and certainly far beyond the extent of David's reign. It is as the Holy Spirit stated, that 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). And now, He is *"upholding* ***all things*** *by the word of His power"* (Hb 1:3).

B. Commendation from the Christ:

If we were among any of the disciples of the seven churches, we would want to be among the disciples in Philadelphia. There is no condemnation of any teaching or behavior of these disciples. The culture of their fellowship certainly reflected the name of the city.

1. ***An open door:*** One historical note on the founding of this city is revealed in the opportunity that Jesus set before them: *"I have set before you an* ***open door and no one can shut it****"* (Rv 3:8). The original purpose for the founding of the city in 140 B.C. was to make the city **a center for the spread of the Greek language and culture throughout the region**. The city was located in a wide vale that opened into the Hermus Valley. The city subsequently became an outpost opportunity for the preaching of the gospel beyond the region of

Philadelphia. This was the open door that no one could shut.

When Christians who are strategically located realize the opportunity that is given to them because of their location, they should seize the opportunity of the open door for the preaching of the gospel beyond their region. Those who are in strategic locations, but fail to see the opportunity for mission outreach beyond themselves, are short sited, if not introverted. They are not taking advantage of the open door that Jesus sets before them.

Paul was very perceptive to find open-door opportunities that were made possible by God. When he and Barnabas returned from the first mission journey, they *"gathered the church together"* and *"reported all that God had done with them and* ***how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles****"* (At 14:27). God opens the doors. Christians must pray to perceive those doors. When in Ephesus, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.* ***For a great and effective door has opened to me*** *..."* (1 Co 16:8,9). Could this very open door have been the opportunity for Paul from Ephesus to reach cities as Philadelphia? It could have been an open door that led to the salvation of the saints in Philadelphia, and thus, Jesus was using their past experience of their receiving of the gospel in order to motivate them to do likewise for others. While in Ephesus on a mission journey Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus for two years, *"****so that all those who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus****, both Jews and Greeks"* (At 19:10). Could there have been a similar open door for the Philadelphia saints to do the same from where they were located?

It is the responsibility of leaders to be perceptive to doors of opportunity for evangelism. God opens these doors. And the fact that He does assumes that His people should take the opportunity to enter in order to preach the gospel. If we do not, then we are negligent in our duties as His children. This may have been the problem with the loss of the "first love" by the Ephesians and the deadness of the Sardis disciples. Ephesus was the gateway to all Asia Minor. God opened a door there once for Paul, but it seems that the Ephesians refused to continue the legacy of using their key location as an opportunity to continue to preach the gospel to the world. When Paul was in Troas on his last mission journey, and on his way to Corinth, he wrote ahead, *"Now when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ,* ***and a door was opened to me by the Lord*** *..."* (2 Co 2:12). Must we assume that this open door was only for the city of Troas? If we use Ephesus as an example, the open door was not simply for the city of Troas, but for those who lived beyond Troas. Every city of disciples must see how God is using them as an open door to reach beyond their city limits.

It is the responsibility of the disciples to find doors that are opened by God. And if a door is not opened, then it is the responsibility of the saints to pray that God open it. Open doors assume that they were first closed. And if closed, then we must trust that the One who opens doors will do so on behalf of the gospel. While in prison, Paul asked some Christians, *"... **continue praying for us so that God may open to us a door for the word**, to speak the mystery of Christ ..."* (Cl 4:3).

So we must ask ourselves, "When was the last time we prayed that God open some doors for us in order to preach the word?" If that prayer has not been on our lips for some time, then we can judge for ourselves that we have lost our first love. Some Christians are sometimes as those who were explained by a preacher, "When opportunity does knock, by some uncanny quirk, it often goes unrecognized, it so resembles work." It seems that the opportunity to preach the gospel has to be advertised to some before they can perceive God working through open doors. We must pray for perception because the open door for preaching the word is often off its hinges in some places of the world and waiting for someone to enter. Unfortunately, and unlike those in Philadelphia, some people do not want to make the prayer for an open door because they feel that God will tap them on the shoulder to enter.

It would be good to listen to the public prayers of an assembly of disciples. If one never hears a public prayer for God to open doors for preaching the gospel, then we know that we are sitting among many dead disciples. If so, then we must heed the exhortation of Jesus to the Ephesians. We must restore our first love (Rv 3:1).

C. The promise of the Christ:

Jesus makes four promises to the Christians in Philadelphia, promises that would encourage them to continue their outreach through the open door that He would not allow anyone to shut.

1. *"I will make those of the synagogue of Satan ... come and fall down before your feet."* This is a significant statement in reference to the date of writing of the book. On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, prophecy was fulfilled through the apostles' speaking in languages (At 2:1-4). The fulfillment of this prophecy was God's initial stamp of approval on the apostles through the languages that He was now working through the spiritual Israel, the ekklesia (church) of Christians.

Paul explained this "stamp of approval" by the use of languages when he wrote to the Corinthians. In quoting Isaiah 28:11,12, Paul argued that *"languages are for a sign, not to those who believe,* ***but for unbelievers****"* (1 Co 14:21,22). The languages that were miraculously spoken by Christians signalled to the unbelieving Jews that God was now working through those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God.

In the parable of the Tares, Jesus spoke of a time after His ministry when *"****the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father****"* (Mt 13:43). That time came on the cross in A.D. 30 with the termination of the Old Testament law of national Israel (Cl 2:14). Termination of the state of national Israel came in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus explained to the Philadelphia saints that when national Israel was fully consummated in the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24, it would be then that many of the formerly unbelieving Jews would *"fall down before your feet"* (Rv 3:9). Jewish persecution would cease (Rv 2:9). This would be the time about which Paul wrote,

> *For I do not want, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own minds,* ***that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*** (Rm 11:25).

God initially signalled to the Jewish nation in A.D. 30 by the apostles' speaking in languages that He accepted as His people those who believed in Jesus (At 2:1-4). He then signalled to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem with the speaking in languages that He accepted the Gentiles (At 10,11). After this, the Jewish Christians went with force into the Gentile world through Paul and other evangelists. This happened for about thirty years after the cross, that is, *"until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."* After this "fullness of the Gentiles had come," then *"all Israel will be saved"* (Rm 11:26). All Israel does not mean every single Jew, but only those who would accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. These would be those Jews, as the Gentiles, who *"were disposed unto eternal life"* (At 13:48). This number would be all of Israel who would obey the gospel.

Now to the Philadelphia disciples, this time was close. Therefore, some of those Jews who were persistent to claim to be God's people (the synagogue of Satan), would eventually see the true people of God shine forth under the kingdom reign of Jesus. A.D. 70 would be the time when over one million unbelieving sojourning Jews to Jerusalem would be massacred in the destruction of the city in A.D. 70. The Roman Caesar Vespasian waited until the Passover/Pentecost feast, and then the Roman army made war with Israel, which war eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem. The 80,000 or more Jews who survived the war in Jerusalem were sold into captivity throughout the Roman Empire. It was a time when formerly unbelieving Jews figuratively bowed down before Christians as the Gentile Cornelius literally bowed down before the Jewish Peter (At 10:25,26). But this time, it would be the formerly unbelieving Jews who would finally confess that Jesus was the Messiah and figuratively bow down before Gentile Christians.

We would assume that the Christians in Philadelphia believed the prophecy of Matthew 24. But we would also assume that they had not yet experienced the fall of Jerusalem, for there was still opposition from the "synagogue of Satan." But this opposition would soon be terminated, since many of the zealot Jews of the synagogue may have been killed in the A.D. 70 destruction when they traveled to Jerusalem for the annual Passover/Pentecost feast.

Through the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said that He would make the unbelieving Jews *"know that I have loved you"* (Rv 3:9). What would be significant to assume is that some surviving Jews who escaped the A.D. 70 war and possibly returned to Philadelphia, were warmly received by the Philadelphia Christians upon their repentance and obedience to the gospel. Such would not be uncommon behavior among true Christians, for Philip the evangelist later received Saul, now Paul, who had aided in the stoning of one of his best friends in Jerusalem many years before (See At 7:58; 8:1; 21:8). There is certainly power in the words that Jesus uttered from the cross, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Lk 23:34).

2. *"I also will keep you from the hour of trial that will come on the whole world"* (Rv 3:10). There was a reward coming for the Philadelphia saints *"because you have kept the word of My perseverance ..."* (Rv 3:10). The reward was that they would be kept *"from the hour of trial that will come on the* ***whole world*** *...."*

Keeping the word of Jesus has its rewards in the time of trial. This promise reminds us of 1 Peter 4:16: *"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name."* The Philadelphia disciples knew that *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tm 3:12; see Mt 5:10-12). The following words would be precious to the saints in Philadelphia as they passed through the coming trials: "*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).

The early Christians knew that before they could reach the promised land, they had to pass through the wilderness of tribulation. They knew that if one would seek to live the godly life, then there would be the trials of this life that godliness inherently engenders. But it is as someone said, "Trial is the structural steel that goes into the building of character." So Peter would remind the Philadelphia disciples,

> *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been distressed by many trials, so that the proof of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is refined with fire,* ***might be found to praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*** (1 Pt 1:6,7; see Js 1:2,3).

The phrase "whole world" in Revelation 3:10 must be interpreted with the dictionary of Luke 2:1. Caesar Augustus of the Roman Empire decreed that *"a census be taken of* ***all the world****."* This certainly did not pertain to every person on earth. The terminology was taken from the Roman dictionary, in that the Roman's thought that they reigned over the "whole world." But we would ignore their arrogance by realizing that the census of Augustus was only of the citizens of the Roman Empire. And so we bring this definition into the context of Revelation 3:10 as Jesus' meaning in the context. The "hour of trial" was coming when Rome would unleash its persecution against Christians throughout the Empire. This would be Jesus' message of introduction to the encouragement of the visions that would begin in chapter 4 and continue throughout the book.

It seems that Jesus has in the context of His message to the Philadelphia saints turned from the destruction of Jerusalem that would take care of the limited Jewish persecution of the church, and moved on to the state persecution that would take place throughout the Roman Empire. The Empire would set itself against Christianity. A limited persecution of Christians had already begun with the personal vendetta of Nero against Christians during the 60s. But under Caesar Domitian (81-96), there would begin a state persecution for the next 150 years until Galerius eventually issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311. But for some reason, this persecution did not come upon the disciples in Philadelphia, at least this seems to be the promise of Jesus in His message to these Christians. The city of Philadelphia may have been a small sanctuary for Christians throughout the Empire while Rome launched its fury against Christianity in other areas.

"I am coming quickly" cannot be a promise of coming at the end of time. This was a coming "in time." Jesus would not have deceived the Philadelphia Christians into believing that He was coming in His final coming in their lifetime. Such a promise would have robbed them of the immediate comfort they needed. As James encouraged his readers around A.D. 66,67 to be patient for the "coming of the Lord" in His destruction of Jerusalem (Js 5:7,8), so here the promise may be to the Philadelphia Christians that there would be an end of Roman persecution, which end eventually came in A.D. 311. We are not told specifically in this address what the relief would be from the trials from which they would be delivered. The immediate disciples were simply promised that there would be relief from their hard times.

3. ***"I will make*** [him] ***a pillar in the temple of My God "*** (Rv 3:12). The city of Philadelphia was devastated with an initial earthquake that levelled the pillars of the main buildings in A.D. 17. Subsequent earthquakes that took place in the years that followed finished the total destruction of all the buildings in the city. But in the promise of Jesus, the faithful would be made pillars that would never fall.

When someone in Roman society accomplished a good deed for the society, a pillar in a public building was often made and named after the person, as we today would name a street after someone. Jesus is saying that because the Christians in Philadelphia were remaining faithful, they would be "named pillars" in the house of God. They could be assured, however, that these named pillars would never lie in ruins as they witnessed every day the pillars of the old city laying on the ground in ruins.

4. ***"I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God."*** The Greek word for "overcome" in 3:12 is a present participle. The action of the verb is continuous action in the present. Therefore, they were overcoming in their daily discipleship. Living the life of a disciple for the saints in Philadelphia was a daily struggle.

When the A.D. 17 earthquake came, people in mass fled the city for their lives. But when one is a pillar in the temple of God, he need not flee. On the contrary, he is the occasion for people to flee to him for protection and comfort (1 Pt 3:15). *"The new Jerusalem"* comes down from God in heaven. This is the church of the Lord. As people come into Christ, the church is pictured as coming down from its origin, that is God. So when one is obedient to the gospel, then he would be accepting the name about which Peter wrote, the name "Christian" (1 Pt 4:16). It would be to this name, and the refuge of the city of God, that people would seek refuge in times of trial.

After the destruction of the city of Philadelphia in A.D. 17, Caesar Tiberius appropriated funds for the rebuilding of the city. The name of the city was subsequently changed to honor him, but the name never stuck. When God names His people, the name can never be changed. Some in Corinth tried to change the name of their allegiance by calling themselves after the name of some man. Paul wrote that some say, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas" (1 Co 1:12). Paul admonished the disciples in Corinth for this divisive and disrespectful practice. He admonished, *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Co 1:13).

The fact is that we wear the name of Christ because He was crucified for us, and we were baptized into His name. If Christ had not been crucified, then religious people could wear any name they choose. If one has not been baptized in the name of Christ, then again, it does not matter what name one would wear. But since all Christians have been baptized into the One who was crucified for them, then they are called "Christian" after Christ, of whom they are because they have been baptized into Him under the authority of His name (At 2:38; Rm 6:3).

D. Warning:

Jesus warned, *"Hold fast what you have so that no one take your crown"* (Rv 3:11). The Greek word (*krotein*) for "hold fast" means to "hold on to tightly." If they hold on to that which they have, then they will not lose their crown. The exhortation to "hold fast" assumes that one can let go, and thus, lose his crown. It is not that one is saved by the grace of God, and then cannot lose his crown. The very fact that Jesus here exhorts the disciples to hold on to that which they have (their salvation), assumes that they will lose it if they let go.

The exhortation to the Philadelphia disciples is similar to that given by Jude, but with an added responsibility on the part of Jesus. *"**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 ..."* (Jd 24). Combined with the Revelation 3:11 exhortation, the individual disciple has the responsibility to keep himself saved, but he is helped by Him before whom he will be saved in eternity. The link that connects the two exhortations is Paul's statement in Ephesians 3:20: "*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** ...."* Outside us, Jesus is working all things together for good (Rm 8:28). Inside us, we are struggling against the lust of the flesh in order that we not lose our salvation. There are things for which we are responsible in order to guarantee our salvation. *"Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure**. For if you do these things, you will never stumble"* (2 Pt 1:10; see 2 Pt 2:20-22). Since one can stumble, then we seek to watch and be faithful, for we remember Jesus' promise to the Ephesians, *"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life"* (Rv 2:10). Flickering lamps need to give all diligence to add oil.

Chapter 7

MESSAGE TO THE LAODICEA DISCIPLES

Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid King Antiochus II in the third century B.C. It was named after his wife, Laodice (261-256 B.C.). The riches of the city came from its location, for it was situated on one of the great Asian trade routes. It was a very prosperous city, and thus, a banking center for many traders who passed through the city. After the great earthquake of A.D. 60, the banking firms were so wealthy that they financed the rebuilding of the city. In the rebuilding of the city, the banks even refused to receive funding from Nero. As a result of its wealth, it developed a culture of aristocracy and a social class that was based on wealth. There was a spirit of self-sufficiency among the residents since they trusted in their great wealth. Probably no other church of the seven that Jesus addressed, better represents the business and social environment of the modern urban church.

The Lycus Valley was pasture land for a black sheep that produced a glossy black wool, from which stylish coats and carpets were made. The city became known for this wool and the garments of the black wool industry. There was also a medical school in the city, as well as an industry for the manufacture of collyrium, a well-known eye salve of the times.

The unfortunate thing about Laodicea's location was that there was no sufficient local water supply within the city. Water was thus channeled to the city from hot springs some distance south of the city. But because of the heat of the water at its source, it arrived in the city lukewarm, and thus, it still had to be cooled in order to be consumed.

Since the society was one of business and banking, there was a spirit of compromise within the culture that was necessary for business. As in today's urban centers, a great deal of time had to be spent in being successful in one's business. In some cases, cities are so large together that surviving within them as a Christian is challenging. In the case of Laodicea, the competitive business culture of the city led the Christians into a spiritual indifference that labelled them to be the "lukewarm church." As a result of their little focus on spiritual things, the disciples of the area manifested indifference in reference to their faith. The result was the eventual disappearance of the church from the area. The disappearance of the church was as the history of the city. The ancient city of Laodicea was eventually abandoned.

A. Description of the Christ:

Jesus' introduction of Himself to the lukewarm Laodicean disciples is meant to remind them of who He is. If they would recall the One after whom they were originally called, then they should be shocked into remembering that this is not "sweet Jesus, meek and mild." This was their Creator, the One before whom all men will eventually give account for the works done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Co 5:10). This is the One who will eventually make the final pronouncement to the apathetic, *"Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Mt 25:41). These spiritually indifferent disciples needed to be shocked out of their lukewarmness and into the reality that King Jesus is not playing religious games.

1. *Jesus is the revealed "truth."* Isaiah identified God as *"the God of truth"* (Is 65:16). It was indeed appropriate, therefore, for Jesus to make the statement during His ministry, *"I am the way, **the truth**, and the life"* (Jn 14:6). *"Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him ... you will know **the truth**, and **the truth** will make you free"* (Jn 8:31,32). What He was saying was that they would know Him, and it would be Him who would set them free.

Contrary to the thinking of many, Jesus was not talking about a body of doctrine that they would know. Knowing "the Truth" must be interpreted in the context of what John wrote at the very beginning of his dissertation to explain who Jesus was: *"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).

Throughout His ministry, it was the work of Jesus to explain that He was "the Truth," "the Word" that was revealed to man. Jesus was the revelation of "the God of truth." To know "the Truth" was to know "the Word." And to know the Word, was to know a personality, not an outline of doctrine on a piece of paper.

When Jesus said, *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (Jn 14:9), He was saying that in person He was the revelation of the true God of heaven. It is for this reason, therefore, **that any religionist who does not recognize Jesus as the Word (the Truth) who reveals the true God, has simply created a god after his own imagination**. When Jesus addressed the Laodicean disciples, He claimed to be the true revelation of the God of heaven (Rv 3:14). In order to deliver the Laodicean Christians out of the stupor of their lukewarmness, they had to again realize that the One they claimed to follow was the revelation of the God of all things. Their lukewarmness resulted from their "lukewarm" understanding of who Jesus really was.

The Hebrew word for the Greek word that is translated "Amen" means "truth." It is a Hebrew word that was not literally translated into the Greek Septuagint, and then into English. When the Jews heard the cry, "Amen," they understood that what an individual was saying was, "Truth." In the same sense, the English word "Amen" should convey the same meaning when one says "Amen" to a statement with which one agrees to be "truth." Jesus is the Truth who will set us free and keep us free. If we lose sight of who He is, then our flame will flicker out.

2. *Jesus was the origin of creation.* Jesus is *"the ruler of the creation of God"* (Rv 3:14). In other words, when creation began, it was the Son of the Godhead who began and completed all creation.

> ***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).

Because He was the Creator, Jesus was the one who had all the rights of a firstborn son. *"He is the image of the invisible God, **the firstborn of all creation**"* (Cl 1:15). He was not a creation of God, but was one with God. He was the origin of all that now exists. And since He created us, He took ownership of our existence through incarnation. He emptied Himself of being on a equality with the Godhead in order to come for us (Ph 2:5-11).

We must leave a note here for those interpreters who have somehow twisted the Revelation 3:14 statement into some fantasy that Jesus was a created being of God. This interpretation was based on a weak translation of Revelation 3:14. Some versions translated the

verse in a manner that somewhat indicated that Jesus was "the beginning" of the creation of God. This translation gave the impression that Jesus was first created, and then the rest of the material world was created.

If Jesus were a created being, then Paul's statement of 1 Timothy 2:5 means nothing: *"For there is one God and* ***one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus****."* If Jesus were a creation as any man, then there would be no mediatorship between created man of the material world and God who is spirit (Jn 4:24). He would be no greater than any other man who was created, and thus, He could not function as a mediator between that which is spirit and that which is material. That which is material cannot mediate on its own behalf. If man, who is material and mortal, could mediate on his own behalf, then why would we need Jesus, if He too were only mortal and material? If a material and mortal mediator would do, then any other good mortal and material created man would do, maybe Abraham, or Isaiah, or Paul. But to create from dust a mediator between Deity and dust is simply the manifestation of biblically challenged interpreters.

B. Pronouncement of judgment:

The condemnation of the disciples in Laodicea is harsh. The severity of the judgment portrays a fellowship of Christians who seem to be past repentance, though a plea is made by Jesus to *"be zealous and repent"* (Rv 3:19). Whether the stark rebuke of this message generated repentance, we do not know. What is important to understand is that Jesus picked out these disciples as an opportunity to manifest His condemnation of lukewarmness that so often affects so many members of the body. As we study through His message to these disciples, we must be on our knees in prayer to perceive, if perhaps, we too are of those to whom the message in directed.

It is as if Jesus were speaking to the normal metropolitan church today that is composed of those who have been lured into a world of materialism. Laodicea would be the example of the urban church that has laid itself in the tomb of mediocrity, but at the same time, claims to be the representation of the body of Christ in the community. This is a message that is seldom heard from the pulpits of pastoral prophets of urban churches. Even those churches that take pride in being doctrinal soundness will seldom turn to this message to the Laodicean Christians as a point of reference to define true discipleship. After all, if we can take pride in our doctrine, then what need is there to check our behavior with a faith that should be working through love. If our contribution is up, then why would we say anything to discourage the rich contributors. A great deal of pride in one's doctrine will often lead one to overlook a great deal of lukewarmness.

1. *"You are lukewarm"*: It is true that the more wealthy one becomes, the more he is likely to fall into the sin of apathy in reference to spiritual matters. Since one's focus and energy must be placed on the world in order to generate the wealth of the world, then one's focus and energy are directed to the things of the world. They are thus directed away from Christ. For this reason Jesus stated,

> ***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 lethargic Laodicea church is proof of this truth. Split loyalty will not work if one seeks to be a dedicated disciple. It is as Jesus said, *"****He who is not with Me is against Me****. And he who does not gather with Me, scatters"* (Lk 11:23). If one is not totally committed to Jesus, then he reserves some commitment for something of this world. "Half hearted" is never a term that can be used in reference to a disciple of Jesus. Jesus deserves more than half a heart. Our Bibles still say, *"You will love the Lord your God with* ***all*** *your heart, and with* ***all*** *your soul, and with* ***all*** *your mind"* (Mt 22:37).

The water that came from the mineral springs south of Laodicea served as the appropriate metaphor for disciples who had been stricken with the sin of lukewarmness. As one would spew forth the lukewarm mineral waters that were channelled into the city, so Jesus will do the same with the lukewarm Christian who is "channelled" to the final judgment. It is as someone said, "Lukewarm water will not take a steam locomotive to its destination, and neither will a lukewarm Christian reach his desired destination."

The curse of lukewarmness is that one fails to perform for Jesus. One can create a religiosity that conforms to a life-style of mediocrity. God warned Israel that if the Israelites did not keep His word, the land would spew them out (See Lv 18:27,28; 20:22). The same could be said of those who are lukewarm in the body of Christ. They will be spewed out if they were not obedient. How this would happen in the lives of the disciples of Laodicea would be an illustration of what Paul said of some Christians who were wood, hay and straw.

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver,

> *precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will be manifested,* ***for the day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire****.* ***And the fire will test each man's work to determine what quality it is*** (1 Co 3:12,13).

The fire of persecution was about to burn away those disciples of Laodicea who were wood, hay and straw. It would refine those of gold, silver and precious stones. The persecution that was coming would snuff out the lukewarm disciples of Laodicea. The lukewarm would not endure the storm of tribulation that was bearing down on Christianity.

It often takes the fire of persecution to determine if one is a lukewarm disciple. If in the heat of persecution a disciple would fall from Jesus, then he knows that he was a "wood" disciple. If in the heat of trials, a disciple says, "Hey, I'm gone," then he was a "hay" disciple. And if in the heat of the battle for faith a disciple withdraws, then he was a "straw" disciple.

When a culture of lukewarmness is established among a group of disciples, "Christianity" is redefined by the apathy of the members. And once this happens, it is very difficult to reverse this spiritual death. If a new convert would come into such a group, those who are sick with the sin of lukewarmness will intimidate such a one to identify with the culture of apathy of the majority. The curse of apathetic churchianity is in the fact that those who are caught in the culture do not believe that they are in danger of being spewed out. Lukewarmness has a tendency to make one comfortable and not conducive to repentance. If one believes that lukewarm disciples will be brought into eternal glory by grace, then he should study again what Jesus was about to do with the lukewarm disciples of Laodicea.

2. *"I am rich"*: Since wealth has a tendency to stymie spiritual growth, Jesus wants us to know that this is what has happened among the Christians of Laodicea. Though riches do not always detour the spiritual growth of the wealthy, wealth is a particular danger for which the rich must be cautious. They must always remember the good advice of the wealthy Christian who said, "It is easy for a good man to make money, but hard for money to make a good man." The reason this is true is because of what the Holy Spirit said. *"****But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and a snare****, and many foolish and harmful lusts* ***that drown men in ruin and destruction****"* (1 Tm 6:9). The Laodicean disciples were drowning in ruin and destruction.

The problem with wealth is that it ofen leads one to obsess that which will not exist beyond wealth. *"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). And such seems to be the spiritual situation of the disciples in Laodicea. They took so much pride in their riches that their proud attitudes reaped this strong condemnation from the One they presumed to follow. They had forgotten what a wise person once said, "We grow rich, not by depositing money in a savings account, but by depositing the word of God in our hearts." We must never forget, therefore, what someone wisely said, "A man is rich according to what he is, not according to what he has."

It seems that the Laodicean disciples had forgotten the words of Jesus that He spoke during His earthly ministry: *"****Take heed and beware of all covetousness****, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses"* (Lk 12:15). Henry Ward Beecher wrote, "In this world, it is not what we take up, but what we give up, that makes us rich." Beecher must have read Jesus. Or maybe he read the Holy Spirit through Solomon: *"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold"* (Pv 22:1).

In the case of the Laodicean Christians, it seems that they had forgotten the concept of Proverbs 22:2: *"The rich and poor meet together.* ***The Lord is the maker of them all****."* In the eyes of God, there is no difference between the rich and poor. Though among men we would seek to exalt the rich above the poor, in looking down from God's perspective, we are all still little men. The rich need to remember, "The poorest of all men is he who has nothing but money." It was as if James were writing specifically to the rich Christians of Laodicea in the following words:

> *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). *You have lived in pleasure on the earth and lived in a self-indulgent life. You have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter* (Js 5:5).

No better commentary statement could have been written against the rich of Laodicea. We must keep in mind that these were Christians about whom both Jesus and James spoke. These were not those of the world. Riches had so corrupted the spirit of the Laodicean Christians that they were deserving of the harsh condemnation that came from both Jesus and James. They were deserving of such because Jesus loved them, and thus, wanted them

to repent in order that they reign with Him in heavenly places. But at the time of writing, they were simply happy with reigning on earth through the pomp and prestige of their riches.

The judgment of Jesus is harsh in the statement: *"**But you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked**"* (Rv 3:17). This is the character that riches will produce. This is the outcome of greed. This is the description of Christians who have made money their god. Paul simply said to the rich, *"Put to death your members that are on the earth ... covetousness, **which is idolatry**"* (Cl 3:5).

The road to repentance for a church of Laodiceans is difficult. They must put to death their idol god of riches. It is not that they must give themselves into poverty, but that they use their riches to the glory of God. This is behind the instructions of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. If one would find himself sitting among the *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,"* then here is what the Holy Spirit would instruct:

> *Charge those who are rich in this world **that they not be high-minded or trust in the uncertainty of riches**, but in the living God who richly gives us all things to enjoy. **Teach that they do good**, **that they be rich in good works**, ready to distribute, willing to share, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

Every rich person must consider his riches according to the meaning of what Jesus said in answer to the one who stated, *"I will pull down my barns and build larger ones"*:

> *"You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; **then whose will those things be that you have provided**?" So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God* (Lk 12:18-21).

The rich must always be cautious about this truth: *"**For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also**"* (Lk 12:34). The Christians in Laodicea had become somewhat proud of their riches. They seem to be of the same attitude as the Ephraimites of Israel who puffed themselves up because of their riches. Hosea stated that they proclaimed the arrogant statement, *"Surely I have become rich. I have found for myself wealth. **In all my labors they will find no iniquity in me that would be sin**"* (Hs 12:8). This would be the proclamation of the rich disciples in Laodicea. But Jesus defined their sin to be their depraved character. Their character was *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (Rv 3:17). They should have been crying out as Paul, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?"* (Rm 7:24). But their pride would not allow them to make such a confession because they trusted in wealth.

We must notice that neither in Jesus' call for repentance on the part of the rich Laodiceans, nor in any message of the Holy Spirit through the writers of the New Testament, that rich Christians must give themselves into poverty. The only call is that the rich Christians be willing to share (1 Tm 6:17,18). Some have been blessed with the gift to make money. Others have not. Christianity is not as communism, that is, we all must be financially equal. The problem with political communism is that everyone becomes poor, except for the rich ruling class.

The advantage of a rich brother who loves Jesus is that the church has the great opportunity of sending the gospel into all the world. The rich also have the opportunity to help others. Therefore, when we see the house of a rich man, we should be thinking that he should have built a bigger house. If he had built a bigger house, then the fathers of children who built the house would have received more money in wages to feed their children. They too could have built bigger houses for their children. We must dispel with this jealousy of rich brethren who are willing and generous to share by providing opportunities for employment. Their sharing is not in giving handouts. Their sharing is in providing the opportunity for fathers to have a job in order that they feed their children and pay their schools fees. We must never forget that handouts often destroy self-esteem, but handing out opportunities to working hands builds nations.

3. *"I counsel you ...."*: When one is selfishly blinded by his wealth, then he should listen carefully to this counsel of Jesus (Rv 3:18). The city took pride in its great banking that served many who traveled through the area. But Jesus said that instead of trusting in their banking system, they should *"buy from Me gold refined in the fire"* so that they would be spiritually rich (Rv 3:18). They should buy from Jesus white garments, instead of taking pride in the garments that they purchased from the local trade stores that were made of the fine black wool of the area. The garments from the trade stores would give the outer appearance of someone of status, but their being clothed in Jesus would give the presentation of a godly nature. They needed to remember that when they came out of the grave of baptism, that they *"put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"* (Ep 4:24). They had dressed themselves with Christ (Gl 3:27).

Unfortunately, the Laodiceans allowed their spiri-

tual clothing to be replaced with material clothing of the world, and thus, they revealed their naked spirituality. And in reference to the eye salve of the city, such would momentarily solve the problem of itching eyes. But the spiritual eye salve that Jesus provided would quench their itching spirit from following after the things of this world. The eye salve of Jesus would give them relief to stop lusting after wealth. It would give them the opportunity to see the world as it is. They would also be able to see God (Mt 5:8). It would give them the opportunity to see their true self, that they were *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (Rv 3:17).

C. Exhortation to repent:

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rv 3:19). We find a commentary of this exhortation in Hebrews 12:

> *My son, do not despise the disciplining of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives* (Hb 12:5,6; see Pv 3:11,12).

There is only one way to avoid the chastisement of the Lord. Jesus explains, *"Therefore, be zealous and repent"* (Rv 3:19). When one realizes that the Lord chastises those He loves, he must understand that the chastisement comes as a result of our falling from our faithfulness to Him. Therefore, in order not to be chastised, one should give all diligence to remain faithful. We should be a people who are *"zealous of good works"* (Ti 2:14) in order that we not be led into the apathy that is produced by riches. The Laodiceans allowed the easiness of their life-style to infect the culture of their faith. They became complacent in their coins and lax in their love for Christ. It was not that money is evil. When one loves money more than good works in response to the love of God through the cross, then he is spiritually in trouble. It is for this reason that personal good works are a measuring gage as to how much one loves the Lord.

D. Plea for spiritual restoration:

We know that one can repent from the life-style of lukewarmness because of the call of Jesus for repentance. The fact of the plea is evidence that they could restore zeal for Jesus and focus on those things that are above. They needed to read again the letter that the Holy Spirit sent to the Christians in Colosse in A.D. 61,62, which by this time, had been circulated among the seven churches, for the city of Colosse was not far from any of the seven cities.

> *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).

When He wrote the letter to the Colossians, the Holy Spirit knew the direction of lukewarmness to which the Christians in Laodicea and other churches were going. The Colossian letter was the forewarning of admonition from God. The direct address of judgment of Jesus to the Laodiceans in Revelation was the call for their repentance, for they had eagerly run after the lure of riches. Jesus' address was a direct warning because they did not read well the exhortation of the Holy Spirit in the Colossian letter. Instead of having Bible class studies of Colossians, they were waiting for the "closing prayer" in order to leave God and run after money.

1. *"I stand at the door and knock"*: The plea of verse 20 is not to unbelievers. The plea is to Christians who were *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* in their prosperity. This is not an evangelistic plea. It is a plea to Christians who have died in their lukewarmness, and were about to be spewed out by Jesus. This is a plea to the lukewarm sinners in the church, not to sinners of the world.

Jesus is at the door of opportunity for the lukewarm Christian. The word "knock" is a present participle, and thus, Jesus is continuously knocking. The metaphor is pointed because Jesus continually pleads with His disciples to repent when they fall into the sin of lukewarmness. The lukewarm disciple knows that he is not zealous with good works toward God, and thus he continually feels the knock of Jesus on his heart. His conscience tells him that his life-style of lukewarmness is not pleasing to the One who gave up being on an equality with God in order to redeem him (Ph 2:5-9).

The present participle action teaches that repentance from apathy is difficult. The knock is continuous action because apathetic disciples must work themselves out of a religious culture of lukewarmness in which they became very comfortable. All the time Jesus is knocking on one's conscience, one must be struggling to repent of lukewarm churchianity.

2. "If anyone hears": Now we know why Jesus concluded each address to the seven churches with the statement, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Rv 3:22). The word "hear" means repent and obey. If one would hear the commandments of Jesus, then he would repent and obey. Discipleship is more than knowledge. One can know the outline of commandments, but do nothing. It is legalist

hypocrisy if one claims to be a disciple of Jesus, and yet, remains lukewarm.

The Laodicean disciples had fallen into the religiosity of knowing all the outlines of doctrine, but their behavior was stagnant. They were comfortable sitting in assemblies on Sunday and taking in all the knowledge of the teacher. But their performance after the "closing prayer" was far from adequate. Such is the curse of riches. It is easy to pay someone to get the job done instead of getting one's own hands dirty in the filth of humanity. Lest they stain their white garments with the dirt of duty, the rich Laodiceans would be comfortable to just hire some clergyman to do the job for them.

The rich cannot fool the Holy Spirit on this matter. Through Paul, the Spirit instructed Timothy to tell the rich that they be rich in good works (1 Tm 6:18). This means hands-on activity for Jesus. No disciple can work at a distance from the needs of others. Money can never become a buffer between servant and need. If we think it can, then we need to take another look at the dirty towel in the hands of our Creator after He finished washing the dirty feet of His disciples (See Jn 13:1-17).

3. *"To him who overcomes"*: Those who would overcome the stifling curse of prosperity would gain the privilege of sitting down beside the Lord of the world (Rv 3:21). What a powerful promise. When Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father, all the universe became the domain of His kingdom reign (See Dn 7:13,14; Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:5-11). At the time John was recording these words, Jesus was right there at the right hand of God, reigning over all things. Now the sweet promise of Jesus to the Laodicean disciples is if they can overcome the curse of riches that often produces the sin of lukewarm activity for Jesus, they too could sit right there with Jesus.

This was not a promise that would be fulfilled centuries later. The power of the appeal of the promise was that it could happen in their lifetime. We can, as Paul taught, *"reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ"* (Rm 5:17). *"If we suffer, we will also reign with Him"* (2 Tm 2:12). And suffer, the Laodiceans would in the coming years. This last personal message to the members of His one organic body was a plea of Jesus that they open the door of their hearts to Him. He knew their future. He knew that they were going into a century and a half of torturous turmoil before they would emerge on the other side of truly "dark ages." If any disciple was to survive the ages to come, then he had to allow Jesus to come in and sit down with him in his heart. And by sitting in their hearts, they would sit with Him in a heavenly reign over all those who would bring harm against them. Any Christian would be able to overcome because he or she would be right there beside Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

> *These will make war with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords an King of kings.* ***And those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful*** (Rv 17:14).

Those who open their Bibles and listen to Jesus will remain shining lamps of light in their communities. Their good works will generate glory of God (Mt 5:16). Instead of being a flickering flame on the verge of being snuffed out by Jesus, they will draw all men to them. Their drawing power is the nature of who they are in their community. One of the most powerful ways to win others to Jesus is to shine one's brilliant light before the world. It is then that the exhortation of Peter will come true in one's life:

> *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).

Flickering flames need to repent in order to become flaming lights for Jesus.

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**