

Introduction

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Whatever happened to the small groups that met from house to house to form the early church? What became of the intimate, caring relationships that bound the early Christians together with gentle cords of love?

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Many today have experienced the warmth and closeness of a Bible study held at the home of a friend or neighbor. Perhaps we've been touched by the informal and unrestrained flow of conversation, prayer or worship on these occasions. We may have thought, "Why can't church meetings be more like this?" Or, "Why is it I get more out of these meetings than I do at church?"

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Could it be we felt that way because it more closely resembled the church that Jesus built; the one that existed before man took control and refashioned it into his idea of a new, improved model? No one can fault man's efforts. As men we've put a lot of time and energy into remodeling and revising it; we've changed it countless times, not to mention the expense. We've divided, subdivided and sub-subdivided it again and again. We've removed it from the spiritual realm where it was constructed of spiritual stones and given it real material substance of wood and brick.

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We've changed the concept of church from being thought of as an assembly of believers to seeing it as a tall impressive structure where God lives. In the first century there was only one church and any group searching for truth and following Jesus was part of it. In those days, its headquarters was in heaven and it was ruled from there. Today, we've assumed much of the administrative duties; after all we don't want to bother the Big Guy with small details, do we?

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We are able today to offer a selection to our worshipping public. We have repackaged it and can now offer church in a variety of flavors with a whole range of brand names. It's much more exciting than merely saying, I belong to THE CHURCH. Now, we can be a part of the chocolate church, the caramel church, the vanilla church or the custard cream church. Today, we can package it in an assortment of colorful packages each displaying its brand name proudly in large, easy to read letters. Imagine each brand competing to please your individual spiritual tastes. Don't you think competition is wonderful; don't you think it's healthy?

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In the beginning we had the tiresome responsibility of determining one to one, whether or not a particular individual was a true, spiritual brother or sister. We had to know them for awhile, examine their lives, both public and private. Today, thanks to the technology of labeling, much of this tedious task has been eliminated. If the individual in question wears the same label displaying the same brand name as ours, then they're obviously saved; how simple. Isn't this much easier? This method is not without some problems however; sometimes instead of finding brothers or sisters, we find cousins. These are among those who wear a different label but are more or less in the same general family.

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In the new and improved version of church, costuming and professionalism is most important. Like any successful, well-run business, we must establish various levels of administration based on a good resume of experience and solid academic education. Just as Jacob saw angels ascending and descending the heavenly ladder, we must have a vision that permits the true professional to ascend and descend the corporate ladder. We must see that each administrative level carries a title worthy of respect and whenever possible, supply uniforms appropriate to the rank being honored. There is no better way to show our appreciation to these worthy administrators than with our financial resources. True success is measured in wealth. The bottom line on the paycheck really says it all, don't you think? The better they live, the better we look. After all, we don't want other churches to think we're cheap.

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Whenever the selection of a qualified leader, male or female, comes into conflict with the Bible, we must assume that the conflicting Scripture has been improperly translated or was meant for a particular ethnic group or generation long past.

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In the face of all we've said on this subject there remain those who stubbornly cling to the old out-of-date, less-modern, Biblical ways. Can you believe it?

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There are still a few who look back fondly to simpler times when the church was less formal, less complicated and less professional. As hard as it may be for some to accept, there is a remnant determined to revive and do the first works of the church, to recapture their first love. These hopelessly idealistic, romantics desire to once again experience the unity, love, power and miracles of the first generation church, even if it means accepting the hardship, persecution and death it may take to restore it.

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It is to this wonderful, steadfast, open, truth-seeking, radical group of faithful disciples that this book is written and for all those seeking to be like them and like Him.

Chapter 1

Welcome Home

[1.1]

You have just found the door to the simple, loving, in-house church that our Lord Jesus and His Apostles established and built as seen in the New Testament scriptures. A church without physical walls; a church where we are the stones, living stones, joined together with the mortar of love to form its spiritual structure. The Lord's church, our church, is not a building made with hands; for we are the building and the spirit of God dwells in us.

[1.2]

Because we do not build with wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver or precious gems we are free to invest the Lord's resources in the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and imprisoned. We are free to love the violent, drunk, perverted and profane and to reveal God's forgiveness through Christ. Welcome home. Because we do not invest in the works of the flesh by erecting steepled monuments we will suffer no loss by the fires of testing which will one day consume them all.

[1.3]

When we say church, what comes to mind? Do you think of your denominational affiliation or the steepled building with its pulpit, platform, alters and pews? Imagine; many of today's church goers confuse the building with the church. What a vision. Can you see it; Christ returns and millions of buildings rise to meet him in the sky while all of God's children wave goodbye. Don't laugh! If someone asked you directions to your church, what would you tell them? Is it the white building on the corner?

[1.4]

Many, if not most, who attend today's institutional churches suffer from a deep spiritual dryness that has settled into their very bones. It seems to manifest itself as a hunger that penetrates the very soul. Because they have not followed God's blueprint many, aware of their need, go about like blind men groping in the darkness seeking what they sense they do not have. Many actually find the truth they hunger for and the joy that comes with the quickening of God's spirit within. For a season this new light from God illuminates their heart and beckons them to follow but, afraid to leave familiar surroundings or endure the rebuke of their loved ones, they remain captive in a religious system that has grown cold. A denominational system which is determined to be right even if it has to deny the truth to do it. Winning the doctrinal argument becomes more important than discovering God's truth. These institutional captives are like grapes left too long on the vine, poor souls withering and wrinkling with age. Their skin thickening and no longer sensitive to the truth that surrounds them. The time of enlightenment passes and with it the joy of serving Jesus. Finally, legalism sets in and the Spirit moves out.

[1.5]

The fruit of God's vine must be picked in season if it hopes to satisfy the purpose for which it was planted. Many, out of fear, fail to respond to God's call. Truth resisted builds hardness of heart and the Spirit of truth who called them out of darkness has been ignored and can no longer be heard. In their brief season of light they dared to ask question of leaders; they compared their church assemblies to God's blueprint and found them wanting. Their questions about these differences only drew the standard denominational answers and a warning not to make waves. Their questions, far from being welcomed, were seen as a threat and they, as rebellious for asking them. Even on that rare occasion when a leader might admit to deviating from the blueprint, he shrinks back and suggests that it's not important enough to risk confrontation and possible division, so he refuses to make the required changes. Some try to steam-roll over you with some intellectual sounding nonsense that makes black white and white black in an effort to persuade you of your error.

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Some leaders, for fear of loosing the questioning member suggest the member stay in the church and bring about the required change from within. Of course, if the member continues to raise objections, remaining unwilling to compromise the word of God or their own resolve to obey it, they're asked to leave, making internal change impossible. If things remain unchanged, the fires that once burned within are quenched by a religious system whose size and weight smother every remaining spark of reform that once glowed with the zeal to destroy hypocrisy and replace it with the pure undefiled truth of God's word. Some brethren have dared to ask themselves questions like, "Where is the power, unity, love, miracles and simple worship found in the pages of the New Testament in the early church?" If you've ever asked this question, then take a moment, listen to your heart. Beloved, listen closely. Listen to that still small voice within and you will hear God ask, "Where is the early church?"

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God desires to bless His church the same way today that He did in the first century but what we now attend, in most cases, is not even close to a first century church. The first century church was His; can we say this about today's church? God longs, once again, to pour out blessings upon those who practice church according to His blueprint. The early church did, but what little of it remains is all too often regarded as some off-the-wall cult.

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Why would the Christians of today regard those who worship in early church fashion as a cult? If you compare these two forms of worship with each other you will soon discover that they are very different. Anything different is viewed with fear and suspicion. Who is he that attends an institutional church that doesn't believe his church to be correct and true? Along comes an assembly that worships in the manner of the early church; does this man compare this assembly to the New Testament? No! He compares it to his church and seeing the differences declares it to be a cult.

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Can the early church be found? Are there those today who worship and live as the early church did? You may have to search high and low to find it as one seeking treasure in a field or a pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-45). God's kingdom on earth is His true church and finding it is indeed as finding treasure. To find it you may have to search for it with all your heart. You may have to travel far and wide or be used, if called, to build one according to God's blueprint, trusting God to teach you how. The answer to the above question is yes, the early church can be found if you know where to look.

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To build one according to God's plan we must first destroy whatever now stands on its site. I'm speaking of our heart. To do this we must put away all hand-me-down doctrine, return to the model and specifications given in the New Testament and approach this blueprint with a servant's heart and integrity. We must be determined to build according to His plan and not our own.

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Christ did not build His kingdom on the backs of the Pharisees, nor within the walls of the temple; if we are to enter into his labors neither can we. We cannot build on the traditions of men nor can we build His church within the walls of a denomination. We must first come out, as He did, then we'll be free to follow His voice and His direction alone.

[1.12]

If we are to find our way back, then we, like the prodigal son, must come to ourselves or if you prefer, realize our error and return home. Home to the structure that Jesus built; home to the foundation of the Apostles; home to the early church.

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Can we truly say today, as we look at today's church that it bears any resemblance to the church of Acts? Indeed, outside of God's word can we say that it exists anywhere but in our hearts? Perhaps it does if we'll open our eyes, take the blinders off and look outside the mainstream institutional church to the unnoticed fringe; to the ridiculed, persecuted and discarded. Look close; you won't be able to identify them by their clothes, education or speech. The only way you'll be able to recognize them is by their love and the fruit of their lives. They most likely won't be meeting in rented or purchased buildings. They won't be teaching or preaching from elevated platforms and they won't acknowledge any difference between layman and clergy. They will recognize all who truly follow Christ as co-laborers, joint heirs of salvation and fellow priests in the service of the kingdom. They will be a peculiar people, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood called to build God's kingdom according to His specifications. They will follow His blueprint with the integrity of a master builder.

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Today's institutional churches have lost this vision. They no longer follow the blueprint of Christ but have instead modified it making their own improvements. They add their own specifications and ignore the plan of God as if they had some special permission given them to redesign the work of Christ. They wonder why they can't get their people excited about ministry; many won't even review a simple Sunday school lesson and shy away from reading or praying aloud. Why is this happening? Could it be they've lost sight of God's plan for their lives; God's vision? Remember, where there is no vision the people perish (Proverbs. 29:18). Let us now consider laying down the hypocrisy; the self-serving trappings of a man-made religious system to return home to the church that Jesus built. Let us now heed that admonishment of the Lord given to the church of Ephesus in Revelation chapter two and remember from where we have fallen, repent and do the first works. We have left our first love behind, the time has now come to return to Him and do the first works (Revelation. 2:4-5).

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It is the way of the early church not to further the cause of division by recognizing denominations which separate many of our Lord's most faithful and loving disciples from each other. This obscene practice exists and continues in direct contradiction to God's blueprint (1 Corinthians. 1:10-13). In Paul's day the prideful among God's flock were trying to divide into factions under the names of Cephas, Apollos and Paul; today we divide under Luther, Wesley, Meno Simons, and many other names adopted for the same shameful purpose. It was wrong in Paul's day and it's wrong today!

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Many of those who are held captive by denominational restraints are victims of their own natural family. We came into the institutional church through our family, which is to say, we were born into it. Because we were born into it we have become convinced of several things. First, it must be true because my family belongs to it. Second, it must be true because our leaders are educated and know much more than we. Third, it must be true because it's what we are. Like being English or German, we were born Methodist or Baptist or something else. It is as though it can't be changed. Like your race or color; your label is your label. So then, you're a Baptist because you were born a Baptist, your mother and father were Baptists, and your grandparents were Baptist and that's all there is to it. Right?

[1.17]

How much knowledge of God's word do you really have? Have you really examined and compared it with your denomination's doctrine? Can you honestly say you can be objective after a lifetime of doctrinal brainwashing? Can you research each of your denominational doctrines and compare them to God's word without bias? Come on, admit it. When you hear something foreign to your denominational doctrine you immediately become defensive and assume your position to be correct even though you've never researched it in scripture. When challenged did you listen with an open heart or did you run to your leaders so they could reaffirm all that you want to believe? Did they show you that choice, out of context, verses that support your argument? Was knowing the truth as important to you as being right? Perhaps your leaders were

right and what they showed you was the truth. How do you know unless you, yourself, search the scriptures with an open heart? This will be very hard to do unless you are truly guided by the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of truth. You must not try to make God's word say what you want to hear but rather what God's word is truly saying. You must know your bible, not just those church-taught, pet doctrines, but as one who allows it to speak to them. You must put away your preconceived ideas and your hand-me-down denominational doctrines. You must search for truth no matter who it offends for to do less is an offense to God.

2 Timothy 2:15

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (KJV)

[1.18]

You say, "My pastor wouldn't deceive me, he's a godly man; he has much more knowledge than I." True, he might not willingly deceive you, but what if he, himself, is deceived? There are many educated church leaders most of which don't agree with each other. There are educated Methodist, educated Baptists, educated Catholics, educated Pentecostals, educated evangelicals, and educated charismatics and most of them don't agree. When leaders don't agree; when the educated teachers don't agree, where does that leave you? It leaves most people confused, so rather than trouble themselves or search for answers they simply accept whatever they're taught continuing on as their ancestors did before them. Like poor, dumb sheep they follow blindly, not knowing where it is they're going, but hoping against hope that the one at the front wearing the bell (making the most noise) does. Too often, the one in front is not Jesus, as hoped, but another sheep following the denominational road map rather than the narrow, clearly marked road found in God's word.

[1.19]

Not all who attend the institutional church are biblically illiterate. Many know the bible well, but have learned to interpret it as their denomination does. They have learned to defend the denominational position rather than the truth. What's worse they've allowed themselves to be deceived into believing that what has been taught to them, without exception, is the truth. Their doctrinal positions are fixed, like the denominations they belong to. By this we mean, they cannot or will not change them. A coal miner coming home in the dark is unaware of the coal dust that covers the exposed areas of his body because he can't see them. As he draws closer to the light he becomes increasingly conscious of these dirty areas. The more he sees the greater his need for cleansing. This same principle applies to our understanding of God's word. The closer we are drawn to the truth the more we realize our error. Can we ever be too clean; can we ever claim we know the whole truth? God's truth comes as an unfolding revelation to our mind and heart. The wondrous adventure of it all is that it does not come complete and packaged for instant use but a little at a time. Our understanding of it grows with our maturity. We must never feel that we have it all or even that what we think we understand is complete and correct. We must be prepared to receive new light, allowing us to expand or change what we already have. All such additions or changes should be fully substantiated in the bible and not based on extra biblical knowledge, though often, extra biblical knowledge will support that which has been

discovered in God's word. Much of what a denomination or for that matter, individual church, might teach may be good, even most of it, but whatever portion of it that remains in error will lie forever justified under a mountain of convoluted reasoning and half truths.

[1.20]

Allowing believers to receive new light could result in biblical unity with others who are trying to come out of division and darkness. Who knows, if we found unity with others, the only thing that would divide us would be the brand names we've adopted. We might then be tempted to drop those also. Can you image what that would mean? It would be the end of denominationalism and the beginning of the simple loving church that Jesus built. We might then catch a glimpse of home. Have you ever dared to dream of a church like this, a church that feels like home? One that expects no fancy "go to meeting" Sunday clothes or pews arranged like theatre seats. I'm speaking of a church where you don't go to watch a performance put on by professional singers, musicians, and preachers; where the show is a carefully orchestrated program of religious rituals, but one whose worship is simple, unprofessional and from the heart.

[1.21]

Have you ever dreamed of being a participant instead of an observer? Have you dreamed of simple worship; singing songs that are themselves instruments of worship rather than just unemotionally sung? Have you longed to hear sincere, unsermonized prayer offered from a child-like heart? Have you hungered to see real sacrificial love flowing over and between the members of the assembly instead of idle conversation, gossip and vanity? What about a church where the service continues in the hearts of its people all week long? Have you desired to be a part of a church body where each member cares more for others than themselves? Welcome home! You must first find this church in your heart before you'll recognize it in its physical form. You must first find it in faith if you expect to ever attend it in the flesh.

[1.22]

Are you thinking it's too good to be real? Wrong! It's true, it's possible, it's in God's word right there in His blueprint and it's being modeled today in the homes of people just like you. These people serve one another; speak the same thing, have no divisions among themselves, but are completely joined together in unity. They have the same way of thinking and hold the same opinions in spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 1:10). Some play instruments, others sing. Some teach while others share some special message from God. Each comes with their own unique gift for worship. Poems are composed, songs written and all done to glorify our Lord. In assemblies where there are no musicians, music pours out in beautiful accappella harmony. The very gifts God has supplied are cultivated and returned to Him in praise and worship.

1 Corinthians 14:26

26 How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. (KJV)

[1.23]

If you listen, you may hear the sweet sound of an untrained, faltering voice singing off key but with a sincerity that touches both the Lord's heart and your own.

[1.24]

Gone are the props, the gowns and the intellectual instruments of worship. Gone are the altars, pews and stained glass. Gone are the bulletins, steeples and pulpits. Gone is the unspoken belief that worship music must be old and composed by those long dead to truly be of God. All of these have been replaced by the only property the church as a body owns; one plate for unleavened bread, one cup for red wine and two candlesticks (candlesticks optional) to symbolize the presence of those who have given their life to the service of our Lord; those born under the old covenant who were born under the law but saved by grace. A candle burning for those who, like their father Abraham, became children of faith. The other candle that burns, keeps alive the memory of those who sleep, waiting for us, for the sound of the chief shepherd's voice, calling us together. This flame burns for Apostles, martyrs and all those faithful believers born under the shadow of the cross; those born under the covenant of grace. Yes, the church of Acts lives on. The church whose cornerstone is Christ, whose foundation is the apostles and whose structure is comprised of stones, living stones placed side by side to build God's spiritual house. A house not made with hands but of lives; spiritual stones. We are those spiritual stones, we are His habitation.

1 Peter 2:5

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (KJV)

1 Corinthians 3:16

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (KJV)

[1.25]

This church is dedicated to the belief that there is but one flock and one shepherd, one Lord, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is above all, through all and in us all (Ephesians 4:4-6). Welcome home!

[1.26]

There is a new wind blowing, can you feel it? In the middle nineteen sixties another wind blew. It crossed America like a silent wave changing lives, empowering people in the Spirit and calling all who were God's children to dare to step out in faith and be led by the Holy Spirit. Young and old alike began receiving spiritual gifts. People from all walks of life began accepting Jesus. The traditional church was shook to its very foundations and some broke apart. For every one that crumbled, two took their place and the thirst for the word of God and the anointing of the Spirit seemed unquenchable. We thought it would last forever but it went as it came, like a breeze sweeping across a ripe field of grain. There is a new wind blowing, though its roots had much

earlier beginnings. Perhaps you can remember when home schooling was something rarely heard of then, suddenly, it appeared to be everywhere.

[1.27]

The new wind spoken of here is not home schooling; what we see happening today is something far more important than home schooling with much greater spiritual implications. We are witnessing the re-emergence of the early church. The home church movement is well under way and unlike the sixties when only America was affected, this movement has spread around the world from Asia to Europe, from Africa to the Americas, touching virtually every nation.

[1.28]

Like the whisper of a soft sweet song or a still small voice it beckons us to follow as it leads us home. Home, where worship is simple and sincere. Home, where there is only one standard; the word of God. Home, where the sweet call of the Holy Spirit can be answered by all who have the ears to hear it. Home, where there is love and unity. Home, where God's Spirit can flow freely; where gifts and talents can be shared without the need for educational credentials. Home to the small, warm spiritual family who meet together in a house. Home, where each share their possessions and goods as everyone has need. Like an unseen spiritual dimension, they're out there; with arms outstretched waiting to welcome all who labor under the heaviness of a man-made religious system.

[1.29]

How do you find them? Pray and seek God's guidance, ask at Christian book stores or consult the internet. There are thousands of them. Be careful to check out each before you become involved. Do not be fooled into becoming part of a **denomination that meets in a house**. A good definition of a denomination is 'two or more assemblies sharing the same earthly church leadership.' Each home church, like the early church should be independent, bound together only by love, unity of purpose, acceptance and most importantly, Christ, but not bound together by an ambitious political system. When one home church gets too big to remain in the home it occupies, it must give birth to another, giving opportunity to other men who have been prepared to lead.

[1.30]

Many believe that all groups who meet as churches in homes are cults. This is false in most cases but there are some. The devil continues to plant weeds among the wheat. Test the spirit, examine the doctrine, and see if it's faithful to the blueprint given in the New Testament scriptures. Look carefully at the leadership; do they point you to themselves or to Christ? Those who magnify themselves are deceived and will try to deceive you. Be sure the enemy will try to discourage you on your quest. But keep on looking; don't give up until you've found your way home.

[1.31]

Most of the home churches you encounter are earnestly seeking to restore the early church but, of course, some are further along than others. There is one out there that you can help along its way; have the courage to find it, support and grow with it. Be prepared to serve before you lead. Good leadership is born out of a servant's heart.

[1.32]

Finding or starting a home church could be the greatest adventure you'll ever have as a Christian; do it with diligence. When you turned the first page of this book and began to read you took the first step toward the early church, the first works and your first love. Reading the rest of this book will prepare you for the spiritual journey ahead as you search for the early church. It will help you trace its shape and form as together we compare it with God's blueprint, and find our way home. Welcome home!

Chapter 2

Whose Church is it?

[2.1]

It's sunny, it's Saturday, and it's springtime when the thoughts of the pre-teen neighborhood kids turn to baseball. Most of the usual rag tag assemblies have made their way to the local vacant lot for the first day of the sandlot season. Drawing closer to this jabbering group of all stars, we discover that they've just completed the choosing up of sides.

[2.2]

The captain of one of the teams is engaged in a furious confrontation with his teammates over what position each will play. It appears unanimous; all team members including the team captain want to pitch. Suddenly, the voice of one small lad rises above the rest and with one declaration the matter is settled. What was it he said you wonder? Above the din of the other voices he screamed, "**My bat, my ball, I pitch.**" And with that the matter was ended.

[2.3]

Today's church faces a similar problem. It would seem that most assemblies have decided that authority to establish church government, make rules, set policy and determine requirements for membership belongs to them. Many even go as far as to determine the very requirements necessary to be saved as though salvation is something to be voted on. They feel they can attach their own list of parameters apart from God's word. They also believe it's within their power to deny salvation by denying church membership to anyone who fails to obey their rules.

[2.4]

Salvation comes as a result of Christ's completed work on the cross; a work which could not be shared with any other. He, through His sinless blood is able to wash from the soul of mankind the sin which separates man from God. He and He alone.

[2.5]

The Lord, through His word has revealed His exclusive position as head and sole authority of His church.

Colossians 1:18-19

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; (KJV)

[2.6]

What can we, as members of it do, especially if we have been chosen by Him to be His delegated authorities? If we have been delegated then we must represent Him; not ourselves. If we represent Him, then we must carry out His plan; the blueprint He has placed in our hands to follow. We cannot add anything to this blueprint nor can we take anything from it without betraying the trust of the one we represent.

[2.7]

Like the young ballplayer who cried, “My bat, my ball, I pitch,” we must listen to our Lord’s voice as He lifts it above the objections of the crowd to say **“My blood, my resurrection, my church, I make the rules!”** If you have been searching for the first century church, that warm, simple, loving church family that gathered about the Lord’s Table, you’ve found it.

[2.8]

The Word of God was given as a plan, a spiritual blueprint for the building of God’s kingdom on earth. The Bible is not only God’s blueprint but details all of the builder’s specifications.

[2.9]

Was God, through His son and the apostles, building the church for Himself or for those who would become the material that form its structure? Was the structure of the church to be built of physical things such as gold, silver, precious gems, wood, hay or stubble or was it to be built of spiritual material? What form would it take? Would it follow the contour of its foundation or could it exceed its foundation? Would its corner stone set the lines and limits of the structure or would another rule apply? We need to ask ourselves one all important question; **whose church is it?**

[2.10]

To arrive at the proper conclusion we must go back to the blueprint and specifications found only in God’s Word.

[2.11]

One thing is clear from Christ’s teaching; it must be built on a rock, not sand. Sand is always shifting. It must be built on firm unchanging ground, immovable and strong. The parable of the house built upon the rock makes this abundantly clear. (Matthew 7:24 – 27)

[2.12]

1. Who is the rock upon which the church is built? (I Corinthians. 10:4 Ro 9:33)
2. Who is unchanging, steady and sure? (Hebrews. 13:8)
3. Who is the chief corner stone? (Ephesians. 2:20)
4. Who is the foundation? (Ephesians. 2:20)
5. Whose church is it? (Ephesians. 5:27)

6. Is it a physical or spiritual house? (I Peter. 2:5)
7. Can we build upon any foundations we choose?

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

11 **For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid**, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and **the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.** (KJV)

[2.13]

If we, who call ourselves Christians (those who obey and follow Christ) attempt to modify, redesign or reduce any part of the Christ's church we make ourselves equal with Him. The church is a purchased possession bought and paid for with the sinless blood of Christ.

Acts 20:28

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed **the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.** (KJV)

[2.14]

He and He alone has the authority of ownership, authority to add, subtract or keep unchanged that which He has established. He has declared that the blueprint given in His Word will not change.

Matthew 24:35

35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, **but my words shall not pass away.** (KJV)

[2.15]

He paid for the church with his own blood; we didn't and couldn't because we don't have the right blood type: **sinless!**

[2.16]

He declares that no man can lay any other foundation for the church than the one He has already established. If we change the frame or form that He through the apostles gave it by adding our own rules and regulations, we compromise His blueprint. We say that we are qualified to further define God's Word; that God didn't finish His Word because man's clarification is necessary. We must not presume to take upon ourselves the task of correcting God. We can add nothing to traditions, doctrines, or the gospel of Jesus Christ.

II Thessalonians. 1:7-8

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking **vengeance on them** that know not God, **and that obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ: (KJV)

II Thessalonians. 2:15

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, **and hold the traditions which ye have been taught**, whether by word, or our epistle. (KJV)

II Thessalonians. 3:6

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.** (KJV)

II John 1:9

9 **Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ**, hath not God. **He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ**, he hath both the Father and the Son. (KJV)

1 Timothy. 4:16

16 **Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them:** for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. (KJV)

1 Peter. 4:17

17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, **what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?** (KJV)

Galatians. 1:8

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, **preach any other gospel** unto you than that which we have preached unto you, **let him be accursed.** (KJV)

[2.17]

Those who would push aside the Holy Spirit, the teacher and guide to all truth (John 16:13-14), have been a thorn in the side of the church from the beginning. (Galatians. 2:11-16) They always want to add or clarify or change something. They claim to be working on behalf of God but always create division within the church body with their so-called Spirit-led insights. They feel that it's their ministry to tell us what God means. If this is so then why is the Holy Spirit given to all in the family of God instead of just these special few? It would seem if we had them to advise us we wouldn't need the Holy Spirit. Certainly no one should exchange the revelation of God's Spirit for the dribble or babble of men.

[2.18]

Like the Pharisees who came before them, they seek to elevate themselves by enslaving others; by taking away the liberty which is ours in Christ. (Galatians. 3:1-5, 5:1) These modern day Pharisees, like their predecessors, add heavy burdens to the shoulders of God's flock; burdens too heavy to be carried. (Matthew 23:4-7) But the yoke Christ intended for us is easy and the burden light. (Matthew 11:29-30)

[2.19]

We must not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that God needs our help to define, refine or interpret anything. No matter how well intentioned such leaders may be such teaching is counter productive to the work of God and only produces strife and division in the church. If you don't believe this, just look around.

[2.20]

In days past, during the period known as the Dark Ages or Middle Ages the church underwent great change through reform. This reform or reformation produced two great movements toward truth and were largely guided by the Holy Spirit.

[2.21]

The first began with Martin Luther in Germany who defied the institution called the Church of Rome. The church of Rome thought it had the power to act in authority above the Word of God. It sought to, and did impose its self-righteous man-made doctrines on God's people and called all failures to obey these man-made rules sin.

Matthew 15:8-9

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9 But in vain they do worship me, **teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.** (KJV)

[2.22]

Leaving the Church of Rome in peril of their lives, Martin Luther and those with him determined to elevate the Word of God to its rightful position as God's governing authority and example for the Church. These courageous reformers, Luther, Tyndale, Wycliffe and others too numerous to mention, poured their lives into the reformation and succeeded in elevating God's Word to its proper position within the Church but not before they paid a heavy price in martyr's blood.

[2.23]

Though they elevated the Word of God they continued many of the lofty customs and traditions they had grown up with in the confines of the Roman Church. They adopted from Rome the use of large elaborate buildings with spires on top (steeple). These buildings contained altars: pedestals which raised its appointed leaders above the congregation. It divided the congregation from its leadership. Leaders now sat above the congregation and were called clergy. Though no such practice took place in Scripture the traditions of pew, steeple, altar, stained glass and clergy continue to this very day. So accepted did these traditions become that even the building became known as the Church. People began to believe that the building was the house of God and called it so. No thought was given to Scripture on this matter or it would have been clearly seen that each of God's people is His house. (Hebrews. 3:6; I Corinthians. 3:16) They would have known that God does not dwell in temples made with hands. Yes on occasion, the apostles met in the

temple or synagogues with converted Jews to proselytize, but never gave a thought to meeting in one or building one.

Acts 7:48-49

48 Howbeit **the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands**; as saith the prophet,
49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: **what house will ye build me? saith the Lord**: or what is the place of my rest? (KJV)

[2.24]

If the Reformers had read the admonishment given in the second chapter of the book of Revelation to the Church of Ephesus, especially verses four and five, they might have avoided this apostasy.

Revelation 2:4-5

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love**.
5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, **and do the first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. (KJV)

[2.25]

Perhaps they might have even found their way back to the simple loving church of the Apostles.

Acts 2:46

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from **house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (KJV)

Acts 8:3

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, **entering into every house**, and haling men and women committed them to prison. (KJV)

Acts 20:20

20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and **have taught you publickly, and from house to house**, (KJV)

Romans. 16:3-5

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:
4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.
5 Likewise greet the church that is **in their house**. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ. (KJV)

1 Corinthians. 16:19

19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, **with the church that is in their house**. (KJV)

Colossians. 4:15

15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and **the church which is in his house.** (KJV)

Philemon. 1:2

2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to **the church in thy house:** (KJV)

[2.26]

When did the meeting place for God's church move from the loving simplicity of a house to a building or temple or cathedral? Who authorized such a move? When did Christ order church buildings built?

1 Kings 8:27

27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, **the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?** (KJV)

Mal. 3:6 For I am the Lord, **I change not;** therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (KJV)

[2.27]

If God doesn't change then He didn't authorize this move; so who did? **Whose church is it?**

[2.28]

While the Protestant Reformation was growing in intensity, another group had also felt the oppressive hand of Rome. They too had grown tired of obeying its non-biblical dictates so they separated, seeking to return to the truth of God's Word and the simple church life of the first century.

[2.29]

This second movement became known as Anabaptist because they required those who had been baptized in the Church of Rome to now be baptized again. They believed that baptism was a matter of choice and one had to become a believer before they could make this choice. The term for this became known as "believer's baptism" and those who practiced it became known as Anabaptists, meaning baptized twice.

[2.30]

Their rejection of infant baptism made them hated enemies of the Roman Church and of many Protestant Churches which continued the practice of infant baptism. So hated were these peaceful, non-violent Anabaptists that they were pursued from both fronts, hunted down, and executed all across Northern Europe for a period in excess of two hundred years.

[2.31]

The Protestant reformation continued to grow and divide under a variety of leaders and also continued to practice the customs of the Roman Church with one exception: it now taught the Word of God to its members allowing all who could read access to the sacred texts.

[2.32]

The Anabaptists also made the Scriptures available to their people but had returned in large part to meeting in homes and enjoying the simple worship of the first century. These shared what they had and though severely persecuted, they were rich in understanding of the Word and the fellowship of Christ.

[2.33]

There was however, one small crack in their beliefs that went unnoticed until it eventually led to the complete breakdown of this promising work of God. As hard as it may be to believe, these beautiful followers of our Lord began to do the same thing that the Church of Rome had done to them: the same thing that caused them to separate in the beginning. They began to place the church and its mortal leaders above the Word of God. They began to make rules and regulations not found in God's Word. They justified these additions by saying that these things were not forbidden in the Word and would help to define it. Do you think God needs our help?

[2.34]

Like the Roman Church before them, they sought to legislate eating, drinking and especially dress and appearance. Their attitude was, "If we don't define the dress code then how far will the people go?" They failed to see that the final interpretation of such things must be left to the conscience and the ultimate revealer of truth: the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13-14

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, **he will guide you into all truth:** for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and **he will shew you things to come.**

14 He shall glorify me: for **he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.** (KJV)

Matthew. 15:8-9

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; **but their heart is far from me.**

9 But **in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.** (KJV)

[2.35]

Dictating not only the style of the garments worn but the color in many cases. This led of course to an increase in opinion which led to the usual division and ultimately to the breakdown of the solid and simple structure it once had.

Matthew. 23:4-5; 25-28

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: **they make broad their phylacteries,**

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so **ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.** (KJV)

1 Samuel 16:7

7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: **for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.** (KJV)

[2.36]

Later, the Anabaptist also adopted church buildings, pews and altars like the Roman Church before and so had become nothing more than a legalistic reflection of the Protestant church, with a membership that stood out by the wearing of prescribed dress. Quaint and interesting but void of the life, truth and unity it once had.

[2.37]

Does the church belong to its members or does it belong to our Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps we should all answer these thirteen questions for ourselves.

[2.38]

1. Who should pick the meeting place of the church?
2. Who should supply and apportion its finances; indeed, whose finances are they?
3. Who should set the standard for eating food, drinking, dress or holy days?
4. Who should have the authority to establish the requirements for membership?
5. Who has the right to set customs and traditions for the Church?
6. Who has the authority to delegate those who will serve as leaders?
7. What form if any will the structure of leadership follow?
8. Who will set the standards by which leaders are qualified?
9. Who will recognize these qualifications?
10. Is the office created for a man to fill or does the qualified servant carry within himself, by reason of conduct and gifting, the authority of the office. (Do we have the office of the prophet because we have a prophet or do we appoint someone to be our prophet or deacon or pastor or evangelist?)

11. Who should lead and teach its members?
12. Who should supply the blueprint and materials?
13. Where may this blueprint, this plan for the structure of the church, be found?

[2.39]

What is a Church?

1. Is it a club?
2. Is it an organization?
3. Is it a denomination?
4. Is it a living organism?
5. Is it a building?

[2.40]

According to Strong's Concordance #1577 Greek ekklesia, translated church, is a calling out, a popular meeting, a religious congregation of members on earth or saints in heaven or both, assembly, church.

[2.41]

The Biblical definition given in Scripture is so much more.

[2.42]

- The Church is a holy priesthood. (I Peter. 2:5)
- The Church is a spiritual house built as living stones. (I Peter. 2:5)
- The Church is the Body of Christ. (Ephesians. 1:22-23)
- The Church is a Bride. (Ephesians. 5:22-23)
- The Church is God's building. (I Corinthians. 3:9)
- The Church is the household of God. (Ephesians. 2:19)
- The Church is a flock. (I Peter. 5:2)
- The Church is the temple of God. (I Corinthians. 3:16)
- The Church is the people of God. (I Peter. 2:10)
- The Church is the Lamb's wife. (Revelation. 19:7)

This is not a complete list; the church is so much more.

To determine once and for all whose church it is, we must answer the following:

- If we are a holy priest hood then who is the high priest?
- If we are living stones then on what foundation do we sit?
- If we are the body of Christ then who is our head?
- If we are the bride then who is the bridegroom?
- If we are a building then who is the chief cornerstone?

If we are a household then who is the Father?
If we are a flock then who is our shepherd?
If we are the temple what God do we serve?
If we are the people of God then to whom do we belong?
If we are the Lamb's wife then who is the Lamb?

[2.43]

The answer to all the previous questions is the same; it is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that we've determined whose church it is we must now realize that as His Church:

[2.44]

- A. We can have no other doctrine than His. (Matthew 15:9)
- B. No other traditions than those established in His Word. (II Thessalonians. 2:15, 3:6; Colossians. 2:8, 14, 20, 22)
- C. No other gospel than His. (Galatians. 1:8-10)
- D. No other foundation than what He has already built and revealed in His Word. (Ephesians. 2:20; I Corinthians. 3:11-13)

[2.45]

The Church is and always will be a living organism like the cell of the physical body. Just as every healthy cell must have a genetic program to determine its place in the body and a nucleus to allow for growth, so every cell in the body of Christ, the local fellowship, must have as its nucleus, Christ, and a place in His body that we're guided to by the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians. 3:6, 7; John 16:13)

[2.46]

The following poem is a revelation of the condition of the church today.

[2.47]

The Church and The World

The Church and the world walked far apart
On the changing shores of time:
The world was singing a giddy song,
And the Church a hymn sublime.
"Come, give me your hand", cried the merry world,
"And walk with me this way."
But the good Church hid her snowy hand,
And solemnly answered "Nay!"
"Nay, walk with me but a little space",
Said the world with a kindly air,

“The road I walk is a pleasant road,
And the sun shines always there.
“My path, you see, is a broad, fair path,
And my gate is high and wide;
“There is room enough for you and for me
To travel side by side”,
Half-shyly the Church approached the world
And gave him her hand of snow;
The old world grasped it and walked along,
Saying in accents low:
“Your dress is too simple to suit my taste;
I will give you pearls to wear;
“Rich velvet and silk for your graceful form
And diamonds to deck your hair.”
The church looked down on her plain, white robes
And then at the dazzling world,
And blushed as she saw his handsome lip
With a smile contemptuous curled.
“I will change my dress for a costlier one”,
Said the Church with a smile of grace;
Then her pure white garments drifted away,
And the world gave her in place
Beautiful satins and shining silks,
And roses, and gems and pearls;
And over her forehead her bright hair fell,
Crisped in a thousand curls.
“Your house is too plain”, said the proud old world,
“I’ll build you one like mine;
Carpets of Brussels and curtains of lace,
And furniture ever so fine.
And he bought her a costly and beautiful home;
Splendid it was to behold;
Her sons and her beautiful daughters dwelt there,
Gleaming in purple and gold.
And fairs and shows in the halls were held,
And the world and his children were there;
And laughter and music and feasts were heard
In the place that was meant for prayer.
The Angel of Mercy flew over the Church,
And whispered, “I know thy sin.”
The Church looked back with a sigh
And longed to gather her children in.
“Your preachers are all too old and plain”,
Said the gay old world with a sneer.
“They frighten my children with dreadful tales
Which I like not for them to hear.

“They talk of brimstone and fire and pain,
And the horrors of endless night;
“They talk of a place that should never at all
Be mentioned in ears polite.
“I shall send you some of the better stamp,
Brilliant and gay and fast,
“Who will tell them that people may live as they list?
And go to heaven at last.”
“The sons of the world and the sons of the church walked closely,
Hand and heart,
And only the Master Who knoweth all
Could tell the two apart.
Then the church sat down at her ease and said,
“I am rich and in goods increased;
“I have need of nothing, have nought to do
But to laugh and dance and feast.”
The sly world heard her and laughed in his sleeve,
And mockingly said aside,
“The church is fallen, the beautiful church,
And her shame is her boast and pride.”

[2.48]

Pulpits and pews, stained glass and carpeting, altars and steeples; is today's church dressed any better than when she was young and new? (Revelation 2:4-5)

[2.49]

Before you decide to challenge the strength of your own faith by taking a step toward becoming a practicing member of the first century church you should first understand a few things. Any move you make in God's direction is a move away from Satan. If you think this move will go unnoticed, you're deceiving yourself. If you think those who protest will be those who knowingly serve the world or Satan, then you're in for a great surprise. You will be surprised to learn that those who oppose you most will be **those of your own family**. Yes, you can expect opposition from both your church family and your natural family.

Matthew. 10:34-37

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but **a sword**.
35 For **I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law**.
36 **And a man's foes shall be they of his own household**.
37 **He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** (KJV)

[2.50]

Many of these will encourage you not to leave your present church. They will admit that some changes are necessary but will suggest that you stay and help bring about these changes. Brethren, if this were possible we'd still be under the authority of the Church of Rome.

How can we support or correct a system that we have no real voice in. If we protest we will be seen as a trouble maker and nothing will change. We could spend all our lives trying to turn our local assembly back to the truth and after that, the denomination and never accomplish a thing but to waste the only life God gave us.

2 Corinthians. 6:16-17

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for **ye are the temple of the living God**; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore **come out from among them**, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, (KJV)

[2.51]

How often have we heard the phrase “go to church”? If it's not a building then you can't go to it; you must be part of it. Christians are part of Christ's body the church. I can't go to the human race once or twice a week and I can't go to church once or twice a week. I am either part of the body of Christ or I'm not; I am either part of the human race or I'm not.

[2.52]

The church is not a material structure but rather a spiritual house. Neither Christ nor the apostles ever intended to use resources meant to take care of the family of God, on elaborate temples or cathedrals or for that matter simple buildings. Not one cent was ever spent in the entire New Testament to build any structure, church building or seminary.

[2.53]

We hear the cries of the needy saying, “Why doesn't God provide for us?”

[2.54]

Doesn't God care? Can God truly exist and not help us?” If we were to sell every church building built in the name of Christ at fair market value the interest on the amount returned would feed all the hungry on this planet now and until the day of Christ's return.

[2.55]

One poor American missionary felt the call of God to go to Mexico and there to attend to the physical and spiritual needs of the Mexican people in Juarez, just across the border from El Paso. In El Paso there could be found many beautiful church buildings that lay just on the other side of

the Rio Grande; a literal stones throw away. An aerial view of El Paso with all its high church steeples would make El Paso appear like a spike bed.

[2.56]

The missionary failed to understand how so many could go hungry so close to these so called houses of worship. The missionary was so troubled over this, that he found it affected his sleep, causing him to rest uneasily.

[2.57]

One night as he slept he dreamed. He dreamed that he was standing in front of a large gray stone church building with a bell tower that rose high above the street below. All the stones of this structure were huge but varied greatly in size. Some stones were smaller than others, some were greater in size and still others even greater. In his dream the missionary saw a ladder extending from the street and reaching to the bell tower.

[2.58]

At the top of the ladder, dressed in sandals and robe stood Jesus. He was writing something on each of the various stones which made up the structure. The missionary called to Him and asked what He was writing.

[2.59]

Jesus looked down at him with tears in His eyes and explained that each stone in the wall was different in size and therefore different in value.

[2.60]

Some stones were worth ten dollars, others twelve, still others twenty, etc. Then he explained that on each stone he was writing the name of a child that died for the want of the cost of the stone which bore the child's name.

[2.61]

In other words, if the stone cost ten dollars the child whose name appeared on it died for the want of ten dollars. If the stone cost twenty then the child whose name was inscribed on it died for the lack of twenty dollars etc. When the missionary awoke he couldn't forget his dream and it changed him forever.

[2.62]

How dare we invest God's money in buildings. How dare we ignore His explicit directions?

1 Corinthians. 3:11-13

11 For **other foundation can no man lay** than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; **and the fire shall try every man's work** of what sort it is. (KJV)

Matthew. 25:31-46

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and **ye gave me meat**: I was thirsty, and ye **gave me drink**: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and **ye clothed me**: I was sick, and **ye visited me**: I was in prison, and **ye came unto me**.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, **Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me**.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye **did it not** to one of the least of these, **ye did it not to me**.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (KJV)

Acts 7:48-49

48 Howbeit **the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands**; as saith the prophet,

49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: **what house will ye build me?** saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? (KJV)

[2.63]

Unfortunately many feel that they have invested too much money, time and education in doing it wrong to now turn and walk away to do it right. It's easier to justify or ignore conscience-provoking material like this. After all, what ever will they do with all these buildings? It's to late

now to change, isn't it? Or is it? It all depends on how serious their love and commitment is to Christ and His Word.

[2.64]

As a part of the church you must live and walk in the true faith of God. Church is a way of life not a place to visit. (I John 1:7)

[2.65]

To take a step toward early church worship is to invoke Satan's anger like nothing else. Against this church he can't win. (Matthew 16:18) But if he can keep you from becoming part of the true church he can keep you spiritually impotent for a lifetime. The church began with Peter's first sermon just as Jesus said it would (Matthew 16:18) and though the enemy has tried to destroy it, it still stands. (Acts 2:38-42)

[2.66]

There will be those who seek to hold you back; those from your family, your church and those among your friends. They will accuse you of heresy, of joining a cult, of abandoning your friends and family. It will get plenty rough before it gets better. Your choice to live by God's Word will reveal enemies and persecution from sources you never dreamed of.

2 Timothy. 3:12

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (KJV)

[2.67]

Hold on, don't let go, don't give up! Remember, God understands and will reward you for your faithfulness if you continue steadfast in the faith.

(I Corinthians. 15:58; Philippians. 3:13, 14) Some will say that God only makes His will known to you through family or clergy but this is not so. No man in any page of God's Word was called through another.

[2.68]

While it is true that God does speak to us through others, His call to step out and serve always comes to the one called, even if they're only children at the time. (I Samuel 3:4-10)

[2.69]

The final decision rests with you; follow God or follow man.

[2.70]

Just remember to count the cost before you begin, for unless you're willing to put aside all that you have you can not be his disciple. (Luke 14:33) Count the cost.

[2.71]

You will be required to take up your cross daily. (Luke 9:23) Count the cost.

[2.72]

If they have hated Him they will also hate you. (John 15:18-20) Count the cost.

[2.73]

Count the cost first so that you will be able to finish what you have started (Luke 14:28)

[2.74]

God will be with you; He will sustain you; you can do all things through Him. (Philippians. 4:13)
Do not try to reason out God's call: just follow.

Proverbs. 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (KJV)

[2.75]

Once you start back; once you seek to do the first work, you will discover your first love.

Revelation. 2:4-5

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love.**

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. (KJV)

[2.76]

Once you have counted the cost and started back to the true Church of Christ there can be no turning back.

Luke 9:62

62 And Jesus said unto him, **No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (KJV)**

[2.77]

Think of the words to that old familiar chorus, "I have decided to follow Jesus".

“I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back.”

“The world behind me the cross before me, no turning back”.

“Tho’ none go with me still I will follow, no turning back”.

“Will you decide now to follow Jesus; no turning back, no turning back?”

Chapter 3

Like Shepherd like Sheep

[3.1]

One of the greatest, God-given assets the church has is its Spirit filled, Spirit led and Spirit taught leaders. The Lord has provided these shepherds and ordained that they should feed and care for His children. He has equipped them with all the spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities necessary to represent Him to the flock over which He has made them overseers. He has chosen them to plant and water fields which will one day be ready for harvest. The leaders He has chosen have been called to this service; men who meet the biblical standard for integrity and have the ability to model it in their daily walk with Christ.

[3.2]

Such men have a strength and steadfastness often misunderstood by the spiritually immature. These men exhibit humility not seen in the manner of their deportment. Indeed, they may seem as bold as Peter but their humility is demonstrated in their willingness to serve others. Always available, these Godly men are ever prepared to give counsel, or help another find answers to life's problems. Though others view them as teachers they are more likely to see themselves as perpetual students of God's word. They are and will remain disciples who, because of their open heart, are ever searching and willing to receive more truth. Conscious always of the greater condemnation (stricter judgment) that awaits them, these shepherds watch and vigilantly protect the souls in their keeping like a lioness protecting her pride or as one who must give account to the chief shepherd at His appearing.

James 3:1

1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that **we shall receive the greater condemnation.**(KJV)

Hebrews 13:17

17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, **as they that must give account**, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (KJV)

[3.3]

Shepherds do not run when danger approaches like some hired shepherd throwing his staff to the ground and fleeing at the first sign of a predator. Neither do they stop to consider if they've been paid enough to risk injury for another's flock. Seduced by power, fame, popularity, influence and material security, today's so called shepherds, (pastors) have become, in all too many cases, nothing more than the hired men spoken of by Jesus.

John 10:12-13

12 **But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the**

wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. (KJV)

[3.4]

There is nothing new about this, it's been happening for centuries. Even in Ezekiel's day, God declared His displeasure with the self serving practices of Israel's spiritual shepherds and yet these practices continue.

Ezekiel 34:1-10

1 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to **the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves!** should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but **ye feed not the flock.**

4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

5 And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.

6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

7 Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD;

8 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but **the shepherds fed themselves**, and fed not my flock;

9 Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD;

10 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, **I am against the shepherds;** and **I will require my flock at their hand**, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.

[3.5]

If this isn't enough, Paul's second letter to Timothy warns about a time near the end when the shepherds will be controlled by the very sheep they have been chosen to lead. This happens when the voice of the congregation is heard above the voice of God's delegated authorities. The congregation having control of the shepherd's income use the financial purse strings to gain control. These same strings are used to manipulate these puppet pastors by turning them in any direction they choose.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall

they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (KJV)

[3.6]

We need Godly leaders who truly understand the commitment required to care for the churches they oversee. Men who demonstrate this understanding by living in the belief that it might be necessary to lay down their life for the brethren.

I John 3:16

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to **lay down our lives for the brethren.** (KJV)

[3.7]

When trouble strikes the church and wicked men come to scatter the sheep, their first thought is to attack the shepherd. It's his name on their lips when they decide to persecute the body of Christ. It's the leader that's beaten, imprisoned or murdered (Matthew 26:31) (Acts 5:17-18). Once the leader is disposed of, the sheep are without protection and fall prey to their enemy.

[3.8]

We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) so then God's grace is available to those who have faith enough in Christ to receive it. How do we get this faith? How do we know of the atoning power of Christ's blood? Faith comes by hearing the word of God. We hear the word from those who preach it.

Romans 10:17

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and **hearing by the word of God.** (KJV)

Romans 10:14

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and **how shall they hear without a preacher?**(KJV)

[3.9]

The hands of martyred Christian leaders stretch from one to another across two thousand years of time. Our leaders and teachers have become a lifeline of lives which carry the message of God's forgiveness and eternal life to all who choose to receive it. The sacrifice and blood required to bring this good news is beyond man's comprehension. To get a mere sampling of the price paid on our behalf, to receive this most important news, you need only turn a few pages of the "Martyr's Mirror" or "Foxe's Book of Martyrs." If you can read more than a few pages of either of these historical manuscripts and come away without adding your tears to their pages, you need to check and see if your spiritual pulse still beats. God's own word admonishes us to know them that labor among us as elders and esteem them highly.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

13 And to **esteem them very highly** in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. (KJV)

[3.10]

We're cautioned to always relate to them with respect and to never rebuke an elder but rather entreat them as a father (1 Timothy 5:1). Those elders who manage the flock of Christ are worthy of twice the honor. First for being successful managers of their own homes and second by being successful managers of God's, the church family.

1 Timothy 3:4

4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (KJV)

1 Timothy 5:17

17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (KJV)

[3.11]

In the early church, those who labored in the "word" also labored in the market place for their daily bread.

II Thessalonians 3:6-10

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after **the tradition which he received of us**.

7 For yourselves know how **ye ought to follow us**: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

8 **Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought**; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

9 Not because we have not power, but **to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us**.

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. (KJV)

[3.12]

Indeed, Paul worked along side Aquilla and Priscilla making tents while Luke practiced medicine (Colossians 4:14) etc.

Acts 18:3-4

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.
(KJV)

[3.13]

The gift of God had come to all men free; he charged us nothing for His sacrifice how then can we charge another for what we received at His expense? We are called Christians which means Christ-like or perhaps followers of Christ. How can we profess to follow Him if we charge a salary for what He bought, paid for, and gave to all unless we do as He did.

Matthew 10:8

8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. (KJV)

[3.14]

The apostle Paul who taught us those things reminds us that he, himself, though able and worthy to receive monetary reward, preferred to labor, working with his hands. Why? So he might be an example to others.

1 Corinthians 4:11-12

11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place;

12 **And labour, working with our own hands:** being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: (KJV)

[3.15]

True, the workman is worthy of his hire, if indeed his desire is to be a hired man. What was the example that Paul was trying to set if not freely receive freely give? Truly, the elder who labors in the word is part of the body he serves; entitled to share in all benefits accorded to those whom God has entrusted to him. He may accept individual gifts of food and drink also from those he labors among but not a salary.

Luke 10:7

7 And in the same house remain, **eating and drinking such things as they give:** for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. (KJV)

Acts 4:34-35

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made **unto every man according as he had need.** (KJV)

[3.16]

Jesus didn't pay a salary to his disciples. Have any given more than they? He kept them clothed and fed and much more. As God delegated authorities, His shepherds must understand that powerful, wicked, spiritual forces will at times try to discredit them; to smear their names and reputations so none will pay attention to the truths they teach. Their sinful pasts will be dug from the dirt like a putrefied corpse and held up to destroy them; to scatter the flock they lead and cripple the work of God. The fact that they are forgiven, washed in the blood of the lamb, made new with a past forgotten by God, will not be remembered by those immature sheep prepared to cast the first stone.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)

Hebrews 8:12

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. (KJV)

Philippians 3:13-14

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (KJV)

[3.17]

For this reason it is vitally important that no one accept an unfounded, unsupported or unsubstantiated accusation against an elder. When any accusation is made it should be supported by at least two or three witnesses before being considered.

1 Timothy 5:19

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. (KJV)

[3.18]

The age of the offense should be considered and conduct as touching the leaders integrity since the offence.

I John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (KJV)

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)

[3.19]

Godly leaders must be free from all coercion, intimidation, manipulation, or any other form of control. They must be free from all controls but one. God's control! They must never allow anyone's puppet strings to be attached; strings attached to their pride or their purse. A leader's dependence must rest securely in the Lord; He is the only true source of supply; He is Jehovah Jireh! Once a man of God allows one string to be attached to his life, he no longer belongs to God, but to the one who holds that string. By placing his dependence on man he has broken his relationship; his trust with God. His message must in part or in full conform to the dictates of his controller or at the very least become suspect. His loyalty is now tied to those who hold his employment or his ambition in their hand. These string pullers; these puppeteers may be a national or district denominational headquarters or a local body of elders, a council or even the congregation itself. When the congregation isn't happy, nobody's happy, for the financial wealth of a church or denomination rests with the local assembly. Offend the assembly and you risk a mass exodus from the church and with it the financial hemorrhage that follows. The church or denomination no longer has the financial resources to continue its monetary or political growth. At denominational meetings the largest churches most often carry the most influence. Why? Because they control a larger purse and a larger segment of the voting membership.

[3.20]

In the old testament book of Numbers, in the sixteenth chapter, we find a similar situation. Moses' right to lead had been questioned. After all Moses was just one flesh and blood man and the descenders were many. They too, held high office among the people; who was Moses to think he had the authority to govern them. They evidently had taken an inventory of the people and decided they had the power of numbers on their side and thus should be able to determine their own future. Moses stood alone in this contest...or was he? Moses stood with God and God with Moses. With God goes the power of numbers; He is the majority! The opposition was considered a rebellion and God hates rebellion. The rest of the story, like those who rebelled, is history (Numbers 16).

[3.21]

The Lord's church and His kingdom is not a democracy but a monarchy; a kingdom with a king. He, our king, is not an elected official but the ruler of all creation. Our Lord, on the night He was betrayed, in the upper room, at the last supper, told His disciples that He must die. He did not suggest that His twelve disciples take a vote to approve His plan of redemption. True, the Lord Jesus Christ served His disciples but He obeyed always the chain of command. For Jesus that meant His Father. His Father before civil authority, before church authority, before His own authority and before the disciples whom He loved dearly.

[3.22]

Christ represented His Father always just as we must always represent Christ, no strings attached.

Matthew 26:39

39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (KJV)

Matthew 6:24

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (KJV)

[3.23]

Brethren, we must serve our Savior and king first, before all others. We must not trust in the will of men by depending on their ability to keep us from need or harm. What would it profit us if we were to gain the wealth and power of the entire world and lose our own soul (Mk 8:36)? If we serve men for money how can we truly and independently serve God? If our desire is to please men, how can we please God?

Colossians 3:22-24

22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. (KJV)

Matthew 6:24

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (KJV)

[3.24]

Brethren, we must represent God before men at any cost, no strings attached. This is the only way we can truly serve men. There can be no compromise in this, we must represent the Lord before all men. This is the will of God. In the same way that our Lord and king obeyed His Father, we must always yield to the will of the higher authority and there is no higher authority than God.

1 Thessalonians 2:4

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. (KJV)

Acts 4:19

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. (KJV)

[3.25]

All authority comes from God. No authority exists that has not been granted by God (Psalms 75:6-7) (Dan 2:20-21).

[3.26]

The eyes of God's chosen leaders must be steadfastly fixed on Christ alone. His testimony and his life must always point to Christ. The words he speaks must declare the way to Christ. If the leader, in any way, comes between Christ and the church, he becomes an anti-Christ. The leader must never become a mediator between God and those for whom Christ died. The position of mediator has always been filled and cannot be occupied by another (1 Timothy 2:5). Those who dare venture into this forbidden territory become cult leaders and their followers a cult. Leaders who claim special knowledge in addition to God's word or special understanding of it that can only be understood by the privileged few are false teachers and likely false Christians. Those who claim new revelations which contradict God's word or who attempt to discredit it are also false teachers.

Romans 6:17

17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (KJV)

Romans 16:17

17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (KJV)

Titus 2:1

1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: (KJV)

II John 1:9

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. (KJV)

[3.27]

The leaders of the early church who put their lives on the line were not interested in winning theological debates. I know of no theological debate worth the life of even one of these precious men. It would have been stupid for any of them to sacrifice their life to win an argument, but truth, now that's something else. True, Spirit led leadership cares little about winning a heated discussion but is always willing to do whatever is necessary, to sacrifice anything necessary, to preserve and reveal God's truth. Today's church leaders can be divided into two camps. The largest of which is more interested in justifying hand-me-down, man-made doctrines, than putting them at risk to find the truth. If you doubt this take any obvious error in their belief system or confront them with any unpracticed New Testament teaching and see how anxious, how willing and how quick they are to change. Will they send out an emergency bulletin or petition the denominational headquarters for a change in doctrine? No! They'll just stick their heads in the sand and pretend they never saw or heard it. The leaders will look the other way; they'll ignore the truth and instead try to justify the error rather than deal with it.

[3.28]

Once a leader or denomination believes they have all the answers, all the truth, they can learn no more. Each leader must remain open to the continued teaching of the Holy Spirit. You may believe you understand something completely but, when another confronts you with evidence from God's word that reveals your understanding to be in error or incomplete, what should you do? At this point your true colors show. This is your moment of truth. Here is where you discover what manner of leader you are. The choice is simple though the decision may be hard. Will you argue your unfounded position, acting like a spoiled child demanding to be right, or will you be mature enough in Christ to humble yourself in favor of truth? Which will win? Will your desire for truth succumb to your pride? If you remain unwilling to be convinced you may or may not win the debate, but for sure, you'll miss the gift of truth that God had for you. Had you allowed yourself to receive this gift of truth you would have become a better teacher. Each day that you receive new light from God, you're better equipped than you were the day before. Truth resisted builds hardness of heart. What does it hurt to listen? Remember, you have only one mouth but two ears, learn to use them proportionately.

[3.29]

God, like the U.S. Marines, is looking for a few good men; men who like those in His blueprint, are willing to humble themselves before any and all who possess the wisdom of God.

2 Chronicles 7:14

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (KJV)

[3.30]

Those who seek to belong to the same church that was founded by the Apostles should be led by the same type of leaders they were. Such men should meet the measure given in God's word. They should be men of integrity, men of truth (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

[3.31]

The restoration of the early church rests with the Spirit of God and His leaders' ability to follow it. We must not attempt to serve God our way. The only hope we have of pleasing God is to serve Him His way. Men are called-out by the Holy Spirit and their mission is the advancement of truth, not the preservation or perpetuation of a man-made, polluted, religious political system that has a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof.

2 Timothy 3:5

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. (KJV)

[3.32]

If we hope to follow God's blueprint then we'll need men who know how to find its truth and follow it in obedience. They must be able to recognize their own errors; mistakes in their biblical understanding. Men who have the courage to admit error, break into pieces their own walls of pride and tear out of their heart any deviations from God's holy plan. The Lord may speak through the newest babe in the congregation or your fiercest enemy. He may speak through a fellow Christian. He may speak through an unbeliever or jackass but no matter how He speaks, true leaders will hear and obey Him.

John 10:14

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. (KJV)

[3.33]

The early church movement is not another reformation but rather the restoration of the early church, the church of Acts, the church that Jesus built. Yes, it still lives and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. It's alive and well though, as always, small in size and huge in Spirit. It cries out for leaders who, without the need for material gain, will offer themselves as a living sacrifice, dedicating their lives to complete its restoration. Such men are created in the fires of adversity, tempered in the watery floods of sorrow and tested on the rocks of misfortune and pain. Often, such men have been broken by sin; crushed into dust so that God could teach them His grace and recreate them in His image. God, in His mercy, has taught them that He delights in using broken things. In this way they learn to stand in His power rather than attempt to stand in their own (Is 42:3). These men have the kind of compassionate understanding which can only come from the ruins of painful experience. Men like this don't show up to lead. No! They'll show up to follow, but lead they will!

[3.34]

In the early nineteen hundreds, the safest place a baby could be was in the soft, warm, protected environment of its mother's womb. Today, the womb, like a Nazi extermination camp, has become a place of torture and death. In a similar manner, the spiritual babes of today seek a warm spiritual place of refuge; a place to grow and know the love of their Heavenly parent. These babes are gathered together under various brand names and taught what to believe, what to think, and how to express it. Like huge breeding houses, these denominations hope to perpetuate their esoteric doctrine along with whatever truths they may be privileged to know. Each label (denomination) carries its own set of beliefs to be fostered onto the next generation by its own hired men. In this way they insure that division remains alive and continues from generation to generation.

[3.35]

As stated, not all that is taught is wrong. Most of what is taught is good and only sprinkled with error. The greatest damage done is done through the system itself. The denominational system advances separation and thus conflicts with God's word. God's blueprint calls for unity, not division.

1 Corinthians 1:10

10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (KJV)

[3.36]

Denominational teaching is introduced to many at childhood and never questioned. Like shepherd, like sheep division is carried on from generation to generation.

[3.37]

Jesus spoke of fields of souls white with harvest. He asked us to pray for laborers to be sent forth into the harvest but many have entered the harvest who God has not sent. Men who have been deceived into believing they've received God's call to go. These men reap with the sickle of deception. Reaping and storing the harvest in huge barns where the harvest is left to rot. The stench of this rotting harvest reaches the nostrils of God. These barns marked by steeples are a mockery to God. God will one day shake these spiritual warehouses with their rotting fruit and fire will reduce these works of wood, hay and stubble to ashes.

Matthew 9:37-38

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;
38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (KJV)

2 Peter 3:10

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (KJV)

[3.38]

Not only have we locked up the sheep but the shepherds as well, in convents, rectories and monasteries. The most dedicated, those with the most potential, who were willing to lay aside the companionship of a mate; those willing to give themselves completely to God; those who would take up the cross daily, are shut away for life never to realize the fulfillment of God's plan for their lives. What a waste! What a tragedy! These precious servants are cut off before they can make any significant contributions to God's kingdom or do any damage to Satan's. This horrible truths should bring tears to your eyes.

[3.39]

Filled with religious fear, the fear of losing their soul, they allow themselves to be held captive. They are made to believe that their church is the only true path to salvation; when the only true path to salvation is through Christ Himself (John 14:6). Peter didn't start the Roman Catholic church, he started the church, period, and it had nothing to do with Rome. It began with three

thousand and became the church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). This was what Christ was referring to when He said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). These poor deceived souls have been trapped in a false religion, One that makes great boasts of its spiritual power over the soul. For fear of losing their soul, those within this corrupt system obey like blind sheep being led to slaughter. Who is behind all this? God? Never! The spirit of antichrist is already at work and this is the sickening proof of it.

II Thessalonians 2:7

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. (KJV)

[3.40]

God's fields are being harvested and stored by hired men; men who have deceived themselves into believing they're serving God when in reality they serve His enemy. These men lay siege to the flock of God and hold them until they become a reflection of themselves; Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. The fruit of God's field was meant to grow to maturity, nourish others; its seed meant to be planted in new fields bringing forth new generations of fruit after the first. Like the camp of Israel who escaped the bondage of Egypt, all these children of bondage can produce are wilderness children, wanderers who can't find their way home. A rotting harvest of impotent fruit kept neatly bundled together by a system of religion designed to hold them captive. Like the angels that left their first estate waiting in chains for their release into the lake of fire (2 Peter 2:4). Those who wait in these spiritual warehouses are awaiting the same fate though unaware of it now. They've been deceived by believing that merely hearing the word is enough. They come to hear the word and hearers of the word they are, but not doers; indeed they are deceived.

James 1:22-25

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (KJV)

[3.41]

Who is sounding the warning? Where are the shepherds? All around are hired men. True, some of these hired men could be shepherds if they could leave their employers to follow God but most won't. Where can we find true shepherds? Should we look for them in the schools of the Pharisees? Among the traditionalists? How about seminaries? Maybe we should look for those with BS after their names; suitable initials for what they have to offer. Better yet, what about those with MS after their names or could it be that these initials simply stand for More of the Same. Of course, we can go for broke and hire a PHD but these letters might only mean Piled

Higher and Deeper, after all, it was Paul, the educated Apostle, that counted all such recognition as dung.

Philippians 3:8

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, (KJV)

[3.42]

Any who refuse to get in line with the system are threatened with having the strings cut; their income cut off. Frightened, these puppets have come to believe that the church is their source. These poor fools have come to trust the bride rather than the groom for their daily bread. Christ and Christ alone is the source of life within the body physical and spiritual, there is none like Him. With all their education and credentials they have succeeded in being professionals; in other words, trained, hired men, but men with no knowledge of their true source of supply. When our Lord picked men He selected them from among the weak, the simple, the ignorant and the morally bankrupt. In these He could reveal His power and glory. Many of today's church leaders have answered a call from God they never received. Encouraged by family, church leaders and friends they have chosen the clergy as a profession. In doing so, they come before God burning strange fire (Leviticus 10:1-2).

[3.43]

There is no God-ordained profession of clergymen to be found anywhere in Christ's blueprint. Like Aaron's two sons who, because they had knowledge, believed they could assume duties carried out exclusively by their father, the high priest, but were instead awarded with death for their effort. Many congregations today languish and die because their leaders lack the unction of the Holy Spirit. The sheep become no more than a reflection of their shepherd. In many cases the congregation picked these leaders, not God. By picking their own educated but uncalled leaders they have committed what amounts to spiritual suicide for their church.

[3.44]

Spiritual things are understood by spiritual men who are not man pleasers but God pleasers. They are men who maintain their loyalty to God, free of the stings that could turn them into puppets; such men have no desire to meet the world's expectations of them as highly trained intellectuals, but seek only to meet the moral requirements specified in God's blueprint.

1 Timothy 3:1-13

1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.(KJV)

[3.45]

Why not college-trained, educated seminary graduates? If Christ had wanted intellectuals exclusively, He would have picked the top twelve graduates from the school of the Pharisees rather than fishermen from the shores of Galilee. He would have picked leaders rather than followers. He would have picked from among the esteemed rather than the defamed. Paul's testimony itself reveals a desire to separate from his own notable intellectual standing.

Philippians 3:4-11

4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 **But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.**

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. (KJV)

[3.46]

In the second chapter of Acts we find Peter's first spirit-filled sermon; the sermon that officially launched the church. It was this sermon that brought in the first fruits of the church, gathering

three thousand souls to the kingdom. It was this very sermon to which Christ was referring when He said, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock will I build my church..." (Matthew 16:18).

[3.47]

God has seen to it that His recorded word has been carefully preserved, translated into every tongue and delivered to all peoples and nations. The Lord has seen to it that all may study His word and discover how to obtain His approval. Each has the opportunity to work through the scriptures with integrity, not permitting sinful prejudice to interfere, but instead to find God's truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (KJV)

[3.48]

Now that the word of God, God's blueprint, is in the hands of His people then we don't need teachers, right? Wrong! To the contrary. Building projects need superintendents and inspectors to assure us that the structure conforms to the blueprint. God's people need overseers and teachers to make sure that all of the specifications of His word are properly understood and carried out. We need spiritual leaders to answer questions, model God's word for us and hold us accountable to the truth contained in it. We need leaders who, like fathers, can promote a spirit of love and unity among us, helping us work together to advance Christ's kingdom.

[3.49]

The process of kingdom expansion is accomplished by Christ's own system, one He taught when He walked among us. A system known to all as discipleship. This system of learning does not advance the intellectual vanities of so called higher education but rather insists on moral integrity. It makes no provision for intellectual supremacy but demands strict adherence to God's specifications for leadership.

Titus 1:5-9

5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. (KJV)

[3.50]

Clearly, the method used by Christ to develop leaders according to His blueprint is discipleship and none other! How else can God's word be taught together with moral integrity while the progress of each is being observed? Education is not the central requirement for leadership, though a necessary tool (2 Timothy 2:15). Formal education is not even suggested as a qualification for leadership. It's time we consulted the blueprint once again. What does God's word have to say about the educationally wise, the educated debater?

1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: **not with wisdom of words**, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, **I will destroy the wisdom of the wise**, and will **bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent**.

20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? **hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?**

21 For after that in the wisdom of God **the world by wisdom knew not God**, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 **For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:**

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

1 **And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom**, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

4 And my speech and **my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5 **That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men**, but in the power of God. (KJV)

[3.51]

All great educated debaters and debates produce division and only serve vanity (1 Timothy 6:20). It is clear that God's blueprint has already established a system of learning. It was begun by our Lord Jesus Christ. It was effective in His days upon the earth and it's effective today. It's called discipleship. Discipleship is simply others who learn from others to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (KJV)

[3.52]

For many of us this is wonderful news. Many who have felt God's call have failed to answer that call feeling they weren't qualified. Welcome home to the real church! Think of it; if we have a strong relationship with Christ, have a willingness to serve and obey God's ordained leadership, if we're willing to study and live according to His word, if we've been blessed with the spiritual gifts necessary to fulfill His propose for us and have received His call, we can hold whatever place He has equipped us for, and we don't need a college degree to do it. Hallelujah! As yet, there is no better system for teaching than the one He began known as discipleship. Unlike the learned individuals found in today's pulpits, disciples not only teach God's word, but model it. They don't do it for money; they do it for love. They don't serve the God of education, they serve the God of Christ.

[3.53]

If we're not going to the schools to find leaders, then where? First, we must go to God in prayer to seek His direction, then we must figuratively turn to the shores of Galilee. We must again look among the fishermen, tax collectors and tent makers. Our selection is not nearly as important as His. Out in the countryside or in the city market, places we'll find the same unnoticed laborers Jesus did. They'll be found among the ordinary, the sin forgiven, the broken. They'll be those whom God has chosen to accomplish the extraordinary, those picked by Him to do His will. From among those that others expect nothing will come those with the power to accomplish everything. They'll be equipped with the power of God, the Holy Spirit and everyone will know that it's God's miracle and not their educational excellence. He will pick up the broken pieces of their lives, knit them together and through them reveal His might. From among the world's castoffs He'll select men whose only hope is in Him; those who, through His grace, live to glorify His name; those who have learned from Him the meaning of forgiveness. Those who have experienced the joy of redemption. From these men will flow fountains of living waters; waters of forgiveness, waters of mercy, huge irrigation canals that feed the precious garden of God where His fruit grows and the sheep of His pasture come to drink freely. Men cannot make such shepherds; schools cannot produce them. They must be fashioned by God's own hand.

Chapter 4

In One Accord

[4.1]

How did the church get so fragmented? How did we drift so far apart? From the beginning, seeds of discord were being sown. Satan wasted no time in his attempt to choke the life from the future bride of Christ. Before the church was born, Jesus was already warning us of our enemy's attempts to snuff out our spiritual life. Pay particular attention to the parable of the sower. In this parable, three out of four conditions mentioned are destructive. First, birds came to consume that seed which fell upon the wayside. Then, other seed fell upon stony places and was too shallow to take root. Last, some fell among thorns and their life was choked out (Matthew 13:3-9).

[4.2]

The seed in this parable represents the seeds of the kingdom of Christ, the seed of faith. In yet another parable, we find this very seed being sown in a field; good seed. While the farmer slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat. Today, as in the church's beginning, we have weeds among the wheat. In the first century church, it was the circumcision; a group of legalists professing to be part of the church. These were at least in part, converted Pharisees trying to put new wine (the gospel of Christ) in old wineskins (the law of Moses).

Acts 15:1

1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. (KJV)

Galatians 2:11-13

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

Jude 1:4

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (KJV)

[4.3]

They forgot that we are free from the penalty or curse of the law and if Christ has freed us we are free indeed (John 8:36).

Galatians 3:10-14

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (KJV)

[4.4]

Please note above that even the Apostle Peter was influenced by these weeds that were sown among the wheat.

[4.5]

Indeed the devil wasted no time in attacking the church of Jesus Christ. He has planted his weeds among us and sent out his ravens to pluck the truth of God's word from our hearts. Why? What is his strategy? First, we must realize that while the seed that was sown by the apostles was the same, that sown by the enemy was a variety. The Apostles sowed the seeds of truth while the enemy crept in shortly after to sow discord, division, deception, and pride. Have you ever noticed when you plant corn you get only corn when you harvest but the variety of weeds and pests seems endless.

[4.6]

If the early church experienced division in the age of the Apostles, is it any wonder it flourishes today? Where division exists, the weeds of discord, division, deception and pride go unchecked. Discord says, "Let's argue over anything."

Titus 3:9

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. (KJV)

2 Timothy 2:23

23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. (KJV)

[4.7]

Division says, "Let's separate under different leaders and doctrines."

1 Corinthians 1:11-13

11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (KJV)

II John 1:9-10

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: (KJV)

[4.8]

Deception comes as a lamb in sheep's clothing looking like Christ and deceiving those who don't know the truth or don't practice it. What is the truth? God's word!

I John 4:1

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (KJV)

[4.9]

Pride usually finds a comfortable place in the heart of man. It flatters him; it makes him feel special. It says, "You must never allow others to see your weakness or error, how you appear is the most important thing."

Proverbs 11:2

2 When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom. (KJV)

Proverbs 13:10

10 Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom. (KJV)

Proverbs 16:18

18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (KJV)

[4.10]

These four: discord, division, deception and pride, are the assassins of unity within the body of Christ. They are often joined by their first cousins greed, appetite, gossip and envy to destroy any work of potential significance within the body of Christ. What does God's blueprint say? What does God want us to do? Would God ask us to do anything that wasn't possible with His help? Of course not. Then look closely at 1 Corinthians, chapter one, verse ten and consider the possibilities.

1 Corinthians 1:10

10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same

thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (KJV)

[4.11]

You say “Impossible!” God’s word reminds us that all things are possible in Him.

Matthew 19:26

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. (KJV)

[4.12]

What keeps this from becoming reality? The previously mentioned four assassins and their four cousins. Think about it.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (KJV)

[4.13]

What do we mean when we say unity? Men have been trying to accomplish unity since one hundred and twenty people gathered in the upper room to await the promised power of the Holy Spirit. Not content to let the Lord establish unity, those in the church have taken the matter of unity into their own hands. The church, already betrothed to Christ, began to play the harlot by entering into a marriage with the state; the Roman state. Rome, with its iron weapons and its iron laws, first attacked the bride of Christ like a wild beast, devouring many of the faithful in the Roman arena. When this failed, the deceptive practice of seduction was employed. Seduce the Christian population by giving them peace from persecution; safety from the powerful Roman authorities. Herd the Christian masses together, bring them under one central self-serving authority, fill their hearts with false doctrine and teach them to serve idols and to pray to the dead rather than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. During this period, the people lost the light of education (the dark ages), only those in monastic orders of the Roman Catholic Church could read and write, those who later learned could no longer find any scriptural material written in their language for the Roman institutional church, which possessed the only available manuscripts, had them translated and read in Latin, a language no longer spoken. Even as early as 329-330 AD, Rome, through Jerome, was preparing a translation of the Holy scriptures into Latin in the form of the Latin Vulgate. The church, now dependant on Spiritual Rome for all spiritual nourishment, had become one large sea of uneducated and totally dependant masses. This was not a unity brought about by love and relationship but instead by fear, dependence and intimidation. The great imitator, Satan, had brought about his own unique brand of unity. He had

successfully seduced the church into accepting the Roman government as its model for church organization. Its Emperor became the model for the Pope; the Roman Senate became the model for the college of cardinals, and so on.

[4.14]

The unity of Christ's church had now become supplanted by organizational unity. To belong to the Church of Christ, the only true church, you must belong to the Roman Church organization; they considered themselves to be the only church in the world. No longer was the church a body of believers it had now taken on a political dimension. It had moved completely outside the realms of scripture by establishing its own structure and its own authority. Nowhere in the canon of sacred texts could you find a spiritual model like it.

[4.15]

Unity wasn't a matter any longer of love, acceptance, or relationship it was now a matter of belonging to the same club; coming together under the same earthly authority. It had mutated into a dictatorship. Instead of royalty and commoner we now had clergy and layman. The clergy became the royalty in this new spiritual setting and the common folk had better obey them or pay the consequences.

[4.16]

The members of this organization had become driven together like cattle. They weren't being led by a loving Shepherd but driven together by hired shepherders. Some unity! The model of unity and worship given to us in God's blueprint had been replaced by an imitation; a plastic model based on things seen with things that can't be seen; things spiritual in nature. As ants drawn to a sugar cube, the institutional church created its own myths, wonders and magnificent spectacles to impress the masses with its wealth, power and beauty. Gothic Cathedrals, stained glass, sculptured icons, royal tapestries, paintings and robes of magnificent design, all produced to impress the very kings of the earth. Is it any wonder the common folk were seduced into believing that all such towering figures were God's true sportsmen. What happened to the fishermen, tax collectors and tent makers that the crowds followed in the beginning?

[4.17]

Even the false material, political unity of this corrupt system was brought down. This same system unraveled in the reformation of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, but instead of returning to the unity of the spirit, each fragment developed its own set of pet doctrines, its own style of worship and its own label often taken from the name of one of its most celebrated leaders or its favorite doctrine.

[4.18]

True spiritual unity is born when it has as its Father, the word of God and as its mother the law of liberty.

Galatians 5:13

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. (KJV)

[4.19]

Each church must be free to follow the Word of God, as their understanding permits, and each must be free to change or expand that knowledge as God, through the Holy Spirit, gives them light, the light of increased spiritual truth. Unity must flow freely from the heart, from the same place that love does. If two churches unknown to each other are building and growing according to the same blueprint it's likely they will bear a strong resemblance to each other. Most often in these cases, the only differences observed will be the amount of God's blueprint completed. Some may be more advanced than others. When this is evident, the more mature of the two churches will be content to let the other continue to be guided by the Holy Spirit and not attempt to speed up the process. The speed of the process may be directly related to the maturity of its membership. If they seek your help, they're ready for it, but if not, it's better to lead them in God's hands. Our labor is to love them and model it through our fellowship and worship among them. Let's share our resources, our music, our table, our excitement, our spirit and if they desire, our testimonies and teachings.

[4.20]

The church in the world today builds unity in the same way as big business, through the use of legal instruments, like contracts, agreements, recorded results of council meetings written and signed statements of faith, etc. When two assemblies come together it is more likely to resemble a merger than an increase in God's family.

[4.21]

Where does it say that we must be part of the same earthly organization to be part of the Lord's church? Are we all not part of His body? Does not the body have many members?

1 Corinthians 12:14

14 For the body is not one member, but many. (KJV)

[4.22]

Are not these members part of the same body? Can we say to one another we have no need of thee?

1 Corinthians 12:15

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? (KJV)

Are not all members controlled by the head?

Hebrews 5:9

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; (KJV)

Who is the head?

Colossians 1:18

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (KJV)

[4.23]

If Christ is the head then is it not reasonable that the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is the spinal column that carries the message of the head to each part of the body? The Spirit of God is the conveyer between God and man, He is the revealer of truth.

1 Corinthians 12:11

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (KJV)

By Him all the members are brought together into obedience.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (KJV)

[4.24]

Please take note that we are all members individually (1 Corinthians 12:20). As we are members of an assembly, each assembly has its place in the body. As a finger, you are part of the hand, (an assembly of fingers) which in turn is part of the body. What controls the finger? The hand? NO! The head through the spinal column or if you prefer, the central nervous system. If the finger is controlled by the control nervous system then what controls the hand? The same system. The head, working through the central nervous system, controls all parts of the body individually and collectively. Jesus is the head, the Spirit is the central nervous system carrying the message of Christ to all members and moving them individually and collectively. The finger doesn't report to the hand, it reports to the head. The hand doesn't report to the arm it reports to the head also.

[4.25]

We must all realize the importance of this structure. If a denomination can be defined as two or more assemblies of Christ sharing a common earthly administration then at what point do we as individual assemblies come together in unity? First, our administrative unity; our home office;

our church headquarters is not in this world. It exists in the throne room of heaven where Christ now sits and makes intercession for us. He is the head and so where He is quartered or resides becomes our headquarters.

[4.26]

Second unity is not a matter of administration but of desire for companionship. At creation God said it is not good for man to be alone. In the same way God created His spiritual body, the church, not to be alone. The true church is hungry for fellowship with others of God's family. This hunger comes out of maturity. It lays aside fear to reach out in love to others. It opens its heart and its spiritual eyes so that it may recognize others in the family by their fruit. It opens its spiritual ears to new revelations of truth carried by other brethren. Truth confirmed in God's word. It says, "Teach me, share with me, I would know more of God." Before it says, "Let me teach you, it says let me learn from you; teach me."

[4.27]

How can the individual assembly assume this position? By thinking of others as being better than themselves.

Philippians 2:3

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (KJV)

[4.28]

By considering the feelings of others before their own; by laying aside their pride. Could there be the faintest possibility that God has revealed things to them yet unknown to you or perhaps the opposite? Maybe we could learn from each other. Do you suppose that it might be God's plan to increase our understanding by using our relationship with the brethren to do so? Wow! There's a revolutionary idea.

[4.29]

What keeps us from fellowshiping with others? Fear! Yes, fear, not among the flock but a fear growing out of suspicion among the leaders. They fear that members of their flock might be drawn toward another assembly. The fear that members might be overtaken with false doctrine. They fear that other more popular, better known, more gifted leaders might attempt to undermine their authority and seize the oversight of their flock making them subordinate. They fear losing control and the respect that comes with leadership. All of these fears come from the same source, God's enemy and ours.

[4.30]

It would be easy at this point to assume that any leader feeling this way is immature and not qualified to lead. Which one of us who leads is above human temptation? Which one of us does

not appreciate the love and respect of the flock we serve? Who is he that would enjoy loosing a close brother or sister to another assembly? Even the Apostle Paul confessed his jealousy over the preserving of his flock at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 11:2-4

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. (KJV)

[4.31]

Leadership is an enormous privilege, who is he that places no value on it? Whatever we treasure, whatever we love becomes a potential weapon in the hand of the enemy. If we allow the church to be twisted into a political system we will most likely be caught trying to achieve some sort of status within. One of the most damaging doctrines we can buy into is the doctrine of accountability. True, as leaders we need to be accountable, but to whom? In the system, the priest is accountable to the bishop, the bishop to the Arch bishop, the Arch bishop to the Cardinals, the Cardinals to the Pope and the Pope to God. Or, if you're a member of a Protestant organization, it may go minister to area minister or bishop to area council, to general council or council president to God. If the lowest deacon has not the integrity of the highest member, he shouldn't be in office. The head of the body has complete control over all the body parts and all parts report to the head and it's the same way with the body of Christ. We, small and great, are accountable to the head of the body; our Lord Jesus Christ. We are also accountable to each other; we to our leaders and our leaders to us.

[4.32]

Every assembly of the early church was accountable to Christ but assemblies were not legislated together in political unity. Each was free to develop relations with other assemblies or not. Fifty years ago, business relationships were established with a handshake; today it takes lawyers, accountants and contracts to complete an agreement for services bought or rendered. Why the change? Fear. Fear of being dealt with dishonestly.

[4.33]

Remove the fear and possibilities for true fellowship increase. How do we remove fear? First, learn to love one another; every Christian owes his back to his brother. We must be prepared to be vulnerable to take the risk. Second, we must not expect other assemblies to conform to ours in practice or in doctrine. We can expect others within our assembly to conform but not those belonging to other fellowships. If, like the early church we adopt a one Eldership for one flock understanding then others will not fear being taken over. No two assemblies should ever be tied

together with any form of earthly administration. Love should be the main motivating factor and a strong desire to serve one another.

[4.34]

Elders must first share this love and trust. When they do, the assemblies will follow their example. The first major doctrine that these fellowships need to address is this one; unity. As relationship grows so will trust. Suspicion must be the first victim of this relationship. Teachers and leaders with open hearts will soon find little problem in searching for truth together, making pride the next victim of this relationship. With each truly dedicated to finding and obeying God's truth, His blueprint, the last casualty will be error and each assembly will be made richer by the spiritual gifts given them by the other. Remember, unity is not you being called by the same legislated label as another. It's you loving them and them loving you.

[4.35]

When an assembly of disciples gets too big for one house, throw a baby shower (party) and send off the new offspring with its own leadership and don't try to hold onto the oversight of it. Christianity is a family. In a family, a child is raised to maturity then, becoming joined to a partner, moves away and a new family is born. If the father of the older family tries to assume control of the other, a break in relationship is almost certain. A wise leader, like wise fathers, know when it's time to let go and let God. In this way relationship is unbroken and these spiritual families will often find opportunities to get together. When one flock gives birth to another they share a common genetic program; they will bear the same family characteristic; unity and love between them will never be broken as each prepares, like the cells of the body, to center on their nucleus, Jesus Christ, to grow and multiply again.

[4.36]

The secret of power is found in this wondrous equation; when we are together in one accord, speaking the same thing, having the same mind and opinion with no division among us, the power of the Spirit will fall upon us as it did upon the early church (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

[4.37]

The Lord doesn't want us unified by brand names or by contract or some other silly man made device. He wants our hearts knit together; He wants us to be one with each other and with Him. The same unity that He shares with our Heavenly Father.

John 17:20-22

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: (KJV)

[4.38]

The enemy of God is not divided, his desire is for the destruction of the church and he never ceases to sow the seeds of discord among God's children. If his desire is division, then shouldn't our desire be unity?

Matthew 12:25

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: (KJV)

[4.39]

What better way to defeat the enemy than together. Like coal miners separated in darkness by a cave-in, so we as a Christian body have been separated by walls of pride and ignorance. Isn't it time we began to breakdown the dividing wall and dig toward each other? We'll only find our way out of darkness and into light when we all work together. Let's begin to get some dirt under our nails today.

Chapter 5

As A Little Child

[5.1]

Have you ever completed a project and upon completion wished you'd done it differently? Many a Dad, after ignoring instructions, has had this same thought when he realized he had too many left over parts to the bicycle. Too often in our lives pride takes over causing us to lean on our own abilities rather than consulting the plan or the designer. That "I can do it myself" attitude takes over and mistakes follow just behind.

[5.2]

The word of God, God's blueprint, is the manufacturers manual, it's the instruction book for the best maintenance and care of the human soul. It's the B.I.B.L.E; Book of Instructions Before Leaving Earth. When we fail to follow it or take matters into our own hands, disaster usually follows. It's at this point that we often think, "I wish I could do it over, get a second chance."

[5.3]

You can! Jesus said, "To be saved, you must be born again." Not born in the flesh, but in the spirit. He gives us a second chance. As Christians this comes as no surprise, it's old news, but we need to be reminded that the maturing process in the spiritual realm is different from that in the earthly realm. In the earthly or physical realm, we grow up into maturity, but in the spiritual realm, maturity is measured as we grow down. As John the Baptist put it, we must decrease and Christ must increase (John 3:30). In our understanding we should not be children but rather be mature (Hebrews 5:12-13) but when it comes to evil we should all be as children.

1 Corinthians 14:20

20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. (KJV)

[5.4]

In the eighteenth chapter of Matthew; in the third verse, Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Note the operative word here is "become." When we add the color yellow to the color blue, the combination becomes green, something entirely different than either of its components.

[5.5]

In the same way, when God breathed into the dust of the earth, man became a living soul. Stated simply, God's breath (life) when added to the elements of earth, clay or dust, produces the soul of man or Gb+d=s. When we are truly converted, we become a new creation, we become as little children.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)

Matthew 18:3

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (KJV)

[5.6]

This should come as no great revelation as childhood always follows birth. Again, we must direct our attention to the word “become” for it suggests a process. What kind of process? A process of conversion, a process of evolvment, a metamorphosis which takes place within our spirit. Growing up in the world is also growing aware of self gratifying pleasures, that childhood innocence or predevelopment kept us safe from. In society today the word adult has taken on its own special and exclusive meaning. When we grow up into adulthood we’re free to engage in adult pleasures; to satisfy adult appetites. We can legally watch adult movies, read adult material or visit adult locations. Is it any wonder that the metamorphosis that God creates within us is that of changing from adult to child? We remain capable of adult sin but by letting the mind of Christ within control our thoughts and the Holy Spirit, our deeds, once again, we become as children; His children. Once again we are led by our parents, our spiritual parents, Christ through whom the seed of spiritual life came and the Holy Spirit by which it was nurtured have become the parents of our eternal existence.

[5.7]

Can you imagine becoming a little child again? Think of it, being able to shed past sins, to walk in newness of life with all its wonder. We can! This is what Jesus is saying “become as little children.” It won’t happen overnight, we didn’t get this corrupt in a day and regaining a new and healthy mind is a gradual process (Romans 12:2). We are becoming. We are being renewed. Salvation is instant. Cleansing from sin is instant but learning to walk in the light, to become as a little child, that takes some practice.

[5.8]

Have you ever observed two children meeting for the first time? At first, they’re a little shy and tend to cling to their parents but a short time later they’re running and playing like old friends. Trust comes easily to a child and willingness to enter into the activity of another comes quite natural. Why is it, that the children of God have such a difficult time learning to get along with others; to play together? Perhaps there remains in us too much of our past adult life and not enough of the child. Have we stopped becoming? Prejudice, suspicion, greed, lust, and hatred are strong evidence that we’re still adults. Children are able to forgive and forget easily but adults tend to hold onto grievances and not forgive. If we have these feelings and walk in them daily, can we unashamedly say we’ve been born again? Isn’t rebirth followed by childhood?

[5.9]

What does God expect from a child? Could it be to learn of Him? To grow in obedience and to love our brothers and sisters in Christ? Is that so very hard to understand? NO! For a child it's easy to understand, it's only difficult for an adult.

[5.10]

When we were helpless babes upon our mother's breasts, what was God's will for us? Simple, receive nourishment and care, at the hand of our parent. In this case, the Holy Spirit. How about when we reach our spiritual teens? His will for us then is to learn discipline, self control, and how to use the spiritual tools and gifts he's given us. What happens when we reach full maturity? When's that? The process of being conformed to His image will continue until we meet Christ face to face and know all things. God's still fashioning us; He's still the potter and we remain the clay. We remain a work in process in the state of becoming.

Romans 9:20-21

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (KJV)

Romans 8:29

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (KJV)

[5.11]

Yes, we will mature enough to have the ability to bear much fruit and by this qualify as a disciple but let us remember that a disciple is one who remains under the authority of Christ.

John 15:8

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (KJV)

[5.12]

He remains as a father to us and we remain as children to Him if we are to reach the mark of the prize, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (KJV)

[5.13]

Do we ever reach spiritual maturity? Yes, but never full maturity. We will recognize this maturity in others when we see demonstrated the child-like heart, the simple trust, the tender love that can only come from those mature enough to be as a little child.

[5.14]

Some years ago an anagram had become popular among some of God's children. It was K.I.S.S. and stood for "keep it simple, stupid." We might consider changing the last letter "s" to mean servant but no matter, it has a ring of truth in its relevance to the church today. Over the years, the institutional church has made great progress in taking the basic, the simple, the clear and uncomplicated and confusing it with an intellectual vocabulary designed to intellectualize and professionalize the study and understanding of God's word. In the past, they converted the scriptures from a common language to a dead unspoken language that only the privileged few could read and understand. Today, the institutional church has developed its own esoteric, lofty, intellectual vocabulary. In this way, they intend to separate us into two groups. Those who know and understand this new vocabulary are called clergy and those who don't are called laymen. Once again we find ourselves under the control of a self-made spiritual aristocracy. What are the results of this new sophisticated language? Today, instead of studying scriptural prophecy we study eschatology, instead of learning biblical principles we learn theology and instead of studying the biblical account of creation we study theistic evolution. Then to really humble the common folk, we assign whole segments of doctrine to various teachers such as John Calvin and call it Calvinism. We make references to historical creeds coming from councils of church leaders long dead. Leaders with no more knowledge than we and probably less and attribute to them some special divine inspiration. What makes Christians today believe that those from a by-gone era had any more enlightenment than we? Is God a respecter of persons? Does God change?

Acts 10:34

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (KJV)

Hebrews 13:8

8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (KJV)

[5.15]

You see then, that children usually don't understand big, lofty words. These words are chosen by adults to impress and control adults. Adults understand big words and complicated terms. It takes an adult mind to think them up and bring them into use. With this new vocabulary, these inflated adults can remove themselves from among God's children and achieve a higher level of recognition. They can easily accomplish this if they can adopt and use this esoteric pattern of convoluted reasoning. There, how was that?

[5.16]

Most accomplished teachers take what is complex and make it simple. In case you've ever wondered what the difference is between teaching and preaching, well, here it is:

- a. Teaching is explanation (taking what is difficult to understand and making it easy to understand.)
- b. Preaching is application (taking a biblical truth and verbally demonstrating how it may be applied.)

Our leaders today seem to be preoccupied with taking what is simple and making it complex. Why? To set themselves apart; to establish a professional and intellectual difference between the leaders and those they lead. Perhaps in this way, they hope to justify the salaries they accept for teaching others what was given to all men free. Do you understand? It's the clergy and laity thing. How else can they dazzle us with their lofty thoughts and words in their efforts to gain employment? With a sophisticated vocabulary, a library full of books, and formal credentials hanging on paneled walls, they hope to impress us with their haughty self esteeming manner. Are you impressed yet? I wonder in what office Peter's diplomas hung.

[5.17]

The most impressive words spoken since the scriptures were completed are these: "Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so." Let's not forget the next line either, "little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong." Oh, God, grant that we may learn how to be little ones. It was God's choice, He could have selected any relationship with us He wanted. He could have chosen to relate to us as creator. He is! This would have prompted one type of relationship, one of awe and mystery. He could have chosen to relate as our king, for so He is. If so, we would have related to Him as His subjects coming before His throne in fear and trembling. He chose instead to relate to us as a father. He invented the family, He knew exactly how we would relate to our earthly fathers. We know and understand this relationship, it's familiar to us. This is a relationship of love and intimacy, one of trust and informality. A creator's work is his creations. A king's work is with his subjects, but a father's work centers on his children. This is the relationship He chose; this is the one He wants with us. This is the way He wants us to see and relate to Him. Our desire should always be to remain in this precious position. What does this mean in clear simple terms? God created the role that each father must play in his family; a role that He Himself desires to have with us. Does a father provide? Does he protect? Does he counsel? Does he lead and organize? Does he teach and correct? Does he delight in, and play with, his children? Listen to their songs? Wipe away their tears while he attends to their hurts? Does he encourage them to try again and offer to help them? Yes! Yes, to all of these and more; God is so much more. If we ask for bread will He give us a stone?

[5.18]

As a loving parent, how would you feel if when your child had a problem, he or she sought counsel at a neighbor's house? How would you feel if when your little son or daughter fell and scrapped their knee, they ran to another for care and comfort? Our heavenly Father forgives us for doing these same things and we do them all the time. We consistently take our hurts and

problems to others failing to realize or even remember that our Spiritual Father desires to share our problems and hurts with us. He desires to heal and comfort us. He desires to be a part of our hopes and dreams, our fears and our failures. Why do we so often take them to others before taking them to Him? He longs to play with us, to hear our laughter and joy. He wants us to delight ourselves in Him. He desires to bless our hearts when we do.

Psalms 37:4

4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. (KJV)

[5.19]

We can draw strength from these blessed occasions if we'll just learn to enjoy a sweet informal relationship with Him and as an affectionate child come to Him in love.

Psalms 59:16-17

16 But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble.

17 Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defense, and the God of my mercy. (KJV)

[5.20]

Why do we seek to have a stiff, formal relationship with Him? Didn't Jesus make it possible for us to enter in His private chamber, into the holy of holies and call Him Abba (daddy) as He did? The Lord is gentle and kind, patient and forgiving.

Isaiah 42:3

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. (KJV)

[5.21]

His love is everlasting and His ways toward us are generous (Jeremiah 31:34). He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Why then, do we approach Him with ceremony and ritual? Why do we put on such a solemn face when we gather together with Him?

[5.22]

We must stop, take a moment to think, and realize that true expressions of appreciation (worship) must come from a heart filled with joy. So simply put, when it comes to worship, if we're not having fun (filled with joy) doing it, then we're not doing it right. If our songs of praise don't touch our hearts they'll never reach His. Our lives must be a flame of joy burning brightly in a world of darkness. We must walk in that light, the light of righteousness and joy as Jesus did. We must fellowship in this same light as the disciples did (1 John 1:7). We should, with happiness in our hearts, walk in joyful obedience if we truly wish to honor our God.

1 Samuel 15:22

22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (KJV)

[5.23]

Listen closely to your heart, listen to that still, small voice within, the voice of our loving father and you will hear Him say, “Don’t tell me what you believe, show me how you live and I’ll tell you what you believe.” Life in Christ is righteousness, obedience, love and joy. It’s not a life of sorrow or despair for there is no Father like Him, no one can match His love.

[5.24]

Do you remember the first line of that old children’s chorus entitled, “Every Day with Jesus”? The chorus begins, “every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.” This is so true, when you have that sweet child-like relationship, that child-like faith, that child-like joy and that child-like love. Why do we as God’s children feel guilty for having fun? Fun is not sin! Disobedience to God is sin. We find no where in God’s word where He said not to be happy; not to have fun. As His children we should be the happiest people on earth. After all, we are His chosen generation, His royal priesthood. We are joint heirs with Christ.

1 Peter 2:9

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (KJV)

[5.25]

We should desire to remain His children forever for He provides for and protects His own. Let’s never seek to grow out of the relationship He chose and provided for us. We should endeavor to keep our child-like innocence and simplicity, our child like faith, humility and honesty. The wonder of our salvation should be ever before our eyes and the joy that comes with it. Loving, harmless jesting between spiritual siblings is ok; it’s permitted to be happy to make others laugh. It’s not only permitted, it’s healthy.

Proverbs 17:22

22 A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones. (KJV)

[5.26]

One of the most uplifting experiences that should be commonplace in the Christian life is that of seeking other flocks to fellowship and worship with. This is not usually possible in the institutional church for fear of sheep-stealing or doctrinal differences. One of the great advantages of following God’s blueprint is emphasis on discipleship. A home church is most often made up of well taught members. Often each member is a leader of one kind or another.

With a base of biblical knowledge, this well-implanted fear of false doctrine or of losing members is almost nonexistent. In fact, it's replaced by excitement, the joy that comes with meeting other godly family members who share the same freedoms as ourselves. There is a hunger that replaces fear; a hunger to learn from others and share with others. An irresistible curiosity to see how God is raising and teaching others. Often we are surprised to see how much we have in common. Reaching out to other family members in other locations frequently leads to trips, overnight stays and tent meetings at some recreation area. It's guitars and singing around an open fire. It's simple messages delivered by simple, humble leaders and best of all, we get to demonstrate to the Lord how much we love Him and the brethren. Our kingdom is not of this world. Here we are strangers and pilgrims, a people without a land, nomads, gypsies of God, loose in a hostile wilderness. We are not alone however, we have each other, we have God's presence revealed in the Holy Spirit and we have the knowledge that there are other pockets of pilgrims like ourselves who are searching for us on the way to the promised land, the coming kingdom of God.

Hebrews 13:13-15

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. (KJV)

[5.27]

Many of our most meaningful times as a body have been spent going to or from some place. Packed into the same vehicle laughing, singing, and teaching as we go. These times together have been among our most memorable moments. Times of sweet fellowship and spiritual growth. If there was no destination to go to it would be well to go anyway just for the power that it has to lift the spirit; its faith and fellowship building. If there's anything better than celebrating Jesus as a fellowship it's celebrating Him together with other fellowships. The King's kids love getting together to play. It's great to sing, pray and study together and it's also fun to engage in volleyball, camping, swimming and boating or just sit around the fire and swap testimonies; these have spiritual value also because they serve the cause of building relationships.

[5.28]

Think of all we miss by trying to remove the speck in our brothers eye. How about developing a relationship with him before we put him under a magnifying glass. If he loves us perhaps he'll be willing to trust us with removing the speck. Through our relationship we may even allow him to remove the plank from our own eye. Fellow children, can't we learn how to play nice together? Do we really want to hear the spirit say, "Wait till your Father comes back"? It will be too late then to do what we should have done now. Brethren, pack up your little flock, hit the road and enjoy one another; the time for this is now; the clock is running out. Brethren, let us love one another while there is still time.

I John 3:10

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (KJV)

I John 3:16

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Chapter 6

Foundations of Understanding

[6.1]

It is widely believed that one of the chief causes of misunderstanding and division in the church today is our varied interpretations of Biblical doctrine. This point is beyond argument for who, knowing the history of the church, could take exception to this well-established and well-documented position? Truly, from the beginning of church history to this very day, there have arisen countless debates and dissensions over doctrinal issues.

[6.2]

At first, we had to deal with the attempt of the Hebrew legalists to hold Gentiles to Hebrew religious customs. Increasingly, such division and debates have continued throughout the pages of church history.

[6.3]

So vile and violent became these contentions in the Middle Ages that many of God's most faithful sons and daughters were given to the flame, hanged, tortured, drowned, beaten or starved to death; branded as heretics for holding onto some unpopular doctrine not supported by the powerful institutional church.

[6.4]

It made little difference to the executioners whether the doctrine under scrutiny was Biblically sound or not. In fact, many of the doctrines held by these so-called heretics are upheld today as Biblical truths and the heretics have been given a new name; we now call them martyrs.

[6.5]

Today we, like the Pharisees of old, are prepared to divide and persecute anyone who dares to challenge our precious doctrines. We never stop to consider that any doctrine that can fall before the truth of God's Word should not be taught. Instead of discouraging doctrinal testing we should invite all challenges if all we seek is truth.

[6.6]

Does it make any sense to dismember or discredit any brother or sister in Christ over a minor doctrinal point? Why can't we realize that to do so we must totally crush a more important doctrine? We are told in John 3:16 that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Yes, God gave His only Son to die for us that we might have life everlasting. We are instructed to be like Him. How can we be like Him or even consider ourselves Christians when we divide and hate one another over lesser doctrinal issues?

But **he that hateth his brother is in darkness**, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.(I John 2:11)

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should **love one another**. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. **He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer:**and ye know that **no murderer hath eternal life** abiding in him. (I John 3:11, 14,15)

[6.7]

No doubt, if you claim to be a Christian and have even the most basic knowledge of God's Word you know what John 3:16 says, but do you know what 1 John 3:16 says?

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and **we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**(I John 3:16)

[6.8]

Brethren, how can we lay our lives down for each other when we're so preoccupied with trying to bury one another? If, in the face of new and clearer understanding, we were to change a doctrine, would it mean disaster? Would the earth cease to rotate? Would the sun cease to shine? No! All it would mean is that we would be better prepared to teach the truth than previously. It would mean that we have taken one step closer in fellowship to others who love the Lord. True, new understanding could be a thorn in our flesh, but like Paul we could benefit from such a thorn, especially in our flesh, for it's the flesh that must be mortified so that the Spirit of truth may grow.

Romans 8:1

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 8:13

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (KJV)

[6.9]

The divisions attributed to doctrine are many, too many; often it's not the doctrine that causes these schisms, but our own pride, our own self-indulgent need to be right. Not all doctrine can be excused, some doctrines have no legitimate connection with scripture at all. It's simply some legalistic propaganda dressed up in a religious suit to appear respectable and trotted out to satisfy some denominational motive.

Matthew 15:9

9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (KJV)

[6.10]

Yes, we have collected a wide variety of the doctrines of men. Like the Pharisees of old, it seems we just can't resist adding our own chapters to God's word. We measure each other by them, we often attribute to them salvation itself. If a man drinks a glass of wine, he's unsaved. Why? Because we decided that all wine is bad and have a man-made doctrine to prove it. We love to further define God's word as though he desperately needs our clarification. Especially in the areas of sabbaths, food, drink, and dress.

Colossians 2:16

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: (KJV)

[6.11]

We no longer have anything left for the Holy Spirit to guide us to or teach us, we've replaced all this with our own doctrines to cover every situation. Who said the spirit of Leviticus is dead? I thought the ordinances of the law were no longer in effect. Are they? NO!

Colossians 2:13-14

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; (KJV)

[6.12]

Many people today regard doctrine as a dirty word. There's a tendency among the people of this generation to throw the baby out with the bath water. While recognizing that doctrine is at the center of the rift, we fail to realize that our personalized interpretation or our hand-me-down understanding of it lies at the bottom of the problem.

[6.13]

When we consider the issue of doctrine we must first arrive at a uniform understanding of what we mean. What do we mean? What doctrines are we talking about? Are we discussing man-made doctrines? Scriptural doctrines as they appear or scriptural doctrines defined in the way we choose to interpret them?

[6.14]

Often, two or more so-called Christian organizations come into contention over the same biblical doctrine. How can this be? Are they reading the same bible? Do they hear from the same Holy Spirit? Isn't it the Spirit that guides us into all truth?

John 16:13

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not

speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (KJV)

[6.15]

God does not speak with a forked tongue nor is he the one that brings confusion.

1 Corinthians 14:33

33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (KJV)

[6.16]

If God doesn't bring confusion to his church, then who does? The answer is obvious, our own flesh and the devil who all too often uses it to confound the purposes of God.

[6.17]

Pointing at the problem is one thing but it's quite another to see how to correct it. man-made doctrines will always be a problem but God-breathed scriptural doctrine shouldn't be a problem for true children of God. There are only two ways to interpret scriptural doctrine. There is the way he, God, spoke it and had it recorded and the way we choose to interpret it to satisfy our own understanding and desires. Some believe that the bible can be interpreted any way, others, many ways, but God says what he means and means what he says and there is but one, true God-inspired way of understanding his word and it's his way. This should encourage you for when we find his meaning we are drawn together in unity with others before him. Contrary to what we see demonstrated, doctrine was not meant to divide God's children but bring them together and it works if they possess the mind of Christ.

Philippians 2:3-5

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (KJV)

[6.18]

We, without Christ, have many minds and many of us have double minds so it's no wonder we can't seem to get together. Those who seek to achieve their own goals are more likely to find them than God's truths (Js 1:7-8). Many approach God's word as though they were on a hunting trip, licensed to hunt for scriptural support for personal ideas. They seek to find in it what they want so they can justify their own narrow positions. When they do this they speak into God's word. They come, to tell it what to say, what they desire to hear. They find exactly what they want to find and care nothing about twisting the truth.

2 Peter 3:16

16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to

be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (KJV)

[6.19]

Those with the mind of Christ seek only to do the Father's will and care nothing about justifying a privately held or denominational position. They come to God's word as a clean chalk board ready to be written on by the hand of God. When we do this we receive sound doctrine. In these moments, God is at last free to speak to us unencumbered by our preconceived ideas and personal beliefs. Our faith is made stronger and our knowledge of his will made clearer.

Romans 10:17

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (KJV)

[6.20]

In Paul's first letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, the Holy Spirit revealed, through Paul, that in the last days some shall depart from the faith, giving their attention to enticing spirits and the doctrines of devils. Such will speak lies born out of hypocrisy as though they no longer had an active conscience. These same people will have many "man-made" doctrines centering on marriage and food. When we remind our brethren that every creature of God is good if it's sanctified by the word of God and prayer, we are good ministers of Jesus Christ and our doctrine is also good (1 Ti 4:1-6).

[6.21]

With the spread of TV evangelism, there came a flood of doctrine, both good and bad. Some of the things being preached were conceived in the chambers of Satan, things blasphemous, things which make God the servant of man rather than man the servant of God. Like children who go from one new toy to another, we bounce from one new doctrine to another seeking in each some new thrill. Each cleverly designed doctrine holds out some new way that God can serve man, some new promise that God holds out to satisfy our desire for self gratification. If we say the words just right, we can claim anything we want, like some witch's incantation or Aladdin's lamp. Offering half truths bordering on blasphemy, these teachers who preach what we want to hear, promise much and deliver nothing. In fact, they usually ask you to bless them with your gifts (2 Peter 3:16).

2 Timothy 4:3

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; (KJV)

2 Peter 2:19

19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (KJV)

[6.22]

In malice, we should be as children, but in our understanding we should be men (1 Corinthians 14:20). Instead of being seduced by every new spiritual fad that comes across the book shelf or TV, we need to begin to think with the mind of Christ. If health and wealth are the main things you're seeking, then you will miss the kingdom of Heaven. If the measure of your faith is your material possessions then the world's most faithless, the world's greatest failures are Jesus and the twelve Apostles. Do you think Jesus was kidding when he said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Mat 19:24)? It's time the body of Christ put down these children's toys. It's time to stop and consider who we're following and why. It's time to cease looking for preachers to entertain us with some clever twist of doctrine or some perverted half truth. It's time we opened our eyes and realized that many of us are being seduced and deceived.

Ephesians 4:14

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; (KJV)

[6.23]

One of God's greatest blessings is that of having a sound body, one free of sickness and deformity. Another even greater is that of having a sound mind, one free of confusion capable of analysis and reasoning. In the same way, we are blessed if we've adopted sound doctrine, free of fleshly influences, free of intellectual corruption and free of prejudice and religious bias.

1 Timothy 1:3-4

3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. (KJV)

[6.24]

Perhaps you've seen the arguments and division caused by prideful men who have used doctrine as a means of doing injury to the body of Christ. Maybe you blame doctrine for these divisions but doctrine is not to blame, we are. If we approach God's word with a pure heart we'll receive as our reward sound doctrine. Let us continually search the scriptures allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal its truth to us.

1 Timothy 4:13

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. (KJV)

[6.25]

Sound doctrine doesn't destroy, to the contrary, it restores, it saves and unifies.

1 Timothy 4:16

16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. (KJV)

Elders who labor in the word to teach sound doctrine are worthy of honor (1 Timothy 5:17). Nevertheless, let us test all teachings by the word of God. We must never cease to hold our teachers accountable to God's word. We need to try the Spirit of all who teach.

1 John 4:1

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (KJV)

Brethren, let us never be afraid to ask for chapter and verse in any area we're unsure of, or have never heard before.

[6.26]

Any who teach the word should be cautious, knowing that they will receive a stricter judgment and thus must be careful to teach doctrine that reflects Godliness. Any who teach out of their own heart, things apart from God's holy word, are proud and will bring division. The water of God's word will not mix with oily words taught by crafty men. Such words can only bring strife and division.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (KJV)

[6.27]

Is this the kind of teaching you've been hearing? If so, then it's time to move and find a teacher dedicated to truth. Good, sound doctrine is profitable to all for correction and instruction in those things which please the Lord (2 Timothy 3:16). We must always be ready to give an answer to any who ask us.

1 Peter 3:15

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: (KJV)

[6.28]

We must always be ready to preach the word instantly with patience and sound doctrine.

2 Timothy 4:2

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (KJV)

[6.29]

The time will come and in many places now is, when men will not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3).

[6.30]

False doctrines destroy, doctrines of men confuse but sound doctrine is able, if anything is, to convince the opposition, if they have the spiritual ears to hear what the Spirit is saying.

Titus 1:9

9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. (KJV)

[6.31]

Knowing this we must then concern ourselves with only that which pertains to sound doctrine. What is sound doctrine? That which the Holy Spirit, through the Apostles, has given us. There can be no other doctrine in the Christian life. Sound doctrine is God's truth and God's truth for men is contained in his holy word so then it is up to those who see the value of rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) to speak always of those things which are suitable and becoming to sound doctrine.

Titus 2:1

1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: (KJV)

[6.32]

There are unfortunate consequences if we turn from the truth of God to teach any other doctrine (2 Peter 3:16). Those that do such things do so to their own destruction. It's very important that we take firm hold of the fact that there is only one true doctrine and that is the doctrine of Christ. Failure to believe and seek this truth could cost you your eternal life with God. Perhaps you think we go too far here. We are saved by the grace of God but it takes faith to receive this grace and faith comes by hearing the word of God (doctrine). If we don't understand this doctrine we place our very soul in jeopardy. Not only do we risk our relationship with God and our eternal life with him, but we also risk fellowship with each other.

Galatians 1:9

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (KJV)

[6.33]

Failure to teach and preach the true doctrine of Christ can separate you from the fellowship of the brethren. This unfortunate circumstance may not happen by your choice. You won't have anything to say in the matter for the very doctrine which you have been perverting will be that which instructs those brethren who obey it, to regard you, the offender, as a spiritual leper.

II John 1:9-10

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: (KJV)

[6.34]

Brethren, let us take seriously this admonition. Let us now develop a renewed respect for sound doctrine. Let us put away from ourselves all doctrine that is self serving, unbalanced, out of context and replace it with unprejudiced truth that reflects our open hearts (Hebrews 13:9). We may have to re-examine all the hand-me-down doctrine we've ever learned. Replacing those old familiar doctrines so long trusted may be like throwing out a favorite pair of shoes or childhood security blanket. It may seem like asking an old friend to leave; or be like tearing roots out of our heart. Here is where we find just how interested in truth we really are. Jesus didn't say "take up your favorite blanket and follow me," he said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me;" crosses are instruments of death and we, like the Apostle Paul, must die daily.

1 Corinthians 15:30-31

30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?

31 I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. (KJV)

[6.35]

There can be no compromise where truth is concerned for truth is absolute and compromise can only dilute its strength. What fellowship hath light with darkness? There is no shadow of turning with God (Jas 1:17). Now let us, with integrity, read together the word of God; not seeking for it to say what we want to hear but accepting in our heart what it has to say. He says what he means, and means what he says.

[6.36]

Coming together on doctrine can only be accomplished if we approach it in the same way. Each of us has influences that pull at us, tempt our minds into accepting preconceived points of view. Words take on different meanings to some then to others. When you say baptism you may mean one thing while another may understand it as something entirely different. Our spiritual backgrounds and education will be a strong force to be reckoned with. It will endeavor to sway us into a particular channel of thought. How can we hope to rid ourselves of these influences? First, we must honestly want to! Then we must search the scriptures diligently and look especially close at the perfect model of Jesus. He should be ever before our eyes. It is His likeness that God seeks to fashion us into.

Romans 8:29

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (KJV)

[6.37]

The results of searching the scriptures with an open heart will be truly amazing. The greater your willingness to accept truth over previously held opinions, the easier it becomes. As it continues you will find companionship with others who are on the same spiritual pilgrimage back to the simple understanding of the Apostles and the early church. You will find that the truths you uncover are easily supported in God's word. Your confidence in what you believe will grow as will your ability to defend it. Fear will slip away as you appreciate the force of evidence God has left for you in his word. Because of your new-found strength you will become a threat to those who's doctrinal foundations are shaky and they will be frustrated by the soundness of your doctrine. Don't expect them to like it; they won't and will try to discredit you to others.

[6.38]

Truth cuts deep into the soul. Like a surgical scalpel it cuts quickly and deeply. Removing old tightly held beliefs is like removing cancer, though it may be necessary, it still causes pain. Some would rather live with an error-ridden belief system than suffer the pain of removal. Truth can change one's life forever and change can be frightening if you're making it alone and often you are. The sword of truth can bring you pain but it's the only path that leads to God.

[6.39]

Most denominational churches and others have stopped looking for truth believing they've found it all. They've chosen to separate into their own private factions. In disobedience to God's word, they've separated over doctrine, discontinuing their search for truth and are now beyond learning or seeing anything further than denominational propaganda whether it be right or wrong. The glaring example they offer to the unsaved world is that Christianity divides and destroys, it has no real unity, no common bond. It's called the body of Christ but it demonstrates a dismembered body. Jesus said at the last supper, "This is my body broken for you." He allowed his fleshly body to be broken in the hope that his spiritual body, the church, will never be broken. We can't be one, because we choose not to be. We don't want God to tell us what to believe, we want to tell him what we want to believe. We don't want a God before us with a rod of iron, we want a god with a rubber stamp. We want him to approve all our ideas about doctrinal interpretation. We don't want sound doctrine, we want our doctrine and if we're not careful, he'll give it to us and let us believe it. What will come of us if this should happen?

II Thessalonians 2:11-12

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (KJV)

[6.40]

On a highway, just outside a city, two clergymen of different denominational persuasions were returning from their monthly ecumenical meeting of pastors. During the course of their ride, they engaged in a doctrinal discussion which quickly turned into a heated argument. The car they were driving began to swerve from left to right as it continued to pick up speed. Neither of the two passengers were aware of the careless manner in which the car was being handled nor were they aware that behind them another car was following. In this car sat a lone driver surrounded by an assortment of empty beer bottles. His car was also swaying as he watched the action in the car up ahead. As the two pastors continued arguing, their arms raising up and down, their fingers pointing at one another, they failed to negotiate a sharp turn. Spinning out of control, they hit the shoulder of the road and rolled down a steep embankment coming to rest upside down on the roof. The drunk following saw the whole thing and being concerned about the occupants of the overturned vehicle, brought his car to a sloppy stop. He was angled into the breakdown lane, his front wheels coming to rest on the grass at the top of the embankment. Carefully, he opened his car door, using it to support his weight and holding onto the car to keep from falling, he made his way to the left front fender, far enough to see down to the car below. As he was looking, he saw the two clergymen crawling out of the car windows to safety. Though drunk, he, in a slurred speech, cried out, "Hey, guys! Are you alright?" There was a moment of silence as the pastors caught their breath and then one of them replied, "We're OK, we've got Jesus." The drunk responded with concern in his voice, "Well, you better let him ride with me, you guys are gonna kill 'im." Of course, this is a joke, but what's happening today is not a joke. There are too many arguments between Christians, too many scenes like this are being played out before the unsaved and we're killing the Lord right before those whom he came to save. We're killing any desire that the unsaved may have to be part of the family of God.

[6.41]

How do we break free of denominational bondage? Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). Become a seeker of truth, let the Holy Spirit lead you, find a group, a church meeting as the early church did, one consulting God's blueprint for direction, one seeking answers rather than claiming they have them all. The truth shall set you free!

[6.42]

With so much to separate over, how can any of us hope to find peace and unity? There is only one possibility and that is to approach the word of God in the same way. This can only be accomplished if we accept, without dispute, some basic tenets of understanding. If we agree together on four simple truths, we can then find our way to truth and unity. We must first ask ourselves whether we should live by the old covenant, by the new covenant, or both. To answer this question, we must first turn to our most reliable source of truth, God's word. We know that sin is imputed (Romans 5:10) by the law and where there is no law, sin is not revealed. If we live under the old covenant of law, then we remain under its curse.

Romans 3:19-20

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (KJV)

[6.43]

The law was to us as a schoolmaster, we learned from those born under it that no man can keep it.

Romans 3:10

10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (KJV)

[6.44]

By the deeds of the law there can no flesh be saved.

Romans 3:20

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (KJV)

[6.45]

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Jesus has freed us from the curse of the law, we are no longer under that schoolmaster.

Galatians 3:13

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: (KJV)

Galatians 3:25

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. (KJV)

[6.46]

The old covenant offers much to us in the way of instruction; it puts God’s people in touch with their hopeless sinful condition and brings home to our hearts the need we have for a savior. It points us to God's ultimate plan of redemption; to the cross of sacrifice and the sinless offering made there to cleanse our souls of sin. It does all these things but it is this sacrifice made of God on our behalf that removes us from the consequences of the law (death). Through the grace of God that can only be received through faith, God has granted to us a better promise with better rewards.

Hebrews 8:6-7

6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. (KJV)

[6.47]

In short, we have been given a better covenant made possible through the son of God. He is the spotless, sinless lamb of God made perfect, he became the author of our eternal salvation.

Hebrews 5:9

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; (KJV)

[6.48]

Having said enough about this, we can now see that to live under the bondage of the law again would indeed be foolish.

Galatians 3:3-5

3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (KJV)

[6.49]

“If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Now we can say with confidence, that we are only committed to live within the parameters of the New Covenant.

[6.50]

Now having decided to live by the new covenant, we come to a more complex question. How much of the new covenant (testament) should we obey? Why is this a complex question? It seems so basic, so obvious. We should obey all of it! If you agree with this, you better consider first what the New Testament contains before you make this leap.

[6.51]

To mention just a few things contained in it, you may recall that Paul said, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man” (1 Timothy 2:12). The bible also states that women are to be in subjection to their own husbands and obey them in all things.

Ephesians 5:22-24

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (KJV)

[6.52]

They are to be silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34) and to wear a covering when they pray or prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:34). If you're not a woman you may be thinking to yourself, "That's OK with me." If so, hold on, there's a bunch more for men. If you are a woman, do you still think we should obey the entire new testament?

[6.53]

As men, we are required to take the oversight of our own homes and bring all family members into subjection. As men, we must not only accept responsibility for our own souls, but for those we care for as well (Hebrews 13:17). We are to be the spiritual leaders of our own homes. We are to model Christ for our wife and children. We are to work and provide for the daily needs of our families.

1 Timothy 5:8

8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. (KJV)

[6.54]

We must remove our hats and have nothing on our heads when praying or prophesying. We must keep our hair shorter than the hair of a woman if we choose to honor the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:4

4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. (KJV)

1 Corinthians 11:14

14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? (KJV)

[6.55]

Now, do you still insist we should obey all of the new testament?

[6.56]

Not only should we consider those things that are required from us as individuals, but also those things required as a church. Obedience and respect for leadership, serving and loving each other, being willing to lay down our lives for the brethren, parting our possessions and goods for any within our flock that have needs, thinking of others as better than ourselves, knowing the word of God well enough to be ready to give an answer to those who ask about the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15).

[6.57]

About this time, you're beginning to rethink your original position. Perhaps now you want to make a few exceptions and offer a few excuses as to why you no longer think you should obey the entire New Testament. Well, think again, you were right the first time.

2 Timothy 3:16

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (KJV)

[6.58]

Don't turn coward just because things don't suit your thinking but instead, realize that you must comply with his thinking and as hard as that may be to understand, he's right. It's his way or your way and now you get to choose. It was easy when you didn't have to humble yourself, when you didn't have to obey, but now it's different, change is required and it's not easy. Prepare to do all that the New Testament requires and leave out nothing. If you do this, you'll have taken the second of those four important steps needed to bring us all together into truth and unity. After all, which of the changes is impossible to achieve? If God has not asked the impossible of us, then where is the problem? If there is a problem, it might lie between his will and yours. You say that God is first in your life, right? You say you love him and want to obey him, well, here's your chance; here's where the rubber meets the road. When you can't reconcile obedience to God with your life style, then it's time to admit to yourself that you want Christ to be your savior because you want forgiveness for sin and eternal life with him. Don't you realize that disobedience to His word is disobedience to him? You want him for your savior but not for your Lord. He can only be Lord of your life when He has absolute authority over it. Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not the things which I say" (Lk 6:46)? Brethren, the word Lord in today's vocabulary is "boss". If Christ is not your Lord, can he be your savior? The answer is found in His word and that answer is NO!

Matthew 7:21

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (KJV)

[6.59]

Perhaps you're ready to give up without really trying. Try obeying the entire New Testament, you may find that the burden of it is light.

I John 5:2-3

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (KJV)

[6.60]

Our third important step is the most revealing in our quest to find the truth of scripture and the unity that follows it. Step two produced a lot of questions and doubts. It made you feel uncomfortable by suggesting a level of obedience you're not entirely satisfied with. It came into conflict with your pride, your desire for self determination. You began to make excuses, to justify your exceptions to God's word. Perhaps you felt that the things that bothered you were written to a particular people and did not extend you. Another justification is that of time. These unpleasant requirements were written to the people of that generation only and don't apply today. You might choose to believe that these restraints only apply to a particular ethnic group and thus don't fit today's customs. Of course, education provides another excuse when we assume that the lack of education among those required to obey is the reason for these rules and thus being better educated today we need not obey them.

[6.61]

The most often used excuse is none of the above. It's worse than any of the previously mentioned for it denies the biblical authorship of God. When we read God's word, the bible, and see something we like, for example, the grace or gifts of God, then we believe this to be God inspired, no matter who wrote the words down. When we don't like what we read, we immediately attribute it the uninspired words of a prejudiced scribe.

[6.62]

The Apostle Paul usually catches most of the blame because he wrote two thirds of the entire New Testament. We must remind ourselves at this point that if we hope to follow God's blueprint we must follow all of it. The entire plan and specification of God was conceived in the mind of God, protected by God and meticulously given to those men he personally selected to present it in the way He wanted it presented. The men selected were selected by God for their uniqueness. Each was carefully chosen for their individual personality and God foreknew how each man would express the thoughts and revelation he received from him. If this were not so he would have used more than just four of his Apostles as scribes, (Matthew, John, Paul and Peter), he would have used the other Apostles rather than Luke, Mark, James and Jude. It was their emotional expression he wanted, not their spiritual office.

[6.63]

God selected these men as a sculptor selects his instruments or an artist his brushes. Each was chosen for the end result. God, who knows all things, knew how each would express his message and picked each for their individual expression. Every word set down was as God wanted it (2 Timothy 3:16). Even when the Apostle Paul expressed a personal thought, he said, "I speak this by permission" (1 Corinthians 7:6). Who's permission? God's, that's who!

[6.64]

From the beginning to end the Holy Spirit was leading, directing, prompting and reminding.

John 14:26

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (KJV)

[6.65]

If you were to take a letter for your employer with the employer doing the dictation and you the writing, who would be the author? Who's signature would the document bear? Obviously your boss would be the author and you the scribe; it's no different in the word of God. Take a look at the book of Revelation, chapter one, verse one through nineteen, especially nineteen for a vivid example of this point. Can there be any doubt that every word of scripture was given by God to men of all generations? Who among us is wise enough to edit the word of God? Who would dare?

[6.66]

God wrote to one group of people; his people. The customs and traditions he gave to us in his word, i.e. baptism by water, the last supper, feet washing, head covering or uncovering, assembling together, bringing spiritual and material gifts to the church and obeying his law of love, are some of the observances required of the people of his kingdom. These are kingdom traditions and remain in effect until heaven and earth pass away and some won't pass away then. The things he gave us to do are not based on education, ethnic background or generation, they're based on our relationship with him. If we love him we'll keep his commandments.

John 13:15-17

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (KJV)

Acts 2:42

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (KJV)

[6.67]

As subjects of his kingdom we have our own identity and it's found in him. We have kingdom dress, kingdom customs, kingdom commemorations and kingdom authority. We have a king, he is the head of the kingdom. his commands, his desires, his requests must be observed as well as all else. Because the kingdom is spiritual it is peculiar to itself, there is none like it, it stands alone. The subjects of the kingdom are also peculiar, different from others because they have abandoned all to possess a spiritual kingdom and its king. These people have come out from among others; others they love, others they have known, others they were once a part of to join an invisible kingdom led by an unseen king that waits for us at the side of his father in a kingdom not yet fully come.

[6.68]

People of all origins have customs and traditions common to their heritage and God's people are no exception. We have our own ways, our own look and in a spiritual sense, our own language. Our King is also our God and we are his people. It was he who said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people (2 Corinthians 6:16). We can not be his people, we can not be subjects of his kingdom if we do not obey him. We can't pick and choose which of his regulations we will obey or disobey. We can't say we accept his commands but not those of his authorized representatives, the Apostles. Not that we can rightfully separate the two. If you have the spiritual eyes to see it and the spiritual ears to hear it, then read the parable of the wicked husbandmen (farmers) given in Matthew the twenty first chapter, verses thirty three through forty. See if you can then separate the servants from the householder. The servants (apostles and prophets) carried the words of the householder (God) to those to whom the land was entrusted (sinners) and were slain and beaten for their efforts. Can those who possessed the land say to the householder (God), "We didn't think you servants (the Apostles and prophets) were speaking for you." Do you really think God will over-look our disobedience because we attributed the commands to the servants rather than the king?

[6.69]

Imagine listening to our fellow believers standing before God and saying, "I'm sorry, God, I thought Paul, your Apostle, was just kidding. I thought he was just giving his opinion so I decided not to obey." The Apostles were not acting in their own authority but in the authority of God.

Joh 20:21

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. (KJV)

[6.70]

Is this not reason enough to obey (Hebrews 13:17)? How then, can we justify disobedience to any New Testament requirement? You say, "Isn't this getting legalistic?" Any obedience which comes from a heart filled with rebellion is legalism but who says we have to obey grudgingly? Why can't we see each new requirement as an opportunity to please God and offer it to him, from a heart of gladness? In the spirit of Hebrews 13:17, shouldn't we allow for our leaders to persuade us?

[6.71]

Attending church today is seen as an obligation, a duty to God, a place where we go to give instead of receive. Those of us blessed with a good fellowship have come to see it as God's way of supplying our spiritual needs. We see it as a place to charge our low spiritual batteries, to replenish and renew our spirit. If going to church is drudgery, why go? If going to church is like going to the theatre to watch a performance, then you need to find something real. The Lord delights in our praise and worship but if we go just to get a spiritual high and live from high to

high without making any commitment to him then we are treating the Spirit of God like a whore who gets visited for the momentary gratification she can supply. Why not just drop twenty dollars in the collection plate for services rendered and leave.

[6.72]

Being part of a church is being part of a love relationship. It's love received and love given. It's not about affection, the truth and quality of it is demonstrated in service. A man may tell his wife every day how much he loves her but if he never feeds her, clothes her, counsels or protects her, does he? He may have a full physically rewarding relationship with her but if her emotional, physical and spiritual needs are being ignored while her sexual needs are being met, can this be called love?

[6.73]

Can any of God's people feel they have a spiritually healthy relationship with him based on their spiritual highs or does service count for something? Wives tell their husbands of their love every time they wash their socks, mend their clothes or cook their meals. Obedience is better than sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:22

22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (KJV)

[6.74]

Our faith and love is born out in our service to our Lord.

[6.75]

Having said this, let's go back to the nuts and bolts of understanding biblical truth. The fourth and final thing we must understand about scripture is that it is literal and can only be approached in that way. God knew that the simplest way for his word to be understood is the most direct way and that way is literally. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line and the literal line of communication is both direct and straight. Paul said to the church at Corinth, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1). Straight talk is a good synonym for literal understanding.

[6.76]

When we say literal we're not saying that everything in God's word is presented in literal terms but rather the understanding of it will always break down to literal interpretation. Much of the bible is made up of historical events and requires no further explanation, however, many of these

events serve as spiritual examples that reveal spiritual truths as well, but these truths are literal truths with literal spiritual application.

1 Corinthians 10:11

11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (KJV)

[6.77]

Another means that God used to communicate with His people is through dreams and visions; literal dreams and literal visions. Though the dream or vision itself may have produced images of things not considered as actual, they were nevertheless things literally seen by the prophet or person who dreamed them. These dreamed images of the mind were given so as to reveal a literal message that would literally take place.

[6.78]

Yet another means of communication used was that of hyperbole or exaggeration. Christ used this as a means of putting a spiritual magnifying glass on a literal item of importance. An example of this can be found in Matthew.

Matthew 5:29-30

29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
(KJV)

[6.79]

Clearly what Jesus is saying is not that we should pluck out our eye or cut off our right hand, but by comparison it would be more profitable for us to lose our eye or hand than to perish in hell. If this isn't a literal truth then we don't understand what literal truth is. By using this exaggerated comparison Jesus teaches a literal fact, in this way Christ effectively uses hyperbole to demonstrate an eternal and practical truth.

[6.80]

Biblical history is quite naturally written in literal terms but many historical biblical events serve as foreshadows, teaching us spiritual truths as well. For example, Moses brought water forth from a rock in the wilderness; a rock he struck. When the rock was struck water flowed and thus God's people were spared from dying of thirst. When Christ was struck, or executed at the cross, his shed blood, cleansed and saved his people from death and eternal damnation. Clearly this historical event of the Old Testament was a literal foreshadow of the New Testament crucifixion.

Numbers 20:7-11

7 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?

11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. (KJV)

1 Corinthians 10:1-3

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; (KJV)

[6.81]

At first glance it would appear difficult to claim that dreams and visions are literal but remember, it's not the dream or vision that's important. It's nothing more than a conveyor of literal truth.

The important part of a dream or vision is its meaning and in all biblical prophecy the meaning, or if you prefer, interpretation is literal. In the eighth chapter of Daniel we find that Daniel had a dream. In this dream, he saw a ram with two horns, following this he saw a he goat having one large horn between his eyes that charged the ram at a speed so great that his feet didn't touch the ground. At this point you would say that nothing is literal but read what follows.

Dan 8:20-21

20 The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.

21 And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. (KJV)

[6.82]

The historical record clearly bears out the literal truth of this documented conflict between two world powers. Merely because a dream or a vision has yet to be understood in no way suggests that it doesn't have a literal explanation. Much of what the prophet Daniel recorded were dreams and vision that he himself did not understand but the meanings are clear and literally understood today.

Dan 12:8-9

8 And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. (KJV)

[6.83]

With the same reasoning we used for prophecy we can reduce the parables of scripture to literal truths. In Matthew, chapter thirteen, verses three through nine, Jesus told the parable of “The Sower.” It was an imaginary story, an allegory, used to bring life to a literal truth. The proof of this is found in the literal interpretation given in Matthew thirteen, verses thirty seven through forty two. There can be no doubt at this point; the bottom line for scriptural interpretation always results in literal truth. Does this mean that we understand the entire bible? NO! There are portions of prophetic scripture that are yet unfulfilled. You’ll know them when they come to pass but you can be sure they’ll be fulfilled literally.

[6.84]

The main purpose for examining this issue is to bring our thinking into one accord. There are many things about God that will remain unknown until we meet him face to face but the things he desired for us to know are declared in his word. Nothing God has spoken was spoken to confuse us. Some doctrines are man-made and based on the traditions of men rather than the word of God. Others were assembled in the imaginative mind of man and foisted on us in pride. These are based on scriptural supposition but have no foundation as a doctrine in the word of God. They are things that were never taught by Christ, Apostle or prophet. One of these is “predestination.” If we foolishly dare to probe this area of spiritual mystery we must do so in the knowledge that as yet we have insufficient evidence to arrive at any solid conclusions. If we enter into this mystery we must do so equipped with certain unchangeable facts. We must never attack or doubt God’s integrity. He is righteous, holy and truthful. Any suggestion that God creates or protects iniquity is absolute error and could be labeled blasphemous. Because this is not a God inspired doctrine we must never attempt to teach it as one.

[6.85]

If we all could agree together to approach the word of God in the perspectives just outlined, the results would be unity with other members of God’s family. We would find that soon we would all come to the same scriptural understanding. The byproduct of this would be an explosion of unity and love throughout the true body of Christ. Further, the construction of the early church would begin again. The blueprint for God’s spiritual house would once again be on the table and we would once again be gathered around that table to study and compare that blueprint to our lives and churches today.

Chapter 7

When Jesus Calls

[7.1]

In recent years the denominational church has turned its attention to the subject of discipleship. It has become fashionable to hold classes on this subject in an effort to increase laymen's participation in the rank and file duties of the church. Interests in this subject have been sparked elsewhere as well with a different agenda in mind. In this circle the name of the game is "control." Usually, though not exclusively, these are independent charismatic groups with doctrines designed to excite and please. Leadership is dedicated to growth and financial success is sometimes a hidden agenda. Often, gifted leaders use their gifts to gain power over the followers; the kind of power that possesses and manipulates those who have become accustomed to seeing their leaders as God's mediators. Often these leaders become predators and the sheep they lead the prey, especially young, vulnerable women or older women of substance.

[7.2]

Using discipleship as a method these self-serving wolves in sheep's clothing work their way into a position of trust. They demand absolute obedience from those they lead; they often use psychological manipulation inflict guilt on any who resist. "Don't I know best?" "Hasn't God placed me over you to protect and care for you?" "Why are you resisting God, you need to trust me." These are some of the more common phrases used to gain control. There are many injured among God's flock today because of these abusive tactics. For the abused and wounded "discipleship" has become a dirty word. Once again, the enemy of God has taken one of God's most effective weapons and turned it against His church. If this is the way you've seen it work then you haven't seen real discipleship. You've seen bondage applied in the name of discipleship. We have not been given a spirit of bandage but of power and of love.

Romans 8:15

15 For ye **have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear**; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (KJV)

2 Timothy 1:7

7 **For God hath not given us the spirit of fear**; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (KJV)

[7.3]

Many today have no idea what it means to be a disciple. Disciple-ship is not a boat that carries disciples, it's a way of life. It can't be taught in a three week course because it comes from experiential learning, nor is it about earthly control for it can only survive in an atmosphere of Godly freedom. It certainly is not for the faint of heart but rather for the strong and adventurous. To be a true disciple of Jesus Christ He must be your Lord. Not only must He be lord of your life but there must also exist a bond of love between you and He.

[7.4]

So then, your bondage must be a voluntary bondage of love and your control must be one of total surrender to Him because of your love. To surrender this love and obedience to another would be an act of infidelity. He must be preeminent in your life, nothing less will do. The word “disciple” comes from the word “discipline” and discipline has two major meanings. First, we must realize that whom the Lord loves He chastens.

Revelation 3:19

19 **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:** be zealous therefore, and repent. (KJV)

[7.5]

Christ learned obedience through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8) and we must do the same. He is the potter and we are the clay; He has the power over the clay to fashion it in whatever form He chooses.

Romans 9:20-21

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? **Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?**

21 **Hath not the potter power over the clay,** of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (KJV)

[7.6]

The form God has chosen is the image of His son.

Romans 8:29

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son,** that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (KJV)

[7.7]

The second meaning for discipline is that of earthly pursuit. For example, engineering is a discipline, or the study of music or mathematics. Discipleship's is a calling, a lifetime pursuit and therefore a discipline. Both of these definitions fit this calling. God will call us to this service once we have excepted His son and He will continue to instruct, correct, admonish and rebuke all who accept this challenge.

[7.8]

You may think at this point that college training is similar because they also instruct, correct, admonish and rebuke but there is one major difference. Your private life and your college life can be different but there can be no such split in your life as a disciple. In college your allegiance is to man but as a disciple it's to God. College is man's way of teaching but discipleship is God's.

[7.9]

Just as the institutional church today has been fooled into believing there is a difference between laity and clergy the institutional church has also fostered the belief that there are followers and disciples and both are saved. Wrong! We are all called to be clergy (priests) and we are all called to be disciples.

1 Peter 2:9

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (KJV)

John 8:31

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, **If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;**(KJV)

[7.10]

There were many who followed the Lord from place to place sitting on hillsides listening to His teachings, most of these were looking for a free lunch. Not much has changed, there are still many who visit Him, only today, they don't sit on hillsides, they sit in pews, but what they seek hasn't changed, they're still looking for a free lunch. The intent is the same receive, receive, receive and give as little as possible.

[7.11]

When asked to give their time or talents they either want to be paid for services rendered or they remind you that salvation is a free gift of grace not of works and they have no intention of getting on any kind of works trip. They need to be reminded of the following texts.

James 2:24

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.(KJV)

I John 2:3-4

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (KJV)

[7.12]

So you see how it is, no works, no faith; no faith, no grace; no grace, no salvation. **While it's possible to have works without faith it is impossible to have faith without works.**

James 2:20

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead?**(KJV)

[7.13]

If you think you can be a part of Christ's kingdom by listening to his words alone, you're wrong and you're deceived.

James 1:22

22 **But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.**(KJV)

[7.14]

Don't be deceived into believing that attending a church and claiming to be Christian is enough; it isn't! Being a follower of Christ isn't enough, you must be a disciple to really be a part of his kingdom. Following Jesus is just where it begins, there are strict requirements for disciples. Not only do you need to qualify to be a disciple, but the first requirement is that you must do it for love; you must want to be one with all your heart. No legalistic, self sacrificing, long faced, throw yourself on the alter of pity will do. You must present your body a living sacrifice, and do it with a smile on your face. They are then to teach, what Jesus had taught them (Matthew 28:18-20). We do likewise and He is always with us.

Note:The translation of the KJV renders "teaching" as the first part of Jesus' command, indicating the need to place converts under the teaching and discipline of Christ, thus disciplining them.

Romans 12:1

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your **reasonable service**. (KJV)

Matthew 5:11

11 Blessed are ye, when **men shall revile you**, and **persecute you**,and shall **say all manner of evil against you falsely**, for my sake. (KJV)

[7.15]

The love required is two-fold. First, we must love the Lord (Matthew 22:37). Second, we must love others as much as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). Yes, this is the way that others, both in and out of God's family, will know you are a disciple (John 13:35). The depth to which this love must grow exceeds life itself.

John 15:13

13 Greater love hath no man than this, **that a man lay down his life for his friends.**(KJV)

[7.16]

If we, as Christians, are to be Christ-like then we must be prepared to follow him in every way. Jesus gave his life for us because he loved us and because the Father loved us. If he laid down

his life for us then we should, it required, be able to lay down our life for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

[7.17]

Maybe you're thinking, "I'm not sure I'm ready for such a sacrifice." Maybe you're afraid. If you're to die for the brethren then consider how important it is to be able to identify those who are truly brethren from those who merely play at it. One may put fear aside and be willing to die for another brother or sister in Christ but should the sacrifice of your life be required, you may choose to look very closely at the life of the one for whom this sacrifice is to be given. Most of us in Christ are humbled at this suggestion but remember, this is the ultimate gift, "greater love hath no man than this." (John 15:13)

[7.18]

Brethren, do not focus on your ability to make such a gift but instead, concentrate on your capacity to love, for in love lies the secret to this gift. Many who would not have thought themselves able, have given their lives for husband, wife or children. Others have laid down their lives for friends or country. Why? Not out of duty, obligation or honor, for the most part, but out of love. Fear is a force to be reckoned with but when you're able to love another more than you love yourself, fear is put aside and love, that strongest of all emotions, gains the victory.

I John 4:17-18

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear:** because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (KJV)

[7.19]

You're still not convinced that you're strong enough for such a test? Don't worry about it, you won't have to face such a test until you're ready, we have his word on it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but **God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;** but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (KJV)

[7.20]

God will not let you succumb to the temptation of fear but will instead infuse you with the power of the Holy Spirit that you may stand and be able to bear it in the day of your testing. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Ph'p 4:13, 1 Pe 4:14).

[7.21]

Now that we've discussed the love that a disciple should have, let us now move to obedience. For if we indeed love our Lord then it follows that we will also obey him (John 14:15). Obedience is the very evidence of Christian love. Anyone who does not obey the commandments of God and claims to be a Christian is a liar and we have his word on it (1 John 2:3-4).

[7.22]

We can hear Jesus himself asking this question of those who have claimed to be Christians throughout these last two millenniums. He asks, "Why do you call me Lord and then continue to disobey me?" (Lk 6:46) How can Christ be the Lord of our life if we continue to do things contrary to his will? Are we Christians or Churchians? Have we focused on the bride rather than the bridegroom? Do we think the word "Lord" is a common name? Have we failed to recognize its meaning? Obviously some have, and some will continue not to recognize its meaning, for many will say to Him, when He returns, "Lord, didn't we prophecy in your name and in your name cast out demons?" His answer reveals that they never really understood what was involved in a Lord/servant relationship, for He answers, "depart from me, I never knew you, you workers of sin" (Matthew 7:22-23). He reminds us that not everyone who calls Him Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven but **only those who obey God's will**(Matthew 7:21). The prophet Samuel reminds us that to obey is better than sacrifice and to pay attention to God better than the best part of our gifts (1 Samuel 15:22).

[7.23]

For those disciples who really love Him, God's commandments are not too heavy to bear.

I John 5:2-3

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, **when we love God, and keep his commandments.**

3 **For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments:**and his commandments are not grievous. (KJV)

[7.24]

The yoke that we carry is His yoke and the burdens we carry are His also and neither rest heavily on the shoulders of those who have given Him their burdens (Matthew 11:29-30). He had to bear our sin, our guilt, and our shame; is it now too difficult to walk in the light of righteousness carrying the gospel of forgiveness on our shoulders? Is it a burden to carry the good news that God has forgiven our sins and offered a sacrifice for us; one that will remove all of its terrible consequences? Too many today are still clinging to the false belief that Christ can be our savior without being our Lord. The same misguided souls believe that it's possible to be a believer without ever becoming a disciple. Buying into this deceptive belief could cost you your soul.

[7.25]

Even in Jesus' day there were those who sought to become His disciples; men with good intentions but afraid to let go of their lives. Men who couldn't understand how to order their lives

according to God's priority. Men who followed the thinking of Martha rather than that of her sister, Mary. The Lord invites each of us to enter into the labors of his kingdom and feast with Him at his table when their labors are done, but many make excuses to avoid these labors, like those mentioned in the parable taught by Jesus in Luke fourteen, verses sixteen through twenty four. Not all excuses are false, some are real, but none are acceptable. Many of those who came to Jesus to be disciples were sincere but because they had their priorities confused were not accepted. One such individual was a scribe who desired to follow Jesus but was told that Jesus had no home, no fame or wealth to offer him (Matthew 8:19-20). One who had become a disciple desired to return and bury his father, but Jesus suggested he continue to follow Him and let others attend to his dead father (Matthew 8:21-22). Yet another man came asking how to obtain eternal life. Jesus told him, "Keep the commandments." The young man replied that he had kept them from his youth. Jesus then told him to go and sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor and then join Him as a disciple. The young man departed sadly because he couldn't let go of his worldly goods (Matthew 19:16-22).

[7.26]

It is not at all unusual for conduct like this to overtake those who, with all good intentions, became disciples. Discipleship is not for the weak but the strong and many fall short because they love this present world more than our Lord. When they do this they damage the very structure they came to build.

2 Timothy 4:10-11

10 **For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,** and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

11 Only Luke is with me. **Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.**(KJV)

[7.27]

Many who have heard the call of God refuse to answer and many who answer allow themselves to be turned. Like Lot's wife, they perish in sin and disobedience because they stopped to look back on the old life. Once we hear the call of Jesus our hearts, our thoughts, and our spiritual eyes must remain fixed on the road ahead (Lk 9:62). Only then do we have any hope of reaching the high calling of God.

Philippians 3:13-14

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,**

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (KJV)

[7.28]

The road of discipleship is the road of the cross. To take up the cross daily and follow Christ we must first learn how to discipline ourselves, or to accept discipline and this means denying ourselves (Lk 9:23). This doesn't just mean abandoning worldly material possessions but much

more. If we fail to count the whole cost we may at a later time find ourselves turning back, unable to finish what we began.

Luke 14:28-33

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and **counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?**

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, **This man began to build, and was not able to finish.**

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 **So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.**(KJV)

[7.29]

What does forsaking all you have really mean? Most often we think of money, land, houses, and goods but there are more precious things than these that may be lost. Jesus said he didn't come to bring peace but a sword, one that would divide a man from his father and a daughter against her mother and daughter in law against her mother in law. Yes, for the sake of following Christ you may well find your enemies to be those of your own household (Matthew 10:34-36).

[7.30]

Christ won't take second place. He must be preeminent in our lives if he is to be in our lives at all. Anyone who loves father or mother more than he is not worthy of him and he that loves son or daughter more than he is not worthy of him (Matthew 10:37). We read these words but in our hearts we can't imagine them ever coming to pass and when they do we're devastated. Why? Did Jesus keep these things secret? No! He told us plainly so why do we find it so shocking when faced with these loses? Jesus said, "He that forsakes not all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Your faithfulness to Christ could cause you to lose your whole family.

[7.31]

Some, by now are thinking, "I just want to be a believer, I don't want to be a disciple." They're thinking about the cost of discipleship and wondering how they got so deep into something that comes as a free gift from God. We're speaking of salvation, of course. Let's think about this for a moment. A friend gives you an automobile free, as a gift, and you accept it. Step one, the vehicle was offered. Step two, the vehicle was accepted. When you accepted the vehicle you accepted all the responsibilities that go with it. True, the automobile was free but there are taxes to be paid as well as registration fees each year. There is also the yearly inspection and the cost of fuel, oil, and routine maintenance. Perhaps you should have thought about it more carefully

before you accepted this free gift. Salvation is free also but the responsibility that goes with it is discipleship, let's be clear on this point so we'll have no need to turn back.

[7.32]

Having discussed those non-material things which discipleship may cost, let's now turn our attention to those things which are material. The early church disciples parted their possessions and goods as anyone among them had need (Acts 2:45). None regarded the things in their possession as their own (Acts 4:32-37) and those that made false promises to the Holy Spirit by holding back what was promised paid with their lives (Acts 5:1-11). The fear of God was in all of them and they gave great respect to those who lived this commitment. We need more fear of God in today's church. We need to take inventory of those things we say and do or perhaps don't do. We need to examine the promises we're making before we make them, after all, "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalms 111:10). We can't serve God and money (Matthew 6:24) therefore, doesn't it make sense not to stockpile wealth that will one day be destroyed by fire or left behind when we die. Wouldn't it be more profitable to lay up spiritual treasure that remains unaffected by thieves, fire, or our death, remember, where your treasure is your heart is also. Doesn't it make eternal sense to do your banking in the bank of heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)? Being a disciple is not only all about sacrifice, it's also about producing fruit.

John 15:8

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye **bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.**(KJV)

[7.33]

When we bear fruit we glorify God. What kind of fruit? Actually, several kinds. First, there is the **fruit of repentance**.

Matthew 3:8

8 **Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:** (KJV)

[7.34]

This fruit must come to maturity before we are eligible to receive the free gift of salvation previously mentioned. Then we must endure the chastening of God to bring forth the **fruit of righteousness**.

Hebrews 12:11

11 Now no **chastening** for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it **yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness** unto them which are exercised thereby. (KJV)

James 2:18

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and **I will shew thee my faith by my works.**(KJV)

[7.35]

After this we must allow the **fruit of the Holy Spirit** to take root in our hearts.

Galatians 5:22-23

22 But **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,**
23 **Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.**(KJV)

[7.36]

When we have yielded to the Spirit and the Spirit has yielded fruit in us we are then prepared to offer **fruit unto holiness.**

Romans 6:22

22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, **ye have your fruit unto holiness,** and the end everlasting life. (KJV)

[7.37]

Finally, we come to the **fruit of the kingdom;** the bottom line, souls. This is the fruit mentioned in John 12:24 and again in the fifteenth chapter of John. If we fail to bear this fruit then we have not gone forth as commanded.

John 15:16

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should **go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:** that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (KJV)

[7.38]

Failing to bring forth this fruit makes us useless and impotent as disciples, worth nothing as Christians except as kindling to feed the flames of God's fiery judgment.

John 15:2

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (KJV)

John 15:6

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and **cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**(KJV)

[7.39]

The Apostle Paul's plan was to bring forth fruit among each of these he ministered to (Ro 1:13) can we do any differently?

[7.40]

A disciple must never ignore God's word, we must study it and continue to live in it.

John 8:31

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, **If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;**(KJV)

[7.41]

This is the only way we have of receiving more truth from God. If we let Him, God will keep our cups running over but if we hope to receive more of God's truth we must share what we have with others. By doing this we break the chains of sinful bondage and enter into the light of truth; truth that chases the darkness and shadows of sins away and sets us free, free to serve God.

John 8:31-32

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
32 And **ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**(KJV)

[7.42]

In our pursuit of righteousness we must be careful not to be caught in the snare of self righteousness. To allow pride any room in our heart would be to invite the chains of bondage once again. Keep in mind that a disciple is not above his teacher or a servant above the one he serves (Matthew 10:24-25).

[7.43]

The disciple's obedience, his or her unselfish life style, their zeal for souls is born out of a love of God and their appreciation of the grace extended to them by a loving and forgiving Father. Acts of charity or kindness which come from a sense of duty have a different birthplace. They are born out of obligation or, in other words, the law. Sometimes these lines get obscured in our minds, we get confused as to the difference. Let's discuss this

[7.44]

Assuming you had a reason to visit a friend's house but was not acquainted with where he lived you would quite naturally ask him for directions. He would respond, either in written or verbal form, with a detailed explanation or map showing land marks, right and left turns, etc. If you fail to follow these instructions you'll fail to arrive at the correct destination. Consider such a list of instructions as the law. There is another way, however, to arrive at the correct intended destination. If your host agrees to lead you there; he in his car with you following behind, then all you need to do is keep your eyes on him and do what he does. When he turns you turn, when he stops, you stop, etc. In following, you will without thinking about it, make all the correct turns. **Jesus invites us all to follow him; this is grace.** When he walked the shores of Galilee he beckoned to some fishermen and said, "follow me and I will make you fishers of men." They did and men who were once bound by law were free to follow. These men became disciples. They

entered a relationship with their master; not a classroom relationship but a living, day to day, intimate, all seeing, relationship where nothing could be hid from another. They allowed themselves to be taught how to model truth, how to live it and how to walk in integrity. Their strength was not in what they learned but in the relationship they had with the one they learned it from.

[7.45]

Jesus is still calling those who have the spiritual ears to hear him. He is telling us to leave our nets of entrapment and entanglement behind, nets of ritual, man-made nets of tradition, nets of pyramid authority, nets of separation. He calls us to leave the doctrines of men and demons behind and receive only the doctrine of truth which He has spoken by His own mouth and recorded in the pages of scripture with His blood and the blood of the Apostles. Everyone is not called to be an Apostle, though we're all sent out. Everyone is not called to be a prophet, though we all have the capacity to hear God's voice. Everyone is not called to teach, though there's a teacher in all of us but everyone is called to discipleship. When we say "believer" we make reference to one who believes in their heart. Heart belief is belief that's put into action; belief that goes beyond words, belief that is demonstrated by your seen and unseen conduct. It's belief that knows and reveals the joy of serving the king of all creation. **"Believer" is just a synonym for disciple** and if any fail to accept this they'll miss their intended destination, God's kingdom, by approximately eighteen inches; the distance between their head and their heart.

[7.46]

The saddest prophecy given in scripture is found in Matthew seven, verse fourteen.

Matthew 7:13-14

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few there be that find it.** (KJV)

[7.47]

Indeed, few there be that find it. Truth is, we pass more people each day headed for everlasting contempt than those headed for everlasting life. Many, and probably most who read this chapter, will reject its conclusion, that true believers and disciples are one in the same. Accepting this truth would require many of us to make a serious change in our life and you know how we hate change. Many of us would rather deny this truth sitting on a church bench for the rest of our lives, comfortably headed for eternal destruction, than to search until finding the straight gate and having found it, pass through and follow the narrow way that lies beyond; a way that compels us to drag our cross as we go.

Matthew 16:24

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**(KJV)

[7.48]

Most of us will choose to believe that we can have our cake and eat it too. We'll deceive ourselves into believing that we, content to be hearers of the word and not doers, can walk the broad, well-traveled path with our bibles tucked securely under our arm while singing, "Nearer my God to thee" but as Angels watch us go, the hymn they may be singing with tears in their eyes is "Almost Persuaded."

[7.49]

You may say, "I don't have to be a disciple to be saved, all I need do is believe." Remember, even the demons believe and tremble.

James 2:19

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.(KJV)

Do you still feel you don't need to be a disciple to be saved?

Chapter 8

No Compromise

[8.1]

When the church of the Apostles, the early church of Acts, is placed side by side with today's church, the differences are staggering. Today many consider the church to be a building. In the first century the church was a body of believers and no thought was given to buildings at all. Today, a body of believers is generally regarded as a congregation which gathers to meet in a steepled building two or three times a week. In the early days, a body of believers was a group of disciples interacting with God and each other daily for the edification of the church and the advancement of the gospel. Today, those who call themselves by his name invest huge sums of his money to erect elaborate structures in which to worship him. In the early church, Christians worshipped God in the homes of fellow believers and used their money to care for those in need. Today, we have a program to guide and direct us in our worship. It's a step by step guide telling us when to sing, stand, sit, listen, give and go home. In the church of Acts, the Holy Spirit alone had this control; he taught, he led and gave gifts to men so they could edify one another.

[8.2]

What happened? How have we drifted so far from the original plan, the blueprint that the Apostles followed so faithfully? Before we can answer this question, we must first decide a few foundational questions, questions important enough to shape the entire course of our beliefs. These most serious questions are:

[8.3]

1. Did our Lord Jesus Christ leave us an unfinished blueprint for His church or a finished one?
2. Did He leave behind a work fully developed or in progress?
3. Were its walls to be of living stones built up into a spiritual house or was His house to be built of material things?
4. Should we be allowed to compromise His plans and specifications by adding to His design?
5. Did Christ give control of the church to us or did He choose to remain preeminent?

Acts 7:48-50

48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,
49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord:
or what is the place of my rest?
50 Hath not my hand made all these things? (KJV)

1 Corinthians 3:9

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. (KJV)

1 Corinthians 3:16

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (KJV)

Colossians 1:18

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (KJV)

[8.4]

If you're having trouble answering these basic questions then re-read chapter two of Acts; chapter two should be able to help you reach the proper conclusion. The Architect need not be present during all of the construction. He may leave others in charge of those details while he goes to prepare other dwellings (John 14:2-3) but he will return to the church construction site when all is finished. He must perform a detailed inspection of the church structure to assure himself that the integrity of his design has in no way been compromised but has instead been meticulously followed. Any failure to do so on the part of those trusted with its construction could result in serious penalties. This should be enough to bring seriousness to any leader's face. Leaders, think about it! Tampering with His betrothed bride could be hazardous to your spiritual health.

[8.5]

Now that we have these questions out of the way and have a common frame of reference we can at last begin to solve the mystery of what happened to the church. In one word, what happened was "Compromise". Compromise is a technique the world uses to solve its problems. It's a devise that is used to compensate for people's lack of ability to agree. It never completely satisfies because it's based on a flexible, moveable foundation like that of sand. As such, it can never totally satisfy those who engage in it. Unlike truth, which is absolute and never changes, the life of compromise is sustained by movement. It requires that those involved adjust or change positions to facilitate agreement. Agreement reached by compromise can never truly satisfy because neither party involved receives the full measure of their desire. It's based on the philosophy that "you must go along to get along". It has proven to be an effective tool in breaking logjams of pride in order to accomplish desired goals. Without total agreement it's the only practical course we as individuals can take to peace and productivity. Who can ever totally agree on anything? Such absolute unity could only come as a result of a miracle. That's exactly how it does come to those in the family of God! Our way to accomplish anything is as different and varied as we are and so our only solution as individuals is compromise. There is another way however; his way! Yes, we can do it God's way, by abandoning our own desires in favor of accomplishing His will and then it happens. The miracle takes place. Once we surrender totally as required in his word instead of part way, as required in compromise, we see the impossible become possible. God does not compromise with man. God is perfect so any compromise would necessitate a move away from perfection, something God will never do.

[8.6]

Compromise is a pollution of what God has declared to be his divine will. Psychology suggests that compromise is the solution for a happy home. This suggestion is not without merit if the home in question isn't centered on Christ. If it is, nothing less than total submission will do; submission of wife to husband, husband to wife and both to God and his word. There may be

room for compromise on superficial things within a marriage but there can be no compromise on any issue already addressed in God's word. How do you compromise truth? You can't? When compromise enters the spiritual community the spirit of truth leaves. When compromise enters the spiritual life of the believer it brings its cousins, deception and legalism with it.

[8.7]

In the early fourth century compromise reared its head in Rome, a nation that had made compromise one of its chief instruments of psychological bondage. Rome had used compromise from the beginning to rise to world power by accepting its conquered people's customs and ruling through them as well. Now, Rome began to influence the spiritual arena as well as the political by using the same tried and true tactics. By accepting the deity's of the nations it conquered, their religious icons and celebrations, they could keep rebellion to a minimum. Rome was an expert at compromise, the chief weapon in the arsenal of the politician.

[8.8]

Christianity was on the rise. Rome had unsuccessfully tried to stamp it out under the foot of violent oppression. The Roman nobility had even been affected and Rome's Emperor was at a crossroads as to what to do. Christianity was heretofore illegal and the consequence, though now relaxed, could be severe. Constantine had no desire to persecute his political allies among the nobility but they were continuing to advance Christian beliefs. What to do? Compromise; take Christianity out of the illegal category and make it legal in exchange for its control.

[8.9]

Some today have compromised their Christ-purchased, New Testament liberty by mixing the old covenant law of commandments with God's new covenant grace. Some insist on Friday evening or Saturday church meetings using the fourth commandment as justification. Others insist on serving a priesthood made up of those who have received special training like the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Many if not most of today's worshipers have chosen to regard the church meeting house as the house of the Lord and as such have lavished huge sums of money on it in spite of what Acts 7:48-50 has to say.

Acts 7:48-50

48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,
49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord:
or what is the place of my rest?

50 Hath not my hand made all these things? (KJV)

[8.10]

Have we somehow failed to realize that we are no longer bound by Old Covenant law? Are we willing to give up our blood bought liberty to wear the bracelets of bondage?

Galatians 3:3-5

3 Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain.

5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

[8.11]

Have we failed to realize that seeking to conform to the law of commandments brings about separation from Christ and separation from Christ results in the loss of our very salvation?

Galatians 5:4

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

James 2:10

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (KJV)

[8.12]

If keeping the Sabbath or dietary restrictions is still a requirement why did Paul under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, write Romans 14:5 or Colossians 2:16 or 1Timothy4:5? Those verses clearly set us free from old covenant laws and ordinances. Do we really want to compromise the new blood covenant of Christ by polluting it with old covenant law? Do we now think the old covenant wine skins are strong enough to contain the new covenant wine?

[8.13]

If compromise was marred it would have as its mate justification for when God's word is compromised justification always makes itself heard.

[8.14]

Throughout the Roman Empire each deity had its own temple, so why not this new Christian God? Until now Christians had gathered in private homes, obscure buildings, burial places or any place where they might be out from under the watchful eye of Rome. It had been this way for three hundred years but now, Constantine would provide Christianity with temples like all the other gods of Rome. He would become, through compromise, the benefactor of the church and its leader even if he had to destroy it in the process. He didn't, he couldn't, but he was successful in polluting it with idols, material wealth, false doctrine and a political structure that mirrored that of Rome, with himself, as both the leader of the state and leader of the church. Christianity had now taken first place among the religions of Rome and would soon occupy the only place in Rome.

[8.15]

Rome carried out its missionary work in the same way it accomplished its political goals and conquests. Once again using compromise, Rome, eager to expand its spiritual influence around the world, allowed pagan practices to be adopted into Christianity often substituting so called “Christian holiday’s” for pagan observances. It kept just enough of the pagan flavor, however, to attract the pagans to join. The pollution it picked up like an infection, spread through Christendom like a plague. After a time, it was difficult to determine who was having the most influence on who. The church still suffers from many of these same spiritual diseases today.

[8.16]

History vividly displays the corrosive effect that compromise had on the church, but what about other areas equally affected? Most individuals who regard themselves as Christians allow their occupations to compromise their relationship with God. How many times have we been kept from a church meeting because of our employment? Sometimes it’s an important business meeting, other times it’s overtime or some other seemingly critical situation that we allow to interfere with our relationship with God. How many times have we seen others affected in the same way? Too often, at a church meeting we hear, “Where’s John tonight?” Too often the answer is, “He had to work.” What’s worse, is we accept this excuse as valid. If this excuse has validity then clearly Christ is not first in our life. We must not serve God at the pleasure of our employer but rather our employers must have our attention when it pleases God. It pleases God to allow a man to feed his family and thus work but not at the expense of his relationship with that man.

[8.17]

Social activity often compromises our relationship with God as well. Too many are caught at little league with their children or out on the golf course on occasions when serving the body of Christ should have come first. Not all activity of this kind is wrong, most of the time it’s healthy and good but not when it interferes with the will or work of God and not when it negatively affects our relationship with him.

[8.18]

Perhaps the most dangerous place to compromise is within our own heart and mind. When we compromise our beliefs we become no better than Judas; we betray the very word of God. If a belief can’t stand the test of scripture then it should be changed or eliminated to conform to God’s word but if it has scriptural integrity then compromise can only change the truth into a lie. Many in the spirit of ecumenicity believe they’re accomplishing a greater good by promoting unity through compromise. In so doing they join forces with Rome for that is Roman church thinking and we’ve already discussed that and the power behind it.

[8.19]

In the world of governments and politics, compromise may be a necessary instrument to maintain peace and accomplish goals but in the family of God, his church, it’s a dirty word. There can be no room for compromise. Our God is perfect, he requires no modification or

change. He is truth and there is no shadow of turning in him. Brethren, friendship with the world is enmity with God (Js 4:4). We cannot serve two masters, we cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24). We must not compromise!

[8.20]

This world is one big ball of temptations. It calls to every soul. It says, "Come, play with me." It flashes a myriad of colorful images that appeal to our fleshly appetite, it beckons us to taste, touch, and see, indeed, it's pleasing to the eye not to mention our other senses. It calls us to stop, relax, and take a moment to listen to its sales pitch. It points at its many pleasures and invites us to try them. It dares us to walk in dark places, promising us adventure and suggesting it will share secrets with us unknown to others.

[8.21]

It begs us to compromise our love of God, our loyalty, our faithfulness and our commitment. It promises much but delivers only death and destruction. With one voice let us answer, "No Compromise!"

[8.22]

A rock-hard sinner can enjoy sin for a season. Sin has its pleasures, if it didn't where would the temptation be? If that rock hard sinner allows just a little of God's truth to enter, a little, and no more, then the rewards of sinful pleasure will quickly pass and lukewarm misery will soon replace it. A little truth is either too little or not enough.

[8.23]

This same truth holds when reversed also. A "wannabe" Christian, living a double life, is of all people, the most unhappy. Unhappy because he won't allow himself to completely receive sins' full benefit package free of guilt, and unhappy because living in this lukewarm life style he can never enter God's kingdom and realize the full inheritance of salvation and its joy.

Revelation 3:16

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. (KJV)

[8.24]

Many who attend a church today spend their entire life chasing the wind. They spend most of their life seeking power, fame or riches when they should have been involved in giving rather than getting. To achieve their goals, they stole time from their mate and children and justified it by telling themselves, their families, and their friends, that they were building a better life for their loved ones. They'll give their families material gifts but fail to supply the spiritual and emotional necessities needed to sustain a healthy marital and parental relationship. They fail to nurture the spiritual life of their loved ones in preparation for the kingdom to come. What does it

profit, brethren, if we gain the whole world and lose our own souls or perhaps the souls of the children God entrusted to us (Mk 8:36). Even though God's prophetic wife, Israel, acted like a harlot, when he forgave her he took her once again to be his wife and made a vow to her that demonstrated his understanding of her basic problem. She really never knew him.

Hosea 2:19-20

19 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD. (KJV)

[8.25]

Israel had been compromised; she had compromised her love, her faithfulness and her righteousness. She no longer walked in the light of belief but had been overtaken through compromise with the darkness of sin. Solomon, considered to possess more wisdom than any man alive, was brought down by compromise when he allowed his many wives the liberty of religious freedom, which is to say, he allowed them to worship and serve any god they chose. He ultimately became the victim of his own compromise (1 Kings 11:3-12).

[8.26]

His father, King David, compromised his relationship with God when he murdered a faithful subject and stole his wife, having already committed adultery with her (2 Samuel 11:1-27). David had been chosen by God to replace Saul, a king who had compromised God's trust in him by deliberately disobeying the word of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:1-23). So totally compromised was Saul that he actually consulted a witch for help before dying an enemy of God (1 Samuel 28:7-17).

[8.27]

This world is very tempting and pleasing to the eyes but the Spirit cries from deep within, "my child, don't you compromise." Some may have great enormous wealth, but the love of it will steal your soul, my brethren, don't you compromise. Some may twist the word of God and think themselves so wise, but that still small voice from deep within says, "my child, don't compromise."

[8.28]

What fellowship has light with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14)? Can a fountain bring forth water bitter and sweet (Jl 3:11)? Your family will ask you to compromise for their sake, your employer for theirs and your friends for theirs; even your spiritual leaders will beg you not to take a different path, though it may lead to greater truth. All of these lie ahead, but the greatest call for compromise will come from within and will bring reams of justifiable reasons to do so. You may note that each reason will be self-serving rather than God-serving.

[8.29]

Compromise is like a self-inflicted wound that won't stop bleeding until your spiritual life has completely drained away. It happens so slowly that you barely notice that you're spiritually growing weaker and weaker until finally there is no spiritual life left in you and only the silhouette of what used to be remains like an empty, abandoned shell. Let our battle cry be, "No Compromise!"

Chapter 9

Worthy to Suffer

[9.1]

A few decades ago a song entitled, “Everything is beautiful” hit the popular music charts. It remained popular for some time and reflected the sentiment of many then and also many today. It painted a rosy picture of life, nature and love; it lifted the spirits of those who heard it and that if nothing else gave it some redeeming value.

[9.2]

Many today walk through life with the naive idea that Christianity is a comfortable routine of attending church on a regular basis, staying on good terms with their neighbors, keeping their family in line and their lawn cut. Everything that’s good is supposed to happen to those who belong to the local church. Conflict in the home, trouble in the workplace, financial pressures and illness just aren’t supposed to happen to those who live quiet, orderly lives as professing believers.

[9.3]

When the storms of adversity strike those in this comfortable niche, the reaction is one of total surprise. Immediately, they feel that God has broken some unwritten agreement with them and they feel that, like Job, this trial is unfair. Some turn to other church assemblies that lay claim to a closer, more powerful relationship with the Holy Spirit; one that allows them to order up a miracle. Sometimes they get this miracle, but often they don’t. So disillusioned, they abandon their weak and fruitless walk with God altogether. Their attitude is, if God was really there, if he was really who he said he is, then he would have solved my problem the way I wanted him to.

[9.4]

Often, they’ve had their head so pumped up with the health and wealth doctrine that they’ve reduced the miracles of God to a simple name it and claim it formula by just using the right words. It’s kind of a type of witchcraft using incantations which include the most influential names in creation without regard for their will.

[9.5]

They usually begin, “In the name of Jesus, I command you;” the you that’s being commanded is usually some perceived demonic force which had gained control and is causing destruction in the life of the Christian under attack. Without a doubt Jesus is the right name to use when appealing to God, our heavenly father, for help and yes, we should seek his help whenever we’re overthrown by life’s problems.

[9.6]

Also true, is the reality that indeed we may be given divine help in whatever situation we're seeking it, but there are no guarantees. All the promises of God are made in covenant with his children. This means God is a something-for-something God. The largest little word in scripture, one with enormous implications is the word "if". "If you walk in the light." "If you keep my commandments." "If you continue in my word." Etc.

[9.7]

When we accept Christ, we give ourselves to God.

Romans 12:1

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (KJV)

[9.8]

We are no longer our own but have been bought with a price.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (KJV)

[9.9]

Therefore, any circumstance that befalls us happens by God's plan or his permission. The story of Job clearly illustrates this point. To think that Satan could touch anything that belongs totally to God without his permission diminishes the very power and authority of God. Why does God allow us to suffer and be tested? Why did he allow the children of Israel to suffer under Pharaoh for four hundred years? Why did he allow the prophets to be stoned or his only begotten son to be crucified? Why did he allow the Apostles to suffer a variety of horrible deaths or the early Christians to be used for sport in the Roman arena? Christ learned obedience throughout the things he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). Is it possible that God allows us to be tried, tempted and persecuted to fashion us into the image of Christ? Yes, it is!

[9.10]

Christ, himself, as our high priest, had to be taken from among us to represent us before God.

Hebrews 5:1

1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: (KJV)

[9.11]

Because he was taken from among men he was touched with the feelings of our infirmities and was in every way tempted as we.

Hebrews 4:15

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (KJV)

[9.12]

Christ himself felt the pain of being tempted and this is able to comfort those who are experiencing these trials. As a man he had no special advantage but like us, was made lower than the angels.

Hebrews 2:9

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (KJV)

[9.13]

Jonah discovered that once you've given yourself to God there's no going back. If you think that God can't bring judgment upon a man's life then ask yourself who prepared the large fish that swallowed Jonah.

Jonah 1:17

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (KJV)

[9.14]

God will either allow the forces of his enemy to test you or if need be, he will test you himself. God tempts no man to do evil, but he will allow a man to be tried.

James 1:13

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: (KJV)

[9.15]

The Christian must not think that all trials are Satan inspired; all are for our good, however. We are still the clay and he remains the potter. His work on our life continues as we feel his hands on our lives, molding and fashioning us into the image of Jesus. For this reason we should be at peace with our circumstances no matter what they are, once we have checked our relational position with God and found it not to be lacking.

1 Peter 4:12

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: (KJV)

[9.16]

We have the comfort of knowing always that our trials have been carefully weighed and formulated by God who will not allow anything to come upon us that we, with his help, can't handle.

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (KJV)

[9.17]

If we're to die with a fatal disease then let us die to his glory and if we are to live then let us live to his glory for we are not our own, we are his, to do with as he pleases.

The incredible truth that Jesus taught us reveals clearly that he was not trying to sell anybody on becoming a Christian. It had to be our choice. As a salesman, Jesus would have been a complete failure for he begins by asking all who are considering this step to first count the cost.

Luke 14:28-32

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (KJV)

[9.18]

Then, he reminds us that if the world hates us it hated him first and if they have persecuted him they will also persecute us.

John 15:18-20

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have

persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. (KJV)

[9.19]

The first rule of salesmanship is never discuss cost, only benefits; sounds like health and wealth doctrine. Another no-no is discussing any of the negative features of the product and clearly Jesus wants each of us in possession of all the facts. Only when we fully realize the seriousness of our decision and the possible consequences of it, can we truly give ourselves completely to it and to him.

[9.20]

In most of the so called “free world” Christians have lost the concept of suffering for their faithfulness to God. If any among us are being persecuted by the civil authorities we generally believe that they deserve whatever punishment befalls them for breaking the law. Little attention is given to whether or not the law violates any of God’s commands. It never occurs to many of us that we should obey the law of God rather than man.

Acts 5:29

29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. (KJV)

[9.21]

We think that what is legal is also moral but this is not so. Today, we kill unborn babies legally and we can buy pornography legally, etc. Many of us are spoiled, lulled to sleep in the arms of compromise and contentment and willing to let others fight the good fight for us.

[9.22]

If we stand against the tide of deception it will surely bring us enemies. This is true! Our families and friends will turn against us not to mention our neighbors, co-workers and spiritual leaders.

Matthew 10:34-36

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. (KJV)

[9.23]

No wonder Jesus said, “Count the cost.” Let’s remember that while salvation is free, having been bought and paid for by Christ, discipleship is not. Discipleship will cost you whatever life you have left and you can’t have salvation without discipleship; one grows out of the other. You can’t be saved and not serve God as a disciple. If you think you can, you’re already deceived

(Matthew 12:50) (Matthew 7:21-22) (Luke 6:46). As we grow and mature in Christ we begin to understand the workings of God. Though we will never in this lifetime fathom the mind of God, we will grow in our relationship to him and thus come to terms with some of his ways. The first thing we'll understand is that his ways are not our ways (Is 55:8-9).

[9.24]

Like most fathers, our heavenly Father delights in working with and through his children. This is to say, that he is more of a do it with us than a do it for us God. If he does it all for us how do we grow; how do we become like him? If we think we can't do it alone, we're right, but all things become possible when we work together with him (Ph'p 4:13). If, as disciples, our only goal in life is to please God and accomplish his will, then we can take comfort in the fact that in any endeavor we consider to be God's will, we cannot fail. If in our own eyes we think we have missed the mark, we in fact may have hit it. Often our perceived failures are God's greatest victories in our lives for in these we learn, grown and are changed.

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)

[9.25]

This concept will be difficult for many to understand, but the heart that truly seeks to please God, with no regard to self, can never fail. The outcome of any situation in which God is first, is that outcome God intended. If it's the outcome that God intended then how can we, as his servants, regard the outcome, no matter what it is, as failure? If God's will was for us to fail, then by failing we have, in spite of ourselves, succeeded.

[9.26]

As spoiled children accustomed to getting our own way and getting it when we want it, we have come to expect that God and Santa Claus are the same person. We make out our list of wants and he is supposed to deliver them on time according to our schedule. Like the fast food industry has taught us, we want it "our way" and we want it now! Not only do we want what we want, when we want it, but we want to be able to throw it away when we're tired of it. Any who are unprepared to accept any consequence of discipleship should seriously consider if they might be better off continuing in the pursuit of pleasures and treasures of this life. Half way is no way with God.

Revelation 3:15-16

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. (KJV)

[9.27]

Perhaps it would be better for you to enjoy sin for a season and suffer God's everlasting contempt. Maybe that's why Jesus said, "I would that you were hot or cold," it makes no sense at all to be in between. Again, like children, we want our cake and eat it, too, and we want it now! If any who read this simply-written, easy to understand text, are able to lightly brush it off and return to churchianity. They will have chosen to embrace a form of godliness which has no power.

[9.28]

They've already passed through the wide gate and are now traveling on the broad way that leads to destruction. Their denomination can't save them. Their parents can't and their profession won't. They stand alone when it comes to the day of judgment because like the Pharisees before them, they say and do not, they talk the talk but don't walk the walk (Matthew 23:3). Many think, I don't have to be persecuted or endure hardship to be a Christian. Jesus told us that we must take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 10:38). Anyone who does not forsake all he has cannot qualify for discipleship (Luke 14:33). The promise of scripture is that all who live Godly in Christ will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

[9.29]

You say, I don't want to be a radical, a Jesus freak. I just want to quietly serve the Lord by attending church and reading my bible. What you're really saying is, I want to hide my head in the sand, my light under a basket and become a secret Christian. Like the unprofitable servant you just want to take your talent (salvation) and bury it. Take a look at the consequences that servant paid (Matthew 25:30). Maybe when you finish that, you can read the fifteenth chapter of John, especially verse two, six and eight. There is no standing still in God; either we're growing in him or retreating away, there is no middle ground upon which to compromise.

[9.30]

We say we want to be like Jesus. Do we? Do we really? Will we follow a man so intent on accomplishing his God's will that we, like him, will give up our home, abandon any chance for monetary comfort, travel and teach free of charge and endure the ridicule of those esteemed among our own people? Are we willing to live by faith accepting the charity of others for our daily bread, confident that God will touch someone's heart daily so our needs will be met? As previously stated, will we make Christ part of our life and be satisfied that that's all that's needed or will we, holding back nothing, be prepared to give our very lives for the sake of the gospel; will we make Christ the very center of our existence, the core of our being and the heart of our life? Perhaps you're not ready yet for such a commitment. Don't be discouraged, just make sure you're still moving; moving toward him. If you're moving forward, you're not dead yet. If you're sliding back, you're dead already. If this is your condition, it's still not too late, we serve a God that raises the dead, assuming your soul can still be touched by his Spirit and these words on this page have the power to reach your heart.

[9.31]

A quarter of a century or more ago, a man sat on the steps of the Massachusetts state house drenched in gasoline protesting something he felt strongly about. He lit a match and became a human torch before the horrified eyes of watching spectator. No one could doubt his commitment to whatever cause he served, but in most circles, he was labeled a radical. Most who are willing to put their life on the line for an unpopular cause are labeled fanatics or radicals. Each of us as Christians must follow whatever course God has set for us. Not all are called to live exactly as Christ did in the day to day sense, but we are called to live as radically as his call on our lives demands. This means being willing to do what's unpopular, politically or socially unwise, in other words, be courageous enough to take a stand. Not all are called to live exactly as Christ did but all are called. Not all are required to endure crucifixion but all are required to take up their cross. Not all are called to bear the pains of loneliness and torture as Jesus and the Apostles did, but all who live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

2 Timothy 3:12

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (KJV)

All means all!

[9.32]

Christianity is neither a spectators sport nor a club for cowards. Since his fall from grace, Satan has never ceased to hate Christ in any form. Being a Christian means being like him and that's an invitation for all the powers of hell to come against you.

Ephesians 6:12

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (KJV)

[9.33]

There is no conventional way to defeat the forces of evil without demonstrating a willingness to do whatever may be necessary. To some, what may be required might seem radical. When Peter, James and John left the family business to follow Christ it was a radical decision. When Matthew left his profitable job as tax collector it was radical. When Paul divorced himself from all the honor, glory and power that was his as a Pharisee to follow the teachings of a dead itinerant preacher it was a radical decision and a radical life followed it; one of imprisonment, shipwreck, beatings and sacrifice (2 Corinthians 11:25-31). Discipleship is not for wimps!

[9.34]

One the day of Pentecost, Peter preached his first Spirit-filled sermon and three thousand came to know and follow Jesus. Not bad for a first effort. This came as no surprise, for Christ, himself, had prophesied that upon Peter the church would be officially launched (Matthew 16:18). Standing before three thousand people and holding their attention is no easy task for an unlearned fisherman; in the flesh he must have been scared half out of his mind. Of course, he wasn't speaking in the flesh but in the spirit. That same spirit had given him such command,

such boldness that one couldn't help noting that the only explainable reason for this miracle would have to be the influence of Jesus on Peter's life.

[9.35]

It's not easy to take that kind of responsibility, to exercise that kind of boldness even with the proper spiritual gifts. It takes character, trust in God and courage. Discipleship is not for shrinking violets, it's for the radical, the committed, those who have completely sold out to Christ. It's for those who have no image to preserve but desire only to cast the shadow of Christ over all they meet. Their boldness is a sign for all that they have been with Jesus. Not all are called to preach as Peter did, but no matter what your calling, you must carry it out with determination, lay self aside and accomplish it with a boldness which goes beyond the flesh.

[9.36]

If you succeed in yielding to the spirit in this way, speaking truth in boldness whenever opportunity and the leading of the Spirit permit, you will undoubtedly develop a rare but well known social disease we call spiritual leprosy. This can cause a great deal of suffering to those who must bear it. Like Jeremiah the prophet, you'll find that you're no longer welcome in many social and even religious circles. Friends, having heard of your radical stand for Christ, will not want to associate with the "Jesus freak" you've become. We're not speaking here of those immature types newly saved who run around without plan, purpose or permission, thumping their friends, neighbors and anybody who will listen over the head with their new found faith. We're talking about mature Christians who are fully prepared and qualified to reach into those closed, sensitive areas of your life and by love, God's word, and their example, draw you closer to the Lord.

[9.37]

Those disciples carry and demonstrate truth, that which is sharper than a two edged sword. For this reason people will back away from them, ignore or insult them and treat them like lepers. Why? They're terrified of being cut by the surgical edge of that sharp two edged sword of truth. It hurts when family and friends laugh behind your back or poke fun at you. It hurts when they speak lies about you behind closed doors. Often, they discourage those seeking God's help from listening to you because, in their words, you're a religious fanatic or worse, they'll claim you're part of a cult. Many will go as far as forbidding you to talk to them or any of their family. Even clergy will begin to warn their congregations about your heresy. If you're armed with sound doctrine, the enemy of God will do whatever he can to keep those he's deceived locked securely in his camp. He knows if their able to hear the truth without a prejudiced mind, their likely to cross over to God's real kingdom and one more for God is one less for him.

[9.38]

Not many are counted worthy enough to suffer for the Lord; most of the suffering we experience comes as a direct result of our own improper behavior. For most, suffering for the sake of righteousness is a foreign concept. The most widely held belief is that we suffer for wrong doing

and get rewarded for doing right. Real servants of God's kingdom have come to realize, however, that this is not always true, especially in the service of the Lord.

[9.39]

In the service of God we can often measure the damage done to the satanic world by the amount of persecution coming against God's disciples. Conversely, we can determine how effective our contribution to God's kingdom is by the personal attention given us by its enemies.

[9.40]

The sermon on the mount is considered by many to be the heart of Christ's teachings. If this is so then the beatitudes found in Matthew, chapter five would have to be the very center of this heart. Step by step, these very important truths are built one upon another. Consider particularly the promise given in verse six, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Compare this verse with verses ten and eleven.

Matthew 5:10-12

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (KJV)

[9.41]

Notice the promise given in verse six is followed by its normal consequences found in verse ten and eleven.

[9.42]

No sooner had the church begun at Pentecost when the persecution began. In Acts two, Peter's sermon got things underway but by Acts four, they're being interrogated by the high priest Caiaphas together with other rulers, elders and scribes. In Acts five, the Apostles are imprisoned (Acts 5:18), in Acts six, a young believer names Stephen is being falsely accused (Acts 6:13) and in the seventh chapter, they drag this same young man out of the city to stone him. Wrapped in the serenity of the moment, caught in the vision he had of Christ standing at the right hand of God, the Father, Stephen never wavered, never acknowledged the pain inflicted on him as he closed his eyes to sleep in Christ (Acts 7:55).

[9.43]

Giving ones life for ones belief is not something new, men have been throwing themselves on the altar of sacrifice since they understood the meaning of love. They'll die for love of God, love of country, love of family, love of freedom and love of friends. We've seen this inspiring gesture

made throughout the pages of history. There is nothing more noble, more unselfish than this but before offering this one time gift, we should make sure that reason is worthy of the sacrifice. If we, as Christians, are to be prepared to die as Stephen did, we, like Stephen, should experience the joy of giving that goes with it. If we are to lay our lives down for the brethren, then we should be certain in our own heart that they are brethren and not just men playing church.

I John 3:16

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (KJV)

[9.44]

Returning to the beatitudes, Jesus not only reminds us that we will be persecuted for righteousness sake but that we should rejoice when we are (Matthew 5:12). In fact, we are not only to be glad, but exceedingly glad. All gifts given to God must be gifts from the heart. Any who give grudgingly would be better off not giving at all; if the gift is not given from the heart, it's not acceptable to God. Those who worship God through giving must worship him in Spirit and truth, in deed and in truth, with the hand and the heart.

John 4:23-24

23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (KJV)

[9.45]

Alright, we may be called upon to give our life for God or even a brother, but must we be happy about it? Yes, but we must understand the reason why in order to truly rejoice. Jesus tells us that if we are persecuted for righteousness, we should be very happy because great is our reward in heaven. He reminds us that when we do this we stand in the company of the persecuted prophets that came before us. Not bad company to be in and good reason to be happy (Matthew 5:12). Few Christians are called upon to give their lives but all are required to suffer and to rejoice in the occasion.

[9.46]

Maybe this explains why the Apostles, after being imprisoned, interrogated, beaten and released left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy the suffer the shame of imprisonment and punishment for the sake of Christ.

Acts 5:41

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. (KJV)

[9.47]

In fact, the next verse reveals that this experience may have actually inspired them. Maintaining an attitude of joy during persecution does not mean pretending to rejoice; it does not mean putting the best face on a bad situation, either. It means to be in full awareness of the privilege that is ours if we, as His servants, are fortunate enough to be honored by being awarded this select kind of service. It is the same as being given the position of personal attendant to Christ. Can there be any better reason to rejoice?

[9.48]

We may never know how the Apostle Peter really died but it is believed by many that he, too, was crucified. According to one account he was crucified upside down at his request because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified in the same position as his Lord. Peter was an Apostle and as an Apostle many believe that he was some kind of superman with special protection not afforded the common folk, but this is not true, for many have done the way of Peter. Since the first century, God's blueprint has been stained repeatedly by the blood of martyrs who, like Peter, offered their lives with joy. Documents centering on the Roman Arena record many Christians who, while being devoured by lions, died singing praises to God. They didn't sacrifice their lives, they gave them as an offering of love. They were worthy to suffer!

[9.49]

John Hooper was also worthy. During King Edward's reign, John Hooper served as bishop over two dioceses, his conduct was a model of Paul's requirements set down in his letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-9). He had no thought for personal wealth; his life was completely absorbed in the care and salvation of God's flock. He was a generous man who was known to give away whatever money came his way. On two occasions, John Foxe, a teacher at Oxford, who had embarrassed Protestantism, was a guest at Hooper's house. It is Foxe that receives the credit for recording the story of Hooper. On both visits, Foxe recalls how he saw Hooper's house filled with beggars and poor folk eating meat at Hooper's table. A servant told Foxe that this scene took place nightly before John Hooper sat down to eat his own meal.

[9.50]

For more than two years Hooper served as bishop during King Edwards's reign. After Edward's death, Mary was crowned queen and remembering her Catholic roots, she turned the country back to Catholicism using whatever force necessary to achieve her purposes. It is little wonder she became known as "bloody Mary". Mary had no sooner come to power when she ordered Hooper to report to London where he was at once imprisoned. He remained in prison for eighteen months. In poor health and forced to spend his limited resources on food, Hooper waited for trial.

[9.51]

On March 19, 1554, John Hooper was called before the bishops of London, Llandalf, Winchester, Chichester and Durham and temporarily stripped of his bishoprics. On the 22 nd day of January, 1555, the Bishop of Winchester sent for him and demanded he forsake his beliefs and

recognize the Pope as the spiritual leader of the Church of England. To do so would mean pardon. Others had already been pardoned for renouncing their former belief and pledging their loyalty to the Pope, but not Hooper; he refused.

[9.52]

It was January 28, 1555, when Hooper appeared before Winchester and company. At this time he was given another opportunity to accept the Pope and the Catholic Church as his spiritual authority. On this same day another Protestant brother whose name was Rogers was also being interrogated. As they left accompanied by their guards both men came face to face. "Brother Rogers," said Hooper, "Should we take this matter in hand and begin to fry these faggots?" Hooper knew the fate of both Rogers and himself would be that of burning at the stake if he did not recant. It was to this he referred when he called himself and Rogers faggots (kindling wood).

[9.53]

Rogers reply was, "Yes, Sir, by God's grace. Be sure, God will give strength." Hooper was then taken back to Newgate Prison where he spent six days. On February 4th, the Bishop of London officially stripped Hooper of all his church offices and responsibility and Hooper was sent to Gloucester to await execution.

[9.54]

Finally, on February 5th, 1555, Hooper was brought to the stake. To ease the suffering and bring death quicker, one of Hooper's guards had given him several packages of gun powder. Hooper placed the packages under his arms and between his legs. Three irons were brought to fasten him to the stake. One was to be placed around his neck, one around his legs and a third around his waist. These would hold him tightly to the stake but Hooper refused the neck and leg irons and suggested that the waist iron would be enough. Just the one around his waist was used.

[9.55]

Hooper then took the opportunity to forgive the man whose job it was to make the fire. The wood was placed around Hooper and set afire, but the lumber was green and it did not flare up quickly as it was supposed to. Instead it went out and had to be re-ignited the wind did not favor the flames and blew them away from Hooper and once again did not flare up quickly as it was supposed to. The fire was started for the third time. The gunpowder exploded but did not do its intended job because of the wind.

[9.56]

Cooking slowly in the flames, Hooper's mouth was black, his tongue swollen but his lips continued moving until they shrank to the gums. Hooper pounded on his chest with his hands until one of his arms fell off. He continued pounding with the other. Fat, water and blood began dripping from the ends of his fingers until his hand became stuck to the iron band around his waist.

[9.57]

Hooper was in the fire for over forty five minutes, suffering agony beyond description until the lower part of his body burned away and his intestines poured out. Now, John Hooper has been crowned in glory, clothed in the white linen of righteousness as a blessed martyr. Now he knows the joys of being made worthy to suffer; now, he is ready to receive the reward of all those who have been faithful to Christ.

[9.58]

Christ was ready to die for us, are we now ready to die for Him? Have we counted the cost? Are we worthy to suffer?

Romans 8:18

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (KJV)

Romans 8:35-39

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (KJV)

Chapter 10

Why Not Walk On Water

[10.1]

Let's begin this final chapter by looking at a conversation that took place between Jesus and Peter. Jesus and Peter had many conversations but none like this one. This one was special. This was the first recorded dialogue Jesus had with Peter since Peter denied Him. Jesus, now clothed in His heavenly body, turned His attention to Peter and asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" With his denial still fresh in his mind, Peter answered, "Yes, Lord; Thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus replied, "Feed my lambs." Again, Jesus asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" and once again Peter replied, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus responded, "Feed my sheep." When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him for the third time, Peter was grieved because He asked him this question three times and he said to the Lord, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." To this Jesus once again replied by asking Peter to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). Immediately after this, Jesus informed Peter that in his old age he would be required by others to go where he didn't want to go, indicating by what death he should glorify God. After this, we see Jesus speaking the same two words to Peter that He first spoke to him, "Follow me." Jesus speaks these same two words to all who have the spiritual ears to hear them.

[10.2]

Remember that Peter, like each of us, had denied the Lord. Sitting outside the house of Ciaphas, he denied Jesus three times. It had been early that same evening when Peter had heard Jesus say that all of his disciples would be offended because of Him. Peter was quick to counter this by replying, "though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matthew 26:33). Later, we find Peter sleeping on duty when his Lord is facing his most critical trial. Many of us, like Peter, have fallen asleep on duty failing to protect our Lord from those who seek to destroy Him and His work. Though Jesus had taught Peter to turn the other cheek, Peter abandoned all he had learned to lash out, and strike with a sword, one of those who come to arrest Jesus. In one night Peter had gone from arguing that he might be the greatest in God's kingdom to vowing he would never deny Jesus though his very life be threatened (Matthew 26:35). Peter then falls asleep on duty, cuts off the ear of one of the high priest servants (John 18:26), and three times denies Christ outside of the very place when Christ is being held on trial.

[10.3]

It seems as though Peter's commitment to Christ began to hemorrhage and bleed out in one night. Many of us experience the same downhill slide. We attend a service of revival meetings, get all pumped up like some large balloon and slowly loose the air of conviction we received at the meeting. We've never moved from being hearers of the word to doers. Hearers of the word are like spectators at a sporting event. They get all excited during the event and some of that excitement may even spill over into the next few days, but eventually it passes.

[10.4]

Being a disciple is very different; it's like being the athlete. As an athlete, you're training or competing constantly and your spirit is continually being renewed with the expectation of victory and the reward it brings, though it brings aches and pains as well. Many today shy away from the degree of dedication required to be an athlete or disciple for fear of the investment needed, the sacrifice required and the suffering endured. Some are afraid to become a disciple for fear they may catch the spiritual leprosy associated with the radicals.

[10.5]

Getting back to Peter, remember Jesus said, "Do you love me?" and then said, "feed my lambs and sheep." Who are His sheep? Who are His lambs? We know that lambs are young sheep, therefore, if we can determine who the sheep are we should have no trouble understanding what Jesus means. The sheep, according to the scripture, are believers; disciples that know the voice of their master and shepherd, Jesus Christ.

John 10:26-27

26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: (KJV)

[10.6]

Jesus has linked two elements together here. He has equated the feeding of His sheep (believers) with loving Him. Notice that this compares very favorably with His discourse in Matthew the twenty fifth chapter, verses thirty one through forty six; "In as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Who are His brethren? He answers clearly those that do the will of His Father (Matthew 12:50). So, then, if we truly love Him we must feed His flock. We must feed them, attending to their needs in the flesh and we must satisfy their spiritual hunger as well. We should understand that the latter has eternal implications while the former has only temporal.

[10.7]

Jesus used three metaphors to portray the people of this earth. He refers to those who are His, as sheep. Sheep are interesting animals. They'll lie quietly for hours then one of them will raise their head, sound an alarm, and begin to run and hop right into the barbed wire fence that contains them. Sheep require a lot more care and maintenance than cattle and they become easily attached to their shepherd and fearful of all others. It is easy to see why Jesus picked this metaphor for Christians.

[10.8]

Jesus also spoke of goats in Matthew, twenty-five: Many of the same characteristics found in sheep are evident in goats also. This may explain why they get along so well. Goats, however, have a strong propensity to butt, an annoying trait for any who work among them. Goats feed on

things that sheep wouldn't dream of. They're not nearly as discriminating when it comes to food physical or spiritual. Goats are a metaphor for those self-centered, bible-toting, hypocrites who need nothing more because they have it all. The truth is there and they're perfectly capable of feeding themselves without help from anyone. They're easy to recognize because they, like all goats, like to butt. When you're trying to feed them sound doctrine they're going but, but, but, but what about this and what about that, etc.

[10.9]

Finally, we come to those individuals who prey upon the sheep, the wolves. Wolves and sheep look nothing alike and so many sheep graze peacefully, unaware that spiritual wolves first disguise themselves as sheep so they can walk unnoticed among the sheep, taking them by deception and killing them with lies, rituals, false doctrine, legalistic practices and the traditions of men. Wolves, being more aggressive in nature, find sheep willing to let them lead while the sheep blindly follow. They dominate, isolate and then ravage the flock and by the time the sheep become aware of their true identity it's too late; all that's left is those wounded, lost and dead. Wolves are those with smooth tongues, those who come dressed in the trappings of religious leadership, those who come as prophets or teachers prepared to deceive any and all who are foolish enough to allow them to.

Luke 20:46-47

46 Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts;

47 Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation. (KJV)

Matthew 7:15

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (KJV)

[10.10]

Capitalizing on this truth, many leaders today frighten their sheep into remaining within their grasp. They warn them about the dangers outside so as to keep them under their control. This way, they can isolate them, cut them off from any association with other flocks or other shepherds. This is also a tactic of the work for those in Christ have nothing to fear if they're anchored solidly in Christ and His word. This is why it's so important to feed His sheep. What should we feed them that will protect them from the wolves that seek to destroy them? We must make them strong in character, strong in integrity and strong in the word. We must feed them sound doctrine to equip their mind and teach them, through discipleship, how to model it by living what they've learned. This truth will set them free; free to follow the Chief Shepherd; free to hear and recognize His voice in any flock and free to follow Him anywhere He leads. If we're properly fed and equipped we can enter any flock, hear any teacher and know by God's spirit and by His word if the flock is of sheep or goats and if its leaders are shepherd or wolves. Those unequipped with sound doctrine need to be nurtured within the church body until they're reached spiritual maturity. The teachers within a true church body must dedicate themselves to equipping

the saints with the sound doctrine truth. Only when they've properly prepared with the truth are they truly set free. How would the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation ever have reached our ears if those men of God that first heard it never moved beyond their own assembly? God seeks those who both know and live the truth to send into His harvest. First, we must know, then we must grow and finally, we must go. Our mission in Christ is to teach others to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (KJV)

[10.11]

God's will is for His kingdom to be expanded and how shall it be expanded without teachers? How shall teachers make a difference if they never reach those who need to be taught? God wants all who call upon the name of Jesus to grow up to maturity so they can nurture others to do the same. Many of God's children are afraid to step out for God. Many fear running ahead of His will and so never move. How angry do you think God will be if in trying with all your heart to serve Him, you make a wrong move? Many shrink back, so afraid of making the wrong move, that they make no move at all. Better to die actively seeking to accomplish His will than die waiting to discover what it is. If you're not equipped with the truth then seek it. If you have the truth, then live it. If you live the truth, then share it. Get off the bench and get in the game!

[10.12]

The most formidable instruments of deterrence used against those who desire to forsake all and follow Christ are those who are closest to them; usually members of their own biological or spiritual family.

Matthew 10:36

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. (KJV)

[10.13]

God's call is heard within. Your own body is God's temple and His spirit dwells in you. His voice will be heard first from within though often it may be confirmed from without. That still, small voice will speak to you, just as it did to Samuel and Elijah.

1 Kings 19:12

12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (KJV)

[10.14]

When God calls He will first speak to you before confirming it through anyone; He will not call you through others. When He called Moses, He spoke to Moses and when He called Paul, He

spoke directly to Paul. This is His plan; this is consistent with His blueprint for His kingdom and your life.

[10.15]

God never intended that we should remain good little sheep but that we should become good little shepherds. To do this, brethren, we must shake off all earthly influences and grow up. Turn now to the fourteenth chapter of Matthew, beginning in the twenty-second verse and reading through verse thirty-three.

Matthew 14:22-33

22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God. (KJV)

[10.16]

Let's take a close look at what happened in this text. Peter saw Jesus coming toward the boat, walking on water. He was fascinated, captivated, entranced, how could anybody walk on water? He was convinced that if the Lord allowed and bid him, too, he also could walk on water. He first had to make sure that it was the will of Christ; the will of God. Now notice, that Peter had first to ask then he and he alone had to take that faith testing first step. Do you suppose he had sufficient faith or did God prove He was Peter's father also by increasing his faith; taking him by his spiritual hand, so to speak, and helping him take that first step.

[10.17]

Peter's confidence grew as he drew closer to the Lord. Peter's eyes were fixed on Jesus. As long as Peter's eyes remained on Jesus, he walked in the power and authority of Christ and he didn't sink, but when he became concerned with the circumstances around him, the tempest of wind

and waves, he began to sink. Notice that even when his faith was weakening, the Lord rewarded him for his effort and would not let him drown.

[10.18]

There's a lesson to be learned here, brethren. As long as you keep your life focused on Christ He will not let you sink. If you make a mistake but your heart is bent on serving the Lord and you continue moving in His direction, He will not let you go. It would take a special person, a peculiar person, a dedicated person to step from the boat to the water knowing it meant defying all the laws of nature but Peter proved himself to be a radical, a peculiar person, a true disciple.

[10.19]

Peter had the guts, the spirit of adventure, and the fortitude to take the risk. He didn't need three days to think it over, he didn't need to study the principles of buoyancy or physics to make up his mind. All he had to know was that Christ said, "Come". Peter got out of the boat, out of the security of that vessel into the winds, into the waves, into the tempest of the storm.

[10.20]

Others stayed behind in fear. Peter certainly wasn't the greatest thinker among them. If he had been he probably would have reasoned that walking on water is impossible unless you know where those stones were hidden just beneath the surface. Yes, Peter was no brain surgeon or rocket scientist; he was just simple enough to follow Jesus. Jesus didn't walk over to the boat, put his arm around Peter's waist and lift him into the water while holding him. No, He stood off a ways with arms out-stretched as a father does when his child is just learning to walk. Then Jesus, like a father, said, "Come," and Peter, like an anxious child, simply did what Jesus asked. The rest of the disciples cowering with fear thought Jesus was a ghost, and were afraid to get out of the boat, to leave the safety of this man-made craft, to walk on a Jesus-made sea. Only Peter had the courage and faith to move toward Jesus and share this incredible, supernatural experience with Him. Do you think when Peter returned to the boat, he thought, "That was a silly thing to do. I don't know why I did that, boy, I'm lucky to be alive. I'll never do that again?" No, Peter didn't think like that. Even though he began to sink, even though he felt his life was threatened he wasn't the least bit sorry for the experience. He most likely told all of his companions and all of his relatives about the experience he alone shared with Jesus when together they stood and walked on water. What an incredible tale, what a phenomenal adventure and Peter became richer for it. Peter had grown to love Jesus and as we have said before, perfect love casts out all fear. Peter may have had his problems at the end. He is so like many of us; so inconsistent, so awkward in his daily walk but he always had a willing heart. Let's keep in mind that when Peter crawled over the side of that boat, he did it without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Peter and the rest of the disciples didn't come into that experience until John, chapter twenty and verse twenty-two.

John 20:22

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: (KJV)

Christ was with Peter, as was His Spirit, but it was not yet in him or any of the other disciples.

John 14:17

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (KJV)

[10.21]

Can there be any doubt that Peter truly loved and trusted Christ? Who else was eager to try their hand at water walking? Some of us have heard of fire-walkers but how many water walkers have you seen or heard of?

Proverbs 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.
6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (KJV)

[10.22]

These two verses are among the most quoted in scripture; the most quoted but also the most ignored. Peter trusted in the Lord with all his heart, he didn't stop to lean on his understanding, he merely acknowledged Christ and the path that led to Him. Somehow, Peter knew that his foot would come to rest upon the waves and they would bear his weight. He knew that what was impossible with men was possible with God. He knew that he could do all things through Christ who would strengthen him (Matthew 19:26) (Philemon 4:13).

[10.23]

If we ask for bread will God give us a stone (Matthew 7:9)? We know He won't. If we are truly seeking the will of God with no ulterior motive, we need not worry about falling for God will have His way with us; God's hand will be in all we do. Why? Because He says so (Proverbs 3:5-6). God will not let you sink but you must get out of the boat! You must walk on the water, living water (John 7:38-39). What if I sink? What if I make a fool of myself? What if I make a mistake? So What! It's not important. The important thing is building your faith by trusting the Lord. Stop worrying, it's God's responsibility to take care of you, but it's your responsibility to serve Him; keep your eyes on Jesus. Do you believe Romans 8:28?

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)

[10.24]

If you believe this, then it's time to get out of the boat; your boat, whatever and wherever it may be. Discover for yourself that you can walk on water; living water; the Holy Spirit.

[10.25]

When Jesus approached that boat, Peter saw an opportunity, the others saw a ghost. When Peter saw Jesus on the water, he was filled with wonder and the spirit of adventure filled him. The others were filled with the spirit of fear. While the others shook with fear, Peter shook with excitement and expectation. The others could have, they should have, but Peter did. When it was over, all the others could do was admit to everyone they didn't have the faith to try but Peter had the testimony of accomplishment. Peter had proved that Christ alone was sufficient to sustain him.

[10.26]

Peter's love for Christ had conquered his fear of death; his love was greater than his fear and the testimony of his faith and love remain forever recorded in the word of God. Many of us cling tightly to our little mad-made boats of home, job, denomination, culture or tradition. We huddle in some sinking corner of our boat afraid to take that first step; afraid to test our faith and God's word. We haven't been called of God to represent Him in fear but in boldness. Only a special class of people could meet such a challenge and that is exactly what God has called us to be.

Deuteronomy 14:2

2 For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth. (KJV)

[10.27]

Perhaps you think this text is meant only for those in the Old Testament or only for Jews, if so, then read first Peter, chapter two and verse nine of the New Testament.

1 Peter 2:9

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (KJV)

[10.28]

How can we be a peculiar person, a person sanctified, filled with the Holy spirit, a person living in righteous obedience before God if you never leave the artificial safety and comfort of the boat? How can we ever hope to walk in heavenly places if we never leave the fearful confines of this world?

[10.29]

Brethren, each of us must face our own test. For one young pastor it was leaving behind a church that had grown from a bible study he had taught in upstate New York to go two and a half thousand miles away to a mission field in Mexico. This meant leaving friends and loved ones behind. First, he had to be prepared to go. For him, this meant visiting the area in which he would serve, determining what needs beside the gospel that he might be able to fill then making the arrangements to prepare himself to meet those needs.

[10.30]

He learned that the greatest need in the area to which God had called him was child delivery. He promptly returned home to seek out a doctor or nurse practitioner who would be willing to return with him. Though he looked for months he found no one. Frustrated, but still convinced God had called him, he visited a local hospital and spoke with the chief obstetrician, the head of the obstetrics department. He felt ridiculous asking, but he summoned up the courage to ask the doctor if he would train him to deliver babies in the mission field. To his amazement, the doctor replied with a reluctant yes. Later, our missionary learned the doctor was convinced he would abandon this notion in a few days when he saw the incredible amount of study and stress required to accomplish this task. He didn't know that God had another plan in mind.

[10.31]

The resident physicians with whom the missionary would be training had just enough college boy in them to find the prospect of training an "off the street" pastor to be amusing. These residents were required to spend twenty-four hours a day at the hospital. They found by teaching another what they had just learned and converting it into simple layman language was good practice and fortified their own understanding. The pastor spent sixteen hours a day, six days a week, at the hospital preparing for the mission field. Only on Sunday did he allow himself the opportunity to rest, though he continued to preach on Sundays as well. He continued this rigorous routine for almost one year. Not only did he learn to deliver babies but finished a rotation in the emergency room.

[10.32]

At last, the training was completed, the pastor had by this time delivered more than a few babies under the watchful eyes of graduate doctors and was, in their opinion, ready to go to Mexico. Only two questions remained. First, he had not practiced as a minister in a denominational setting, therefore, he had no financial backing from a mission board. He had made up his mind that if his call was truly from God, then God would provide. His second problem seemed to be even greater. He had no formal credentials with which to impress the Mexican government to allow him to practice his newly learned skills.

[10.33]

He arrived in Texas with a few others who accompanied him, some of which he had convinced the hospital to train with him. Together they found employment in Texas just across the border from their chosen mission field. At first, they worked on one side of the border to earn their daily bread and buy the medical supplies needed on the other side in Mexico. The pastor then visited the administrative head of the local Mexican Health Department with whom he had secured an appointment. He prayed repeatedly for God's intervention and help, realizing that all his training and preparation would be for nothing if he failed to get permission from this agency to practice. The pastor spoke no Spanish, creating one more obstacle to be overcome.

[10.34]

Many of the brethren he had left behind in New York scoffed at him and predicted failure. They commented he was crazy to believe that Mexico was going to allow him to practice obstetrics on their citizens but undaunted by this criticism, he steadfastly forged ahead. Now, he sat outside the office of the one man who could approve or destroy all his hopes. When he was at last shown into the administrator's office he was relieved to find that he spoke English fairly well, but this in no way assured him success. After a lengthy interview in which the pastor had opportunity to present his plan to work among the poor in the poorest colonies delivering babies, etc, the administrator listened patiently, but gave no indication of support or resistance, in fact, he remained virtuously emotionless. The meeting ended when the administrator promised to send two doctors to the pastor's residence to verbally test his knowledge and understanding of labor, delivery and medicine in general.

[10.35]

Several days later, as agreed, the pastor was visited by two promised physicians who spent the greater part of two days asking question after question but giving no indication as to whether or not they approved. A few days after the verbal examination, he was summoned to the administration office for the answer he had so long waited for. After waiting for what seemed forever, he was at last shown into the administrator's office. The two men exchanged handshakes and the administrator began to relate how impressed his doctors were with the pastor's knowledge. The pastor thought that the administrator was just letting him down easy. Finally, with all the small talk out of the way, the administrator looked directly into the pastor's eyes with a serious look which matched the serious tone of his voice and said, "You won't be able to charge any fees for your services and you won't be allowed to practice near the office of any Mexican doctor, do you understand?"

[10.36]

The pastor replied anxiously, "Yes Sir, I understand." He continued, "Very well. I'm issuing you this document giving you permission to practice general medicine in this corner of Mexico." Overwhelmed, the pastor replied, "Sir, I just want to deliver babies among the poor. I never asked to practice medicine." Once more the administrator responded, "My doctors assured me that you know how to use antibiotics and many of our people suffer from infections in these areas. I think we can trust you to do what you can to help."

"When can I start?"

"As soon as you like."

"Can I start today?"

"By all means," replied the administrator and the pastor's heart began pounding with excitement as he turned and left.

[10.37]

The pastor practiced for about seven and a half years, sharing the gospel, healing the sick and delivering well over one thousand babies. He delivered them on both sides of the border legally. On the American side, he practiced as a midwife for a small fee which he used to support himself

and buy the supplies which he used on the Mexican side to deliver babies and attend to the sick for free. He never did get use to the term midwife, but he learned to live with it.

[10.38]

He would have continued his ministry there, but long hours of service took their toll on his health as well as the strain of ministry and he had to return home to rest upon learning he had a potentially fatal heart problem. Today, he counts it all joy and regards those seven and one half years as some of the most fruitful in his life. This experience had revealed to him what it means to walk on water; to leave the boat and follow Jesus. He had delivered babies before but that was in the safe environment of an American hospital with loads of emergency equipment and skilled doctors to assist should any problems arise. It was only a short time later when the pastor found himself delivering the second child of a twenty-eight year old Mexican woman who had no husband and no money. He was scared and exited at the same time. Trying to act calm and confident in front of the patient but praying like crazy within, he delivered a healthy six and a half pounder and well over a thousand more. He had seen only one baby that died during pregnancy, but God graciously allowed him 100% survival of both mothers and babies of all he delivered. Birth is truly a miracle of God as is learning to walk on water.

[10.39]

Brethren, please understand that sitting on a church bench all the way to hell is not what God wants for us. Doing today the same thing we did yesterday and the day before is not what Jesus has in mind. We must leave our comfort zone, reach for the mark of the prize, dare to walk on water.

[10.40]

Let's go back to the beginning; back where true discipleship began; back to the shores of Galilee, back to where men were going about their day by day routines, back to that first day when, for the first time, they heard the call of Jesus.

Matthew 4:18-23

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

(KJV)

[10.41]

Can you get your mind around what you just read? Peter and Andrew, his brother, dropped their nets, left their family business and their father, got out of the boat and followed Jesus (Matthew 4:18-20). When Jesus called they didn't say let me discuss this with Dad. They didn't say let us talk about it and we'll let you know or can you wait until we're finished what we're doing. No, they went as the scriptures say, straightway, or in today's language, immediately. Likewise, when He called James and John, they were in a boat with Zebedee, their father, mending nets and they left nets and father to follow Him and never hesitated, but left immediately (Matthew 4:21-22).

[10.42]

If they hadn't left when Jesus called, they would have missed His teachings in the synagogues of Galilee. They would have missed His preaching on the kingdom, His healing of the sick and His curing of disease among their people (Matthew 4:23). They were learning a new discipline, they were studying under a new master, serving a new king in a new kingdom. Had they remained in their comfortable little boat, they would have missed it all.

[10.43]

Many today have no idea what they're missing because they're too afraid to move, too frightened to step out in faith and walk on the living water of the Spirit. Jesus calls "follow me" but one by one, we begin to make excuses. If our faith was real, our relationship in Christ based on love rather than a wish, we would respond with action.

[10.44]

Can we be doing anything more important? Can we be involved with anything or anybody that would be more critical than following Him? We wonder why our spiritual lives are drying up; why they lack meaning. Without following Christ, our lives have no purpose. What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith and has not works? Can faith save him (Js 2:14)? Can we be hearers of the word without being doers? Are we deceiving ourselves? Is it possible that we will be among those who, when they reach the judgment seat of Christ, will hear Him say, "Depart from me. I never know you" (Matthew 7:22-23)? Many seem so sure of themselves, so confident. If you're one of these, then perhaps you can answer why His word refers to our salvation as the blessed hope?

Titus 2:13

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; (KJV)

[10.45]

Do you suppose that these fishermen never attended a synagogue, never visited the temple? Unthinkable! They were, most probably, as committed to their religious lifestyle as we are to ours but they put it down and walked away. They left the old wine with its old wine skin behind because they had, like the wedding guests at the feast of Cana, discovered the deep, rich,

compelling flavor of the new wine and knew it would take a new wine skin, a new stronger, peculiar container, to hold it and they were volunteering for the position (Matthew 9:17). Do you think their priests, the Pharisees, were content to see them leave? More likely, their priests, parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends and neighbors all asked them if they had lost their mind. “How can you leave your home, family and business behind?” “How can you just leave your boats to rot, drop your nets and just walk off to follow a man of no reputation?” But they did. They left their nets behind, the things which had caught them; the safety of home and family of income and religious custom, the comfort of the familiar, things that had sustained them all their lives and simply walked away.

[10.46]

So many of us, like the fishermen, are out there, in the world, trying to catch a living, a home, a comfortable and secure life, but it's we that are instead caught by it. It's we who are trapped, caught in the snare of getting. How do we ever hope to walk by faith if we never leave the boat, if we never learn to walk on water? How do we hope to understand God's eternal, spiritual plan, His blueprint, if we don't have the faith to see it, understand and follow it? The disciples left their boats and nets behind, will you? Disciples of God have love one for another (John 13:35), they bear much fruit (John 15:8), they forsake all that they have (Luke 14:33). If we can't stand the heat maybe its time we got out of the kitchen. Perhaps now we can understand why the gate is straight, the way narrow and few find it (Matthew 7:14). The population of God's kingdom will be a lot smaller than that dumped into the lake of fire; a lot smaller than most of us realize or care to think about and the requirements for citizenship are a lot narrower than most of us want to believe. Will we leave the boat or will we shiver in a corner of it? When Jesus bids us to walk on the water, will we hold back, allowing our fears to control our faith?

[10.47]

Brethren, don't hold back when you hear Him call; He may not call again. Don't worry about failing in your attempt, worry instead about failing to make an attempt. God will sustain you. Yes, you will slip, but the Lord's hand will uphold you when you stumble.

Psalms 37:23-24

23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. (KJV)

[10.48]

Are you ready now to return to the church that Jesus built, the early church, the church of Acts, the only model Jesus left us that meets His blueprint? You may be thinking, “I can't live so complete a commitment, I want to, but I'm not ready.” If your present church hasn't prepared you after all this time then you should realize now that it hasn't done its job. If you ever hope to reach the mark of the prize, God's highest calling for your life, then your only hope is reconstruction according to His blueprint. Take your inadequate, insecure self to a body of Christians who live in Christ and can prepare you to reach the goals of true discipleship. You

don't have to be a finished product to get out of the boat, you need only the courage it takes to take the first step. Peter wasn't a finished product, he was just a willing one.

[10.49]

What is an early church? How do I find one? Where do I look? First, look to Christ, then listen to your heart, then seek what you're looking for with all your heart, praying each day for God's guidance. Check the internet for the early church web sites that have information. Share this book with others and if they hear God through it begin to meet together with them. Remember, where two or more are gathered together in His name, He will be among you.

Matthew 18:20

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (KJV)

[10.50]

Put aside all denominational doctrine and begin together to search the scriptures with an eye to locating and destroying false hand-me-down doctrine within yourself. Take the plank out of your own eyes before trying to remove it from your brother's. Buy nothing with your offerings except perhaps a communion set and let your resources be used to care for one another within the assembly. Let any excess be used to advance God's kingdom through the distribution of biblical materials and charity, giving to those in need in the name of Christ. Write songs and poems, give teachings that reflect sound doctrine and tolerate nothing that is staged, phony, hollow or designed to entertain. Don't be afraid to have fun for there is nothing wrong with feeling a spirit of joy when worshipping. Do everything according to God's word. Judge everything according to God's word and do not use it for personal gain. Let your leaders be recognized by the assembly as those who must meet God's standard for leadership as established in His word. Let your goals be to raise everyone to leadership level so that there be only leaders and leaders in training among you. Come into complete agreement with each other on all spiritual and doctrinal things, for unity will be the key to God's power among you. Do not regard this as an impossibility but as a goal. The miraculous appearance of total doctrinal unity among you will be a sign to you of His approval.

[10.51]

Search the blueprint and build exactly as it requires. Do not build any portion of it off the foundation specified. Do not add or take away anything from it. Do not try to combine the wine of the Old Testament with the wine of the New, but instead follow the New Testament completely with a willing a joyful heart. All of it was given by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, prophets and teachers to us and it all bears His seal.

[10.52]

Do not become an island to yourself. Home churches are usually small and need the strength that comes with fellowshiping with other home churches. Don't let your focus be fixed within by

getting into self-analysis but instead look out over the fields the Lord has left us to harvest. Do not place an intellectual bookend on your learning for God is constantly revealing truth to all who remain open and yielded. Learn from each other. Seek to challenge and correct your doctrines always and be grateful to those who help. Examine any who come to you claiming to have special knowledge from God but listen carefully, they may have something you need. Do not allow yourselves to be included in any scheme that combines two or more churches together under a common earthly leadership and do not invest the Lord's money in anything that will not stand the test of fire.

[10.53]

Do not become impressed with titles, educational credentials, materials or political power. God doesn't look on the outward but on the heart. If possible, live in close proximity so you can be a daily testimony to each other. Use your homes and tables to accommodate the brethren or those who would like to be. Serve one another always, let forgiveness be a sign of your love toward each other. Pray, for the days grow short and the time of His appearing grows near and the day will come when we will no longer walk on the tempestuous waters of this life but instead will rise to meet Jesus in the air. Until then, let's keep on keeping on. Amen.