A photograph of a shepherd in a dark coat and hat, carrying a long staff, leading a large flock of sheep up a dirt path. The sheep are densely packed and looking towards the camera. The background is a steep, eroded dirt hillside.

CHRIST

HEAD OF HIS CHURCH

Steve Phillips

*An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land;
The prophets prophesy falsely
And the priests rule on their own authority,
And My people love it so!
But what will you do in the end of it?
Jeremiah 5:30,31*

**God's ancient people were abandoned because
They were filled with influences from the East
Isaiah 2:6**

**The Jews of Jesus' day lost all because
They taught as doctrines the precepts of men
Mark 7:7**

**In latter times, deceiving spirits and demonic doctrines
Will influence many to turn aside from Truth
Unto myths, according to their own lusts
1 Timothy 4:1 2 Timothy 4:3,4**

**And Jesus said, unless you repent,
I will remove your testimony and
Vomit you out of My mouth**

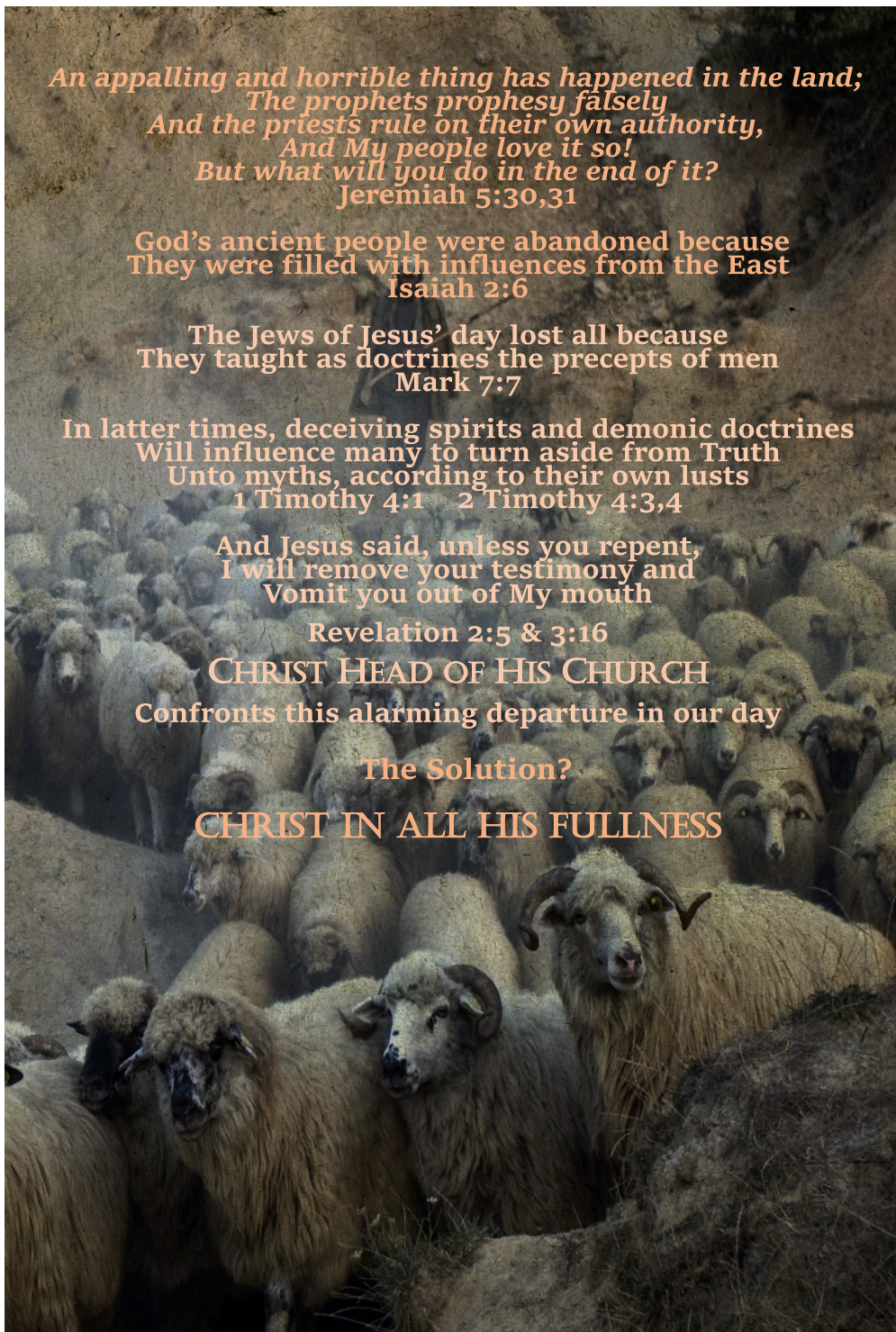
Revelation 2:5 & 3:16

CHRIST HEAD OF HIS CHURCH

Confronts this alarming departure in our day

The Solution?

CHRIST IN ALL HIS FULLNESS



Christ

Head of His Church

By
Steve Phillips

CHRIST: HEAD OF HIS CHURCH

by
Steve Phillips

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CONTENTS

- 1 Christ is All** page 4
- 2 Vain** page 11
- 3 Self** page 12
- 4 Devotion to Christ** page 14
- 5 Where Ya Goin'?** page 25
- 6 Christ the Wonderful Counselor** page 27
- 7 Good Question** page 36
- 8 The Stumbling Block of the Cross** page 38
- 9 Meekness** page 48
- 10 Set Your Mind** page 50
- 11 Pride & Dust** page 52
- 12 The Great House** page 56
- 13 I Hate Christianity** page 67
- 14 Slaying the Beast** page 70
- 15 True Unity** page 72
- 16 The Gist of the Ist and the Ism of the Schism** page 79

- 17 Bricks & Stones** page 81
- 18 The Leaven of the Pharisees** page 84
- 19 Hypocrites** page 93
- 20 Women in Ministry** page 95
- 21 Shame in the Pulpit** page 108
- 22 Christ Our Passover** page 112
- 23 Fear** page 125
- 24 The Gospel of Technology** page 127
- 25 Culture and the Kingdom of Heaven** page 131
- 26 Decline** page 141
- 27 Love Not the World** page 143
- 28 Doctrine of Demons** page 153
- 29 Den of Thieves** page 155
- 30 The World From Above** page 161
- 31 Christ the Teacher** page 162
- 32 Lucifer Invents Positive Confession** page 191
- 33 What & Why** page 193

- 34 Sects** page 194
- 35 Dust Bin Sermons** page 195
- 36 Sammy Goes to Church** page 197
- 37 Killing Kids in Mother's Milk** page 212
- 38 Judging the Prophets** page 213
- 39 Brick For Stone: Nimrod and Christ** page 219
- 40 Pillars of Death** page 243
- 41 One Another** page 256
- 42 Christ Head of His Church** page 259

1

CHRIST IS ALL

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain

Phil.1:21

Christianity is no moral reformation. It is a new creation. Existing raw materials have not been employed. Nothing in the natural realm is contributory. Our God does not utilize what is at hand to fashion something new. He did not do so in the beginning. He does not do so now.

“What is seen was not made out of things which are visible” -Heb.11:3. All was brought into being by His Word. He spoke and it came to pass. He commanded and it stood forth. Substance and reality result from omnipotence.

And creative power is as surely required to bring forth spiritual life. Darkness is upon the face of the deep of our hearts [Gen.1:2]. Sin has rendered us more formless and void than the first ancient ocean.

But the Spirit of God is moving over this vast waste as He did then. Order can yet arise out of chaos. Light may still diffuse darkness. And the God of heaven is still in the business of making men in His own image. But it is His work to do so.

Residual in dust is not to be found the image of heaven. We are of earth. It was into this that the breath of God exhaled. Then life animated the clay and the image of God was seen. “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground” -Gen.2:7. This body, fashioned as it was by God, was not yet in His image.

It was merely the shell, a tangible dwelling. It was an earthly tent to house the Divine. It remained a lifeless form until imbued with life from above.

And the clay had no hand in it. That dust, named Adam, could not arise from where he lay. He had neither power nor will to do so. He was nothing but dust apart from the breath of God.

Only the Lord of heaven can create something out of nothing; and we are not that creator. Life comes from above. The image of God in man was a creative act in Eden.

It is ever as much so in the church. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" -Eph.2:10. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, all things have become new" -2 Cor.5:17.

The old was discarded. It had no value. It will not be discovered as annexed into the new.

An amalgam of human contrivance and Divine creation will never be forged. Only in the fantasy of an alchemist can the flesh bring forth spirit.

They are mutually exclusive realms. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" -Jn.3:6.

No quantum leap can transfer from one domain to the next. Many attempt it. All fail. Modify, adorn, or discipline it as you may, we remain flesh.

And "the flesh profits nothing" -Jn.6:63. It is this that condemns all efforts at the outset.

Undisputed as this is from the lips of our Lord Jesus, endeavors have not been abandoned. Religionists doggedly continue their pursuits undeterred either by the Scriptures or their manifest failures.

Israelites were masters at this. "Jews outwardly in the flesh" -Rm.2:28 was their signal identity and zenith of attainment.

But modifying the external did not alter the internal. The flesh adjusted could not affect the spirit within. Circumcision did not reach their hearts.

And this is the crux of the dilemma. An external religious act in the flesh does nothing to transform one's heart. To this, the religion of circumcision aptly testifies.

Circumcision is a religious act performed by the hand of man. It modifies the flesh. It excises a portion while leaving the whole intact.

The man ends up surviving the religious event. The assembly of the circumcised fancy themselves as distinguished from the

commonplace. They are different from those abiding in their natural condition; and it was their own doing that made them so.

As such, self has cause to congratulate. An air of superiority swells its conceits. "They desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh" -Gal.6:13. But the flesh has nothing to boast of.

In it "dwells no good thing" -Rm.7:18. Cutting off certain aspects of it yet leaves nothing good remaining. It must be removed altogether.

A cross accomplishes this effectively and finally. No known survivors have endured its treatment. The cross puts to death all that we are in the flesh.

All that offends, which is all that we are, is brought to an end. A cross terminates the totality of our life and breath. Here, the flesh is finished.

It is God's remedy. It silences pride. Only madmen boast that they have been counted worthy of crucifixion. But boast in the cross we may, yes, we must [Gal.6:14]. For it is the only solution to what we are in the flesh.

No amount of modification to it can change its basic nature. It is for this reason that all religions of man abysmally fail. "For in Christ Jesus, neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" -Gal.6:15.

Circumcision is nothing, for it does not change what we are by nature. "Nothing good" and "profitless" are all that the flesh may claim. Thus, it must be eliminated: and so, the cross.

The cross leaves nothing with which to work in the natural realm. It cancels any conceivable contribution of its victim.

Christianity is a new creation. Life must come from another realm. It is not self-generated. Its origin is not discovered in the recipient.

The root supports the stem, not vice versa. Vital sap courses from source to the sustained, and not otherwise. It is the vine that supplies each branch, but not contrariwise. For what is a branch apart from the vine?

What has it to boast of? Certainly nothing arising from its own beauty, strength, or utility. All glory is in its root. From there the life sap saturates its fragile stem.

The branch originates nothing. Its only purpose is to bear fruit. Yet this is wholly dependent upon the living flow which permeates its every fiber. It must abide in the vine or it withers, dies, and is cast into the fire [Jn.15:6].

“I am the Vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in Him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” -Jn.15:5. There is no other source: for fruit is the outward effect of inward life.

Consider well this question: Do the efforts of the branch account for its fruit? The answer hardly need be stated. “Apart from Me you can do nothing:” nothing to glorify God or benefit man. Fruitless is the branch apart from Him. Actually, it is dead.

“Goodness, righteousness, and truth” -Eph.5:9 cannot possibly bud from dried twigs. It is the life within that is everything. This is so with any living organism. The component parts only function as they are animated internally.

A hand can do nothing apart from the head. It is from “the Head, Christ, that the entire body grows with a growth which is from God”- Eph.4:15; Col.2:19. All development or impulse to action comes from the head.

The hand initiates nothing as do none of the members. The head governs all. Life is not localized in particular portions of the body only. It infuses each irrespective of function.

None can boast. It is not of their doing that differences exist or that they have life at all. Theirs was not the choice whether to be part of the body or not. This, the Creator determined.

It is not the son who selects his parents. This was settled at conception: and that apart from consultation with the embryo to be. All that his essential constitution will be was determined without his input or approval.

In the natural realm, we are all products of others' desires, decisions, and actions. In the spiritual, we have no more part in this than did the babe in arms.

He gives the right to become children of God. None of His children were born of their own fleshly will or that of others. All were “born of God” -Jn.1:13.

It is His life that is imparted to His children. This, they did not generate. It came from above. "To live is Christ"- Phil.1:21. Everything springs from this fount.

Paul clearly tells us that "we are not adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" -2 Cor.3:5. We are the genesis of nothing: nothing adequate, that is.

But our competency to bring forth the corrupted and profitless, however, is unrivaled. And whatever is true, right, pure, or good cannot be validly ascribed to us. Do not be deceived. "Every good and perfect gift is from above" -Jas.1:16,17.

But we have deceived ourselves. We believe that the finite can transcend to the infinite. We imagine that the decayed may resuscitate into liveliness, that the things below manufacture things above.

Ours is a mechanistic religion. We are achievers. We set goals but do not seek God. We follow formulas but not Christ.

Answers we have but not wisdom. Rules we can generate but not godliness. Procedures abound to "resolve" difficulties, but we do not know our God. We are full of the "spiritual" while yet remaining carnal.

There is no remedy for our malady but God's beloved Son. No formula exists to improve our condition but Christ Himself. No power to transform our deviant nature can be found apart from the Lord Jesus. No amount of resolve, religion, or reform will make it so.

The life that is being spoken of does not spring from ourselves. It is "in Him." It is His very life, for Christ "is our life" -Col.3:4. The question is: are we "found in Him" -Phil.3:9? As seconds slip into hours and these into the days of our fleeting existence, how are we found?

When the snapshots of our daily routines are reviewed, how do they find us? Has it been "in Him," lovingly trusting the Lord Jesus? Have they discovered His life coursing in and through ours?

Are the movements of our lives evidencing the Head's governing of our faculties? And what fruit abides as a testimony to its living source? What will these photos record?

"Ah, here's a nice one. Look at me singing in the church service." "Oh, that one didn't turn out very well. It looks like I was really upset about something." "This is better. You see how I put my tithe in the offering?" "Oh, no! I think we'll just skip over this one. I can't believe that there's a picture of that!"

"Oh look, this one's funny. I was gossiping with my friend about that useless choir member." "Hey, Hey, here's a typical shot of me, just relaxing in front of the television with my closed Bible in the background."

That's right, in the background. It's been that way for long.

Nothing is omitted in the record. The snapshots are voluminous. All is documented as it is, in fact.

The books contain it all. The photos are there from cradle to grave side. What do they show? What is their story?

Is it a tale of being "found in Him, not having a righteousness of your own" -Phil.3:9? Or is it a saga of self, paltry substitutes, and fleshly failing efforts?

The books are being filled. And there are no rehearsals or studio poses.

To live is Christ

2

Vain

Vain: the word itself is alarming. It means “empty, meaningless, without purpose.”

What if our worship was vain: or our belief and very religion itself? They very well may be.

For if our worship arises from man-made notions, it is decidedly vain; Jesus said so, not me [Mk.7:7].

If our belief does not issue in holding fast to the Word of God, no other word can describe it but vain; that was Paul’s choice of words, not mine [1 Cor.15:2].

And if our tongue wanders about unleashed, whispering delicacies and sputtering fire and venom, it renders our entire religion bankrupt—vain. This is what James had to say in his letter, chapter 1, verse 26.

Vain: the word itself is alarming, isn’t it?

3

SELF

Beggarly thoughts of Christ and inflated esteem of Self render devotion a stench.

Humility, that fearful distrust of Self, is the fount of all virtue.

Who can discern the strength of that thing called Self which can even resist the Almighty!

If the Scriptures nowhere direct us to hate Satan but do command us to hate Self, what then are we to think about this foe within our very breast?

When praise neither elates nor cursing deflates us, then we have died to Self.

A man who knows he is nothing and does not bristle when others say so is dead to himself.

If a man persists serving others when rejected and maligned, then Self has died in him.

A man who accounts his achievements as things of nothing is dead to himself.

When heaven's assessment fills the heart with trembling, then a man has died to Self.

Self, when indulged, renders the soul unfit for higher purposes.

Clay, if finely crushed and uniform throughout, can be fitly fashioned to a vessel containing treasure: so too a man, if Self be broken and contrite.

He is a fool indeed who would promote what ought to be denied,
even this thing called Self.

No rivals can abide when Self reigns; all and everyone must bow.

The wasp, buzzing frantically upon its back, struggles to the last;
so too Self is loath to die.

Clutching to Self what God has devoted to destruction brings its
curse.

Better to spy out oneself rather than the city of Ai.

Self is a miserable delusion and a powerless refuge.

“Us, We, I, Our, My, Mine” are frantic pronouns spilling from the
deranged lips of Self.

Repentance is never the recourse when Self is never the suspect.

Conquest is certain when Self-judgment is continuous.

Suspicion is the creator of Self-attested certainty.

Self is adorned while the interests of heaven lie in wretched
reproach.

Tradition: Mammon is his master and Self is his sovereign.

Self is the supreme stumbling block in the spiritual life.

Self, arch-traitor to yourself, is your deadliest foe.

Self, that wanton whore lying in the bosom of every man, seduces
that true self within.

Self, the household idol enshrined within every heart, has incense
burned before it daily by 7 billion souls.

Self is the arena of your fiercest conflict.

Every godly soul must take up sides with God against this usurping tyrant Self.

Self must be slain or Slayer Self shall slay you.

The Cross does not sanctify self-esteem; rather, by it, Self is exterminated.

Self, to survive, will don a thousand cloaks.

4

DEVOTION TO CHRIST

One thing is needful

Luke 10:42

Devotion to Christ is the outmoded relic of yesteryear's religion. We are satisfied with this situation. Like the five thousand of old, if we may merely eat of His loaves, we are content. Indeed, receiving from His hand is our chief delight, but He is not.

Our belly has become our god. Success, prosperity, and fulfillment are the ignoble objects of our waning devotion. We will sacrifice, in measure, to obtain His benefits, using Christ Himself as the means to our own selfish ends.

It is imagined that He will help us perform our will: that He will hasten to fulfill our decrees. And when He has done His part, we toss Him aside, forgotten, as we bask in what we have used Him to obtain.

Formerly the church had sung, "Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest; now Thee alone I seek, give what is best." Now it chants, "Abraham's blessings are mine."

We are no different than the church of Laodicea who thought themselves to be rich, increased in goods, with need of nothing. It sickens Christ still.

We struggle in order to gain for self. Answers are demanded while wisdom is despised. Solutions are eagerly sought but the Savior is not. Provision is pursued with no thought for treasure in heaven.

And if God can assist us in our quest, we are willing to use Him to get what we want. But the great men of both covenants were not so engaged.

Moses said to the Lord: "Let me know Your ways that I may know You" -Ex.33:13. Paul exclaimed: "That I may know Him" -Phil.3:10.

In fact, this is what eternal life is made of. It is the Lord Jesus Himself who said so. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" -Jn.17:3.

We gauge eternal life by our confession, He, by our communion. We are unlike our God. We neither know Him nor are particularly concerned to do so. Many other things occupy us.

A distraction is that which interferes with our concentration. Concentration is focused thought and attention. When distracted, the object of our devotion is set aside for that which is of lesser significance. Yet we are willing to entertain the interruptions that so readily clamor for our recognition.

Distractions may not be positively evil; they may in fact be good. Serving the Lord is nothing to be shunned. But Martha was "distracted with much service" -Lk.10:40.

Service to the Lord became an encumbrance. It diverted her heart from its true and worthy focus. Doing something for God replaced communion with Him. Martha was willing to tolerate distraction, Mary was not. Martha spoke, Mary listened.

The Marthas of the world wish their voice to prevail. They will presume to command the Lord and expect Him to comply. "She came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Then tell her to help me'" -Lk.10:40.

Martha imagines that her Lord is just like she is, but He is not. He is unknown by her. His heart remained veiled to her hurried footstep. "Worried and bothered about so many things" -Lk.10:41 was the true assessment of her service. Irritated insistence upon her own way testified to her lack of devotion to the Lord Jesus.

The coming day of Judgment will reveal many things done poorly. For some, it will show a few things done well. Fewer still will have a testimony of having done the one necessary thing in all of life.

"One thing is necessary" -Lk.10:42. Here is a definitive statement of what is essential. This must be done; all else is optional and, at best, secondary.

We do not live this way. Devotion to Christ is not the compelling passion of our souls, yet it is the only truly necessary thing. Nothing else truly matters.

But we have not opted for this. We have chosen the foolish part which shall be taken away from us. "Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" -Lk.10:42.

It will abide with her throughout everlasting day. She will carry this into eternity. Devotion to Christ is the only portion that a mortal soul will not have taken from him when he leaves this earth.

It is eternal life. Knowing the only true God is necessary; nothing else in all of life falls into this category.

The categories are but two: necessary and unnecessary. Devotion to the Lord Jesus is all one will find in the first category. Everything else in life will be found in the second.

This is a shattering reality to any honest heart. To this busy and superficial generation, it will only significantly trouble them when standing naked before the God they have not known.

Devotion to the Lord Jesus cannot begin then. Eternal life, knowing God, can only have its origin here on earth. It is the exclusively necessary thing now in this life.

This is not religious fiction. Christ Jesus who spoke it knows whereof He speaks. The final verdict on all of life's activities is that one thing has been necessary all along.

You have been told. The Lord Jesus has said it Himself. Search through the vast array of activities, distractions, and delusions that comprise your life. What have you found there that qualifies as necessary?

All is vanity. If nothing essential and hence truly worthwhile is discovered, all is loss. The tragedy of an irrelevant and wasted existence will overwhelm you in a single horrifying instant. In a blinding flash of clarity you will realize that one thing had been necessary all along.

But retrospect will not save us then. Devotion to the Lord Jesus is a matter for the moment, and every moment thereafter, here upon earth.

Dear reader, you are worried and bothered about many things. They will be taken from you. They have no lasting value.

They can neither rescue you at the Judgment nor satisfy you in the present. One thing is necessary.

Disturbed as we may be by this, few of us will do anything about it. We may guiltily redouble our efforts to attend church, but we will not become devoted to Christ Himself. We may vow to pray more often, but this will soon fall by the wayside. We remain void of devotion to the Lord Jesus.

There are two main reasons for this. First, we do not believe that He is worthy. Second, we do not believe that we are as evil as we are. These are the roots of the matter.

The Lord Jesus sees us; He is watching. He knows not only what we do but why we do it. He gazes into our very hearts. "He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing" -Mk.12:41.

All is open and laid bare before His all-searching eye. He saw their acts of devotion; He also saw what no one else did, He saw who was truly devoted.

"Many rich people were putting in large sums out of their abundance. A poor widow put in all she owned, all her living" -Mk.12:41-44. He knew the coins of each.

He knew what remained in the purse, and what didn't. The rich reserved portions for self, the widow abandoned all for the Lord.

How much is He worth? This is the fundamental question when assessing devotion. Of what value is the Lord Jesus to us?

The worthiness of the object dictates the terms of the investment. And money is surely not the point of the discussion, for the Lord Jesus said: "This poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury" -Mk.12:43.

No calculator can quantify the devotion of a heart that is wholly abandoned unto Him. Nor can one count up the inestimable value of Christ Jesus the Lord, "precious in the sight of God" -1 Pet.2:4.

Grasping the immeasurable greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ will determine the greatness of our devotion. Without this, even thirty shekels of silver can be imagined to be a "magnificent price at which I was valued by them" -Zech.11:13.

The rich in the Temple fared better than this in their own estimation. Even so, combined, theirs could not equal two mites.

To the widow, the Lord was worth all. Her life was of no account in her mind. That she would entrust to Him who was worth all. He would attend to all her needs.

This is the secret and the mystery of devotion. The Lord is worth all. Nothing is to be withheld; nothing remains clutched to the bosom of self.

Who is the Lord Jesus Christ to you? Of what value is He? Is He worthy of a total and complete devotion in an abandonment of self?

You answer, "Yes"? Have you told Him so? Have you brought your two mites? Has everything passed from your hand into His?

He is still sitting and observing. He is seated now in the true temple which the Lord built, and not man. He sees beyond the surface, He sees your heart.

One thing is necessary. The Lord Jesus has a question for you: "But who do you say that I am?" -Mt.16:15. You must answer this by your life, and not only with your lips.

Our devotion is sickly because our thoughts of the Lord are beggarly while our esteem for self is highly inflated.

We love little because we have been forgiven little. We are not that bad in our own estimation. We have some sins to be sure, but the extent is minimal we imagine. And so, we remain loveless and devotionless.

"Which of them will love him more? Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have judged correctly. He who is forgiven little, loves little'" -Lk.7:42,43,47.

The estimation of our own guilt determines our response to the Lord Jesus. Simon was actually no better off than the harlot, except in his own deluded conceits.

It is not that one must wallow in horrible crimes in order to be devoted to the Lord Jesus. What is needed is a clear perception of the nature and reality of our own sinfulness.

The woman wept in acute bitterness over her wretchedness. The Pharisee reclined with Jesus thinking to himself that all was well with him.

She was painfully conscious of her condition; he remained in delusion and darkness. The woman judged herself, the Pharisee judged her and the Lord Jesus both, but not himself.

He imagined that he needed nothing. The truth is that he was a hypocritical son of hell [Mt.23:15]. Actually, he was a blind fool full of self-indulgence [Mt.23:17,25]. If he would see himself clearly he would know that he was a whitewashed tomb full of all uncleanness and soon to be damned [Mt.23:27,33].

But he did not think of himself in this manner. He therefore did not weep. He did not kiss the feet of the Lord Jesus. Neither was he forgiven; neither did he love.

He thought much of himself and little of the Lord. He was devoted to his religion and his place therein, but he was not devoted to God.

Tearless saints lack devotion to the Lord Jesus. When have you last wept over the abysmal blight of who you truly are in the corrupt depths of your inner self? Do you kiss His feet as the sinner you are, or recline at His head in self-generated acceptability?

You may not congratulate yourself that you are not like others. You are, and worse. Doubting this, you shall never be justified or cleansed from your desperate evil [Lk.18:9-14].

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” -Ps.51:17.

According to the dictionary, contrite means "broken down with sorrow for sin; humbly and thoroughly penitent." What does it mean to you?

Judas kissed the Lord, but not His feet. He felt remorse, but shed no tear. He had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. He had the appearance of a disciple, but was not. “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way” -Ps.2:12.

Tears and kisses are not optional. One abides a Simon, or worse yet, a Judas, in their absence. There is no forgiveness apart from them. You will love but little, if at all.

One thing is necessary. Devotion to Christ is not an added element to our existing religion; it is the one indispensable foundation for all that is built upon it. Lacking this, our religion is a vapor and delusion.

Those who venture all for the Lord Jesus will not be understood by the devotionless multitude: they will not be by fellow disciples either. The lack of practicality of such "extremism" will draw the disapproval of the unconsecrated. It always does.

"The disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, 'Why this waste? For this might have been sold for a high price and given to the poor'" -Mt.26:8,9.

They were very expedient, conservatively calculating. The sum of their calculations was that man takes precedence over God, that needs preempt worship, and that ministry eclipses communion.

"Jesus said, 'Let her alone'" -Jn.12:7. There is something that transcends service and charity. It is the one necessary thing He prizes.

"The Father seeks such to be His worshipers" -Jn.4:23. He is seeking not for better servants, but for worshipers, for lovers, for tear-stained cheeks, for lips pressed to nail-scarred feet, for costly vials emptied upon a thorn-crowned head.

He is seeking for those who will pour out every precious thing in their possession upon the Son of God: to do so because He is worthy due to the excellence of His glory.

This is the essence of gospel response. It is what the Lord has been seeking even from before time immemorial. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love" -Eph.1:4.

Holy, in love: isn't this what it means to know God? Is this not what eternal life is, and ever will be?

But those who are forgiven little love little. Those who withhold for self do not value Christ. Those who are occupied with activities do not chose the good part. And those who focus upon the ever-present poor will always ask: "Why this waste?"

Why, indeed? Because there is nothing better that one can do. There is nothing else that is truly required. Those who love little call it waste. He who loves His own to the uttermost calls it necessary.

“Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her” -Mt.26:13. What she did is what the gospel demands.

The conclusion of Paul's gospel is to “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice” -Rm.12:1. This is what she did. All that she had, she gave.

What it cost her was of no concern. What others thought did not turn her away; He was worthy. This is what filled her heart, which in turn filled the house with the “fragrance of Christ unto God” -2 Cor.2:15.

Kept to herself, the ointment did no good to any: neither to her, the poor, nor the Lord Jesus. Kept to yourself, of what benefit are you?

One may well ask of you, "Why this waste?" Why are you wasting on Self that which ought to be entirely poured out upon the person of Christ? What is He worth to you?

Others have gone to great lengths for lesser gain. The queen of Sheba traversed from afar to hear, firsthand, the wisdom of Solomon. She saw him and spoke to him of all that was upon her heart.

She perceived the wisdom of his words and the splendor of his house. She sat at meat with him and tasted of his table. His servants were blessed and their amenities fine.

When she gazed upon his ascent to the house of God, “there was no more spirit in her” -1 Kings 10:5. She was overwhelmed.

She confessed that she did not believe the word she had heard in her own land. She had thought less of Solomon than he was worthy of. When her eyes were opened, the realization rushed upon her that “the half was not told me” -1 Kings 10:7. So great was he, so magnificent, grand in wisdom, and glorious in riches; there was none his equal.

Her mouth could contain it no longer. Praise peeled from her lips. Riches poured from her hands. Spices: rare, fragrant, exhilarating aromas, wafted their delights throughout the house of Solomon. “Never again did such abundance of spices come in as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon” -1 Kings 10:10.

Solomon was glorified. He was delighted. And the queen was blessed from his abundance [1 Kings 10:13].

Dear reader, “behold, something greater than Solomon is here” -Mt.12:42. The Lord Jesus exceeds Solomon as the sun does a match, as the sea a dewdrop. He is greater and He is here.

You have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear. His Word has reached you in your land. But what of you; have you arisen to come to Him, to seek His face, to hear His wisdom?

When you see Him as He is, when you perceive the glories of His house and the blessedness of His servants, as you gaze into His face and feast at His table, and behold His ascent to His Father's house, there will remain in you no more spirit.

You will confess that you have not believed the Word you heard in your own land. You will realize that you have thought Him to be far less worthy than you had ever imagined. You will abhor yourself in dust and ashes.

Then your tongue will be loosed in praise and your hand will relax its grip on all you have clutched to your bosom. Gladly all will be given.

The insignificance, foolishness, and pride of your heart will be seen in the light of His glory. And you will bring forth spices uncountable. You will become devoted to the Lord Jesus.

You will have tasted of the one necessary thing. He will be glorified and pleased. You will be blessed from His bounty.

But you must arise and come. You will not be devoted to Him staying where you are. You must come to where your tears will cascade upon Him, where your lips will meet His feet.

He cannot be anointed from afar. His Word will not be heard amidst the bustle of your activities. You must come to His feet, both to hear and to weep. It is there that you shall discover the one necessary thing.

Some of you will come; some of you will not. It is because of this that I must tell you one other thing about the Queen of Sheba.

“The Queen will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here” -Mt.12:42.

She was compelled by the greatness of that king of peace to seek him earnestly. At all costs and with glad sacrifice she came to see his face, hear his wisdom, and behold his glory. It was a great expenditure for a lesser reward.

She will condemn this generation. Her very life will bear solemn testimony to the wickedness of hearts in not arising and seeking the Lord Jesus Christ.

This queen will be there, as will you, at the Judgment. The King will ask you, "Do you see this woman who came from the ends of the earth? How far have you come in pursuit of the one necessary thing in life, devotion to My Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?"

Many will be speechless on that day, but not the Queen of the South.

She will turn and ask, "Why this waste?"

One thing is necessary

5

Where Ya Goin'?

"Gotta go!"

"Where ya goin'?"

"I'll call ya."

And so with a flurry of woosh, the narrow way gives way to the expressway.

"Gotta go!"

"Where ya goin'?"

"See that Cross?"

And so with spit, bruises, and blood, the narrow way became the gateway.

"Gotta go!"

"Where ya goin'?"

"I don't know."

And so with a terrified gasping breath, life's way exits into unending way.

"Gotta go!"

"Where ya goin'?"

"See that Throne?"

And so the tomb-way gave way to the reigning way.

"Follow Me!"

"Where Ya goin'?"

"The Way, a Cross, the Throne."

And so feet must walk, self must die, and all must be judged.

"Where'd you say you were goin' again?"

And Jesus turned and said:

'What do you seek?'

Jn.1:38

6

CHRIST THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

His name will be called Wonderful Counselor

Isa.9:6

There is but one source for true counsel. In the Lord Jesus are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” -Col.2:3. Wisdom scavenged from other sources is not treasure. It is void of value. All that is truly worth having is found in Him. He is the One possessing what we do not.

If wisdom and counsel are to be ours, we must go to the everlasting source. And in Him alone can counsel of worth be granted. But it cannot be attained. Eyes of earth cannot gaze into heaven; natural ears hear nothing spiritual.

Such wisdom is not of recent origin; true counsel has always been. Before earth's earliest ages the Lord declared: “Counsel is mine and sound wisdom. I was established from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was” -Prov.8:14,23.

What He establishes abides. The ways of the Lord do not evolve; they do not mature or improve.

His counsel is unchanging without variance from age to age. “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven” -Ps.119:89. It is the Word of God that constitutes His counsel. “Your testimonies also are my delight; they are the men of my counsel” -Ps.119:24.

They do not merely pass on good advice. The counsel of the Lord is not an optional suggestion for an improved quality of life.

It is not a challenge to higher aspirations, but rather is the exclusive remedy from destruction and the only means of obtaining life and favor from God. “With Your counsel You wilt guide me, and afterward receive me into glory” -Ps.73:24.

But it must be followed. The directives are to be taken according to prescription. Remedies remaining on the shelf are of no help at all.

Guidance unheeded results in arrival at other destinations. One will certainly lose one's way, become disoriented, and, finally, be lost altogether.

Counsel from God is not designed to soothe distressed emotions. It rather commands, rebukes, trains, and liberates. It sets our feet upon the straight and narrow. Glory will be reached only if our steps proceed upon that path.

One cannot ignore this counsel and expect to be admitted at heaven's gate. "For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me injures himself; all who hate me love death" -Prov.8:35,36.

Our great need for counsel lies in the corruption of our own hearts. The Lord Jesus said it well: "If you then, being evil..." -Lk.11:13. Evil, this is the final analysis.

Only the Lord Jesus grasps the depravity into which we are plunged. His is the only counsel that avails to rid us of our malignancy. It is unrivaled and penetrates to the deepest source of our woes.

There is only one Wonderful Counselor. There are no substitutes; accept none others. Listen to what He says, do it, cling to Him. Confide in Him, seek His counsel diligently. Abide in it by the strength of His might.

"Apply your mind to My knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge?" -Prov.22:17,18,20.

Indeed He has. Here exclusively is excellence of counsel to be found. "Thy testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors" -Ps.119:24.

Listen to Paul. Consult with Isaiah. Harken unto Moses. Learn from Peter and the some forty other authors of God's Word. It is the voice of the Wonderful Counselor that will surely be heard therein. These "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" -2 Pet.1:21.

The Scriptures are not their own notions. They do not contain yet another option amidst the Babel of therapeutic fare. They are the undeviating directions from of old, from the days of eternity.

And the Lord is more than willing to counsel the naive and to instruct the foolish, if we are willing to “turn to His reproof” -Prov.1:23. But turn we must.

To refuse or to “neglect His counsel” -Prov.1:25, leaves one with nothing but to “eat of the fruit of our own way” -Prov.1:31. These are morsels of death, sweet to the palate but wormwood to the soul. The truth from on high is just the opposite, bitter to natural taste, but health to the heart.

Yet men prefer the immediate of the sweet. Its bitter aftertaste is combated by downing yet more sugared solutions. But they do not last, nor do they resolve the ailment.

The gall and bile of man-generated counsels continue to upsurge their poison. Placebos may be made of sugar, but not remedies.

The prescriptions of men are not those of God. They do not even approximate them. Man's counsel is rooted in the pride of independence from the revelation of heaven. As such, the advisors of earth perceive and prescribe from faulty equipment.

Maladies wrongly diagnosed will be given irrelevant treatments, or worse. The correctives are more often lethal as the true condition goes undetected.

Apart from this Wonderful Counselor, man can only begin from himself. He assesses according to his own perspective. But the lens through which he sees is distorted.

Rather, it is treacherous. “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?” -Jer.17:9.

The heart of man is deluded, yet it is all that man has to evaluate life. The conclusions he draws then can only be in error.

Mathematics is not the subject of this analysis. Common sense observations such as, "If you go out in the rain, you will get wet," are not addressed.

The allegation is that man is incapable of rightly diagnosing and resolving his deepest difficulties of life. The question put to the heart of man stands: "Who can know it?" And the answer is so obvious that it need not be stated.

“I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways” -Jer.17:10. When the Lord

searches the heart He finds deceit and wickedness. Truth and uprightness are not discovered; devious distorted evils are.

The conclusion is inescapable; man is no competent analyst.

If one would believe the Bible, modern psychoanalysis must be disbelieved. The converse is also true. The counsel of man and that of God are mutually exclusive antagonists.

They cannot be wedded. And fornicating with the psycho-mistresses of Freud, Jung, and other deluded psychotherapists is forbidden wickedness.

Psychoanalysis is a field of chaos. There exist some 10,000 conflicting "therapeutic" approaches. Apparently the Scriptures are correct: the heart of man cannot be known by man.

Several years ago, Newsweek Magazine's cover article was entitled, "The Curse of Self-Esteem." The leading "experts" were asked a simple question: "What is self-esteem?"

Not one of their answers coincided with the others. By their own admission, they do not know what they are talking about. Yet the myth of self-esteem perpetuates and is more entrenched than ever, though indefinable even by its so-called "experts."

The Scriptures have much to say regarding the counsel of man. The revelation is sobering and chilling. The first mention of counsel in the Bible contains in seed form all that followed thereafter. "Now listen to my voice; I shall give you counsel and God will be with you" -Ex.18:19.

Here was a man, a priest of Midian unschooled in the ways of the Lord, acting as advisor. This counselor, as well as his modern counterparts, presumed to speak for God. "My voice" became synonymous with "God being with you." But it was not, then or now.

The essence of man's counsel is this: The paltry opinions of men supplant the truth of God. The Lord's counsel is absolute verity, the other, total deception rooted in raw pride.

Analysts are not prophets and the "science" of psychiatry is no savior. No liaison is forged between the Word of God and the pronouncements of men. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord" -Isa.55:8.

Since Eden, an alien orientation has governed the mind of man. His thoughts are corrupt and warped, rendering his counsel

useless. "The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations. The counsel of the Lord stands forever" -Ps.33:9-11.

He sets it aside because it is a delusion. It stands opposed to His Word as a masquerading substitute.

As it was in the days of David, so it is today, only more so. The declarations of men preempt the revelation of God.

"The counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired of the Word of God" -2 Sam. 16:23. "As if" is the key phrase.

It wasn't then, nor is it ever. God Himself thwarted his counsel [2 Sam.17:14] as He does that of all his successors.

Man's counsel can never be on par with the Word of God. Our inflated conceit may account it to be so, but it is deceit.

Yet pride alone does not motivate the quest for advice from sources other than the Wonderful Counselor. Men seek others to approve their self-chosen paths.

The Scriptures reveal that men consistently solicit counsel according to their own lusts. Advisors who condone the propensity of the heart eagerly receive a hearing.

It was so with Rehoboam who "forsook the counsel of the elders which they had counseled him, and spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men" -1 Kings 12:13,14.

The wisdom of the aged was spurned for the folly of youth. Theirs appealed to his desires. He wanted to show who was chief, to be accounted as a big-man. What they said found ready acceptance with the evil longing purposed in his heart.

His counterpart, Jeroboam, "took counsel and made two golden calves" -1 Kings 12:28. Scheming considerations had already been "devised in his own heart" -1 Kings 12:33. The course was set before he uttered the first query of his "counselors."

All that remained was their rubber-stamping of his pre-determined lust. "The sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin" -1 Kings 15:30, originated in the perverted design of his own heart. He then sought counselors who would sanction his horrid scheme.

Witness Ahaziah, the son of the wicked wretch, Athaliah: "His mother was his counselor to do wickedly. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab, for they were his

counselors after the death of his father to his destruction” -2 Chron.22:3,4. He was no innocent victim of his upbringing.

Ahaziah welcomed the counsel he received to do evil. It suited his desires admirably. And the evil which he loved came upon him because of it.

But it issued in his everlasting ruin. The conclusion of the matter was this: “The destruction of Ahaziah was from God” -2 Chron.22:7.

See yet another king. Amaziah surrounded himself with those who told him just what he wished to hear. They were his "yes-men," the psychological and political "experts" of the day.

Yet they were surely counselors to his demise. Under their influence, the king flung the Words of God to the ground. He hated reproof. Royal deceivers were commissioned in their stead.

God's prophet was threatened with death because he spoke contrary to kingly lusts. A sovereign outburst resulted: “The king said to him, ‘Have we appointed you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?’ Then the prophet stopped and said, ‘I know that God has planned to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not listened to my counsel’” -2 Chron.25:16.

This is what it comes to: death to evil or the slaying of one's own conscience. Compromise is unknown on either hand. They are enemies.

Ultimately, when stripped of its dainty apparel, the stark reality of man's counsel is revealed. Exposed in all its shame is the naked hatred of the ways of God.

The final desperate assault of earth's kings is to cast off the ways of God. Overthrow of restraint is their aim and extinguishing the light is their hope. “They take counsel against the Lord and against His anointed” -Ps.2:2,3.

But it is a suicidal mission. He who sits in the heavens will laugh them to scorn. His king will shatter them as thousands of scattered shards [Ps.2:4-9].

The remedy? “Kiss the Son lest He become angry, and you perish in the way” -Ps.2:12. You must embrace the Wonderful Counselor. There are no alternatives: no, not for men, nor for the people of God.

Yet we have not done so, the church in particular. We are not noted for our wisdom. The church has sold her birthright for a mess of psychological pottage.

We are a people "perishing in counsel, and there is no understanding in us" -Deut.32:28. In the very house of God is where "wicked counsel" -Ezek.11:1,2 is to be found.

Pharisees are its proponents. No shameful association is shunned by them in pursuit of their madness. Even Herodians are fit bedfellows for seditious deeds and perverse proposals [Mk.3:6].

It is here, in the house of God, that we discover that pride and lust alone do not motivate the pursuit for proposals of folly.

Men hate God. They despise any impediments to their maddened course.

They would rather strike with the fist than bow the knee. Barabbas will be chosen over Christ. And under the counsel of their leaders, "Hosannas" become cries of "Crucify."

From the counsels of men, the Deliverer is accounted a deceiver [Mt.27:63], the Savior, a Samaritan [Jn.8:48], and He who is Divine, a demon [Jn.8:48].

At the prompting of religious men, the Wonderful Counselor is murdered by the hands of the godless. "No king but Caesar" -Jn.19:15 is the verdict of priestly deliberations. "His citizens hated Him and sent a message after Him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us'" -Lk.19:14.

Yes, it is His citizens: the lawful subjects of His sovereignty, who spurn Him.

Flattered and seduced, the church wantonly embraces the adulterers of psychoanalysis and worldly counsels.

The Wonderful Counselor is despised. Her lust is poured out upon other lovers, and arrogance colors it all. This is the way of the church.

"This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wickedness'" -Prov.30:20.

But she has. The church has. And we shall surely reap what we have sown.

7

Good Question

Jesus asked: “Who do men say that I am? But, who do you say that I am?” -Mt.16:13,15.

Two noteworthy questions, and ones that Jesus fully expects that His disciples will not base their convictions upon prevailing popular opinions– Men say many things, but what do you say?

Where have you obtained your knowledge of Christ? Seriously, reflect carefully; what have been the sources of your understanding? Has it been conveyed directly to your spirit from God Himself or merely absorbed by osmosis from your religious environment?

Peter received his illumination directly from the Father [Mt.16:17]. Paul’s understanding of Christ was not according to man, received from man, nor was he taught it; it was rather granted through revelation [Gal.1:11,12]. This is the rock upon which the true church of Christ is built.

The sheep of Christ follow the voice of their Shepherd, but not that of strangers and hirelings [Jn.10:4,5,12]. The Comforter guides them into all truth [Jn.16:13].

This anointing teaches them what is true and right, needing no human agency to accomplish it [1 Jn.2:27]. The Word of Christ is spirit and life, requiring no contributions from the flesh to substantiate it [Jn.6:63].

Our Christianity is largely a learned social behavior. We have received little if anything directly from above. What we have observed, we imitate in ignorance.

Much of what we think we know has been by assumption and not resulting from reflection and revelation. We have formulated our

doctrines by hearsay and gleaned expected behavior patterns by participating in religious activities, not by obtaining it from the source: Jesus Christ and His Word.

“Blessed are you because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” -Mt.16:17.

This is true knowledge of the true Jesus; no other christs exist, and none trusting in them are blessed.

So, who did you say that Jesus is again?

8

STUMBLING BLOCK OF THE CROSS

A Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense

1 Pet.2:8

Man, by nature, hates the cross. Interwoven into every fiber of his being is the continuous thread of self-preservation. This is what occupies his waking existence from the cradle to the grave.

"No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" -Eph.5:29. We seek the ease of the soft, the simple, and the sweatless.

We coddle, adorn, and tantalize ourselves until our dying breath. "Good luck," "Take it easy," and "Enjoy yourself" are the watchwords of each self-occupied generation.

So infused is this notion of self-first, that any suggestion of suffering or death meets with immediate and instinctive reproof. We will spare self at all costs; and self, to survive, will don a thousand masks.

It is unimaginable to the natural mind that a cross could ever be the will of God for anyone. Yet it is; it was for Jesus Himself though Peter could not conceive that it could be so. He even rebuked the Lord for such a "misguided" concept.

But Jesus rebuffed him and all who hold such a deceived idea. "He rebuked Peter, and said, 'Get behind me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man'" -Mk. 8:33.

Avoidance of the cross is at the prompting of the devil. God's way is to put to death self, the flesh, and all that we are by nature. It is the way of man, in concert with the evil one, to save, preserve, and rescue the same.

To a vast host of would-be followers, the Lord Jesus turned and said to them: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" -Lk.14:25,26.

Hatred of the downward pull of every natural association is mandatory for every disciple. One cannot properly be called a disciple, a learner, a follower, who compromises under the influence of the things of man - the pressure of those closest to us. This is a closeness measured according to the flesh.

The requisite for a true disciple is to reject, in the strongest possible manner, any tendency, suggestion, or directive to stray from the narrow path of life. A disciple must hate his own opinion, perspective, and inclination. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool" -Prov.28:26.

It is thus that the stumbling block is encountered. Hatred of Self and love of Self cannot co-exist. Inbred in each is the destruction of the other. No treaty of toleration can be drafted between the two. The cross deals death blows to the self-centered of every generation.

Esteem of one's self has never waned in the human race since the first sin. Unmasked, self-esteem and self-acceptance are nothing more than pride.

But for a disciple, there is nothing to boast in, "except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" -Gal.6:14. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" -Lk.14:27.

Crosses were reserved for the worst of humanity's off-scouring. In the delusion of pride, virtually everyone can congratulate himself that he is not as bad as the soon-to-be crucified evildoer who had been judged as wicked by his contemporaries.

He was unfit to live by their estimation: a criminal whose very existence was a polluting scourge on society that must be eliminated by the extremist of measures, the death of a cross.

Through the concourse of life he was paraded bearing his own cross. He was attended along the way with the cruelest of mockeries, abuse, and insults.

As he made his way through the familiar lanes of his native town, all who had known him spat in his face, hurled refuse upon him, and railed their curses at him. They turned out to gloat at the spectacle of his final agonized breath.

And thus he expired: unpitied, rejected, scorned, hated, and tortured. All that he was in himself came to an abrupt and violent end; the cross put him to death. He became like his Lord, he became a disciple; there are no other kinds.

We dislike this immensely. We would rather be spared this treatment at the hands of men and of God. How much better, we think, to be respected, pleasant, and "normal."

Surely then we shall have a platform of common ground to influence our fellows to be favorably inclined toward our religion. But this will not make us disciples.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" - Mk.8:34,35.

This is the stumbling block of the cross. We wish to spare our lives; the Lord desires to crucify them. We want to preserve ourselves; the Lord says we must deny ourselves. We esteem ourselves highly; God declares that self is nothing more than condemned criminal activity.

The devil whispers in our ear, "God forbid, this shall never happen to you." The Lord Jesus rebukes this preservation of self and says: "Get behind Me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man" -Mk.8:33.

So pervasive is our love of self and esteem of our abilities that we want by all means to find some other explanation for the Lord's words. But there is none.

Lk.14:28-35 tells us why death to self is our only option; our resources are woefully inadequate. None of us has what is required to insure fruitfulness in the coming day or to secure victory over the enemy of our souls.

Here the Lord Jesus is not directing us to look within ourselves and assess our own will power, commitment, and sincerity. He is not looking for people who will pledge their own loyalty out of a determined self-effort.

Self-help is not God's help. God does not help those who help themselves; those who think so become the ridiculed fools described who "began to build and were not able to finish" -Lk.14:30.

The point of counting the cost is simply this, when we honestly evaluate what we possess to contribute toward being a disciple, it falls far short of the requirements.

Actually, it is a positive hindrance, a liability which is outstanding against us, a stumbling block. What we have to contribute is so far worthless that the Lord's conclusion sweeps it all away as so much refuse.

“So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up/forsake/say ‘farewell’ to all that he has/all his own possessions/all the resources from himself” -Lk.14:33. The possessions He refers to are not "things;" they are what we account as valuable as contributing toward being His disciples.

They are our perceived assets of religious devotion, intellect, morality, and strength of resolve. You cannot be His disciple while you are relying upon what you possess, expecting to donate that to the cause of becoming what you ought to be.

You rather must hate it. You must see it as that which is condemned by God Himself as being fit only for a cross. You cannot be His disciple unless you give up all the resources you treasure as dear.

“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to consider anything as out from ourselves, but our sufficiency is out from God” -2 Cor.3:5. “And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” -1 Cor.4:7. “A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven” -Jn.3:27.

A real disciple embraces the cross as putting to death within himself that which is at total enmity against God. A true disciple abandons self, his attainments, and esteem, and flees to his only hope of life and godliness, the Lord Jesus Himself. Anything else is worthless.

“Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out” -Lk.14:34,35.

Salt is always salty; it never can lose its saltiness. This is how it is recognized. If it isn't salty, it isn't salt. The very nature and composition of it makes it so.

The only thing that would hide its saltiness would be the introduction of such a volume of other elements that its presence goes undetected. But even then it hasn't lost its savor, it has merely been overcome by other things so that its flavor is "lost" in the mixture.

The nature of salt is saltiness. The nature of a disciple is an abandonment of self-confidence. If it isn't salty, it isn't salt.

If reliance upon one's own resources is characteristic, you are not a disciple. In neither case of "salt" nor of a "disciple" are they of any value, they are thrown out.

Paul threw his out. Listen to him say: "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more" -Phil.3:4.

All of his heritage, his scholastic achievements, his stringent religious practices, the polished facade of righteousness, and his consuming zeal are summed up in his own words: "I count them but rubbish/ filth/ dung/ in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" -Phil.3:8,9.

He did not view anything he possessed as being an asset; as contributory to any right standing with God. Whatever could be conceived of as in his favor, a credit to his account, a resource, a valued commodity, was actually the opposite.

It was a "loss" -Phil.3:7; it stood against him. All of his perceived gain was actually a debit, a liability, an impoverishment, and an outstanding obligation.

Thus are the flesh, self, and what we esteem ourselves to be. They are against us. They lead to our everlasting ruin, and many are deceived thereby.

Peter warns us to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul" -1 Pet.2:11. And it is not limited to the coarser and flagrantly reprehensible activities that he is speaking of. Many are slain by the battle-ax of religion, morality, and self-effort.

The best that we are, our noblest efforts and sincerest desires, are "as filthy rags" -Isa.64:6. Yet we somehow hold on to a vain hope that this is not the case.

Though the Scripture declares, “All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” -Rm.3:12, we do not believe it. We imagine that, nevertheless, there surely must be something of worth, some vestige of goodness about us, which we can offer to God that will meet with His approval.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil” -Jer.13:23. We are born into this world evil, with an irreversible and uninterrupted propensity to wickedness. These are disturbing thoughts for any placing confidence in fleshly achievement.

Equally troubling is this: “For while we were yet without strength/helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” -Rm.5:6. Here is a twofold devastating verdict; we are both powerless and we are corrupt. What complete folly to imagine the helpless helping themselves.

The helpless help no one. The powerless lack the least ability to do what is required. Furthermore, they lack the very quality which would commend them to God.

Men are ungodly. Though we have been made in the image of God, our likeness to God has long since been effaced. We are not like Him who made us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” -Rm.6:23.

This being the case, is it not astounding “that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again” -Gal.4:9? Why do we not rather cast ourselves wholly upon the mercy of God?

Reliance upon self, in any degree, is a base, powerless, and impoverished slavery. Adding religious scruples to it only worsens our predicament.

Will clinging to a shadow in the presence of the reality commend you to God [Col.2:17]? Or what of careful observance of religious festivals, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath-keeping “in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men” -Col.2:16-22?

The answer is plain. “These are matters which have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement,

and harsh treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” -Col.2:23.

The flesh cannot conquer the flesh. It cannot improve itself one bit for, “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing” -Rm.7:18.

These are sobering realities. Some of the strongest language in the Scriptures is reserved for those placing confidence in the flesh: words like “accursed” -Gal.1:8,9, “false brethren” -Gal.2:4, “fools” Gal.3:1, “bewitched” -Gal.3:1, “worthless” -Gal.4:9, “slavery” -Gal.5:1, and “leaven” -Gal.5:9.

Those not denying self “have been alienated from Christ” -Gal.5:4. These have “fallen from grace” -Gal.5:4, and discover to their everlasting ruin that “Christ will be of no benefit to them” -Gal.5:2.

If you have Christ, what need do you have of self-effort? This thing of salvation is no cooperative endeavor; it is not, "Just do your best and God will make up the rest."

“I do not reject/nullify/frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain/needlessly” -Gal.2:21.

But the Lord Jesus has not died in vain. The fact of His crucifixion settles the question of right standing with God once and forever.

All self-effort, epitomized by law-keeping, is what sets aside the cross as meaningless. And it is the cross that sets aside, rather, puts to death under the severest judgment, all that man is in himself.

Of what avail are your codes and rules, promises and formulas, steps and systems, or ceremonies and routines, when you are helpless and corrupt criminals fit only for crucifixion?

How shall an external token act of religious devotion such as circumcision do one thing to effect the needed radical transformation of an uncircumcised heart? One may boast in this devoted act with a fair degree of show, all the while the heart is full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Circumcision aptly represents man's confidence in himself. It is an act which he can perform with his own hands that modifies

himself outwardly; an external religious deed that distinguishes himself from his fellows.

It is a form of godliness, but does nothing to effect the power thereof: one that affords a good showing in the flesh, but provides no cure for it. It is a source of smug complacency and self-congratulation, centered in one's self-generated attainment. But circumcision and the cross are always mutually exclusive adversaries.

Self is always opposed to the cross and the cross is ever the death of self. The conclusion is this: "That One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" -2 Cor.5:15.

"If I still preach circumcision then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished" -Gal.5:11. Confidence in self effectually nullifies the cross.

And it is the cross that executes self with its 1,001 tentacles of self-confident reliance, "in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" -Rm.6:2-6.

"He who has died is freed from sin" -Rm.6:7. He who "lives" is yet "dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of his flesh" -Col.2:13. Which will it be, the circumcision of man performed by your own hand, or "the circumcision of Christ, a circumcision made without hands" -Col.2:11?

One is the activity of self, which has "no value against fleshly indulgence" -Col.2:23; the other is the internal supernatural work of God which puts an end to that which holds us in bondage.

This is the proverbial choice of walking by "faith and not by sight" -2 Cor.5:7, by "grace, not of works, that no one should boast" -Eph.2:8,9. It is that of trusting "in the Lord with all your heart and not leaning on your own understanding" -Prov.3:5,6.

Jeremiah puts it this way: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength...blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord" -Jer.17:5, 6.

A stroll through the local "Christian" bookstore provides ample evidence that the church of this generation has stumbled over the stumbling stone.

The stumbling block is Christ and Him crucified. Strange, isn't it, that Christ would be a stumbling block to those laying claim to His name? Yet He is.

This generation does not need Him. We have opted for a vast array of substitutes instead. The gospel, the "power of God unto salvation" -Rm.1:16, has nicely been set aside by our fleshly alternatives.

We have stumbled over Christ and Him crucified. The cross is a reproach unto us, but we think there is little reproachable in ourselves. Self is exalted, Christ is degraded, while we esteem ourselves and dishonor the Lord Jesus.

We have "stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed'" -Rm.9:32,33.

He who relies upon self will not only be disappointed, but be scattered like dust [Mt.21:44].

And blessed is he who does not stumble over Me

Mt.11:6

9

Meekness

The great lesson we are to learn from putting our neck in Jesus' yoke is meekness. Jesus said, "Learn from Me, for I am meek" -Mt.11:29.

Meekness is that disposition of heart that receives all as from the hand of God without resistance, disputing, or complaining: even the evils permitted by Him at the hands of wicked men.

Jesus was meek, wasn't He? His last action and last words prove this; He bowed His head, not in self-pity or despair, not in defeat or shame, but in submission to the will of a Father who was greater than He.

His last words breathed out the unbroken principle that infused His every breath all through His life: "Father, into Your hands, I commit My spirit."

He had never deviated from that path, from that meek submission: even through agony, scorn, spitting, and blood.

Though He had all authority and command to do so, did He call down 12 legions of angels to wreak a havoc of vengeance upon ungodly despicable men plotting His demise, who pounded spikes and plunged spears into His guiltless form? No, Dear Reader, He did not.

Had He avenged Himself of His enemies, the cross would never have been His portion; it would never have been our portion; and then where would we be?

Where would we be had Jesus allowed bitterness, revenge, and wrath to run in dark rivulets in His clear heart?

We would be of all men, most wretched. No blood would have flowed at the hands of wicked men: no blood of Jesus that cleanses from all sin, no blood for you and me.

And so perishing in meekness, He rescued the perishing in corruption.

Bless God for meekness, and bless God for such a Teacher. Take His yoke upon you and learn from Him; learn meekness and you shall find rest for your souls.

10

Set Your Mind

Jesus began to show...Peter began to rebuke Mt.16:21,22

If we fail to hear and hearken to the voice of our God, we discover to our horror and shame that our minds are set on the things of man which the Lord Jesus rightly and stingingly attributes to satanic sources.

Wrong thoughts, untruth, unreality, a heart set upon saving one's life rather than losing it: all of these spring from this polluted well.

Though earnest, fervently and emotionally moved, decisive, concerned, and bold, Peter was nonetheless deadly wrong and at total odds with the purpose of the ages.

And if Self could masquerade so convincingly in even such a one as Peter, can we afford to recline in complacent carelessness?

Jesus tersely sets forth but two options: either deny self or "save" your soul in the pursuit of gain in this world - Deny self or save self, these are the mutually exclusive alternatives [Mt.16:24-27].

We are either denying, losing, dying, and forfeiting or indulging, gaining, "living," and acquiring.

Those following the deception of Satan are ever occupied with sparing Self, obtaining comfort, ease, and increase in this world while guarding against hardship, privation, shame, ostracism, and death that constitute self-denial.

When standing naked before a fiery white throne from whose presence heaven and earth flee away, we will be judged by what was lost or saved, given or gained, shunned or sought, borne or

refused, denied or indulged, followed or neglected, crucified or spared, and found or lost.

The former in these couplets are Divine, the latter, devilish.

*Set your mind on the things above,
Not on the things that are on earth
Col.3:2*

1Pride & Dust

Humility flourishes in the dust. It is from whence we arose, it is what we are, and what awaits this mortal flesh. "You are dust and to dust you shall return" -Gen.3:19.

In the dust, the mighty and lowly alike embrace. There beneath the sod, worms do their work without respect of persons. No pomp abides below.

What are we, really, but gloryless dust: unnoticed, trodden down, and lifeless apart from the breath of God? This is the unflattering verdict upon all that we conceive ourselves to be.

Dust: It is from here that we see ourselves as we are in fact. Only prostrate there will we discover the Lord of glory as He is. And Damascan dust is a most fertile field for the budding of this comely grace of humility.

Paul discovered it to be so. In a brilliant flash through now blinded eyes, he saw clearly for the first time in his life. In the dust, his God of ancestral tradition was abandoned and the Lord of glory was apprehended.

It was there that he had to admit that he did not know the very God he presumed to serve. "Lord, who are You?" -Acts 9:5, was the penitent supplication from this former pompous Pharisee.

His mission, entourage, and fanaticism were forgotten in one instant. The curried favors obtained and invested authority of Jerusalem's high priest ceased to inflate his conceits [Acts 9:1-9]. Swelling thoughts of self no longer inflamed his breast.

Stripped of all its pretensions, his heart now had only one occupation: knowing and serving the Lord Jesus. Self was forgotten, nay, deserted for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord. This is what humility is made of.

When we see ourselves as we truly are mirrored in the Word of God, pride is exposed for the folly that it is. Even apart from sin considered, our curriculum vitae are far from impressive.

We are as grand as grasshoppers [Isa.40:22] and permanent as the morning mist [Jas.4:14]. The sum of our achievements is

less than nothing and void of value [Isa.40:15,17]. This is man, insignificant [Job 40:4] as a writhing worm [Job 25:6] whose glory fades and vanishes like the wilting grass [Isa.40:6,7].

Turning from considering our weak constitution as creatures to that as it has been defiled by sin, the diagnosis becomes even bleaker. The Lord Jesus summarizes our pathetic condition with these withering indictments.

"Sinful, adulterous, evil, wicked, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" -Mt.12:39,45; Lk.11:29; Rev.3:17.

Is it from this putrefying rubbish heap that "a crowning sense of self-worth and an ennobling emotion of self-respect" is generated? We must be mad. "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil" -Jas.4:16.

Boasting is sinful. It demotes and ignores the God of glory while promoting and advertising the baseness of man. All things considered, we have nothing but one thing to boast of.

Boast we may in the cross alone; God forbid that we should boast in anything but. Through it "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" -Gal.6:14.

Crucified, now there is something to boast in. God has put to death by a final violent act all that I am. Self is the arch enemy to myself, to God, and to man and it has been executed. This is cause for rejoicing.

Crosses do not sanctify self-esteem. By the cross, rather, it is exterminated. This flesh, which profits nothing [Jn.6:63] and in which dwells no good thing [Rm.7:18], is condemned. We may boast in it no longer [Gal.6:13].

God's sentence on all my attainment and presumed worth is to crucify it. There is nothing else that justly could be done. All the refined, learned, and sanctimonious among men recoil in revulsion at such a notion. That is, until they be struck down in the dust.

While reclining on velveteen sofas, mounting rostrums, or parading in the sanctuary, the infection of self-esteem thrives. The dirt approaching Damascus quickly quenches this fever.

Few wish to taste it. To prostrate there with all pomp and pretension stripped does not flatter the flesh. Neither does the cross. But neither is there any other remedy for what we are.

If we must boast, let it be in what pertains to our weakness [2 Cor.11:30]. This is what Paul was proud of, what he exulted in, and promoted to commend his credentials. Here is the highest he could conceive of about himself.

"In Damascus the governor under king Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands" -2 Cor.11:32,33.

Dust, a basket, and the cross were all that Paul could truly glory in. Outside Damascus he was accosted by the risen Christ and cast to the dust. Inside, he also found cause to boast in a Damaskan basket.

Vilified, scorned, and hunted as a loathsome beast was his lot. They had accounted him to be off- scouring scum, unfit to draw another breath. Death's sentence hung over his head as he withdrew, cornered and defenseless, from these relentless assailants.

Powerless, Paul awaited his fate holding on to but one glimmer of hope. Help may yet come from above. And it did, and that in the form of a basket.

From above, he was lowered to freedom and safety. Looking up he saw the source of his salvation from certain doom. He, however, could do nothing to effect his rescue except abide in the means of his deliverance as so much pitiful cargo.

The strength to save was not of himself. The means were none of his own devising. His only participation was to enter and abide. Humbled, humiliated, and helpless aptly describe the basket's occupant.

This is something to boast about. Abiding in a basket, he was saved apart from his own efforts. It is what this thing called Christianity is comprised of.

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" -Rm.S:6.

A cross, at the right time, for the helpless and ungodly. A basket, at the right time, for the powerless and condemned. Dust, at the right time, for the proud and self-willed.

Where then is boasting; It is excluded
Rm.3:27

Therefore as it is written,
“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”
1 Cor.1:31

12

THE GREAT HOUSE

*But in a great house
There are not only gold and silver vessels,
But also vessels of wood and of earthenware,
And some to honor and some to dishonor*

2 Tim.2:20

There exist a multitude of "churches" of which "I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" -Phil.3:18,19.

They worship in the spirit of this age, boasting in their disgrace, and putting all their confidence in the flesh. They are incurably religious but incurably godless as well.

Where can they be found? They may be found in any one of a thousand different "churches." Their labels may appear distinctive, but the ingredients are the same old thing: human wisdom and ceremony with an absentee Christ.

They love the rule of man but not that of God. The Lord Jesus has become the figurehead of their association. He is merely the emotional rallying point of their allegiance.

But He is not their living Head, who actually guides, directs, and controls their activities. He is not their exclusive mediator between God and man. Other "shepherds" feed them in pastures of their choosing, but not upon bread from heaven.

There, man has effectually taken His place as Lord, Master, and King. The pronouncements of men are bowed to and obeyed. Other lovers have allured and claimed their affections.

Outwardly their organizations and members may appear as unlike as day and night, both in doctrine and practice. Yet there exists among them a unanimous agreement on the central pillar of their "faith."

It requires conformity. It is urged by the fundamentalist as being Biblical. The ecumenist promotes its efficient practicality.

Orthodox insist upon compliance based on long-standing traditions. Pentecostals appeal to it as the self-evident way of God in the church. Cultists demand obedience to it as a non-optional essential.

None tolerate deviation from their "authority." This persuasion is a dark cloak, a thinly veiled shroud of "godliness" under which countless untold evils have been perpetuated in the name of religion.

This evil is contrary to the Lord Jesus being the Head and Lord of His church. It renders the people of God subservient, impotent, and passive. By it the church is stripped of God-given responsibilities and privileges.

This consensus is called hierarchy. It is that formally designated or informally recognized class of individuals who occupy an "office" or position of authority over the people of God.

These "rulers" presume to reserve final say over the lives of men, their equals, as if this were their God-given right and duty. They lord their decisions over "their" church by taking to themselves an authority and rule which the Scriptures nowhere grant them.

The manipulative club whereby their churches are beaten into subjection is taken from one verse: "Obey them that have the rule over you" -Heb.13:17, KJV. And so their members prostrate at their feet in dread of incurring their displeasure; but they do not fear God.

How like Israel in 1 Samuel 8 these churches are! Longing to be like the world, they willingly rush after their self-chosen shepherds. Where they might be led they do not know, to pastures fresh or unto the slaughter. Like so many silly sheep, they dutifully bleat after these hirelings and walk in their paths.

They long after a champion, anyone, to deliver them from unwanted responsibilities, and ultimately from God Himself. It does not matter to them who it is, nor that it provokes the King of Glory Himself [Hos.13:9-11].

"We want another lord! We will subject ourselves! Enslave us! Ravage our families! We will pay him to do it!" [1 Sam.8:11-20].

"But give us a pastor, a bishop, a prophet, a priest, or a pope! Let us have a president and founder, a ruler, a doctor, a reverend, a minister! Any will do, as long as it is not God Himself!"

"And they said to him: 'Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.' And Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel: 'They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them'" -1 Sam.8:5-7.

How like Corinth these are! They bear with the foolish gladly. "For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face" -2 Cor.11:19, 20.

And this is precisely what the lofty lords throughout Christendom do. In their mad rush to be like the nations, church rulers have done exactly what the Lord Jesus explicitly forbids.

They have exalted themselves over the people of God in the name of being "benefactors" -Lk.22:25. Yet "benefactor" is nothing more than a vainly whitewashed attempt to mask the obvious.

Actually they esteem themselves to be "great men" -Mt.20:25, "rulers" -Mk.10:42, and "kings" -Lk.22:25. And what is their benefitting "service" to the people of God? They "lord it over them" and "exercise authority over them" -Mt.20:25; Mk.10:42; Lk.22:25.

"But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, 'IT IS NOT SO AMONG YOU'" [emphasis added] -Mt.20:26.

His leaders are "slaves" -Mt.20:27 and "servants" -Lk.22:26, not lords. Yet why do we discover rulers in the church lording their authority over the flock of God? We can only conclude that this is flagrant disobedience which dishonors God and oppresses the church.

Christ's true leaders lead others to their Lord and Master, Jesus. They do not twist the Word of God to draw away disciples after themselves [Acts 20:30].

We cannot serve two masters. If these so-called leaders are lording it over the church of God, they are putting themselves in the place of Christ. It is both a dangerous place to be and a dangerous path to follow.

He is the Lord; leaders are the slaves, and slaves obey their Master. They are "lorded over" by the Owner and Sovereign, but they do not lord it over fellow servants.

Christ's leaders lead by godly example and the persuasive power of truth, not by appeal to their position and authority or by employing intimidation or force.

For a leader to be otherwise than a slave is the essence of the deeds of the Nicolaitans. These are the deeds that the Lord Jesus says, "I hate" -Rev.2:6. The word "Nicolaitan" means, "I conquer the common people."

Conquering the common people is what the rulers of the Gentiles do [Mk.10:42]. It is what the rulers of the churches do and what the Lord Jesus hates; but it is not what is done in the church which He Himself builds.

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" -Mt.28:20. And He has not delegated His authority to would-be "christs" within the church. "It is not so among you" [Lk.22:26].

See for yourself. A concordance reveals that the 95 usages of the word "authority" in the NT never once describe one believer as having authority over another.

The only authority that a slave has is to obey the specific command of his Lord. He has authority to do the will of his Master, nothing more.

This is what is described in Mark 13:34. There, the Lord Jesus compares Himself to a man away on a journey, leaving his house and giving authority to his slaves, to each one his work.

A slave has authority to do the work commanded by his Lord, and the Lord has never commanded any to take His place as Lord by exercising authority over fellow servants.

In the only two instances in which "authority" is applied to a believer, it merely re-echoes the theme of Mk.13:34. Paul's authority was to "build up" -2 Cor.10:8; 13:10 the people of God. That was the work he was given to do by the Lord, but never that of ruling over them.

The apostle to the Gentiles says in no uncertain terms that he has no right or desire to exercise authority over anyone: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy" -2 Cor.1:24.

The apostle to the Jews says the same: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder, shepherd the flock of God among you, nor yet as lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" -1 Pet.5:1-3.

Note it well. Paul is a worker with them, not over them. Peter is a fellow elder, not a ruling one.

If the apostle to the Gentiles does not practice or allow lording it over Gentiles, and the apostle to the Jews forbids exercising authority over Jews, then who is left to rule over? No one. Neither is there place found for "rulers" in the true church.

Check a concordance and see for yourself. There is not a single word for "ruler" throughout the entire NT that is ever applied to an apostle, leader, pastor, overseer, elder, deacon, priest, or to any believer at all: a rather arresting fact.

All of these words for "rulers" are titles of civil magistrates, officers, and military personnel. They do not describe Christians or church leaders at all.

Neither is there a single instance in which one believer is ever called upon or commanded to "obey" another within the body of Christ. Search again and see for yourself.

The "hand" does not command the "leg;" it is the Head of the body who rules both. No member of the body has authority over or rules another; that is the prerogative and function of the Head, Christ Jesus, alone.

Which brings us back to the bludgeon of the would-be lords of Christendom: "Obey them that have the rule over you" -Heb.13:17 KJV. Let us examine this verse carefully.

First, the word "obey" used in this verse is not the customary NT word for obedience to one in authority. That usual word describes the obedience of a subject to a king, a child to his parent, or the true church to the Lord Jesus. In all of those associations, there is a decided and proper superior/subordinate relationship.

However, the word rendered "obey" here in its 53 usage's in the NT, has the central concept of "to persuade." When used in a command, it has the meaning "be persuaded by." It emphasizes a different motivation for complying with directives.

The first word demands obedience simply because someone is in a position of ruling or authority. The word used in this verse appeals to spiritual reasonableness as the motive for obeying and following the leaders. God is commanding believers to be spiritually persuaded, not to blindly obey men claiming to be "lords."

Secondly, the phrase "them that have the rule over you" may not be clearly understood to the modern reader. This phrase is taken from the KJV which was translated over 400 years ago now.

Nearly all current English versions use the word "leader" to replace the phrase "them that have the rule over you." This can be seen in translations such as the NIV, NASB, Good News, New Century, ESV, New Translation, NET, NLT, and others.

It is the identical word the Lord Jesus used for His leader in Lk.22:26. He is a leader, not a lord. Christ's leaders are servants, not rulers. They guide by example, not by exercising authority as the world does.

What is the church commanded to do in Heb.13:17? "Be persuaded by your leaders and submit." The brethren follow and obey because of the convincing godly example and true teaching evidenced before them.

This is precisely what believers are commanded to do with respect to their leaders. "Remember your leaders [yes, it's the identical word as in v.17 and in Lk.22:26] who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith" -Heb.13:7.

This is leadership: Speaking the Word of God in truth coming from a life that is conformed to it. This is what persuades the believers to follow their leaders. This is what has impact upon the hearers as it is truly teaching "with authority, and not as their scribes" -Mt.7:29.

In the passages found in 1 Tim.3:4,5; 5:17 and 1 Thess.5:12, yet another word is translated by "rule" in the KJV. However, this word has many meanings besides merely "rule."

Its wide range of definitions include: "lead, direct, attend to with care and diligence, manage, conduct, care for, give aid, show concern about, and rule."

As you examine these passages noted above, which of these definitions makes the most sense? See for yourself. You will discover that "rule" is not what these verses are directing leaders to do at all.

We do, however, find in the NT a man who ruled in the church. He was a wicked man. He did not accept the Word of God; rather he oppressed the brethren who wished to follow the Scriptures.

Those who would not obey his rule were thrown out of the church [3 Jn.9,10]. The root cause of his evil exercise of authority was that he "loved to be first among them" -3 Jn.9. He shows what all rulers in churches do.

Only Christ as "Head of the body, the church, is to have first place in everything" -Col.1:18. There cannot be two heads in the church; two cannot both have the first place.

Christ must be pushed aside from His rightful place to make room for Diotrefes and the church rulers following in his steps. This is the heart of the matter.

What have we done? Something has gone radically and tragically wrong. What excuse can we lay before the Lord Jesus for allowing man to effectually usurp Him as Head, Shepherd, and Bridegroom of His church? What explanation is there for the development of the ceremonies and carnal noise of Christendom's "worship services"?

Where can these things be found in the NT? Why then do we continue to defend and practice them since they have no biblical basis? If their origin is not from the Word of God, then they have arisen from foul and corrupted sources. Why are they not abandoned immediately?

The NT knows nothing of routines of tinkling bells, swishing robes, flickering candles, and mumbled mysterious liturgies. Neither is there to be found a predictable and well-oiled ceremony performed by "rulers" for the benefit of passive congregations.

No evidence is observed in the NT to sanction the frenzied noise and chaotic uproar of the typical Pentecostal gathering. Our failure and refusal to live and meet together in a manner that

glorifies the Lord according to His Word merely unmasks the bankrupt state of God's professed people.

We "heap to ourselves teachers having itching ears" -2 Tim.4:3 who become to us substitute "christs." We cling like parasites to external acts of "worship." We rely on countless "aids" to inspire, stimulate, and create an atmosphere of the "presence" of God about us.

Keyboards, choirs, and "worship teams" arouse sluggish saints to chant religious choruses. Majestic and ornate crosses tower before our adoring eyes. Drums drive to a fever pitch enthusiastic anticipation of our spiritually uplifting experience. "Worship" leaders announce or shout prayer-points through their microphones into our too willing ears.

O, how we love our church! How we love our tradition! How we pride ourselves in being found within the fold of the Reverend Doctor So-and-so!

Our pathetic and sickening addiction to such fleshly devices is all too evident. Strip us of these things and we will sit in appalled bewilderment as to what is to be done to worship our God.

We have become the willing servants of man-made routines and fleshly practices. We are paralyzed by such inventions and have made ourselves incapable of actually worshiping in Spirit and Truth.

Essential to idolatry is the manufacture of an external tangible form in order to make the unseen deity "real." It is imagined that it is merely a "help" or an "aid" to better conceptualize one's god.

Or so it is claimed. But remove the "aid" to worship, and the worshiper is at a loss as to what to do for his god to be worshiped.

We have been duped. We, the priests of the Living God, have been the willing victims of a subtle death.

The church has allowed itself to be artificially bound and gagged by the cumbersome and predictable invented ceremonies of religious overlords. The proof of this lies in our stupefied impotence to actually corporately worship the Lord Jesus apart from this vast array of unscriptural incentives.

Instinctively we know this is true, in practice we affirm week after week that we are helpless to worship apart from them. We deceive ourselves by attempts to assure our hearts that these formats, rulers, and "aids" to worship are not essential. They are, we say, genuine and beneficial supports to further our worship.

The deception lies in the fact that, if removed, our "worship" vanishes with them. Thus, if the "worship" disappears when the "helps" are gone, then the "worship" is actually totally dependent upon them. This is a great delusion on a grand scale; worse yet, it is idolatry.

What excuse will we offer for replacing the simple mandate, "Do this in remembrance of Me" -Lk.22:19 with that which is, at best, optional? Why has this meeting of simple worship been transformed beyond recognition and buried under uncountable years of dusty traditions of men?

Why is the priesthood of all believers content to sit in dumb passive silence observing the performance of a higher caste of clerical overlords?

What is wrong with us that we cannot worship without prayer-points and directives being announced from our praise and worship leaders? Is He not capable as Head of the body to direct its activities? Isn't the voice of the Good Shepherd sufficient to guide His flock into the pastures of His Word apart from "rulers" in the church?

Does not His heart of affection alone arouse a response of love from His bride? Doesn't He as Lord have the only legitimate right to prescribe and command His servants' worship? Isn't He present in the midst of even two or three of His people?

The answer from the true church is, "Yea and Amen." Those that would answer otherwise can readily be encountered this coming Sunday. They're everywhere.

*"You look for much, but behold, it comes to little;
When you bring it home, I blow it away.
Why?" declares the Lord of Hosts,
"Because of My house which lies desolate,
While each of you runs to his own house"*

Hag.1:9

*No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment
And puts it on an old garment;
Otherwise he will both tear the new,
And the piece from the new will not match the old*
Lk.5:36

*I have this against you: You have left your first love.
Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen,
And repent and do the first works;
Or else I am coming to you,
And will remove your lampstand out of its place Unless you
repent*
Rev.2:4,5

13

I Hate Christianity

I hate Christianity.

I love Jesus, the Christ, my living Lord. I love His church, all those joined in a living union with Him.

But I hate Christianity because both God and Christ hate it.

“Hear the Word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom: ‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of offerings and I take no pleasure when you come to appear before Me. Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?’

‘Bring your worthless offerings no more, they are an abomination to Me, the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.

‘MY SOUL HATES your appointed feasts, they are a trouble to Me; I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear’” [emphasis added] -Isa.1:10-15.

God hates Christianity. So does Christ.

“You have loved righteousness and HATED lawlessness” [emphasis added] -Heb.1:9.

Yes, Jesus hates lawlessness.

He hates false prophets spewing forth rubbish in His name. He hates fake miracle workers who blaspheme His name by their lying wonders. He hates imposter deliverance ministers using His name as a charm.

Why does He hate them? Because they are lawless; and Jesus hates lawlessness. Don't believe me? Read Matthew 7:21-23. Jesus never knew these workers of lawlessness and so they are hated.

“Esau I hated” –Rm.9:13. Jesus hates ungodly men whose god is their belly; who are willing to sell every spiritual reality to satisfy flesh cravings [Heb.12:16].

Esau's Prosperity disciples have swelled the ranks of Christianity and thus have made it hateful.

“You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also HATE” [emphasis added] –Rev.2:6.

Nicolaitan is a combination of two words: Nikao – I conquer: Laos – the common people. What does Jesus hate? Conquering, ruling over, dominating, exercising authority over, and oppressing common people by so-called “ministers.”

Jesus hates what religious men are doing by lawless, ungodly, dominating deeds all in His name throughout what calls itself Christianity.

Christ hates it. God hates it. I hate it.

What of you? Do you love what He loves and hate what He hates?

“All their evil is at Gilgal; Indeed, I came to HATE THEM there! Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more” [emphasis added] –Hos.9:15.

“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule on their own authority, and My people LOVE IT so. But what will you do at the end of it?” [emphasis added] –Jer.5:30,31.

14

Slaying the Beast

Beasts can effectually be slain by starvation.

Stop feeding them and they will eventually become extinct.

They will roar with gasping breath until the last; but they will expire in the end.

That hideous Monster of Prosperity masquerading as “Church” can be thus overcome.

The solution is simple; Stop paying money to feed the Beast.

Bring no more tithes, offerings, thanksgivings, levies, dues, seed-faith, fines, first-fruits, and contributions to gorge its belly.

Let the Beast starve. Let Prosperity perish miserably. Let this Dragon-Child die the death.

Rather, give to the poor. Open your hand freely to your needy brother. Gladly support sincere and genuine servants of God. Bless the orphan and widow from your substance with joy.

Of course, if you yourself love the Monster Dragon-Child-Beast of Prosperity, this will never happen.

In that case, your belly has become your god, the Dragon your father, and the whore of Prosperity your illicit mother.

The love of money will plunge you and your adopted family into flaming pits of ruin and destruction where the worm never dies; and there you will roar unendingly – there will be no end of that there.

Better to starve the Beast now than to gnash one's teeth in everlasting torments then.

15

TRUE UNITY

He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit

1 Cor.6:17

Unity has nothing to do with conformity; it has everything to do with the life of the Lord Jesus being manifest in mortal flesh [2 Cor.4:11].

True unity is found only in the Father and the Son [Jn.14:9-11] and in those indwelt by Him [Jn.17:21]. It is a supernatural reality whose origin and maintenance is in God Himself. And this oneness can never be fabricated by external artifice.

Unity among true Christians has always been. It exists today despite clamoring to the contrary. To claim otherwise is crass unbelief.

It is actually an indictment against the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is the One building His church and no power or device of hell can prevail against it.

Either our Lord's prayer of John 17 has been answered or it has not. If it has, then unity exists. If it has not, then His petition [as if this were possible] was contrary to the will of the Father; for we know that: "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" -1 Jn.5:14.

Did the Father "hear" the request of the Lord Jesus? It is inconceivable that He did not. "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me" -Jn.11:41,42.

It is unthinkable that unity has not been and is not now the present reality of all true believers. The prayer of our Lord Jesus makes this evident. "Holy Father, keep them in Your name that they may be one even as We are" -Jn.17:11.

Unity is a spiritual consequence in response to the prayer of the Lord Jesus. It is established by God Himself and can be maintained only by Him.

All are preserved for God, by God. As such, they are "not of the world" -Jn.17:14; their origin and home is from above; they are a heavenly people.

The manners and customs of their homeland are foreign to those of this world. The law of their land governs their every action, not the ways of earth-dwellers among whom they live. They are like their Lord: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” -Jn.17:16. Herein is the key to unity.

Unity consists of possessing the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is having the same other-worldliness, righteousness, truth, and godliness that characterized Him. It is what constitutes one a Christian. In this they are all one with full agreement.

To be otherwise is to be something else besides Christian which destroys unity thereby. One cannot be demonstrably unlike the Lord Jesus and still lay valid claim to being one with Him; He does not participate in such hypocrisy.

He resides only in those who love Him with all their hearts; who demonstrate such love by obedience to His Word. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word” -Jn.14:23. Love evidenced by obedience to the truth is what sets apart the Christian and issues in unity.

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth” -Jn.17:17. The ones who belong to God keep His Word [Jn.17:6]. They are kept from the defilement of the world by the Father Himself [Jn.17:11]. They are one in their obedience to the Word of God which sets them apart and renders them hateful to the world [Jn.17: 14].

Truth is foundational to all genuine unity. Minimize, ignore, or abandon this and all basis of unity is destroyed.

If the Word of God is not our foundation, we have departed from our only reference point. We can then no longer distinguish a saint from a false apostle, the temple of God from idols, or light from darkness itself. Opinion then dictates and consensus dominates; truth and sanctity do not.

The Word of God is absolutely essential to unity, and unless our words echo those of the Lord Jesus, other people cannot become one with the Father and the Son. “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one” -Jn.17:20,21.

The words of the Father have been given by the Lord Jesus to believers [Jn.17:6,8,14]. These same words are then called “their word” [Jn.17:20].

It has come to them. They have embraced the Word, understood it, and kept it; it has performed its work in them. They are transformed thereby; it has become theirs. Therefore, they speak as one with the Father and the Son.

For each believer to manifest the truth, holiness, and love of God is what constitutes unity. As the world observes Christians they behold the manifold excellence of God's character in each saint. The common glory of God is unity manifest to the world [Jn.17:21,22].

Unity has nothing to do with conformity. "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" -Rm. 12:4,5.

True unity is simply being possessors of a common life. We are not told to *become* one, we *are* one.

The uniqueness of the body is the unity of the one life manifest through the widely divergent members. No member lives and acts unto itself. All are governed by the directives of the Head. Herein is the profound key to a unity which is intensely spiritual at its core.

Submission to one another is in response to the direction and purposes of the Head. The members do not dictate to the others what they are to do. It is the Head who governs who shall submit to whom.

Life in the Lord Jesus, both individually and corporately, is a radically spiritual reality. No member has the prerogative to act independently of the life, will, and authority of the Head; to do so is the ruin of unity.

Distinctions of Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female are no hindrance to their access to the Father, "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" -Gal.3:28.

All are being renovated into the spiritual image of the Lord Jesus Christ apart from any fleshly considerations [Col.3:10,11]. The mighty, the noble, the religiously "privileged" have no preference before the God who chooses the weak, base, and despised of the world to confound the "wise" -1 Cor.1:26-29.

God has made "one new man" -Col.3:9,10, "one commonwealth" -Eph.2:19, "one temple" -Eph.2:19-22. There is

“one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father” -Eph.4:4-6.

This is a unity which must be kept diligently [Eph.4:3]. And the necessary element to do so is “love, which is the perfect bond of unity” -Col.3:14.

The love which perfectly unites Christians is obedience to the Word of God. “He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word. He who does not love Me does not keep My Words” -Jn.14:21,23,24.

Obedience to the Word of God [love] is the perfect bond of unity, and it is only by this that “we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments” -1 Jn.5:2.

Keeping the Word of God obediently is the only valid expression of union with the Living God. It is the only real evidence of unity with the true people of God themselves.

Sheep straying off paths of righteousness by heeding the “voice of strangers” -Jn.10:5 destroy the unity of the flock thereby; that is, if the sheep hearing and following the Good Shepherd choose to follow them. But they will not, for “they know His voice” -Jn.10:4 and rather follow the Good Shepherd.

Uniformity has nothing to do with unity. Those who cry the loudest about establishing unity in the church merely betray their own lack of obedience to the Word of God.

Unity among true Christians has always been. All real believers have consistently loved God by obeying His Word, and they have displayed their love towards one another by keeping His commandments.

Who was it that was united to the God of Glory, more than 2.5 million Israelites, or Joshua and Caleb [see Num.14:1-11]? Though there was a virtual absolute consensus of opinion among the tribes of Israel, there was no unity because there was no obedience to the Word of God.

Their bodies “fell in the wilderness” -Heb.3:16,17 while Caleb “followed the Lord his God fully” -Josh.14:8,9. Unanimous agreement among the professed people of God does not constitute unity; being sanctified in the truth does.

There was agreement among the 400 "prophets" of God in the days of Jehoshaphat. "Behold, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king, so please let your word be like one of them and speak favorably" -2 Chron.18:12.

Micaiah, however, diligently maintained the unity of the Spirit by utterly refusing this compromising rubbish. "But Micaiah said, 'As the Lord lives, what my God says, that I will speak'" -2 Chron.18: 13.

The Spirit unites us to glorify God by being separated unto Himself from the corruption and compromises of our age. We are to hear, keep, and speak the truth of God's Word; this, Micaiah did. Conformity/Uniformity urges association upon the basis of the lowest common denominator.

To achieve this ideal of "oneness," the doctrine of the Word must be cast aside while keeping only the bare "essentials." And so we are implored to join together with any who claim to be Christian regardless of their beliefs or practices. We are exhorted to join in associations with all that "name the name of Christ."

We are told that we find our basis of unity in a united opposition to the moral evils and troubles of this age. We ought to join hands with everyone who protests abortion and pornography, who bewails the problems of the modern family, who stands against homosexuality, corruption, and things like these.

The united front we present is thought to be the oneness that the Lord Jesus longed for in John 17. Somehow we think it is up to us to create the oneness He was pleading for there. But He was asking the Father, not us.

Only God can answer prayer and create life out of death. It is only the Spirit of God that can bring unity out of chaos. No amount of dialogue, associations, conferences, publications, or creeds can ever create, establish, or maintain unity.

They can, however, gain significant mileage toward erecting a monolith of ecumenical conformity. And what a lofty edifice it is becoming.

Literally millions are swelling its ranks as its tower steadily rises heavenward. Enthusiasm is running high among all who share the common concern of making a name for themselves: for

the reputation and image of unity being gained throughout the known world.

They are in agreement; they are all talking the same language. The spirit of cooperation animates them as the structure ascends brick upon brick. And the Lord said, "Behold, the people are one" -Gen.11:6. Indeed, their efforts have become proverbial.

AS BRICK FOR STONE
AND SLIME FOR MORTAR,
SO MAN'S CHURCH WILL NOT STAND.
FOR WHAT IS BRICK
BUT A MAN-MADE FORM?
AND WHAT IS SLIME
EXCEPT TOLERANCE?

Ecumenical slime bonds strangely diverse and unlikely companions together in a semblance of oneness. They willingly set aside differences for their common objective.

And it is this Babylonish unity that breaks down long-standing enmity between opposing factions. "Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day" -Lk.23:12: the very day they delivered Jesus over to be crucified.

Unity has nothing to do with conformity.

The Gist of the Ist & the Ism of the Schism

Now it seems like lots of folks love to wear name badges, you know, to let everybody know who they are and what they stand for. It's really convenient and all; at a glance you can say, "Oh, yeah, so you're one of them."

"Yep; and I'm proud of it. Say, where's your name tag?"

"Well," says I as I kinda shifted my left shoulder some to adjust my collar, don't rightly know why I did that except I was kinda feeling like my head might be on the chopping block soon, "I reckon I don't have one."

"So how's anybody gonna know which group you're in?"

Yep, it was starting to get a smidge uncomfortable alright.

"Can't tell if you're a Calvinist, or Methodist, or Dispensationalist, or in Arminianism, Catholicism, amillennialism, or whatever ism or ist you really are."

Now he was starting to get all hot and steamy 'bout this name tag thing, so I says, "Well, I'm actually kinda glad I don't have one because that way I'm not in my own little corner."

He didn't much like that one: no, not one bit. So his eyes kinda narrowed and some cord like things got all stiff-like alongside his neck and he got right up in my face and said, no, more like hissed, "How do you pronounce this?"

And he held out a scrap of paper with the letters S-h-i-b-b-o-l-e-t-h scrawled on it.

Boy howdy! I knew I was in some deep muck now. I was trying to remember how he and his group said it, but I was all sort of confused because I kept getting it all mixed up with how some other groups had been saying it.

Anyhow, it seemed like a pretty big deal to him, so I took a stab at it: more like a shot in the dark. Well, that didn't go well; I missed his target all together.

He didn't need to say anything else and I didn't either; I already knew my goose was as good as cooked. Yep, his pot was already steaming with a cup full of suspicion and some hot peppers thrown into his stewing superiority.

That was a dead ringer that my head was about to roll and I'd be thrown in the midst of his bubbling brew.

All because I didn't have a name tag.

"Then they would say to him, 'Say now, "Shibboleth."' But he said, 'Sibboleth,' for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim" -Jud.12:6.

And that's the gist of the ist and the ism of the schism.

17

Bricks & Stones

Uniformity is not Unity.

Monolithic towers ascend heavenward, fame redounds abroad, and swarms swell their ranks; yet these facades are crafted with Nimrod's bricks [Gen.11:3]. Though the people are "one," the God of heaven will confuse and scatter them in hot displeasure [Gen.11:5-8].

And why? Because bricks are not stones.

Bricks are fabricated according to human invention by virtue of being forced into an external man-made form: rigid and uniform. Any not fitting the mold are discarded as defective, even maligned as willfully deficient.

Stones, however, are individual creations of God Himself. Not one is identical in constitution or outward deportment. These are laid according to Divine association in relationship to one another.

This is the work of the Spirit, Christ is its only foundation, and it grows into a dwelling of God by the Spirit: a holy temple in the Lord, a place of habitation built with living stones [Eph.2:20-22; 1 Pet.2:4,5].

Nimrod's repurposed and re-manufactured earth meet with no Divine approval. His priest-craft blocks were fashioned in revolt against the Lord of heaven. And all who follow in his steps meet with similar disaster.

Nimrod's clay substitutes will collapse in a babel of confusion according to that true word:

AND SLIME FOR MORTAR,
SO MAN'S CHURCH WILL NOT STAND.
FOR WHAT IS BRICK
BUT A MAN-MADE FORM?
AND WHAT IS SLIME
EXCEPT TOLERANCE?

Let each man be careful how he builds
1 Cor.3:10

A Riddle: “Brick for Stone”

Bricks: Human inventions
Stones: Divine creations

Bricks: Substitutes
Stones: Original

Bricks: Towers
Stones: Altars

Bricks: Conformity
Stones: Diversity

Bricks: Forced into uniformity
Stones: Freedom in unity

Bricks: Compiled by force – Slime
Stones: Joined by love – Mortar

Bricks: Identical components in one man's enterprise
Stones: Individual living members in One Man's body

Bricks: Gathered to central location
Stones: Discovered everywhere

Bricks: Come to shrine and “worship”

Stones: Abide where you are and worship

Bricks: Custodial decrees

Stones: Divine arrangement

Bricks: Tradition of man's priest-craft

Stone: Truth of God's Word

Bricks: Institutional organized shrine

Stones: Living organism body

Bricks: Money gathered maintains custodian & shrine

Stones: Money shared gladly to bless needy

Bricks: Conform or be cast out

Stones: Grow into maturity

Brick: Nimrod the Hunter

Stone: Christ the Savior

Bricks: Let US scatter the tower

Stones: I will build MY church and gates of hell will
not scatter

The Leaven of the Pharisees

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees

Which is hypocrisy

Lk.12:1

Religion is a mask for hatred of God.

The ways of the Lord are judged according to their own with no thought of His ever judging theirs. Quickly they find fault and slowly, if ever, do they hear rebuke. "Healthy," needing nothing from the Great Physician, they are progressively devoured by the cancer of Cain.

Cain was the father of Pharisees [Gen.4:1-11]. Hating, rejecting the way of righteousness, a self-conceived substitute was offered in its stead. A bloody execution upon sin and self he would have none of, and with brazen face the fruit of his own cursed toil was laid in haughty confidence before the God of Heaven.

Yet when the Lord cast aside his tainted fruit as worthless, his hardened heart forged war. Reproof was spurned. His neck stiffened against the God whose ways he despised.

His fist clenched against the righteous and struck with murderous rage. He loathed in the depths of his rancid soul the sacrifice that the Lord approved of [Heb.11:4], and slaughtered him who brought it [Gen.4:8].

"Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother" -1 Jn.3:12. Then with insolent disdain, he mocked Omniscience by his sullen lying reply as to Abel's whereabouts [Gen.4:9]. He was a true child of his father, the devil, who is "a murderer...a liar" -Jn.8:44.

The Pharisees follow in his train. Rejecting the way of righteousness "and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" -Rm.10:3. The very name Pharisees means "the separated ones."

But they are not separated unto God at all. The only separation they know is a self-imposed isolation into the squalor of their own darkened hearts' chambers.

What was handed down by tradition from ancient lore dictates their every carefully rehearsed step. And their steps, like their forefather, Cain, led them to kill “those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One” -Acts 7:52.

Their religion led them to betray and murder the Son of God whose blood “speaks better than the blood of Abel” -Heb.12:24.

“They do all their deeds to be noticed by men” -Mt.23:5, “to be seen by men” -Mt.6:5; “to be honored by men” -Mt.6:2, and to “receive glory from one another” -Jn.5:44. “They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God” -Jn.12:43.

See them nod the acknowledgment for the respectful greetings encountered in the concourse of life. "Hail, Pastor, Reverend, Doctor, Rabbi" [Mt.23:7]. Gaze at them solemnly seated above their fellows at the head of their halls of weekly ceremony [Mt.23:6].

Listen as trumpets acclaim their deeds of beneficence. Watch as their hoarded coins clink impressively into coffers which eventually filter down into their awaiting left hand [Mt.6:2-4].

Hear their lofty swelling oratory to the skies: a magnificent volume of multiplied words unheard by heaven [Mt.6:5-7]. Observe them, morose and downcast, denying bodily demands in order to feed the cravings of insatiable pride parading as humility [Mt.6:16-18].

Learn from them seated in Moses' chair. Learn the peril of knowing what God says without doing it [Mt.23:2,3]. Learn well the damnation upon knowing where to seek the Lord Jesus without arising, finding, and worshipping Him [Mt.2:1-11]. Count with exactitude their tithes of dill [Mt.23:23].

Scrutinize closely gnats that have been purged [Mt.23:24]. Admire expanded encasements of Scriptures brandished before approving eyes [Mt.23:5]. Stand reverently with them before honored memorials of the dead [Mt.23:27].

Rather, weep with broken heart for the devoured widow [Mt.23:14]. Grieve for multitudes enrolled and seduced by them, now sons of hell [Mt.23:15].

Gasp in amazement as the camels of greed, arrogance, and hypocrisy are devoured by their ravenous gaping appetite

[Mt.23:24]. Shudder in disgust over the vermin-infested stench of their decomposed heart of death [Mt.23:27].

Shrink in horror at the tombs of the righteous from every generation murdered by their forefathers. And appalled and aghast, witness them fill up the measure of their guilt as spikes are driven into the outstretched arms of the Son of God Himself [Mt.23:29-37]. Witness the sure end of all religion.

“Behold, your king!’ They therefore cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!’ ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” -Jn.19:14,15.

Solemn; in zeal for "Jehovah," they slaughtered Jesus -Jehovah's salvation. Of these the Lord Jesus said: “Outwardly you appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” -Mt.23:28.

Hypocrisy is a masquerade, a clever drama. A role is assumed and performed with impressive persuasion to the admiration of onlookers.

The character portrayed by the Pharisee is that of "Man of God." The role is studied minutely; long hours of laborious concentration to perfect the part issue in its well-rehearsed performance.

It is a calculated show: The costumes are donned, facial expressions are carefully studied, accents are adopted, and lines are memorized.

Props are employed to lend credence to the act. All is a synchronized flowing sequence of convincing portrayal. But it is just that, an act; it is not what they truly are.

With a ceremonious swish of sanctity in a flurry of tasseled blue [Mt.23:5], they exit the church's stage until the next curtain call. There, unmasked, in private counsel with fellow pretenders, their deeds of darkness are forged. “Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said” -Mt.22:15.

“The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, ‘What are we doing? If we let Him go on like this the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’

So from that day on they planned together to kill Him” - Jn.11:47,48,53.

No unhallowed union is spared by these supposed separated fools in formulating their hateful schemes. “And the Pharisees went out and immediately began taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him” -Lk.3:6.

“Ah, but now, the temple, the synagogue, and the market place are calling; the show must go on. There are trumpets to be blown, mint to be tithed, fasts to endure, prayers to recite, Scriptures to be shuffled, seats to ascend, greetings to acknowledge, ceremonies to perform, hands to be washed, and Christs to be crucified.

“We must honor God with our lips though our hearts are far from Him [Mk.7:6]. We must worship God in the utter vanity of our own opinion [Mk.7:7]. We are constrained to be as eyes to the blind so they too can plunge headlong into our pit [Mt.15:14].

“Oh yes, and the key of knowledge: the door must be barricaded and guarded fast lest any should enter therein [Lk.11:52]. And, certainly, prayers: we believe they should be long, very long [Mt.23:14], and when at all possible on the street comer or synagogue [Mt.6:5], and by all means with wholehearted thanks that we are unlike other men [Lk.18:11].

“Indeed, sacrifices must go on! How else could we continue to finger the Mammon of unrighteousness [Lk.16:13-15]! And where shall tithes and offerings be placed if not in our den of thieves [Mt.21:12,13]! What other source of revenue is there to fund the deeds of a Judas unless it be the shekel of the sanctuary [Mt.26:14,15]!

“We must love our money [Lk.16:14,15]! We have to exalt ourselves! Our opinions must prevail! And of course we actually despise the Lord of Glory!

“You see, we are hypocrites. All is a masquerade. The lord of light governs our every move [2 Cor.11:14]. Surely this is no cause to marvel, is it?”

“It is not surprising if his [Satan's] ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness” -2 Cor.11:15. But, then again, ours has been an unrivaled performance for centuries now.

“You probably thought that it was real all this while, but it isn't. It is leaven.”

Leaven is hidden within. It is alive and it feeds upon its host. It progressively transforms the whole by its internal mixture.

Leaven puffs up; it fills the mass with empty air. It adds lightness to what is weighty and makes palatable what is distasteful. Unchecked, it inflates to enormous proportions.

It is corruption. “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Clean out the old leaven! Let us therefore celebrate with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” -1 Cor.5:6-8.

Pharisees are neither sincere nor true. Behind their mask they peddle “the precepts of men” -Mk.7:7. Be warned against their influence, their pretensions, and their doctrine.

“But beware of the leaven of the teaching of the Pharisees” -Mt.16:11. Their instruction injects leaven into the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Beware! If not arrested, it will certainly transform you into “twice as much a son of hell” -Mt.23:15 as the Pharisee who recruited you.

Leaven's effect is visible from without. Though it has permeated the whole, it betrays its presence by what it does on the exterior. Visible, outward, and tangible are the hallmarks and preoccupation of Pharisees.

Everything revolves around the external; a pageant could not be otherwise. Having not the inward reality of a “broken and contrite heart” -Ps.51:17, they can do nothing else but emphasize the external act.

“Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” -Lk.6:2, is the rallying cry of their wretched hearts. Censure, condemnation, and self-justification formulate their "ministry": “The Pharisees' disciples often fast and offer prayers, but Yours eat and drink” -Lk.6:33.

Without joy, void of compassion, the slightest affront to their self-generated scruples launches an assault upon any who dare to transgress: “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet. And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus” -Jn.5:10,16.

There is joy in the presence of God over one sinner who repents [Lk.15:7,10], but the heart of the Pharisee, as a deadened stone, is unmoved in its malice: "And the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, 'There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day'" -Lk.13:14.

The Lord of the Sabbath [Mk.2:27,28] steadfastly refused to stoop to the bankrupt rebukes of these petty scrupulous fools. Their tangled maze of requirements sprang from the polluted cisterns of their own depraved hearts, and not from that blessed Spirit of Light.

"Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?" -Mk.7:5 is their exclusive touchstone of reality. All is arraigned, tried, and convicted in the supreme court of Self, with lord Tradition presiding.

In that tribunal, their intricately inscribed volumes "nicely set aside the commandment of God" -Mk.7:9. Their burdensome weight of multiplied codes "invalidates the Word of God by your tradition which you have handed down" -Mk 7:13. They teach "as doctrines the precepts of men" -Mk.7:7.

Pharisees receive nothing from above; they merely reshuffle useless fare received from fellow scribal mongers. Their doctrine is "safe," but it cannot save.

It is ever-so-balanced, but not piercing to the conviction of soul and spirit: having the approval of men, but not that of Heaven.

It is leaven, and leaven corrupts. Their teaching permeates the heart and transforms the lives of those infected. To be seen before men and not by the Father in secret becomes the motivation in life; pleasing lord Pharisee now is the governing principle of the heart.

"Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men rather than the approval of God" -Jn.12:42,43.

They did not glorify God because they feared men. They dared not transgress the determination of the "reputed pillars"

-Gal.2:9 lest they incur their wrath and thereby lose their standing before them.

“You see, the Pharisee is our benefactor; he will lead us into ‘truth.’ Apart from him we could never find our way through the bewildering maze of ‘divine’ necessities heaped upon us.

“He is our ruler; he knows the requirements and knows the penalties for deviation from them. He also administers the punishments. We must comply; if we do not, lord Pharisee has determined it to be transgression against God.

“Certainly we must bow to the pronouncements of men. The accepted behavior must be practiced. Of necessity, externalism is our focus. The ceremonies of our church must be performed and of course our hearts are not actually right with God.

“You see, we are hypocrites, all is a masquerade.” The leaven of the Pharisees has done its work.

With smiling handshake amid multiplied pleasantries, they exit the scene of their weekly church performance until the next curtain call. There, unmasked, in the privacy of their own parlors, their deeds of darkness are found.

“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, “The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land”’” -Ezek.8:12.

There devotees bask for hours in the ghastly bluish tones of their televisions. All manner of garbage, unfit for swine, much less the Throne, is eagerly ingested by these undiscerning and unconsecrated fools.

There dainty delicious morsels of gossip fill their bellies [Prov.18:8]. It is here that the fires of hell smolder in defiled tongues that lash out flames of cruelty, bitterness, and rage [Jas.3:6]. And on these beds lustful passions are poured out upon any willing passer-by [Ezek.16:25].

“But, oh yes, the key of knowledge; the Bible is indeed a magnificent piece to be displayed for our weekly enactment, but of little value otherwise. But don't be alarmed, our chief Pharisee will unlock its mysteries to us.

“And, certainly, prayers; we believe they should be short, very short, and by all means at meal-time only.

“Ah, but now, the sanctuary is calling; the show must go on. There are costumes to don, seats to occupy, ministers to flatter, hallelujahs to shout, tithes to bring, sermons to endure, greetings to lavish, ceremonies to perform, conviction to resist, and fanatics to be spurned.

"Those troublesome narrow-minded do-gooders! They're forever preaching on this, that, and the other. Why, one of them publicly told my father and mother that they were lying hypocrites!

“It makes my blood boil just to think of it! I could just kill him! The nerve of that high-minded fanatical extremist, anyway; who does he think he is?”

"What? You mean you didn't hear about it? I thought everybody knew about it by now."

"Yeah, some guy named Peter."

"My parents? Their names were Ananias and Sapphira" [Acts 5:1-11].

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees

*Under three things the church shudders,
Yea, under four it cannot stand:*

*Under a Pharisee when placed in authority,
And under a tongue of love lacking its deed:
Under hearts weighted with sin unforsaken yet hid,
And under man's tradition parading as truth*

19

Hypocrites

Hypocrites lurk at every corner; the church has no monopoly on them.

Teenagers are expert at pretense while deceiving their parents.

Businessmen will wine and dine those whom they hate in the hopes of gain

.

Husbands deliver flowers to their wives while secretly panting over Internet porn.

Women's groups smile and giggle and afterwards phone lines sizzle with gossip—and the list goes on.

But, admittedly, religious hypocrisy is the most disgusting and deadly of them all.

You know, long-winded prayers while devouring widows' houses, obsessive in external ceremony but void of mercy, justice, and faithfulness — whitewashed tombs crammed with rancid rotting human bones. That's Jesus' indictment in Mt.23:14,23,27.

Hypocrisy signifies play acting, a masquerade and calculated show. Costumes are donned, facial expressions carefully studied, accents adopted, and lines memorized. Props are employed to lend credence to the act in this synchronized flowing drama.

Hypocrites shall be turned into hell, "for the congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate" -Job 15:34.

And Jesus is characteristically blunt in addressing all such religious pretenders, asking: "How can you escape the damnation of hell?" -Mt.23:33.

The truth is, you can't: that is, if you're a hypocrite.

Hypocrisy is a religious mask that will be unceremoniously ripped off the face of every pretending fool, leaving the wearer naked,

ashamed, and terrified before the all-searching eye of the holy God of Light.

Better lay aside your mask and costumed folly now before the final curtain falls.

*This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity
which she continually did*
Acts 9:36

Innumerable are the blessings from the faithful services of Christian women. Truly the godly woman contributes significantly to the “adorning of the doctrine of God our Savior” -Tit.2:10. From the beginning she was fashioned for a distinctive purpose.

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable/ corresponding for him’” -Gen.2:18. And again, “For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake” -1 Cor.11:9.

Woman was created to assist the man as his companion. She helps him to fulfill what God has given him to do. Her contribution is therefore complimentary to his purpose and works.

Helpers, by definition, are not initiators. They do not take the prominent role. They are not leaders. They occupy a support position and lend aid to those they are associated with. Helpers rarely appear in the public eye but typically carry on their works behind the scenes.

Her God-given realm is not public but in private; she is a follower, not the leader. He guides and directs, she responds. He has prominence, she, retirement. The man influences his world, the woman, her home. This order from creation establishes the scope of her ministry in the church.

Several NT passages outline this: “But women will be saved through child-bearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control” -1 Tim.2:15. “I want the younger women to get married, bear children, manage a household, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach” -1 Tim.5:14.

“Older women are to be teaching what is good, so that they may train the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored” -Tit.2:4,5.

These verses summarize the primary arena of the Christian woman's ministry. It is to her husband and family; it is at home. It will save her from intruding into ministry reserved by God for the man. It will save her from neglecting her own God-given duties.

Mature spiritual women are to train the younger women in their godly domestic responsibilities. Practical spirituality is the emphasis of their instruction.

These godly qualities will determine whether she has been faithful to the Lord or not. The elderly Christian widow will be evaluated as to whether she has been “faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble, devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds, and continuing night and day to pray and ask God for help” -1 Tim.5:9,10,5.

It was these helpful works of service that Phoebe was known for [Rm.16:1,2]. Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and many others did good deeds by “ministering unto Him of their substance” -Lk.8:2,3. Dorcas “was always doing good and helping the poor” by making “robes and other clothing” -Acts 9:36,39. Lydia opened her home in hospitality to Paul and those with him [Acts 16:15,40].

These are the things that the Christian woman of God is to do for His honor and glory. The home is her domain from which she extends her deeds of kindness to those outside as well.

Yet there may be occasions when she assists her husband to expound the Scriptures in private to one of God's servants. But the man and wife did not do this from the pulpit or in the public gathering. “They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” -Acts 18:26.

Spiritual women have a testimony to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. One repentant infamous woman testified to various ones in her village resulting in the conversion of many [Jn.4:39-42]. Euodia and Syntyche were “women which labored with me in the gospel” -Phil.4:3.

Do not despise the ladies. They were at the tomb early; where were the disciples? They heard the glad gospel; disciples cowered in fear, darkness, and doubt.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James, and Salome pressed through the gloom and witnessed the light. Let us hail these devoted daughters of Zion along with their sisters, Martha and Mary, Anna, Elizabeth, Susanna, Joanna, Phoebe, Dorcas, Euodia and Syntyche, Pricilla, and Lydia, and a host of others too numerous to recount.

“And they remembered His Words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and all the rest. They and the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them” -Lk.24:8-11.

“Mary Magdalene came, saying: ‘I have seen the Lord!’” - Jn.20:18. Beware that prejudice and pride should close your ears to the witness of women.

They assisted in their appropriate capacities as ordained by the Lord in His Word. They served the saints but did not lead them; they testified of the gospel to individuals, but were not the teachers in the church itself. The Scriptures are quite clear regarding this as the following translations of 1 Tim.2:11,12 demonstrate.

“Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” -KJV.

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” -NIV.

“A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” -NASB.

“Women should learn in silence and all humility. I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet” -Good News.

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” -NKJV.

“Women should learn quietly and submissively. I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly” -NLT.

Paul's express purpose to Timothy in this letter is stated in the next chapter: "I am writing these things to you so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, because it is the church of the living God" -1 Tim.3:14,15.

These are no isolated and unique directives to resolve an immediate situation encountered by Timothy alone. They contain universal truths and the command of God to all Christians and churches wherever and whenever they may be found.

Paul's teaching did not vary from place to place. He spoke the same truths, as he says, "just as I teach everywhere in every church" -1 Cor.4:17. "It is what I direct in all the churches" -1 Cor.7:17.

And these things are not his personal advice or prejudice, but are the Lord's commandment. "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's commandment. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored" -1 Cor.14:37,38.

So then, what we are told in I Tim.2:11,12 is the Lord's command for the church throughout the world. In the church, the women are to listen, not speak. They are to learn but not instruct, to submit and not exercise authority.

The compelling reason cited by Paul is contained in the next verse: "For Adam was first created, then Eve" -1 Tim.2:13.

From creation the woman's role has been supportive as a helper, not initiating as a leader. We have already seen in what capacities she is to teach: to other women and her children.

But here we learn that she is not to be the teacher of men; she is not to exercise authority by leading and directing the brethren.

This is the consistent teaching of the Word of God respecting women in ministry: "As in all the churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church" -1 Cor.14:33-35.

"To speak" means much more than not disturbing the gathering by distracting interruptions of talking and whispering

during meetings. Certainly this ought not to be done. Even common courtesy would inform us of that.

Paul tells us what he means by "speaking;" he says it 23 times in this chapter. It means to speak by way of instructing the brethren as 1 Cor.14:6 summarizes.

There he identifies the speaking he is referring to as "revelation or of knowledge or of prophesy or of teaching." It is this that the women are to remain silent about in the assembly.

They are not allowed to instruct the church. Being "silent" means ceasing from instruction as verses 28 and 30 clearly inform us. Being "silent" and "not speaking" refer to one and the same thing.

The woman is not allowed to teach or exercise authority over a man. Since the primary work of the overseer is being "able to teach" -1 Tim.3:2 and "exhorting in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" - Tit.1:9, women are unqualified for this ministry. An overseer certainly publicly leads and instructs the people of God which, as we have already seen, is outside the realm of her God-given capacities for service.

Women bishops, reverends, pastors, elders, and general overseers are contradictions in terms. The English translations are in agreement: "An overseer/bishop/church leader *must* be above reproach, the husband of one wife" -1 Tim.3:2 [emphasis added]. If the overseer must be above reproach, it is a qualification that is not optional; it has to be so or he is disqualified for such ministry.

Yet the same Scripture that says he must be above reproach equally demands that he must be the husband of one wife. No woman who is the husband of one wife can be found. Women are not husbands; it is a contradiction in terms.

We therefore will never legitimately encounter women in this type of ministry. Call it what you will, a woman can never be an overseer/bishop/ pastor/elder/reverend according to the Word of God. It is not her God-given sphere of service.

To claim that men and women have received the same Holy Spirit and therefore can have the same ministries is an argument disproved by the Word of God. The fact that all believers possess the same Holy Spirit does in no way indicate that each has the

same spiritual gift or capacity for ministry: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord” -1 Cor.12:4,5.

The Lord does not distribute the ministry of overseer to women, though He is the same Lord of both male and female. Though “there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” -Gal.3:28, this does not mean that all ministries given by Him are without regard for gender.

The Rev [Mrs.] Peter did not preach on the day of Pentecost. The apostle John's wife did not raise the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. You will discover no parallel to our modern practice of "ordaining" women to public ministry in the pages of the NT.

Which gospel preacher in the NT was a woman? Which apostle was a woman? Which overseer was a woman? Which church in the Scriptures had a woman pastor? Which of the NT books were written by a woman for the church's instruction? The answer is none.

And the fact that your daughters will have the Spirit poured out upon them in the last days and will prophesy [Acts 2:17], in no way alters what the Scriptures say about the realm of the woman's ministry. Joel does not say that your daughters will become ministers of churches or that they will become ordained overseers of congregations and ministries.

He says that they will prophesy; but Joel does not indicate where or when or to whom they will do this. Any who presume that this means that women will become leaders in the church merely deceive themselves.

Philip had four virgin daughters who were prophesying [Acts 21:9], yet when it came time for the prophetic word to be spoken, the Lord sent a prophet, a man, to speak forth His Word in that assembly [Acts 21:10,11]. His daughters carried on their prophetic ministry in other spheres, but not in the church in accordance with what the Scriptures command us.

We mustn't imagine that an isolated exception establishes a general precedent. Yes, without dispute, God spoke through Deborah [Jud.4&5], but it was shameful. It was not normal. The Lord allowed that to be done as a rebuke to the wayward rebellion of His people Israel.

The glory went to a woman and Barak was put to shame. Barak ought to have taken the lead, instead he followed a woman and was publicly disgraced.

This exceptional instance of God speaking through Deborah did not qualify her or any woman to be a pastor. No basis for ordaining women as overseers can be derived from her history. In fact, in the pages of the Scriptures God has spoken through many abnormal means.

God spoke through Neco, the idolatrous Pharaoh of Egypt, and used him to rebuke Josiah, the king of Judah [2 Chron.35:2-22]. The murderous king Saul was overcome by the Spirit of God and prophesied all day and throughout the night [1 Sam.19:18-24]. Caiaphas, the wicked high priest who ordered the crucifixion of Christ, also prophesied [Jn.11:49-53].

Does the fact that God spoke through these unlikely vessels qualify them to become pastors and leaders in the church? That should be obvious; I don't think we would like Pastor Pharaoh, Overseer Saul, or the Rev. Canon Caiaphas to be senior ministers over our churches.

And we should not forget that God spoke through a donkey and used that dumb beast to shamefully rebuke the madness of Balaam [2 Pet.2:15,16]. Yet the fact that God used this animal does not justify ordaining donkeys over God's people.

Thus the fact that God used Deborah in an unusual way does not establish a precedent for women to be appointed as leaders in the church.

The Lord has given women a different work to do than He has to men. Sisters are to represent the church's submission to Christ: "As the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" -Eph.5:24. The Lord has afforded the Christian woman a unique way to display this submission. It is in the woman covering her head [1 Cor.11:1-16].

This serves as an acted-out parable of the church's relationship to the Lord Jesus. It shows that the church takes the place of retirement and Christ that of preeminence. In this illustration, the man represents Christ and the woman portrays the church.

The church does not instruct Christ; His Word speaks to her. She does not lead Him. The church does not have authority over the Lord Jesus. Christ does not obey the directives of the church represented by the woman.

Covering her head tells all that the church glorifies her Head, the Lord Jesus, not herself. Her glory is veiled, His is seen. This is why it is shameful for the woman to have her head uncovered.

To do so exposes the glory of man, a thing which ought to be unseen. "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man" -1 Cor.11:7.

In this acted out parable, the man represents Christ, the glory of God, in the church. The woman represents the church, the glory of man. In the church, the glory of the Lord and His Word are to be seen and heard. Man is not to be exalted; man's words are not to prevail.

The woman's covered head shows the proper place the church has in submission to the Lord in obedience to His Word which brings glory to Him and not to us. This is the spiritual significance of the woman's head covering as taught in 1 Cor.11:1-16.

Her long hair is "her glory" -1 Cor.11:15, naturally, as created by God. Spiritually, in the new creation, her natural glory is to be veiled.

It is not what she is by nature that is her glory. Christ, the glory of God, is all that believers can boast of. His honor is all that the church wishes to display before men and angels.

Her hair is not the one and the same covering both in the natural realm as well as in the spiritual. There are two coverings: one by birth in the natural, and one by choice in the spiritual. To attempt to make her hair the covering in both realms makes havoc of the Scriptures.

If her hair is the only covering spoken of [1 Cor.11:15], then we must read verse 6 as follows: "If a woman does not cover her head [i.e. have hair on her head], let her also have her hair cut off..." But if she has no hair on her head, what then is there to cut off or shave? This cannot possibly be the meaning.

What she is naturally, however glorious, is to be covered by her decision to wear a headcovering. She is showing that the church's single desire is for the glory of Christ to be seen. She willingly submits to this, humbles herself, and takes the place of retirement so that He might be exalted before all. It is a great ministry she has to perform which reveals profound truths.

And angels are watching. "Therefore the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels" -1 Cor.11:10. There is no place found for man to glory before Christ Jesus or the elect angels. And the church is no place for this to be seen either [see Appendix].

The Christian woman in ministry prays night and day. She submits to, and lovingly helps her husband. Her children are loved and brought up in the ways of the Lord. The teaching of kindness and truth is upon her lips to the blessing of her fellow sisters.

Mercy, good deeds to help the needy, and giving to benefit the saints occupy her waking hours. She testifies privately of the grace of life from which she has partaken. Her domain is the home where she delights to serve. And her gentle quiet spirit, precious in God's sight [1 Pet.3:4], is well content to abide where God has allotted her portion.

*Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the Lord,
She shall be praised
Prov.31:30*

APPENDIX

BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS

*Therefore the woman ought to have [a symbol of] Authority
on her head*

Because of the angels

1 Cor.11:10

WHY?

1. Because the greatest of the angels continually cover themselves in the presence of God [Isa.6:2].
2. Because the angels do not seek for or display their own glory in the presence of God. They are ever giving glory, honor, and thanks to the Lord [Rev.4 &5].
3. Because, Satan, a rebellious angel, spoke his own thoughts and sought his own glory against the Most High [Isa.14:12-14].
4. Because through the church the wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. It is an everlasting rebuke to the devil and his angels that once wretched, rebellious, and defiled people now live utterly to the glory of God. Satan and demons once lived solely for that purpose but now are unclean rebellious spirits [Eph.3:10].
5. Because angels “long to look into” -1 Pet.1:12 the significance of the gospel. As the women cover their heads, the angels see that the church purchased by Christ is intent that He alone be glorified.
6. Because the angels serve the Lord and perform His will within their allotted sphere [Ps.103:20,21; Heb.1:14]. The church is to do the same within her allotted sphere.
7. Because some angels did not “keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” -Jude 6. The church is to abide in her proper place, with the women keeping theirs and not intruding into that of the man.

8. Because we are solemnly charged in the presence of the elect angels to keep the things commanded in the Scriptures [1 Tim.5:21].

9. Because angels give report to God of the conditions they observe as part of their assigned responsibilities [see Gen. 18:20-22; 19:1f; Zech.1:8-11; 6:1-7; Rev.1:20; Rev.2&3]. In the church, do they observe the thoughts and ways of man being honored, or those of God?

10. Because, unknown to the Christians, angels may be present among them [Heb.13:2]. Do we want them to see Christ glorified or man?

Summary of Headcovering

The holy angels are looking to see if those redeemed by the gospel are suited for the presence of God as they are. Is the church in complete subjection to Christ?

Does she seek only to make His glory known? Does she proclaim His glory and Word alone or does she shamefully allow her own thoughts and agenda to be promoted while receiving glory from men for doing so?

They seek to see if men, crowned with glory and honor yet lower than themselves [Ps.8:5; Heb.2:7], choose to cover and conceal their own glory [1 Cor.11:15] which is represented in the church by the woman [1 Cor.11:7]. Lucifer did not do so and untold disaster resulted.

Will the church not cover herself when angels, who are greater in glory, might and power [2 Pet.2:11], cover themselves in the presence of Him whose glory fills heaven and earth [Isa.6:1-3]?

21

Shame in the Pulpit

Women bishops, reverends, pastors, elders, and general overseers are contradictions in terms. I Tim.3:2 states: “An

overseer/bishop/church-leader must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.” Since the overseer *must* be above reproach, it is stating a requirement that is not optional.

Yet this same verse also says that he *must* be the husband of one wife. No woman who is the husband of one wife can be found. Women are not husbands. It is a contradiction in terms.

We therefore will never encounter women in this type of ministry by God’s appointment. Call it what you will, a woman can never be an overseer, bishop, pastor, elder, or reverend according to the Word of God.

It is not her God-given sphere of service. If she pretends to be such, she has done so without the approval of heaven.

But, you may say, hasn't God given the same Holy Spirit to men and women alike without distinction? Indeed He has. But let us not be ignorant of this fact:

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord” -1 Cor.12:4,5. The Lord simply does not distribute the ministry of overseer or pastor to women, though He is the same Lord of male and female.

But how can you say that when Galatians 3:28 says “there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus”? True, male and female all have equal access to the throne of grace, they receive forgiveness without respect to gender, and are heirs of eternal life without distinction on these grounds. But receiving the blessings of salvation, and the Lord granting specific ministries within the church are two entirely different things.

The Rev. Mrs. Peter did not preach on the day of Pentecost. The Apostle John’s wife did not raise the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. You will discover no parallel to our modern practice of “ordaining” women to public ministry within the pages of the NT.

Which gospel preacher in the NT was a woman? Which apostle was a woman? Which overseer was a woman? Which church in the NT had a woman pastor? Which of the NT books was written by a woman for the church’s instruction? The answer to all of these questions is “None.”

But doesn't Joel 2:28 plainly say that God “will pour out [His] Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and daughters will prophesy”?

Certainly it does say so and it came to pass on the day of Pentecost.

Yet it was Peter who took his stand with the apostles and spoke to the multitudes; their wives did not join them in this ministry. Women may surely be given the gift of prophesy, but Joel does not say that they will therefore become pastors or church leaders.

But you can't tell me that God did not use Deborah! God spoke through her and she led the people of God! So we too can have women leaders who speak the Word of God to the church. Yes, without dispute, God spoke through Deborah, but it was shameful. It was not normal.

The Lord allowed that to be done as a rebuke to the wayward rebellion of His people Israel. The glory went to a woman and Barak was put to shame. Barak ought to have taken the lead, instead he followed a woman and was publicly disgraced.

The fact that God spoke in an exceptional way through a woman does not establish that exception as the norm. This did not qualify Deborah to be a pastor.

No basis for ordaining women as overseers can be derived from her history. In fact, in the pages of the Scriptures God has spoken through many abnormal means.

God spoke through Neco, the idolatrous Pharaoh of Egypt, and used him to rebuke Josiah, the king of Judah [2 Chron.35:2-22]. The murderous king Saul was overcome by the Spirit of God and prophesied all day and throughout the night [I Sam.19:18-24]. Caiaphas, the wicked high priest who ordered the crucifixion of Christ, also prophesied [Jn.11:49-53].

Does the fact that God spoke through them qualify them to become pastors and leaders in the church? You tell me. I don't think you would like Pastor Pharaoh, Overseer Saul, or the Rev. Canon Caiaphas to be senior ministers over your churches.

And don't forget that God spoke through a donkey and used that dumb beast to shamefully rebuke the madness of Balaam [2 Pet.2:15,16].

So, you see, God spoke through a donkey and the Lord used him to teach a man! Therefore, God can also speak through a woman to teach men!

Very well, then, you may ordain women to the ministry if you will also ordain Rev. Dr. Donkeys to be your pastors. After all, you can't tell me that God did not use a donkey.

Dear reader, the woman represents the church, and the husband, Christ. Let me ask you some simple questions.

Is it proper for the church to praise Christ? Of course. Is it proper for the church to pray to Christ? Certainly. Is it proper for the church to testify of Christ? Definitely. Is it proper for the church to express her love for Christ? Decidedly.

But now consider this:

Does the church teach Christ? Does the church usurp authority over Christ? Does the church direct Christ? Does Jesus submit to the lead of the church? Hopefully it is obvious that the answer to these questions is "No."

It should also be obvious that it is a reproach both to Christ and to the church that women have become its leaders.

It is time for us to remove shame from our pulpits and return to honorable and biblical ministry in the house of God.

*As for My people,
Children are their oppressors,
And women rule over them.
O My people!
Those who lead you cause you to err,
And destroy the way of your paths
Isa.3:12*

22

Christ Our Passover

Terror and pit and snare confront you,

O inhabitant of the earth

Isa.24:17

For indeed, Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us

1 Cor.5:7

A certain and terrifying expectation of judgment awaits you [Heb.10:27].

It is coming and will utterly sweep you away by sudden terrors [Ps.73:19]. Flee as you may, the path will be dark and slippery, with the Angel of the Lord in pursuit of your every futile effort to escape [Ps.35:6].

You shall be cast into the outer darkness where there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth [Mt.25:30]. Your worm shall not die in the ceaseless gnawing at your tormented conscience [Mk.9:48].

This fury of a fire which consumes the adversaries of the Most High will not be quenched [Heb.10:27]. You shall be in agony in the flames [Lk.16:24]. The smoke of your torments shall ascend without relief, day or night, forever and continually [Rev.14:10].

Before a throne so dreadful in its white-hot purity that even the heavens and earth flee away [Rev.20:11] is where you shall appear. And you will stand there naked before that august tribunal [Job 26:6].

Though you do not believe it, though you may ignore it, scoff, or be offended at it, you will nonetheless meet the Lord God in judgment. It is coming.

The Lord Jesus is coming with His holy ten thousands to “execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” -Jude 15.

Ungodly! Unlike God! This is the indictment. And you are weighed on the scale of the Almighty and found deficient [Dan.5:27]!

How often “you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven! But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified!” -Dan.5:23. How often you have

slighted Him and despised His Word by doing evil in His sight [2 Sam.12:9]!

How often you have neglected doing the good which you know ought to be done [Jas.4:17]! How often has His name passed thoughtlessly and in vain through your careless lips [Ex.20:7]!

How accursed you have rendered yourself by your refusal and failure to love the Lord Jesus with affectionate devotion [1 Cor.16:22]! And how blameworthy you are by not fearing Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Mt.10:28]!

Nothing you can do will remedy your plight. "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin'?" -Prov.20:9.

All of your righteousness, the best you can proffer, is as the filthiness of a menstrual rag [Isa.64:6]. The cleanest that you can present yourself before the blaze of His glory is in garments rife with vomit [Zech.3:3].

As the spots of the leopard and the skin of the Ethiopian are inbred and irreversible, so is evil within your own heart [Jer.13:23]. "Although you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your iniquity is before Me," declares the Lord" -Jer.2:22.

You are completely ruined. You are corrupt, evil, dead, powerless, bankrupt, foolish, and bent upon continuing in your destructive path.

You are on a collision course with the Living Judge of heaven and earth. Regardless of your stature, station, attainments, or religion, you shall stand naked and alone before Him on that awful day. And He shall prevail.

"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations who forget God" -Ps.9:17.

"Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It shall come as a shattering from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt.

"And they will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor, and will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame.

"Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.

“Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

“Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of Hosts in the day of His burning anger” - Isa.13:6-9,11,13.

But this you may not believe. Whether you do or not, it is coming. And it will be a “terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God” -Heb.10:31.

Neither the Egyptians nor their pompous Pharaoh believed that it would come. But it did. When they least expected, it came.

The sun has nestled into its nightly repose in the west. Darkness descended upon the sacred Nile. The ever circling flies ceased their hum of activity.

Slaves, taskmasters, and royalty alike assumed their respective nightly routines. Drowsiness overcame one and all. Preparations were made for the coming day.

Fleeting thoughts of normalcy flickered through condemned minds before closing their eyes one last time.

We shall arise and pay homage as Ra arises in the east and worship the Nile of life as she continuously flows in her sacred course. And, once again, we shall attempt to appease the lord of the flies. And then, this coming day, as did the last and shall be the next, has much in store.

But now, to sleep.

Though warnings had thundered repeatedly, they went unheeded. And so they slept on.

Displays of power arrested their maddened appointment with doom, but they were soon forgotten. And so, on they slept.

Mercies repeatedly relieved them from the sure and final wrath that awaited them, yet they hardened their hearts against the God who gave them. And now it was midnight.

In stillness, blackness, unseen and unheard, it came.

“He sent upon them His burning anger, fury, indignation and trouble, a band of destroying angels. He leveled a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death” -Ps.78:44,50.

“And Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead” -Ex.12:30.

Bitterness, wailing, and griefs unnumbered shrieked from every dwelling throughout the land. The judgment of the God of heaven fell in devastating severity on noble and lackey alike.

None escaped. No one was spared. Wrath as an overflowing scourge swallowed one and all in its awful torrent as multitudes were plunged into a blackness from which they would never arise.

None who dwelt in the land of Egypt were exempt. The sword of death visited each abode and left victims in its wake. Not even Israelite dwellings were spared the stroke of judgment.

Death was found within their doors as well. The slain was in the midst of each home.

But no tear was shed. No cries pierced the night. No terror of darkness engulfed them.

Within was light and gladness, a feast and rejoicing. Hope, blessing, abundance, and exultation rang from their hearts for the mercies of this very same God of vengeance.

They had the lamb!

Its blood had flowed beneath the stroke of judgment. The innocent victim was slain to preserve the very ones responsible for its execution.

This final plague of fury was the terminal event for Egyptian and Israelite alike. Egyptians were hurled into an endless bondage attendant with horrors far exceeding any they had imposed upon the Israel of God.

But for those sheltered by the blood of the lamb, it ushered in a whole new beginning [Ex.12:2]. This dated the inception of freedom from rigorous oppression at the hand of merciless tyrants. It heralded an inheritance abundant yet to come.

Released from captivity, the Pharaoh's scepter shattered, and enriched with plunder Divinely secured [Ex.12:35-36], “the sons of Israel went out with a high hand” -Ex.14:8; the blood of the lamb had spared them from that horrific night of judgment.

The lamb! The undefiled substitute who was slain to rescue and save the condemned! The lamb! Whose blood was spilt to

deliver the helpless from death's destruction by dying in their stead.

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” -Jn.1:29. “Christ, our passover, also has been sacrificed” -1 Cor.5:7.

What agonies He endured to set His people free from the bondage, misery, corruption, guilt, and judgment of sin! He, the faultless and peerless One, subjected Himself to a judgment undeserved to spare the undeserving from the wrath and ruin that we do deserve.

Innocent and without blame, holy and undefiled was He in every way. The lamb of the Passover was to be kept four days: observed, examined, and approved as being unblemished, perfect in proportions, and in vigor of strength [Ex.12:3-6].

Who can find fault with the Lord Jesus? He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” -Heb.4:15.

Hounded by embittered religious rulers with their baited pitfalls and subtle snares, He confronted their hypocrisy head-on. “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” -Jn.8:46 was the accusation laid before their evil conscience.

Examined and scrutinized at the place of judgment by the political powers of the day, the four-fold repeated confession rang clear: “I find no fault whatever in Him” -Lk.23:4; Jn.18:28; 19:4,6.

Though sorely assailed and tempted unmercifully by the twisted dragon who embodies darkness and evil itself, He did not yield or waver for an instant [Mt.4:1-11]. Just hours before the cross hear Him say, “The ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” -Jn.14:30.

But aside from the assaults and slanderous barbs of those steeped in their own corruption, what of the assessments of heaven itself? How is He seen by Him whose “eyes are too pure to approve evil,” the One who cannot “look on wickedness with favor” -Hab.1:13?

In weighty simplicity the answer is voiced from on high and heard throughout all eternity: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” -Mt.3:17. And with this, all heaven is in accord.

“I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was

myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!'

"And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing, and honor, and glory, and dominion forever and ever'" -Rev.5:11-13.

Amen. Behold the Lamb of God: holy, innocent, undefiled, and peerless in perfections, purity, and proportion.

He was fit to be slaughtered.

"The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight" -Ex.12:6.

All hands joined in the deed, each one contributed to the slaying of the lamb. This very one, perfect in every respect, guileless and guiltless, "you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" -Acts 2:23.

Who can fathom the abyss of our own corruption! On what kind of scale can be measured the magnitude of our betraying, ignoring, neglecting, spurning, deriding, despising, hating, and slaughtering the very God of Glory become flesh and dwelling among us [Jn.1:14]?

How vast is our guilt! How grievous our malady!

Stop and weep with me. Your hand was there as well as mine. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" -Jn.1:29 "Behold, your God!" -Isa.40:9 "Behold, the Man!" -Jn.19:5.

"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and I am the worst of all" -1 Tim.1:15.

Don't you feel it? Doesn't it crush the hardened crust of your heart? Your sin, borne "in His body on the cross" -1 Pet.1:24. We all were gathered at Golgotha where the Lord Jesus Christ was slain for the sin of the world.

It only follows that the feast ought then to be eaten "with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" -Ex.12:8. God's Passover is not to be eaten with sugared sweets.

There is nothing here to appeal to natural tastes, nothing to tantalize the flesh, nothing to boast of. Rather, remember the

bitterness of Egyptian bondage. And as well, all leaven must be purged.

Leaven is that corrupting influence of pride which puffs up with empty air. It renders one and all “inflated without cause by his fleshly mind” -Col.2:18; and there is no place found for pride in the presence of God.

Leaven was to absent from their dwellings for the entire week following: “Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses” -Ex.12:19. Every day during the normal course of life is to be free from the corruption of sin.

Do you lay claim to being saved by the blood of the Lamb? Search your house! Is leaven to be found there? Leaven in one’s hands, one’s mouth, and in the heart brands the forehead: “hypocrite.”

“Trembling has surprised the hypocrites” -Isa.33:14. “And He shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth” -Mt.24:51.

Beware, leaven permeates the hidden recesses to effect its transforming work. It thrives in darkness in lukewarm conditions. That living fungus feeds on its host, swelling it with emptiness, making it lighter and more palatable.

Such is the leaven of pride and iniquity; it will change you into something altogether different.

Consider it well; “what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness” -2 Cor.6:14, or the Lamb of God with leaven, or being saved and continuing in sin?

“No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him” -1 Jn.3:6. “Clean out the old leaven” -1 Cor.5:7.

This is a bitter feast as well. Yes, let the bondage be felt; don’t diminish the former bitterness of cruel oppression and the lash of the taskmaster’s scourge [Ex.1:4].

Bitter herbs repeatedly sting the palate with harsh evidence of the distastefulness and repulsion of sin. “Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God” -Jer.2:19.

Without such stimulants to our recollection, deception clouds the memory. We recall with warped vision the delectable

fare we enjoyed while yet enslaved and groaning for relief. We too soon forget our bondage and even our Deliverer in preference for deceptive delights.

“O that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well off in Egypt” -Num.11:18. Taste the bitter herb and feel the wretchedness of your own sin, and let your tears salt the whole.

But bitterness over our state does not exhaust its acrid affront to our sensibilities. There is the greater anguish of Him who roared with that bitterest of cries: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” -Ps.22:1.

The slain lamb is “roasted with fire, its head, and its legs along with its entrails. But whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire” -Ex.12:9-10.

No part was spared the flame! Every aspect was subject to fiery wrath! So too Christ our Passover; witness His the mental anguish, physical torture, and heart wrenching sorrow in the deepest recesses of His innermost being!

Reader, mark it well; wickedness provokes the Holy One of the ages. “For a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of hell” -Deut.32:22. Indeed, it is an inferno “which will burn forever” -Jer.17:4.

And it came upon the Lord Jesus. Who can fathom the three hours of thick darkness obscuring His cross [Mt.27:45]? What shuddering gripped Him as He contemplated the cup He was to receive from His Father’s hand!

“My soul is deeply grieved, even unto death” -Mt.26:38. “And being in agony He was praying very fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood” -Lk.22:44. And the cup had not yet touched His lips: a cup so terrific in proportions that He begged it might pass from Him.

“For a cup is in the hand of the Lord, and the wine foams” -Ps.75:8. “This cup of the wine of wrath from My hand. They shall drink and stagger and go mad, to make them a ruin, a horror, a hissing, and a curse” -Jer.25:15-18.

This is what Jesus faced: “The cup of horror and desolation” -Ezek.23:33. “Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup” -Ps.11:6.

The brimming cup of retribution, our portion, our due, was drained, and those bitter dregs downed by the very God whose cup it was. The agony of our Lord's bodily sufferings pale in comparison to the anguish He endured within.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" -Ps.22:1, burst the cry from "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father" -Jn.1:18. Enshrouded in darkness and mysteries known only to the Eternal God are the three hours of gloom on Golgotha's hill.

The Lamb! A cross! And there wrath to the uttermost was borne by the blameless willing victim, the Lord Jesus Christ, the beloved of God, yet accursed. Christ became "a curse for us, for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" -Gal.3:13.

It came upon Him in full measure. He was subject to a fire incomprehensible in its intensity, which raged, as it were, upon His head, His legs, His entrails.

His was the conscious mental awareness of all that becoming sin's sacrifice would entail. The physical torture of crucifixion racked His sinless sensitive flesh. And deep within the inner recesses of His soul, anguish unseen to mortal eye was endured.

Pause here and reflect: "He who knew no sin, He has made sin for us" -2 Cor.5:21.

The shed blood sheltered those within while the Lamb within them strengthened these same ones to go out. They were instructed to "eat the flesh that night...in this manner; with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste - it is the Lord's passover" -Ex.12:8,12.

The lamb itself whose blood sheltered Israel from wrath, also nourished and strengthened them to arise and flee out of Egypt. Whoever was spared from judgment could not continue to abide in that place.

Dear Reader, the people of God do not belong in the world, under its sway, serving the monstrous prince of that place. Listen, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" -1 Jn.3:8,

“That through death He might annul him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” -Heb.2:14-15.

The power to leave Egypt came from feeding upon the lamb who had been slain in their behalf. It was the lamb who enabled them to walk out of bondage, misery, and death. The lamb empowered them to break the ties with the world and to walk at liberty. Everything depended upon the lamb.

And so it is, Dear Reader, eat the Lamb; feed your soul on Christ. He who redeems, revives. He who saves, sustains. His alone is the power within to enable feet to tread His narrow path out of the world’s bondage into the fullness of His inheritance.

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” -Jn.1:29.

Behold Him: The Lord Jesus Christ, undefiled in unblemished perfection, mighty in strength to bear the weight of a world’s sin, tested and assailed on every hand but with the seal of heaven’s approval, willingly slain, shedding His blood, pouring out His life to redeem, rescue, and renew those who, at best, were His enemies.

Behold Him, plunged into a horror of fury flowing from Him whose throne is “ablaze with flames” -Dan.7:10, cut off, banished from Him who declared Him to be His well-beloved, who yet was “forsaken, far from the words of My roaring” -Ps.22:1.

Christ the Lamb! The food of His people, the strength of their lives, the power of godliness, the deliverer from bondage, the enabler to flee the snares of the world!

“And they shall take of the blood and put it on the houses in which they eat it” -Ex.12:7.

The blood was applied. The lamb was eaten. And they were saved.

Do not be deceived. Admiring the noble qualities of the Lord Jesus will not commend you to God. Accounting Him a prophet and a good man does not save you from wrath. The blood of the Lamb must be applied to where you live.

Believing that He died upon the cross to save the condemned will avail nothing to avert your certain doom. “The demons also

believe, and shudder” -Jas.2:19. The Blood of the Lamb must be applied to where you live, to your very heart of hearts.

Is the blood of the Lord Jesus above your head as a protective covering from the wrath revealed from heaven against all your guilt? Is it upon your heart as the only effectual cleansing from your corruption? Have you cried out to God to be washed from your soul’s filthiness in “the blood of Jesus His Son that cleanses us from all sin” -1 Jn.1:7?

If not, and you “go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains for us, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume God’s enemies.

“How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was made holy” -Heb.10:26,27,29?

Upon your heart, the blood of Christ is the seal of heaven. Under your foot, it is the guarantee of hell.

And how is your table spread day after day? Do you dine on Egypt’s fineries? Are you being filled with the leaven, melons, and fish of this world?

Or is the Lamb, the bitter herbs, and unleavened bread your sustaining feast? Do not be deceived; only those who are feeding upon the Lord Jesus are enabled to escape the corruptions in the world through lust.

“Jesus therefore said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day’” -Jn.6:53-54.

For a little while longer, the light will be among you. The shadows of declining day are lengthening and stretching their fingers over the land. Dusk creeps silently steadily upon you.

Darkness folds its blanket around you. Too soon sleep will overtake you and irresistibly your eyes will close.

And now it is midnight. In stillness, blackness, unseen and unheard, it will come.

The rustle of the destroyer's wings are aroused, but you are not.

It is coming.

Behold, now is the day of salvation

2 Cor.6:2.

*And to man He said, "Behold, the fear of the Lord,
That is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding"*
Job 28:28

Do you fear? You should; the godly of every age have.
"His mercy is on those who fear Him, unto generations and generations" -Lk.1:50.

Do you fear? You should; Jesus did. "In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers, He was heard because of His godly fear" -Heb.5:7.

Do you fear? You should; Jesus commands it. "I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" -Lk.12:5.

Do you fear? You should; the church does. "So the church enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the church continued to increase" -Acts 9:31.

Do you fear? You should; spiritual progress necessitates it. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" -2 Cor.7:1.

Do you fear? You should; a Father requires it. "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, live your lives as strangers here in fear" -1 Pet.1:17.

Do you fear? You should; an eternal gospel demands it. "Having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, and he said with a loud voice: "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come" -Rev.14:6,7.

Do you fear?

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" -Phil.2:12.

Do you fear?

“The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever” -Ps.19:9.

Do you fear?

*You seek Me, not because you saw signs,
But because you ate of the loaves and were filled*
Jn.6:26

We have wed in an unequal yoke technology and the gospel. Mistakenly we believe that technology will be a suitable "helpmeet" for our evangelistic efforts; but the gospel needs no help, and certainly no unhallowed union such as this.

By technology, for the purposes of this discussion, is meant machinery, medicine, materials, and methods which are integrally connected with the preaching of the gospel.

These are enticements which are used to attract people to come and hear our message. They are the bait to allure the fish to bite our concealed gospel hook.

This approach will be referred to as the Gospel of Technology [GOT], while the simple preaching of the Word of God will be called the True Gospel [TG].

The Lord Jesus exposed the basic flaw in GOT. "You seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" -Jn.6:26, 27.

The heart of man is fixed upon its own self-advantage; it is looking to gain for self but not to deny self. GOT appeals to the former while TG insists on the latter. Thus the two emphases are antagonistic one toward the other.

Observe. If we utilize a film-show to attract a crowd to hear the gospel, we have allured them for an unworthy motive. They will come, not for the sake of TG, but to partake of the GOT event.

Should we dispense medicines in our clinic in order to draw an audience for our preaching, they will endure the sermon in order to obtain GOT. If we give away food or clothing to those attending our evangelistic campaigns, there will be record attendance.

No rural farmer will refuse bountiful hybrid seeds and improved fertilizers in exchange for the small price of hearing our evangelical discourse. Few parents object to the benefits of

modern education for their children even if the new religious message must be counteracted afterwards at home.

The same can be said for employing musicians, entertainers, celebrities, sporting events, etc. to entice listeners to assemble.

We may even generate "followers" by employing GOT in our missionary endeavors. Jesus Himself had such followers as we have seen in the John 6 passage above. But He, at least, knew they were not genuine repentant believers; they were still governed by self.

Once introduced, GOT is virtually impossible to uproot. Technology has inbred into it its own obsolescence. Once obtained, it instills an insatiable desire for more and improved versions and additions. No amount of GOT can satisfy the flesh.

GOT appeals to the very unworthy motives that TG is designed to eradicate. And since the heart of man is bent upon self, GOT is preferred over TG. Eventually, GOT devours TG, and all one is left with is technology while the message of TG is marginalized or abandoned altogether.

GOT can never be distributed equitably. Those possessing it never have enough resources to distribute to all in a given locale. Thus, some benefit while others are deprived.

With TG, the only ones who are deprived are those who reject it. With GOT, some will be deprived simply because there is not enough to go around.

Those not receiving GOT as others have, are not happy with merely TG. It is viewed as a meager substitute, not a complete "gospel" like others have received. Thus the question of partiality is raised in the minds of those left out.

GOT is typically dependent upon money from the cities or from abroad. The local Christian in the village, therefore, is handicapped in his preaching to neighboring villages since he does not have the means to obtain GOT.

And if he comes preaching TG only, the next village will ignore, refuse, or despise his message since it is not the GOT which he, the preacher, initially received from the non-indigenous preachers and suppliers of GOT.

Those benefiting from GOT will, to various degrees, be healthier, smarter, and more prosperous than their neighbors.

They will therefore have a measure of social and economic superiority over their fellows.

This places a carnal stumbling block before those without GOT and generates resentment towards those who have it. It finally hardens the hearts further against TG.

“Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness” -Isa.26:10. Though we bring GOT, they will not learn TG. GOT is actually little more than mutual manipulation.

The preacher tolerates GOT as a means of presenting TG, and the listeners tolerate TG in order to obtain GOT. Both smile and deceive the other.

Social welfare must be purely a work of charity and Christian compassion alone, isolated from TG, and as an end in itself. To make GOT a means to the end of TG, ultimately destroys TG altogether.

May we look beyond the immediate before us to consider the far-reaching effects of our missionary endeavors. Let us present TG, the power of God for salvation, with the same single-minded focus of the Apostle Paul.

He and all preachers of TG have “determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified” -1 Cor.2:2.

25

Culture and the Kingdom of Heaven

Our citizenship is in heaven

Phil.3:20

All cultures are the enemies of the kingdom of heaven.

Diversified world cultures can all be traced to the dispersion of Babel's tower. A monolithic idolatrous world-view was responsible for its erection and for the uniformity discovered among them.

Prior to that event, culture was one [Gen.11:1-6]. When scattered, this basic idolatrous orientation was transported with them wherever they migrated. It is noteworthy that all global cultures at their historical roots are idolatrous, Judaism not excepted [Josh.24:2,3].

In addition, another cultural presupposition has traversed throughout the continents following the days of Nimrod. This second instilled principle is stratification of rule culminating in a king. It is that basic hierarchical totalitarianism spawned from Nimrod's Babylon during his reign of terror and darkness.

This highly centralized rule is evidenced culturally by the ubiquitous chiefs and kings among tribal peoples as well as in the reigning dynasties of various world empires.

The net effect of these phenomena is this; the gods, in conjunction with authoritarian rulers, determine the role of the individuals within their societies.

In other words, culture determines the significance and place of the individuals within it, and not vice versa. This is epitomized in the caste system of India prior to Western influence.

Antedating recorded history for centuries, the same mores and modes of worship have been preserved through oral tradition passed on from pontiffs, priests, and prophets to their initiates. This long-standing consensus supplies significant incentive for all to conform to its expected behavior. The strength of these pressures is real and varies in their intensity from group to group, but is present in all.

To all such, the gospel comes as a foreign intruding element and as a harbinger of another cultural tradition which forges no alliance with native practices. This is a fundamental cause for

persecution of the believer who, inevitably, is called upon to abandon local norms in order to obey the demands of the kingdom of heaven.

Furthermore, the believing individual now becomes a voice, other than and independent of the traditional hierarchy, calling the society to modify or cast off the ways of the ancestors. Thus, he incurs the wrath of rulers, family, and neighbors alike –

Rulers, because he is governed by another King, Jesus, and their authority is called into question; Family, because they are exposed to shame by their "wayward" son who is not honoring the traditions of home and habitation; and Neighbors, because the fabric of their society is being challenged and even unraveled by the "rebel."

Idolatrous beliefs and authoritarian dominance have only been called into question but rarely by any culture as a whole. Apart from the direct intervention of God in the Jewish nation, no other society has abandoned these two pillars of culture inherited from Babel except one.

It was attempted by the Greeks in the 8th century B.C. and following. Then, sporadically for a brief space, democracy was introduced and experimented with, only to return to Nimrod's system under Alexander, surnamed the Great.

The Greek gods were unsuccessfully called into question by some of their philosophers and a type of humanism was promoted in its stead. This too succumbed to popular prejudice, returning to their idolatrous roots.

What Greeks failed to achieve, America succeeded in doing. There are several contributing factors to the American phenomenon which need to be considered in order to understand the far-reaching effects this society has had upon modern man, traditional cultures world-wide, and upon our concept of the kingdom of heaven itself.

First, the idolatrous roots of their forefathers had been abandoned for some hundred or more years prior to the establishing of America. The emigrants were from a Christian heritage and orientation, whether they were actually personally Christian in behavior or not. The impact of this was tremendous.

Historically, this was the first culture to emerge from a Christian worldview rather than paganism. It was not a transformed culture as Europe became through the efforts of Christian missionaries.

By Christian, for the purposes of this discussion, is meant any group that espoused the God of the Bible revealed in Jesus Christ as the reference point of their religion. It is thus a cultural and historical definition of Christian, distinct from the spiritual and evangelical one which born-again believers are more accustomed to.

From the outset, a basic Christian perspective of man and society formulated their thinking about the interrelationships in this new land which eventuated in their novel form of government. The radical difference this made in their views of societal rule cannot be underestimated.

Second, their points of origin on the Continent were not homogenous. Diversity of language and customs became mingled in the early colonies.

This necessitated a measure of tolerance toward individual peculiarities of behavior. This also must be given proper recognition in analyzing the development of this society.

It was a decided breach from the prior historicity of cultures. Conformity to long established traditions had characterized all societal predecessors.

This one was forced to develop a mutually agreeable consensus from divergent practices due to the necessity of their close proximity. It thus impelled them to set aside personal preference and abandon ancestral traditions for the sake of the common good.

A pluralistic tolerance was required to develop a mutually agreeable consensus of governance. However imperfectly it was executed, the Golden Rule was the backbone of their societal norms.

Third, their reasons for emigration were essentially the same. They sought relief and refuge from what they considered to be tyrannous practices in their countries of origin.

In short, they were seeking asylum from their native governmental procedures, whether religious or political. They

were dissatisfied with the ruling status quo, the monarchies and ecclesiastical overlords of the European nations.

Fourth, was the prominence accorded to the individual rather than the society itself. No cultural heritage awaited the immigrants upon arrival on American shores.

Settlers discovered no American cultural civilization which dictated their place therein. No such constraints existed in colonial America. Thus the individuals determined their own roles within the new society rather than the society having predetermined those for them.

Finally, this society determined to be governed by a document rather than by the whim of the reigning elite and precedent of oral tradition. And, that document was forged by individuals who were representative of a constituency of commoners while those who drafted it were themselves subject to its very provisions.

Lex Rex [Law is King] triumphed over Babel's legacy of *Rex Lex* [King is Law] in the phenomenon of Americanism.

Thus a nation emerged where the individual formulated the values of the society rather than the individual having a prior determined role within it. This was a decided cultural anomaly which has had disruptive effects upon traditions across the globe.

This was the foment of Americanism: a Christian world-view, tolerance for the common good, discontentment with abuses of monarchical rule, and the individual determining societal norms rather than vice versa. These were the elements which culminated in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights.

It completely severed all ties with classical cultural norms. It was indeed a revolution, one whose ideology would alter behavior and thinking worldwide. Idols were abandoned and monarchy was rejected in this bold break with centuries' old convention handed down from Nimrod.

But it is not world history or anthropology that occupies us in this brief analysis. It is the background and effects of cultural pre-suppositions upon the thinking of men in contrast to that of the kingdom of heaven that interests us.

We have observed one great cultural pattern as a global phenomenon: idolatry and monarchy stemming from Babel's dispersion. Americanism stands as an isolated and unique departure from man's homogenous cultural landscape.

Because of its profound influence on both world affairs and church propagation, Americanism must occupy a little more of our consideration prior to turning to the kingdom of heaven itself.

Revolt from a rightful sovereign accurately describes their solution to perceived colonial oppression. This is both the historical stain and cause for the expected eventual demise of the democracy of America.

Rebellion was accounted to be liberty and unfettered self-will as freedom. It was a fundamental flaw at their inception which vainly ennobled this vice.

Democracy and true Christianity are incompatible ideologies. This is not to say that there cannot be genuine Christians in democratic societies. There can be genuine Christians found within any cultural tradition.

The point is that, as ideologies, democracy and true Christianity are poles apart. The great error in Americanism was the attempted wedlock between Christianity and democracy. It cannot be done; one will consume the other.

At the core of American democracy is the concept of individual human rights. This is not a Christian principle at all. Rights are obligatory based upon law.

However, no blessings ever come from God to man on the principle of law of any kind. Mercy cannot be obligated; demands cannot be pressed upon grace.

Rights and love are not synonymous. Love springs from the heart of the giver to neighbor and enemy alike regardless of their merits.

Demands spring from the heart of recipients who insist on receiving their just and lawful due based on their own perceived merits.

True Christianity is prompted by love; democracy is erected upon rights; and the gulf between them cannot be traversed.

At its center, true Christianity has the spoken will of God contained in the Word of God. Democracy, however, puts the will of the people at that center.

God's will and man's will necessarily will be found to be at odds; the Word of God and the declarations of men will not be discovered to be sounding the same note.

Independence formed the significant agenda to foster an historical revolution, whereas submission and obedience permeate true Christianity. America's sedition, wanton destruction of property, and violent taking of lives cannot be harmonized with scriptural Christianity's honoring the king and Golden Rule.

Yet the notion naively continues that Americanism and Christianity are a compatible alliance. But possessing an elementary Christian world-view is far from actually being accounted truly Christian. Neither can a method of government formulated by those with this orientation be considered as having Divine approval.

So, we are brought to the crux of our inquiry into culture and the kingdom of heaven: the rule of God and that of man.

In the kingdom of heaven are to be discovered two key elements. First is that there is a King, the God of heaven. Second, God, the King, has subjects, His obedient believers.

This, in essence, is what comprises the kingdom of heaven - a King and His subjects.

A king performs two essential functions; from him proceeds the law governing his kingdom and, second, is the protection of the populace from all of their and his enemies.

The subjects simply honor their ruling sovereign by performing his will according to the word of the king. This is what constitutes the kingdom of heaven in its fundamental aspects.

For this reason the gospel of the kingdom of God was described as an invasion upon native cultures. The gods and kings descending from Babel are set at naught and the prevailing cultural expectations are replaced with biblical mandates from the King of heaven.

Oral tradition is supplanted by the written Word of God. And that fact of the mandate of the King being placed in writing

accessible to all, issues in each person judging for himself the content of that message.

Hierarchy is eroded thereby, as the lowest and highest alike within the society both are placed on the same strata as equal subjects. The Word judges both.

As well, the independence, self-will, and unholy tolerance of diversity found in Americanism are abolished by the coming of the kingdom of God to a people.

Customs in this kingdom of heaven are other than those encountered among men. Speech is governed by a different spirit and employed unto another end than that of earth. Dress is simple and modest, free from ostentation or improper exposure.

Treasures and indulgence are disdained while appetites do not impel their actions. Flattery, coercion, or threats of pain fail to move them to stray from their course.

Neither bribery nor sanctions divert their way. Titles, promotion, and prominence are things despised in their eyes.

Aliens they are and "strangers" describes them well. Expatriates residing on earth briefly until returned to their home land are what they are. For a season they sojourn in the foreign environment of this world, though conducting themselves as cultures apart.

These are the ones whose "citizenship is in heaven" -Phil.3:20. Born and bred from above, "partakers of a heavenly calling" -Heb.3:1, they are subjects of the kingdom of God, with a new King, written Law, and transformed practices.

God determines both His culture and those dwelling in it. An unchanging law established from ages immemorial governs this kingdom: the Word of the King contained in the Scriptures which defines the nature and parameters of acceptable behavior within the heavenly society.

Heaven's kingdom replaces gods with the Lord of Glory and an earthly king with the Majesty on High. The written Word of the King cancels oral traditions. America's majority rule and independent self-will are superseded by the Word of God and norms of godly submission therein.

God's kingdom differs, then, significantly from cultures of earth and resolves the constant tension existing in man's societies between oppression, freedom, and autonomy.

Man cannot long endure either oppression or anarchy. Oppression fosters revolt while anarchy is more intolerable still. Men will choose even tyranny over uncertainty and chaos; but in neither case is the individual free.

In oppressive regimes, individual freedom is defined and curbed by the elite. The individual is free to do only what has been determined by others, which is not freedom at all.

Conversely, the autonomous individual has no freedom to interact in his society as he has become an outlaw from it. This is the "freedom" of the fish escaped from the confines of his watery environment.

Americanism attempted to resolve this tension by equating liberty with autonomy: freedom, with imposing self-will and rule. But rebellion can never be synonymous with liberty in terms of the kingdom of heaven.

Self-will and revolt are not components of God's kingdom. Fish out of water only survive but briefly.

Within the kingdom of heaven there is government without tyranny and liberty without autonomy. The society and individuals within it both have their respective places without infringing upon the realm of the other. The society speaks to the individuals and the individual can speak to the society.

Individuals can be required to conform to the cultural ideal of the society without it becoming totalitarian by such insistence. By definition, the individual within the kingdom of God is a subject of the King and therefore accountable to obey the Word of God which is the cultural ideal of that kingdom.

On the other hand, the society itself can be called upon by even a single individual to amend its ways and conform to the law of the King, His Word. And the individual can do so without becoming an autonomous outlaw of that kingdom.

Both the society and the individual are subject to the King and His Word which governs both. Waywardness on the part of either is to be rectified by recourse to the Scriptures. Neither the

status quo of the society nor the novelty of the individual are to be given heed to.

Historically, grave problems have always arisen when the ideal of the kingdom of heaven [i.e. the Word of God] is no longer the basis of appeal to address departure from that ideal by the individual or the society alike.

Then, either the autonomous cry of Jeroboam, "To your tents, O Israel," prevails or the oppressive traditions of the Pharisees, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?" is enforced.

In neither case is the society nor the individual preserved. Both perish when the Word of the King no longer is the reference point.

Repentance from our native cultures and from any borrowed cultural values must take place within the heart of every true child of God or we are no different than the world that we are claiming to be saved from.

26

Decline

We live in a generation that accounts information to be wisdom, technique to be principle, psychology to be insight, the immediate to be priority, diversion as desirable, and toil as drudgery.

Reflection is not engaged in sufficiently so as to transcend beyond superficial silly application and thus we have not grasped universal transforming spiritual principles with substance.

We know enough of the Scriptures to be able to urge congregants to do their devotions, pray, attend religious meetings, and be nice to everyone. But we do not help men thereby or make them a blessing to others.

The fountains of the great deep have not been broken up and the windows of heaven opened in such a religion. Fallow ground rife with thorns and thistles yet abides and the paltry dew that settles thereon is not absorbed to any everlasting or even "practical" benefit.

We are unable to engage men in the deepest strata of life simply due to our not having grasped the deepest strata of eternal verity; and so superficial religiosity prevails, men subsist in quiet despair, hopes wane, and no worthwhile legacy continues to the succeeding generations.

In short, disciples are not made because we are not disciples--we are merely "correct" religious men.

How shall we be delivered from this stultifying suffocating death?

Love Not the World

1 Jn.2:15

Lot is the high priest of a Christianity gone mad.

He had the form of godliness but denied the power thereof. Lot's motivation of life surged from his own deceived and excuse-making heart. Striving with his brothers and inclined towards the sensuous is how he appears in the biblical narrative.

An earthly focus rendered him powerless against the enemy while deluding him as to his influence on the world. It deceived him as to the world's influence upon himself.

Finally, he was overcome by his self-chosen ways and sank in the shameful degradation of his own deception. He is an abiding monument to the sure end of all who love the world.

Moral chameleons are the Lots of this world. His name means "a wrapper," and how nicely he took on the proportions of whatever he was around.

Three times we are told that "Lot went with Abram" -Gen.12:4; 13:1,5. He was with him but wasn't like him. Abraham walked with God; Lot walked with Abraham. An immense difference existed between them.

Lot was an opportunist while Abraham was obedient. The God of Glory appeared to Abraham, calling him to abandon all and follow Him [Acts 7:2]. No such revelation attended Lot. The only visitation to him was that of angels whom he contradicted and resisted [Gen.19:18].

Righteous Lot did not walk with God. He at first walked with Abraham; he then walked by himself. In the end he walked with Sodomites.

Each one he chose and each one left its indelible impress upon his life. He was content for strife to exist with his brethren, for his eye was upon his own things. This, Abraham could not endure, for his eye was fixed upon honoring the God of Glory [Gen.13:5-10].

Lot was willing to fight his brother [Gen.13:7,8], but was powerless against the enemy [Gen.14:12]. Flocks and herds were

counted a greater prize than the love of the brethren. No reconciliation was sought by his self-centered heart.

The governing impulse of his life was covetousness [Gen.13:10]. His was an unholy mixture of the things of God with the things of earth. The garden of the Lord and the land of Egypt appeared as one and the same to his clouded vision [Gen.13:10].

Fools who have no altar roam on endless quests for greener pastures [Gen.13:10,11]. They gaze, they long after, and then choose for themselves without even a glance heavenward [Gen.13:11].

The Living God is not the reference point of their double minded self-will. Unstable, with their backs to the light, they adjust themselves in close proximity to the likes of Sodom [Gen.13:12,13].

Life becomes a gradual but ever-increasing downward decline. One compromise leads to another while deception does its deathly work.

For the worldly, the justifying demand becomes, "What's wrong with that?" "Don't I have liberty?" arises as its rationalizing plea. And the worldling always imagines that he is the exception to the rule; that he can sin while heaven winks at his misdeeds.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" -Gal.6:7. And then again: "Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals" -1 Cor.15:33. Lot was deceived on both accounts.

He continued to plant seeds which would spring up to his own demise. His morals decayed through his own corrupted choices and evil associations.

The deception was in thinking that the first step is actually a small matter. But what begins as a step soon quickens to a gait which eventually breaks into a run.

"My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your feet from their path: for their feet run to evil" -Prov.1:15,16. The deluded longing of the heart prompts the first step.

Worldliness begins in the heart. Its tap root is Self: self-gain, self-satisfaction, self-advancement, self-esteem, self-improvement, self-sufficiency, self-congratulation. Lot's desire to

secure the "best" for self [Gen.13:10,11] led to gravitating towards questionable companions [Gen.13:12].

His final resting place was amidst what was totally abhorrent to the Lord [Gen.13:13; 14:12]. It is here that we discover that the lush green plains of our longings also sustain Sodomites.

Truly, the victory which overcomes the world is our faith [1 Jn.5:4]. But Lot is a sobering testimony that the converse of this is also true; the love of the world overcomes our faith. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" -1 Jn.2:15; and this is what Lot loved.

In Sodom he discovered himself to be defenseless against the enemy and stripped of wealth and sustenance [Gen.14:11,12]. He was powerless to wield the sword against the onslaught of his foreign conqueror. It is impossible to dwell in the devil's environment and not be "held captive by him to do his will" -2 Tim.2:26.

Only he who dwells apart as separated unto the Lord can effect deliverance for brethren ensnared in the world. Abraham was thus able to rescue Lot because Abraham walks with God.

He knows how to smite with the Spirit's sword against all the schemes of the enemy [Gen.14:14-16]. The secret of his power is that he abides in God, not in Sodom.

But as the proverbial swine, though saved as he was, Lot returned to Sodom's sty. Only now he did so as a man of influence and prominence. He sat in the gate as her judge [Gen.19:1].

Lot became involved in community affairs as a man-pleasing politician. It is not possible to seek to please men and God at the same time [Gal.1:10]; one cannot serve two masters. Self-promoted civil servants serve no one but themselves.

He was not godly. His conscience was defiled; it tormented him day after day [2 Pet.2:7,8]. He shrank from condemning evil for fear of losing his position of influence and his imagined "testimony." His appeal was for the blatantly wicked to abandon those deeds for moral crimes of a lesser degree [Gen.19:7,8].

He did not fear the Lord which is "to hate evil" -Prov.8:13. To his deluded compromising mind, only the obviously abhorrent

evils were to be condemned; the remaining were judged acceptable.

“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” -1 Cor.5:6. But Lot did not know and the corruption of compromise was rapidly overtaking him.

Sodom was in Lot long before Lot was in Sodom. He longed after affluence and the leisure it affords [Gen.13:10]. His pride and self-seeking eclipsed denying himself for the betterment of others [Gen.13:7-11].

“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me” -Ezek.16:49,50.

The love of self, the love of money, and pleasure was what Sodom was made of. It is also what characterizes Lot and the Christianity gone mad of which he is the head [2 Tim.3:1-5].

It is a delusion to imagine having a testimony to the world when the principles and motives of our hearts are no different than those of the world itself.

Lot had no testimony; he was despised as a hypocrite by its residents [Gen.19:9] regardless of his fawning upon them as “brothers” -Gen.19:7. His announcement of impending doom was received as an amusing charade by his own family [Gen.19:14].

He had no testimony of obedience to the angels who had to seize his hand, compelling him to flee the condemned jewel of his heart [Gen.19:16]. And what was the testimony that he left for the people of God? That legacy of enmity against the Lord was named Moab and Ammon [Gen. 19:36-38].

The verse which capsulated his life proceeded from his own lips: “Oh, no, my lords!” -Gen.19:18. Hesitating [Gen.19:16], he substituted his own perspective for what was clearly commanded, and appealed to grace as the basis to do so [Gen.19:19,20].

We can imagine what his epitaph read: "Lot of Zoar." Zoar means small [Gen.19:22]. It is what he had chosen all through his life.

His faith was small, as was his consecration. He had little testimony to the world and little influence for good on his own family. Small was Lot's wisdom and minute was his reward.

He had little power against the enemy and scarcely any blessing to the people of God. Even less was his discernment of the evil sway Sodom had upon his own heart.

Yet you have instructed your family quite well, Mr. Lot. Your wife certainly learned from you the "acceptability" of substituting one's own will for the clear command of God.

"My dear husband, have we not 'found favor in His sight' -Gen.19:19? Doesn't God's mercy cover all, that we may do as we please, even as you chose Zoar instead of obeying the angels' command [Gen.19:19,20]?"

"Thus, my dearest Lot, if you need not heed His voice, neither must I heed Him by not gazing back upon my well-beloved Sodom [Gen.19:17]. After all, are we not under His grace?"

"I, like you, darling, can do as I desire. Surely He will forgive and adjust His demands to accommodate my own."

And what of your lovely virgin girls, Lot? They learned all too well that the end justifies the means, that virginity may be sacrificed in order to prevent a "greater" evil.

"Daddy, didn't you offer us to the impassioned animals of Sodom? Didn't you say they could do with us as they pleased in order to keep your guests from their ravaging [Gen.19:8]?"

"Why should we not violate ourselves, even with you, our father, in order to prevent the 'greater evil' of abiding childless?" [Gen.19:31-36].

Ah, how well they learned! They understood the inner workings of your heart and the principles of your life. They knew your values and the truths you spurned despite your religious veneer.

It is a crooked and perverted generation that cries: "My God, we of Israel know Thee!" -Hos.8:2, all the while that the world is loved and the flesh is indulged to its own demise.

Who had a testimony before the Lord? Who influenced the world for the kingdom of God? Was it he who dwelt therein as a man of prominence dutifully legislating equity and morality, or was it the friend of God who was totally separated unto the Lord apart from Sodom and its filth?

It was Abraham who knew how to wield the sword of the Spirit in victory over the enemy's captivity. It is Abraham who

lifts up his hand to God Most High and refuses even a shoestring from the king of that evil place [Gen.14:22,23].

Why was Lot delivered? Because Abraham stood yet before the Lord [Gen.18:22] even while Lot sat still in Sodom's gate. "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow" -Gen.19:29.

It was Abraham's pleading not to "sweep away the righteous with the wicked" -Gen.18:23,25 that was remembered and answered to the rescue of Lot.

Abraham's life of separation unto God influenced Lot [Gen.12:4]. His power with the sword effected Lot's initial deliverance from the bondage of Sodom. His prayer, lastly and profoundly, was the means of Lot's salvation from judgment fires. Separation unto God from the world is the only means of influencing it for the Lord.

Lot's final episode summarizes in a pathetic, disgusting, yet fitting way the path he chose throughout his days [Gen.19:30-38]. His recurring trait was an insatiable craving for stimulants to the flesh.

The stimulants were consciously indulged; the results of so doing, however, were not perceived until the sure end of all such indulgence raised its dreadful head.

The disaster of associating with Sodom was not seen until overtaken by an enemy tyrant. The folly of returning there as a civil servant only became apparent to him when the smoke of the valley ascended as a furnace.

The wickedness of repudiating the Lord's Word for a Zoar of one's own choosing was only exposed as Moab and Ammon flashed their steel against the people of God [2 Chron.20:1].

His distortion of perspective and warping of values were only realized some long while afterward. The stupefying draught of worldliness leads to the grossest of improprieties as did Lot's drunken scandal.

Only when awakened from its grip does one realize what transpired under its influence. It is months, and perhaps years, later that the evil seed implanted manifests itself as the wickedness that it is. The culmination of worldliness is enmity with the Lord and opposition to all godliness.

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore decides to be the friend of the world makes himself the enemy of God” -Jas.4:4. Love of the world is the prostitution of all true religion.

Lot sowed love of self, love of money, and love of pleasure rather than love of God [2 Tim.3:1-5]. When we sow the same, we reap of its corrupted fruit: some 30, some 60, and some 100-fold; and the harvest always exceeds the planting.

The Lord says that true religion is “to keep oneself unspotted from the world” -Jas.1:27. Yet in a Christianity gone mad, the stain of the world has colored the very fabric of our soul though we don external robes of righteousness to hide our uncleanness.

Our happily superficial religion testifies to our worldliness. We nod our heads in concern over the heinous crimes of our day while never judging their root causes in our own hearts.

We are like Lot; He did not hearken to the voice of the Lord in His Word. His own alternative to scriptural obedience was considered acceptable by him; Lot loved the world and its ways.

But it is not merely Lot and his descendants who love the world. The children of scribes and Pharisees do likewise.

Outwardly they appear quite dissimilar. One would never find a Pharisee in Sodom or in drunken shame, yet the principles governing their hearts are one and the same.

Lot was the libertine, the Pharisee was the conservative. Both served self and walked by sight rather than by faith. The name "Pharisee" means "separated one," yet the Pharisees were not separated unto the Lord any more than Lot was.

Both were separated unto their own lust and “walked according to the course of this world, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind” -Eph.2:2,3.

Both donned a mantle of respectability among their contemporaries. The gate was Lot's arena of exhibition while the temple itself was the stage for pharisaical pageantry. Both presumed to pontificate to their fellows from lofty positions of "superiority."

Yet the texts of their sermons were drawn from the polluted cisterns of their own fabrication. Neither one urged men to

repent of their wickedness to serve the Living God in sincerity and truth; neither did they do so themselves.

A man-made morality was the best that either had to offer. The epithet “a sinful and adulterous generation” can justly be applied to both Sodom and Jerusalem. Both were of the world; indeed, Jerusalem is that spiritual Sodom where our Lord was crucified [Rev.11:8].

Worldliness is not defined by a catalog of do's and don'ts. Externalism can never cure or excise worldliness; it is a matter of the inner sanctum of the heart.

Being worldly is an orientation, a frame of reference; through its filter of values and presuppositions all else is assessed.

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” -1 Jn.2:16. The outlook, the drives, and thought system within the heart of man comprises all that is in the world.

Setting one's mind upon earthly things is the essence of worldliness. It is being conformed to its ideals and viewpoint rather than being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” -Rm.12:2. To befriend the world is adopting a manner of life which renders one an enemy of God [Jas.4:4].

Worldliness constitutes one to be both a stumbling block and ensnared by Satan [Mt.16:23]. By it we are held in bondage by weak and worthless elemental things [Gal.4:3,9] “rather than according to Christ” -Col.2:8. The horrid reality is that the course of the world is governed by the evil one in whose power the whole world lies [1 Jn.5:19].

Christ Jesus said of His disciples: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” -Jn.17:16. His followers are other than the world even as Abraham was. In order to influence the inhabitants of earth for God, one must be unlike them both in principle and conduct.

To be otherwise is to lose all effectiveness, doing no good for others and rendering the disciple useless even to himself.

These considerations lend added significance to our Lord's calling His people, “the salt of the earth” -Mt.5:13.

Salt is of value in the preservation of food. It retards decay. It prevents corruption by influencing what it is in contact with without losing its own essence.

That is, unless the salt itself has become corrupted; then it is good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men - similar to Lot in Sodom.

Salt is good if it is not found in the shape of a pillar.

Remember Lot's wife

Lk.17:32

Here's Bible Knowledge Quiz 101.

[1] Who said: "All these things I will give you if you fall down and worship me"? [A] God [B] Jesus [C] Devil [D] Both A and B.

[2] In 1 Timothy 6:5, Men who suppose that godliness is a means to financial gain are: [A] Blessed by God [B] Depraved in mind [C] About to receive their prosperity breakthrough [D] Deprived of truth [E] Both B and D [F] Both A and C.

[3] 1 Timothy 6:9 says wanting to be prosperous: [A] Is God's purpose for all His children [B] Is a foolish and harmful lust [C] Is embracing our destiny [D] Will plunge you into ruin and destruction [E] Both A and C [F] Both B and D.

[4] 1 Timothy 6:10 says that those who long for money: [A] Are on the right path for blessing [B] have wandered from the faith [C] will surely possess what they confess [D] will suffer many sorrows [E] Both B and D [F] Both A and C.

Ok, here's the last question.

[5] Ephesians 5:5 promises that a person who is pursuing prosperity: [A] Is a winner with a living faith [B] Is an idolater [C] Is a kingdom champion [D] Will never enter the kingdom of Christ [E] Both A and C [F] Both B and D.

Finished? Great. So how'd you do? Pretty simple, huh! Well, here's the Answer Key so you can check your score.

[1] The devil promises that the glory and riches of this world will be yours if you worship him. God and Jesus never said that.

[2] Anyone supposing that godliness is a means of financial gain is both depraved in his mind and deprived of the truth.

[3] Anyone who WANTS to be rich is full of foolish and harmful lusts that will plunge you into ruin and destruction.

[4] Longing after money is the root of all evil, shows that you have wandered from the faith, and that many sorrows will pierce your soul.

[5] If you are pursuing prosperity, you are an idolater who will never enter the kingdom of Christ.

Ok then; still doing alright? Uh, not so much, huh?

Unless you scored 100%, you have entered into serious spiritual disaster. There's only one thing that can be done.

Repent of your lust for money, for you have already plunged into ruin and destruction. There is no other alternative but complete spiritual ruin if you do not.

Prosperity is a Doctrine of Demons.

29

Den of Thieves

Men of corrupt mind think that godliness

Is a means to financial gain

1 Tim.6:5

Love has as its focus the good of others. Lust is intent only in satisfying its own unholy desires. Love wishes to give. Lust wants to gain.

Giving in the church has often become little more than a lustful affair to get something for self. We have turned giving into a commercial enterprise to generate funds for our own ends.

Ministers threaten congregations to tithe and give repeatedly so that money will continue to come into their own pockets. Congregations continue to do so many times expecting that God will give them much more than they have “invested.”

The church has once again become a “house of merchandise” -Jn.2:16 and a “den of thieves” -Mt.21:13. This shameless use of religion to gain for one’s self is hated still by the Lord Jesus.

He overturned their money tables then and drove them out of His Father’s house. He will do the same today to the religious merchants within the churches’ sanctuaries.

In our day, giving has become, not a means of blessing to others, but a greedy way to enrich one’s self. Praise to Jesus is upon our lips, but we are really only lusting after His multiplied bread and fish while trying to use Him to get what we want [Jn.6:25-27].

2 Cor.2:17 reveals that there are many who “peddle the Word of God for profit.” The things of God are employed by the hands of self-seeking men in order to get wealth and prosperity in earthly things.

This is no different than the false prophet Balaam “who loved the wages of unrighteousness” -2 Pet.2:15. He was a mixture of both “Prophet” and “Diviner,” caring little about which would obtain the prosperity he lusted after.

Though he knew that the Word of God condemned his desperate lust for riches, nevertheless, he continued to seek gain for himself. He wanted by all means to find a way to get Balak’s promised reward by “using” God to obtain it. Thus he was a chartered minister for hire who prophesied for a price.

The Scriptures speak about Balaam's way [2 Pet.2:15], his error [Jude 11], and his doctrine [Rev.2:14]. These give us sober warnings about following in his footsteps.

[1] The way of Balaam is that motivating greed for self-enrichment. Love of money filled his heart. He cared nothing for the Lord or for the people of God.

That God would judge them along with fornicating Moabite women and Balak himself did not disturb him in the least. Money was his one concern. And so positively confessed decrees continued to flow from his lips.

[2] His error was imagining that God can be manipulated by repeated religious activities and proper ritual. He thought that if God did not approve of his prophetic ravings today, He may yet be persuaded by them tomorrow.

"Noise and religious acrobatics ought to eventually gain my own desires," was the distorted error of his thinking. Balaam believed that God could be convinced to adjust His Word to grant his own. This is error indeed.

[3] He taught Balak and all men thereafter the doctrine which bears his name. The doctrine of Balaam is that truth can be compromised to get what you want.

His message is that the end justifies the means. "As long as my purpose is achieved, it does not matter how it is accomplished," was his deluded teaching.

Truly, a doctrine of demons leading to damnation according to Rom.3:8: "And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come?' Their condemnation is just."

Balaam has millions of disciples faithfully following in his way. They too have the name of God on their lips, the lust for money in their hearts, and traditional idolatrous religion saturating their souls.

Of our modern church it truthfully must be said that "they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error" -Jude 11.

2 Pet.2:2 declares: "Many will follow their shameless ways, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed." And even though we have been repeatedly warned about those who "secretly bring in destructive heresies" -2 Pet.2:1, we continue to

follow as so many blind and senseless sheep being led to the slaughter.

These deceivers continue to demand money week after week and we continue to pay what they require. We are as foolish and wicked as the false teachers themselves. Both the teachers and the congregations alike walk in the way of Balaam: the way of greed for self-enrichment.

Listen to the verdict of 2 Pet.2:3: “Through covetousness they will make merchandise of you with false words.” Yet this could never be if we refused to pay what they require. We would never be taken advantage of by false words if we ourselves loved the truth.

But we do not. We love money and thus continue to tithe and give according to demand. We imagine that God *must* bless us with multiplied financial rewards because we have given according to the law of our self-made religion. But this is a delusion on a grand scale.

Rather, we fall under the condemnation of 1 Tim.6:5 of those who “think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” This same verse says that it is only those who are “of depraved mind and deprived of the truth” who think this way.

Listen carefully to what the Word of God says here. It is only those whose minds are corrupt and who live in error that imagine that godliness is a way to personal enrichment. This reproves the wayward church of today who gives in the expectation of getting.

It is what Simon the sorcerer did. He gave his money in order to spiritually benefit thereby. He saw what he wanted and brought his offering in order to get it. This is lust.

He thought that if he gave money to Men of God, he would get what he wanted in return. He imagined that if he sowed his “seed of faith,” he could get things from God. If he paid the price, he would obtain the same “prosperity” as the Apostles.

Witchcraft employs such methods, but not Christianity. The ministers of today have raised multitudes to follow Simon Magus while quite willingly receiving the money which Peter rejected as unholy. Peter’s rebuke rightly falls upon these sons of Simon as they originally did upon the deluded sorcerer of Samaria himself.

“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! Your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours and pray to God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you; for I see that you are in the bondage of iniquity” -Acts 8:20-23.

It is this shameless and deluded love of money which will condemn Simon along with his children in today’s church.

“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts which plunge men into ruin and destruction” -1 Tim.6:9. The desire for money itself is enough to send this generation of church-goers into everlasting judgment.

This verse calls wanting riches, “foolish and harmful lusts.” With this longing in the heart, already one has fallen. Temptation has overcome you in the snare of “the deceitfulness of riches which choke the Word” -Mt.13:22. No reward awaits you other than that of ruin and destruction.

“Love of money is the root of all evil and some by longing after it have wandered away from the faith” -1 Tim.6:10. This coveting for gain will transform you into an idolater, far from being a Christian at all.

This is the judgment of Eph.5:5 upon all greedy men: “This you know with certainty, that no covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Lust for money masquerades as giving in the church of our generation. We pretend that we are giving for the glory of God and good of others, but it is really for our own benefit. Greed has deceived us into thinking that we can give to God as a means of having Him repay us for our “service.”

The Word of God absolutely reproves this misguided thinking in the words of Rm.11:35: “Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?”

Yet we want it to be so that God will reward us with treasures upon earth. But Jesus has already warned us in Mt.6:19-24: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there

your heart will be also: You cannot serve God and Mammon/Wealth/Riches.”

They are two different gods. There can be no compromise between them.

The true and living God calls His servants with a heavenly calling to set their affections on the things above. The god of Mammon leads his slaves to focus on the things below, on self and wealth which ushers them into everlasting ruin.

Luke 16:13 elaborates on the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon. “Either he will hate the one and love the other, or lese he will be devoted to one and despise the other.”

If one loves God, he hates the love of money. If one is devoted to God he despises focusing on wealth. If one loves money, he hates God. If one is devoted to money he despises the Lord. Both cannot be had.

Nevertheless, we pursue riches as if this was our God-given heritage. But take warning from the words of the wise man in Prov.28:22: “A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth.”

And because we do not heed wisdom’s voice, we show who we really are: idolaters who serve the god of Mammon, but not the God of heaven.

Jesus’ own words rebuke this lustful giving in order to gain for self: “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” -Acts 20:35.

But we have perverted the Words of truth to read: “It is more blessed to give in order to receive.”

And so we hold religious services in a den of thieves while calling it the house of God.

Brethren, the glory has departed, and Jesus yet knows how to make a whip of cords and drive this shameless lust for money out of His Father’s house.

The World From Above

O burning ones, thrice times holy ones,
Full of eyes without and within,
How seest this thing, this world,
O seraphim and cherubim?

Seraph said, "Mold." Cherub spoke, "Cold."
Then, "Vanity," and "Insanity."
"Flies" -- "Lies"
"Rot" -- "Naught"
"Rust" -- "Lust"
"Graves" -- "Slaves"
"Bile" -- "Vile"

There are "Satyrs;" and they are "Haters."

Then stillness, as solemn as the throne,
August as endless day ensued;
Silence, burning with white-hot holy, ere the final views.

Seraph pierced one word, "Lucifiers."

Cherub rejoined, "Crucifiers."

Christ the Teacher

Pattern

Christ Jesus the Lord is the Pattern for His people. He came, delighting to do the Father's will. He emptied Himself of honor to take the form of a servant in order to deliver men from sin. This is the NT Pattern for the church: in character, doctrine, and in ministry.

Conformity to Christ is the standard. His mind is to dwell in His own and govern their every thought and action in all humility, considering others as more important than self [Phil.2:3-5].

Jesus was utterly unlike the religion that He came to dwell among, both in character and in approach to teaching, training, and influencing men. Unlike the Pharisees, He was not rigid in self-devised regulations which were imposed upon the multitudes whom they despised. He was no Sadducee, compromising the Word by courting the favor of the political and influential out of a heart filled with greed.

Though a King indeed, he used no force to promote religious ends as did the Zealots. Rather than isolating Himself from corrupted men, He was even known as the friend of tax-gatherers and sinners while maintaining spotless integrity among them.

When Jesus came to His own people Israel, He met a time-honored and fully developed procedure to train religious leaders. Nevertheless, He neither passed through their process Himself nor submitted any of His disciples to that system.

There were to be found no Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, lawyers, or scribes among His apostles. Religious training devised by men does not produce people who turn the world upside down.

Paul, who had been tutored under Gamaliel, the most notable rabbi of this method [Acts 22:3; 5:34], confessed that his theological upbringing amounted to dung [Phil.3:4-8]. His own horrifying realization was that all of his training had not resulted

in him knowing God at all, much less grasping His will and purposes [Acts 9:5].

His rabbinical schooling, zealous devotion to established traditions, and his exalted position over the professed people of God had not benefitted him in the slightest; they actually brought him into bondage and impoverishment.

He had to unlearn all and begin afresh. He had gained nothing according to the mind of the Spirit; all was loss.

What was true of Paul also characterized the religious rulers among whom he was so highly esteemed. With the Word of God in hand and the Lord's name upon their lips, it was nevertheless the devil himself whom they served [Jn.8:38,44; 16:2,3].

When we survey Christendom in our generation, what was true of them is discovered to be so among us. We reference the Word of God but we have not handled the Word of Life [1 Jn.1:1].

Like the Pharisees, man-made tradition governs the souls of men rather than the simplicity and purity of God's Word alone. Following the well-worn path of the Sadducees, we compete for religious promotion and recognition along with the wealth that such positions afford.

By employing their same methods of intimidation and force, members considered by them to be inferior are dominated by self-appointed rulers. Suspicious, proud, jealous, and coveting, Christ's professed church is fragmented into countless denominational sects, each promoting itself and not Christ.

Brethren, we are not like Christ, and for this cause, neither are we producing true spiritual leaders that are like Him.

Preparation

Jesus learned and developed by prolonged quiet reflection through the means available to all. His character thrived in the care of godly parents, through meditation upon the wonders of the natural creation, habitual gathering with the people of God, secret communion with the Father, by pondering the depths of the Scriptures, through selfless deeds of service, and by engaging in useful labor.

This became the Pattern for Christianity through the example of our Lord during His days in Nazareth: to flourish in the commonplace, in the home in contrast to the lecture hall or public concourse.

Here quiet strengthening of the inner man is cultivated. Consistency of life, regular recourse to secret devotion, and practical usefulness becomes ingrained in such a “school.”

Out of His thirty-three years of earthly life, only three were engaged in what we consider to be ministry. The remaining 91% were passed in quiet development of character and obtaining a comprehensive grasp of eternal purposes into which the unique contribution of His life would fit.

Though at age twelve He was fully conscious that He must be about His Father’s business [Lk.2:49], that business for the next eighteen years was that of simple submission in the carpenter’s shop [Mk.6:3].

In such humble scenes one learns the discipline of the often repeated mundane tasks that fit the soul for future larger responsibilities [Lk.16:10]. If a wooden bench cannot be fashioned well, how can an eternal human soul be entrusted into one’s hands?

Faithfulness is cultivated, not in dramatic public exploits, but in the daily sweeping of planer shavings. Through such menial chores one learns the discipline of self-restraint even though one’s thoughts and ambitions are grand, lofty, and godly.

Preparation precedes service. God must first make the man before He can use or send him.

Character is the bedrock of usefulness in the design of heaven. And it is here that we have failed to follow the Pattern of Christ, both personally, and in our approach to training others.

We have foolishly rushed into service, both while being ignorant of the whole counsel of God and also when underdeveloped in godly character. We have not learned the discipline of years spent in Nazareth’s carpenter shop before engaging in what we deem to be ministry.

Our programmed training curriculums and institutions actually hinder such progress. They promote the delusion that

one is equipped when actually woeful deficiency continues to be our deluded state.

And so, we engage in “ministry” while remaining unlike Christ. Our ideas about service have been absorbed by observation and imitation of the religious status quo, but not gleaned from the Word of God itself through unhurried reflection upon the example of the Lord Jesus.

Rather, we adapt from our surrounding religion that which we hope will further our agenda, but we have no settled convictions stemming from having grasped the Pattern of Christ. We have not learned what teaching is by learning Christ - partly because His methods of conveying truth and influencing men seem peculiar to us, even misguided, ineffective, and eccentric at times.

Word of God

Over the years in the synagogue of Nazareth, Christ habitually devoted Himself to the Scriptures and gathering with the people of God even though the majority were far from being truly spiritual [Lk.4:16]. In this He has shown us to endure patiently with the ignorant and misguided though we may be advanced spiritually beyond those we associate with.

Thus we learn to love as Christ does by associating with the lowly and leading them to know the Father through kindly companionship. Pharisees may ascend to lofty heights, exalted above the common people seated in their chair of Moses [Mt.23:2,3], but not the Lord Jesus.

It was not from the scribes that He learned the words of life or the ways of righteousness. Christ quoted no rabbis and referred to no human writings.

He owed nothing to human wisdom, its schools or literature, religious or otherwise. He drank from the eternal fount of God Himself through the conduit of His Word.

One does not need to read far in the Gospels to see that Christ, the living Word, had treasured the written Word of God richly within Himself. So thoroughly familiar was He with the Scriptures that on the strength of a single text the devil fled

[Mt.4:10,11], mouths of contradicting wise men were stopped [Mt.22:41-46], and centuries of foolish human tradition was confounded [Mt.12:2-7].

So accurately did He know God's Word that His explanation of the tense of a verb in one quotation exposed the error and scattered the long-standing doctrine of His strongest religious opponents [Mt.22:31,32]. Down to the smallest letter of the alphabet and the tiniest stroke of the pen is how holy and unchanging the entire Law and Prophets were to Him [Mt.5:17,18].

He knew the hidden and less traveled paths through the Word and was able to pluck unusual phrases from obscure places to address the needs of the moment [Jn.10:33-36]. Not only was the text precisely in His mind, its truest meaning and intention dwelt in His heart in fullest measure [Mt.5:27,28].

Wherever one could conceivably turn in the pages of the Bible, He was no stranger there but rather the Master of it. The whole of God's revelation was possessed comprehensively in addition to its countless particulars. Sweeping themes of deepest insight were His studied portion. Words of grace lay ready upon His tongue having been received morning by morning through His awakened ear [Isa.50:4].

At once He could tell with authority which were the greatest commandments and declare that the entire Scriptures were summarized thereby [Mt.22:36-40]. Capably He could survey the whole of the revelation of God from beginning to end while pointing out its spiritual consequence [Mt.23:34,35]. With burning conviction from Genesis to Malachi, He explained everything in all of the Old Testament pertaining to Himself [Lk.24:25-27].

The Scriptures testify of Christ [Jn.5:39], and throughout all of His life He testified of them, both by word and by deed. Such was His doctrine, derived from the throne of God itself, fearlessly proclaimed with all boldness [Mk.11:15-18], and mingled with the grace that had been poured upon His lips [Ps.45:2]. And this is why He taught with authority and not as their scribes [Mt.7:29].

Communication

The common language of the people was used by Him. Rarely did He speak words of more than two syllables. His appeal was to the heart, not to the intellect.

Analogy was always present in His message. The literal and tangible were ever employed as the threshold to the figurative and spiritual.

Birds are evil spirits [Mt.13:4,19]. Water and wind are the Holy Spirit [Jn.7:38,39; 3:8]. The appearance of skies are portents of discerning the times [Mt.16:2,3].

Children playing in the marketplace are this fickle generation [Mt.11:16-19]. Salt are believers [Mt.5:13]. Foxes are crafty political beasts of prey [Lk.13:31,32]. Keys unlock access to spiritual storehouses of life and light [Mt.16:19].

He calls Himself the Light of the world [Jn.8:12], the Good Shepherd [Jn.10:14], the Temple [Jn.2:19,21], the true Vine [Jn.15:1], and Bread of life [Jn.6:35].

As a Lamb He takes away the sin of the world [Jn.1:29]; He is the Door to all things blessed [Jn.10:9] and the Way to all spiritual progress [Jn.14:6].

Christ's teaching compressed the greatest volume of truth into the smallest capsule of conveyance: capable of being memorized in a moment, but taking a lifetime to unravel.

The Lord's expressions were often set forth as parables employing the proverbial and pictorial without systematizing doctrine. His Words are "Spirit and Life" -Jn.6:63, impossible to be rehashed and reduced to an abstract doctrinal formula by tiny theological minds. One cannot capture a sunbeam in a carton.

His design was to conceal truth from the casual, disinterested, and carnal [Mt.13:10-15], while gladly expounding their depths to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness [Mk.4:10,11].

He did not sermonize; the dynamics of Christ's method of teaching took place in a context of inquiry, challenge, and confrontation: not using pre-arranged messages in a controlled environment where passive observers listened to religious lectures.

His longest uninterrupted message consisted of 109 verses, able to be spoken unhurriedly in 18 minutes [Mt.5-7].

Rather, His teaching was interactive and spontaneous, quite unlike modern prepared-beforehand sermons delivered to silent audiences. The 59 verses of John 8 contain no less than 26 interactive exchanges between Jesus and those engaging with Him and His teaching.

Participatory dialogue is His method, not monologue.

He was not an expositor; Christ did not quote OT passages and then expound systematically upon them verse by verse as a sort of oral commentary.

“Preachers” do that, but not Christ. Rather, He spoke freshness from heaven received from His Father; He spoke the Word of God that was in accord with the Scriptures already given.

Christ did not engage in information overload. Instead, a simplicity of focused and pointed moral and spiritual purpose graced His discourses.

A systematic catalog of “correct” information was not how He imparted eternal realities. No, His Word is designed to interact with life’s pressing needs and deepest concerns: not as an academic exercise of abstract reflection.

His truth is meant to enter the mainstream of our experience by illuminating and correcting the darkened corners of our soul so as to transform from within; and this requires active interchange unable to be achieved by listening in polite silence.

Answers to inquiries very rarely dealt with the immediate specifics of the questions asked. His responses opened vast vistas of underlying issues while surveying panoramas of unchanging principles.

Nicodemus, a seeking religious dignitary, had the sweeping theme of Spirit and flesh opened before him [Jn.3:1-16]. A scandalous woman of Samaria’s question about the “correct” place of worship was met with the transcending declaration of the necessity of worshiping in Spirit and truth [Jn.4:19-24].

To the inquiry about the propriety of a single ceremonious act, came the scathing denunciation of the root of all contrivance of human tradition [Mk.7:1-13]. To the particular demand to divide the family inheritance came the rebuke of not fleeing all

forms of greed [Lk.12:13-21]. Should we pay tax to Caesar? The greater issue is to give to God the things that are His [Mt.22:15-22].

Example & Truth

Apprenticeship was ever Christ's method to instruct, train, and equip disciples to walk with Him in meekness and lowliness [Mt.11:29]. The goal of such association is conformity to the Master [Lk.6:40] through denial and even hatred of self [Lk.9:23; 14:26] and by willingly suffering all for His name's sake [Lk.14:27].

Explicit forewarning was afforded to His servants to prepare them for the rejection to be encountered by faithfully treading in this path. Suffering, abuse, and persecution even unto death would be the portion of all who devote themselves to Him without compromise [Mt.10:16-39].

Christ's moral and spiritual superiority qualified Him to lead by truth and example and not like the majority of men who use dominating force in the absence of both. It is the rulers of the world that exercise authority and lord it over those whom they view as under and less than themselves [Lk.22:25,26].

But it shall not be so among leaders in His church. There the greatest are servants, the first the last, and leaders are as the youngest who perform lowly unwanted tasks.

True leadership in the church is patterned after the Son of Man who "did not come to be served, but to serve" -Mt.20:28. By Him, feet are washed: not His feet being washed by His servants [Jn.13:3-17].

It is the Life that is the Light of men [Jn.1:4] and the beholding and handling of it that leads to fellowship [1 Jn.1:1-3]. Dictating and lecturing from a distance is not the Pattern of Christ.

Precept lacks power unless it is incarnate. Only as the truth is lived will weight be lent to words [Prov.26:7; 29:19]. Christ has not only told us the way [Jn.12:49,50], but He has shown it to us as well [Lk.22:27; Jn.13:12-15].

Nothing in true godliness or leadership is produced by force or external codes. Christ's object and method was to persuade and win the hearts of men, not to subjugate them, merely modify outward behavior, or gain mental agreement to novel ideas. His manner that we must follow is that of a compelling example of love and holiness merged with the persuasive power of truth.

Though Lord of all, He has provided a servant's Pattern for us to imitate, not that of lordship. He humbled Himself as the lowliest of servants. This is what constitutes leadership in His kingdom, in His church -- serving as a slave.

For disciples to be able to repeat mechanically memorized information gained in a classroom setting was never His purpose. The barrenness of a mere academic exercise of mind was not His aim and could never be thought of as training. His practice rather was that His followers would learn spiritual principles by observation and participation.

His life, both in public and private, was witnessed by them and teachings later explained apart from the multitudes [Mk.4:34]. Christ also had them periodically participate in serving men by way of preaching, teaching, healing, and giving to the poor.

Thus upon the shores of Galilee or along the highways, or in the marketplace and synagogues, His school required men to reason about spiritual issues for themselves. By encountering life situations with the Word of God and by the use of repeated questions, disciples' inner character is developed.

Jesus Himself was the Apostle [Heb.3:1] and knew what was required to be one. The word "apostle" means "sent forth." It describes one who by character, understanding, and method can represent the interests of the one who has sent him.

Christ did nothing except what He saw and heard from His Father [Jn.5:19,30]. His servants, therefore, must likewise go forth with no novelty of message and representation. They are ambassadors, and an ambassador dare not speak or act beyond what he has been authorized to do.

This is the apostolic process: Men are chosen to first be with Him, separated from the unbroken tradition of their customary

life until transformed, then are sent forth once again into that culture without being overtaken by it [Mk.3:14].

It is why laborers continue to be few though harvests are great [Mt.9:36-38]. God does not, no, rather, He cannot send forth workers into His harvest that are neither moved with the compassion of Christ for downtrodden sheep, nor capable of expounding the gospel of the kingdom, nor who employ culturally derived methodologies.

Small boys are unfit to do a man's work. God is no fool. He does not entrust the eternal well-being of undying souls into the hands of those who are unlike His Son.

Many have gone forth, few have been sent. The necessity to pray to the Lord of the harvest for suitable laborers is still quite relevant.

In the extension of the kingdom of heaven, Wisdom dictated to perpetuate life by life, not by pen, sword, politics, or institutions. Grace dictated that those chosen be from the mainstream of common humanity and not from the exceptional or elite, that no flesh may boast in His presence.

And thus it was that unlearned fishermen [Acts 4:13], a tax collector, a political zealot, and volatile sons of thunder became chosen vessels of worldwide blessing. It was a grassroots endeavor so that whatever noteworthy and commendable would be attributable to Christ and not to man.

Methods

Jesus brought no gold from heaven to fund the work committed into their hands. Neither did He solicit funds from men. And He never once collected offerings following His teaching. As He trusted in His Father, so must His disciples.

He built no temples, established no ceremonial procedures, and founded no institutions: a maximizing of power with a minimum of machinery. None of these external things can ever maintain godliness, only men who have been transformed by the Son of God.

No human means, entertainment, or enticements were used by Him to attract men to Himself. Christ alone is the single desire of a disciple, not the allurements of gain or self-interests of any other kind.

Controversy

Christ's Pattern and teaching necessarily provokes controversy: His life, doctrine, and approach came from above and not from below. Willingness to engage in controversy stems from the joyful and certain sense of possessing the truth while being convinced of its value for all men. This conviction is what makes error hateful and inspires the determination to sweep it away in truth's blessed light [Ps.119:128].

But in the midst of controversy, we must distinguish between the propagators of error and evil from those ignorant and misguided ones who are influenced by it [Heb.5:2]. The former we may well rebuke to silence their wicked folly [Tit.1:9-13]. The latter must be dealt with gently if perchance God would open their hearts to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth [2 Tim.2:23-26].

As the King of Truth [Jn.18:37], Christ was a controversialist who had to assail nearly the entire religious system of His day. Yet though He contended earnestly for the truth, Jesus possessed both fervency of spirit while being tempered with self-restraint, even in the midst of murderous antagonists. As such, He could at once scathingly rebuke malicious hypocrites while addressing with grace one among their number who was not of their spirit who had raised a reasonable inquiry [Mt.22:15-40].

Simply stated, Jesus was hated by the world because He loved what men hated and hated what men loved [Heb.1:8,9]. His testifying to the world that its deeds were evil made Him the object of their scorn and anger [Jn.7:7].

He viewed their man-made traditions as one of the greatest evils of all time while refusing to practice any of them in the slightest [Mk.7:5-13]. This provoked the world's fury to the fullest, yet Christ did not shrink from controversy when truth and the souls of men were at stake.

True Leadership

Christ is our Pattern as both Shepherd and Overseer of our souls [1 Pet.2:25]. The Lord Jesus led by spotless example coupled with the persuasive power of truth. He did not practice the leadership and teaching methods of the nations.

They exercise authority over those considered by them to be subordinates; they lord it over men while enforcing their rule by intimidation, sanctions, appeals to their “authority,” and, yes, even threats and punishment.

If we would be like Christ and lead others into the same, our training of true spiritual leaders must be patterned after Him, not after the world.

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant” -Lk.22:25,26. Christ has left us a pattern of lowly service as an example, not directing men from positions of authority over them.

Christ’s leaders follow His Pattern by guiding according to example combined with the persuasive power of truth, not from a compelling position of rank.

In the training of true spiritual leaders, this must be our focus: consistent godly character of loving humble service combined with a thorough grasp and ability to lead the people of God into the truth of His Word. Christ Himself is our Pattern in this and it is here that we have failed.

We are looking for better methods, machinery, and schemes; Christ is looking for better men. We emphasize the tangible, quantifiable, and external; He is seeking internal godly character. We are busy chasing multitudes to attend our programs; the Lord is occupied with seeking and nurturing the faithful few.

Teaching/Training

If we are to raise up a generation of true spiritual leaders in the church who are like Christ, we ourselves must be like Him, not

only in character and doctrine, but in method with men. It is not a moment's process and there are no shortcuts.

Consistent self-denial in humility coupled with lowly self-sacrificing service will fashion our inner character. Diligent prayerful devotion to learning Christ from the Scriptures will equip us to be a blessing in guiding men into the everlasting way of truth as He did.

Christ Himself is our infallible example. "I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you" -Jn.13:15.

Paul continued this legacy of Christ's Pattern. "Be imitators of me as I also am of Christ" -1 Cor.11:1.

And this became the established pattern of teaching and discipleship throughout the New Testament. "Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith" -Heb.13:7.

Jesus' method of teaching was responsive, extemporaneous, and interactive. Rarely did He engage in monologue.

His longest recorded speech is Mt.5-7, consisting of 109 verses taking 18 minutes to speak. Second is Mt.24,25 with 93 verses that require but 15 ½ minutes to recite.

Before sending out the 12, He spoke 42 verses lasting 7 minutes [Mt.10:1-42]. The woes upon the Pharisees [Mt.23:2-39] were complete in 6 ½ minutes.

Unique to Luke are 14 verses spoken in 2 ½ minutes before sending out the 70 [Lk.10:2-16]. Perhaps added to this are the parables in Lk.15:4-32 and 16:1-13: a total of 41 verses and 7 minutes of speaking, though both of these have some interactive elements.

The longest monologue in John occurs in 15:1-27 through 16:16: only 43 verses requiring but 7 minutes from start to finish. The 28 verses of John 5:19-47 are done in 5 minutes.

Besides perhaps a handful of other passages spoken in 5 minutes or less, these are the majority of Christ's uninterrupted messages.

ALL OTHER TEACHING OF JESUS
RECORDED IN THE GOSPELS
IS INTERACTIVE, RESPONSIVE,
AND EXTEMPORANEOUS.

Jesus' pattern of teaching was in an open forum with interactive dialogue. "As soon as He was alone, those about him, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables" -Mk.4:10.

Notice the dynamic of Jesus' teaching illustrated by the following quotes from the gospels:

"Someone in the crowd said to Him...but He said to him... then He said to them...and He told them a parable...and He said to His disciples.

"Peter said, 'Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?'...and He was saying to the crowds...now on the same occasion there were some who reported to Him about... and Jesus said to them...and He began telling this parable" -Lk.12:13-16,22,42,54; 13:1,2,6.

"And He was teaching in one of the synagogues...He called her over and said to her...but the synagogue official...began saying to the crowd...but the Lord answered him and said...as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing...so He was saying...and again He said..." -Lk.13:10-21.

"...teaching...and someone said to Him...and He said to them...just at that time some Pharisees approached saying...and He said to them..." -Lk.13:22-25.

"The Scribes and Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many more things/subjects" -Lk.11:53.

The 59 verses of John 8 contain no less than 26 interactive exchanges between Jesus and those engaging with Him and His teaching. In the 71 verses of John 6 there are 22 changes in who is speaking during that interactive dialogue, 22 exchanges in the 53 verses of John 7, 33 in the 41 verses of John 9.

There are 12 changes of speakers in the 50 verses of Mt.12 as they responded to Jesus' teaching while He replied to their questions and comments.

Interactive dialogue best describes Jesus' approach to teaching. The Lord Jesus often asked questions that expected a reply unlike the rhetorical questions of the orator and sermonizer who never actually solicit responses from their passive hearers.

"Who do the crowds say that I am?" -Lk.9:20. "What will He do to those vinedressers?" -Mt.21:40. "Whose image and inscription is this?" -Mt.22:20.

"What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?" -Lk.10:26. "Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" -Lk.7:42.

"I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" -Lk.6:9. "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? Answer Me" -Mk.11:30.

We are unlike Christ in our practice of teaching and influencing the hearts of men. Through neglect and willful ignorance, we have ceased to imitate Christ.

Spiritual atrophy has set in. We have substituted man-made patterns of authoritative rule and administrative procedures gleaned from corporate models instead. Through sermon and lecture methods borrowed from Greek philosophers and medieval monks, we have produced countless generations of weak passive observers.

But we have not made zealous godly disciples in the process; we are unlike Christ. We have become unfit flabby soldiers being force-fed from paid professional orators. Our very approach to teaching and training has bred a consumer mentality in the audiences that attend our weekly religious pageants.

And so we come, not to give, to share, and to bless, but to get, to be entertained, and "challenged." We ride the weekly church "carousel" till the bell dings, dismount, and go smiling on our way.

But we have not fostered the idea of an outflow of life and truth into the lives of others. We have instead funneled our carefully prepared weekly "worship" programs into the vortex of self-absorbed recipients.

By doing so, we have trained congregants all too well to expect nothing except to partake of an inflow of pre-packaged

religious fare: a mild stimulant to higher aspirations. The very arrangement of the chairs in Christian gatherings testifies to this.

We passively sit row by row, stare at the back of the heads before us, while we listen to monologues delivered by religious professionals. We have no expectation of any responsiveness or interaction with speaker or with one another alike. This, Jesus did not do.

If we will be like Christ, we had better jettison the sermon and our carefully choreographed “services” and return to the Pattern of Christ as exemplified in the NT gatherings.

The dynamics of believers gathering as noted in Acts 15 demonstrates a participatory practice of mutual exchange and interaction that has been abandoned by a wayward church for centuries now.

“Certain men taught...dissension and dispute...describing... reporting...some rose up, saying ...much dispute...rose and said... listened...declaring ...became silent...answered...listen...then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church... teaching and preaching...with many others also... strengthening the churches.”

This is far from our typical Sunday morning routines of programmed rituals. Today, the very priesthood of every believer willingly sit in dumb passive silence.

The only contribution that is expected from such gathered saints is to pay their religious dues of tithes and offerings or to shout when commanded by their imposter lords. This is not the Pattern of Christ.

And why are we not obeying what is commanded in I Corinthians 14? And I quote: “Pursue love, especially that you may prophesy. One who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. I wish that you all would prophesy.

“What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, let all things be done for edification. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted” -1 Cor.14:1,3,5,26,29-31.

And unless we think to dismiss this and deceive ourselves that this is optional, an irrelevant relic of years gone by, hear this: “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s command. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” -1 Cor.14:37,38.

It is disobedience to the commandment of God to gather as believers otherwise. The dynamic of Christ’s Pattern of interactive dialogue in a free exchange among the brethren must be obeyed.

A naive and cowardly attempt to relegate these commands to a bygone era of Corinthian irrelevancy is both unfounded and foolish.

Listen well; Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to “remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church” -1 Cor.4:17.

And if you still are trying to dismiss the obvious, you better reflect on this; Paul’s letter to Corinth was of worldwide scope, one that transcends all cultures and all times: “To the church of God which is at Corinth...with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” [emphasis added] -1 Cor.1:2.

So there you have it; interactive participatory dialogue is the command of the Lord that is to be taught and practiced in every church in every place in every generation.

We are unlike Christ. So now what will we do to remedy our wanton waywardness?

Reformation in the church is the only spiritually sane option.

APPENDIX 1

Christ did not employ an interpretive framework of an historical/grammatical hermeneutic. He did not quote verbatim OT passages and explain to His hearers cultural and historical curiosities while expounding the nuances of grammar.

He did not ask what the original audience understood when the Word of God’s message came to them. It is an irrelevant

query; there is no way to ascertain that with any degree of validity.

Even though original hearers were thoroughly immersed in their culture and fluent in that language, they neither believed nor perceived what they heard. Their historical/grammatical heritage did not gain for them spiritual perception or obedient hearts.

To the inquiry: “Who do the people say the Son of Man is?” came numerous erroneous answers. “Some say...and others...but still others” -Mt.16:13,14.

All were native citizens of that culture and understood the language clearly. But this was no advantage to them in gaining spiritual insight; they were simply wrong in their assessments.

“Some were saying, ‘He is a good man’; others were saying, ‘No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray.’ The crowd answered, ‘You have a demon.’ Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, ‘Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?

“We do not know where this man is from. Many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, ‘When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?’

“What is this statement that He said, ‘You will seek Me, and will not find Me?’ Some of the people were saying, ‘This is certainly the Prophet.’ Others were saying, ‘This is the Christ.’ Still others were saying, ‘Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?’ So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him” [excerpts from John 7].

All were of the same culture; all understood the language, yet there was a division among them about the person and Words of Christ.

Why then do we wish to base our understanding of the Scriptures on the uncertainty of people in a far-removed society who gained no insight from their own culture and language? They were obviously confused and divided in their opinions. What do they have to teach us about Christ?

And if we would naively and foolishly ask: “What would the original hearers have understood when Christ spoke?” we are

asking a question that cannot ever be answered with certainty. Such an inquiry transports us into the realm of pure speculation.

Let us leave these man-contrived notions of interpreting the Scriptures dependent upon linguists and historians. This cannot possibly be the correct approach to the Word of God.

And this is asserted for two reasons: [1] It is an absurd impossibility to actually ascertain what the original listeners might or might not have understood. [2] Jesus Himself never employed such a method.

Not only that, it should be obvious that this cannot possibly be God's intention for His people; the vast majority are ignorant of original biblical languages and ancient Near Eastern history, culture, and customs.

Moreover, it thereby makes true believers dependent upon religious professionals who have been schooled in such things, thus cutting off the majority from any direct access to and encounters with Christ Himself. No, this is folly.

Culture and language did not come to Adam and Eve's rescue in the Garden of Eden. They sinned though they understood both. Neither will knowledge of culture and language ensure that we have correctly grasped eternal truth and are on a godly path.

Rather, let us follow the Pattern of Christ in His understanding and use of the Scriptures under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This is the more excellent way.

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will tell you the things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you" -Jn.16:13,14.

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Holy Spirit, combining spiritual things with spiritual words" -1 Cor.2:12,13.

"But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and

not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” -1 Jn.2:27.

APPENDIX 2

47 Words Relating to Teaching [* indicates all NT references shown]

[1] General Terms

DIDASKO [διδασκω] – To give instruction [Acts 7:22; 2 Tim.2:25; Tit.2:12].

HIEROUGEIO [ἱεπουγεω] – To minister as a priest [Rm.15:16].

MATHETEUO [μαθητευω] – To be a disciple [Mt.27:57; Mt.13:52]. To make a disciple [Mt.28:19; Acts 14:21]. It comes from a root which implies thought accompanied by endeavor: hence, to learn/follow.

KARUSO [κηρυσσω] – To herald, proclaim, preach [Lk.24:47; Acts 8:5; 10:37; Mt.24:14; Acts 28:31; 1 Cor.1:23; 2 Cor.4:5; 2 Tim.4:2].

EUANGELIZO [ευαγγελιζω] – To proclaim good news [Lk.4:18; Acts 13:32; Rm.10:15].

KATEXEO [κατηχω] – To teach orally, inform [Lk.1:4; Acts 18:25].

*MARTUROMAI [μαρτυρομαι] – To bear witness [sometimes with the idea of solemn protestation] [Acts 20:26; 26:22; Gal.5:3; Eph.4:17; 1 Thess.2:11].

*DIAMARTUROMAI [διαμαρτυρομαι] – To testify or protest solemnly [Lk.16:28; Acts 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21,23,24; 23:11; 28:23; 1 Thess.4:6; Heb.2:6; 1 Tim.5:21; 2 Tim.2:14; 4:1].

[2] Re: Discipline

*ΠΑΙΔΕΥΟ [παιδεύω] – To teach/train children, to train by act: used of family discipline [Heb.12:6,7,10; 1 Cor.11:32; 2 Cor.6:9; Rev.3:19].

*ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ [παιδεία] – Training of a child, including instruction, discipline, correction, chastening [Eph.6:4; 2 Tim.3:16; Heb.12:5,7,8].

*ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΟΣ [παιδαγωγός] – A guide or guardian or trainer of boys: literally a child leader. The idea is of training and discipline, not impartation of knowledge. He exercised a general supervision over the child and was responsible for his moral and physical well-being [1 Cor.4:15; Gal.3:24,25].

*ΠΑΙΔΕΥΤΗΣ [παιδευτής] – Instructor, one who disciplines, corrects, chastens [Rm.2:20; Heb.12:9].

*ΕΠΑΝΟΡΘΩΣΙΣ [επανορθωσις] – Restoration to an upright state: correction [2 Tim.3:16].

[3] Persuasion

*ΔΙΑΛΕΓΟΜΑΙ [διαλεγομαι] – To ponder, resolve in one's mind, and then to converse, dispute, discuss, discourse with, dialogue: not a sermon/lecture, but a conversational exchange [Mk.9:34; Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8,9; 20:7,9; 24:12,25; Heb.12:5; Jude 9].

ΠΕΙΘΟ [πειθω] – To apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade, bring about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations [Acts 13:43; 19:8; 18:4; 28:23; Rm.2:8; Heb.13:17].

*ΔΙΑΚΑΤΕΛΕΓΧΟΜΑΙ [διακατελεγχομαι] – To confute, convict powerfully. It is implied that he met the opposing arguments in

turn [DIA] and brought them down to the ground [KATA] while impressing moral blame upon them [Acts 18:28].

[4] Explanation

*HOMILEO [ὁμιλεω] - To be in company with, associate, intercourse with, commune [Lk.24:14,15; Acts 20:11; 24:26].

*EKTITHEMI [εκτιθημι] - To set forth, expound, expose [Acts 11:4; 18:26; 28:23; used in Acts 7:21 of literally being exposed].

*EPILUO [επιλυω] - Release, solve, explain, expound, settle [Mk.4:34; Acts 19:39].

*DIERMENEUO [διεπμηνευω] - To interpret fully [Lk.24:47; Acts 9:36; 1 Cor.12:30; 14:5,13,27].

*HERMENEUO [ἑρμηνευω] - [From Hermes - Greek for Mercury who was the messenger of the gods]. Denotes to explain, interpret, and is used to explain meaning of words from one language to another [Jn.1:38 (in some manuscripts); Jn.9:7; Heb.7:2].

*EPILUSIS [επιλυσις] - A solution, explanation: literally a release - a loosing up [2 Pet.1:20].

[5] Exhortation

PARAKALEO [παρακαλεω] - Primarily to call to a person: entreat, comfort, admonish, exhort, encourage - to urge one to pursue

some course of conduct. Of the 105 uses of this word, the following show how it is used with respect to teaching.

Comfort: [2 Cor.1:4,6; 2 Thess.2:17]

Implore: [Eph.4:1]

Appeal: [1 Tim.5:1; Philemon 9,10]

Exhort: [Lk.3:18; Acts 2:40; 20:1,2; Rm.12:8; 1 Cor.1:10; 4:16; 14:31; 1 Thess.4:1; 2 Thess.3:12; 1 Tim.6:2; 2 Tim.4:2; Tit.1:9; 2:15; 1 Pet.5:1,12; Jude 3]

Guide: [Acts 8:31]

Encourage: [Acts 11:23; 14:22; 15:32; 16:40; 1 Thess.2:11; 3:2; 5:11; Heb.3:13; 10:25]

Urge: [Rm.12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor.16:15; 2 Cor.2:8; 6:1; 8:6; 10:1; 12:18; Phil.4:2; 1 Thess.4:10; 1 Tim.2:1; Tit.2:6; Heb.13:19,22; 1 Pet.2:11].

*PARAINEO [παραινεω] – Literally: to speak near: hence to advise, exhort, warn [Acts 27:9,22].

*PROTREPO [προτρεπω] – Literally: to turn forward, propel. Therefore to impel morally, to urge forward [Acts 18:27].

*NOUTHESIA [νουθησια] – Literally: a putting in mind, admonition [1 Cor.10:11; Eph.6:4; Tit.3:10].

*NOUTHETEO [νουθετεω] – To put in mind, admonish, warn. Primarily to instruct, admonish, and warn by words [Rm.15:14; 1 Cor.4:14; Col.1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:12,14; 2 Thess.3:15].

*ELEGMOS [ελεγμος] – A reproof [2 Tim.3:16].

ELEGKO [ελεγω] – To convict, rebuke, expose, reprove: usually with the suggestion of putting the convicted person to shame as in Mt.18:15 where it is certainly more than informing the offender of his fault [Lk.3:19; Jn.3:20; 16:8; Eph.5:11,13; 1 Tim.5:20; Tit.1:9,13; 2:15].

EPITIMAO [επιτιμαω] – Rebuke [2 Tim.4:2; Jude 9; Mt.17:18; Mk.8:33].

*EPIPLESSO [επιπλησσω] – To strike at, smite, rebuke [1 Tim.5:1].

*PARAMUTHEOMAI [παραμυθεομαι] – to soothe, console, encourage unto the earnest discharge of duty [Jn.11:19,31]. Its cognate occurs in 1 Cor.14:3.

*ENOPKIZO [ενορκιζω] – To bind by or put under an oath [1 Thess.5:27].

*HUPOMIMNESKO [ὑπομιμνησκω] – To cause one to remember, put one in mind [Lk.22:61; Jn.14:26; 2 Tim.2:14; Tit.3:1; 3 Jn.10; Jude 5].

*EPANAMIMNESKO [επαναμιμνησκω] – To remind again [Rm.15:15].

*HUPOTITHEMI [ὑποτιθημι] – Literally: to place under. To lay down [Rm.16:4]. To suggest, put into one's mind [1 Tim.4:6].

[6] Command

DIATASSO [διατασσω] – To set in order, appoint command [1 Cor.16:1; 7:17; Tit.1:5].

EPITASSO [επιτασσω] – To appoint over, put in charge: then, to put upon one as a duty, to enjoin [Philemon 8].

PROSTASSO [προστασσω] – To arrange or set in order towards; hence, to prescribe, give command [Acts 10:48].

[7] Entrust

PARATITHEMI [παρατιθημι] – To set before, entrust, commit to one's charge [Lk.12:48; 23:46; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim.1:8; 2 Tim.2:2].

PARATHEKE [παραθηκη] and PARAKATATHEKE [παρακαταθηκη]
- A putting with, deposit [2 Tim.1:12; 6:20; 2 Tim.1:14].

[8] Lead

HODEMEO [ὁδημεω] - To lead the way, guide [Jn.16:13; Acts 8:51].

HEGEOMAI [ἡγεομαι] - To lead [Lk.22:26; Heb.13:7, 17,24].

MIMEOMAI [μιμεομαι] - To imitate, follow [2 Thess.3:7,9; Heb.13:7; 3 Jn.11].

[9] Feed

BOSKO [βοσκω] - To feed. Used primarily of herdsmen [The root words are found in BOTER [βοτηρ] - herdsman or herd and BOTANE [βοτανη] - Fodder, pasture] [Jn.21:15,17].

POIMIANO [ποιμαινω] - To act as a shepherd, to tend as a shepherd [Jn.21:16; 1 Pet.5:2; Acts 20:28].

Note: In the following summary, the bracketed numerals refer to the categories of terms in the preceding.

In summary, the Pattern of Christ for teaching in the church involves:

To [1] herald, bear witness to, and orally instruct in the gospel and the truth as a priest would serve God in order to make disciples.

[4] Explanation by way of expounding, exposing the hidden, releasing the bound, and interpreting fully the solution by translating the meaning of words in a context of mutual exchange and intercourse with the learner.

Attendant upon this interactive explanation is [3] persuasion in order to bring about a change of mind by the influence of reason and moral consideration. This consists of conversing, reasoning, disputing, discussing, and, as needed, powerfully convicting opposing arguments, having pondered and resolved the issues in one's own mind.

This persuasion requires [5] exhortation by entreating, admonishing, advising, warning, reproving, rebuking, impelling, and urging towards a particular moral course of action. This remembrance or placing in the mind may be by way of soothing, consoling, and encouraging unto the earnest discharge of duty. It may likewise consist of convicting, exposing, and confuting the offender by putting him to shame.

Exhortation may give way to [6] a command or prescription should the situation warrant.

In addition to these verbal means of instruction is the [2] discipline administered as of a father with his child in order to train by action unto a consistently correct and upright manner of life.

Those who faithfully receive this [9] feeding/shepherd care and [8] follow and imitate the lead and example of the godly are to be [7] entrusted with the good deposit that they may teach others also.

Christ's Pattern of Teaching:

Preach to many. Teach multitudes. Interact with the hearts of men. Explain to the interested and awakened. Disciple the committed. Entrust to the wholehearted. Pour out your heart to the one who reclines on Jesus' breast.

Jesus told, showed, did with them, had them do, and then had them teach; only then can it truly be said that someone has learned.

Lucifer Invents Positive Confession

Yes, Positive Confession is devilish, even from days immemorial.

“O Lucifer...you said in your heart:

‘I will ascend to heaven;

‘I will raise my throne above the stars of God...

‘I will sit on the mount of the assembly...

‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;

‘I will be like the Most High’” – Isa. 14:12-14.

That is the origin of Positive Confession.

But it didn’t work then and it doesn’t work now.

The Most High is not commanded by anyone. Here is the Lord’s reply to Satan’s positive confession:

“The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked. You have fallen from heaven. You have been cut down to the earth. You will be thrust down to Hell, to the sides of the pit” – Isa. 14:5,12,15.

Nevertheless, even afterwards, the devil still uses Positive Confession, even against the Lord Jesus.

“Since You are the Son of God, Command that these stones become bread!” – Mt.4:3.

“Command, Decree, Confess, Claim, Speak the Word of Faith: This is the devil’s Positive Confession.

It is satanic to imagine that you can command the Most High.

It is devilish to believe that your spoken word has power to create and bring into existence.

Is it any wonder then that the Word of God warns us of “seducing spirits and doctrines of demons” – 1 Tim. 4:1?

You have been warned; Positive Confession is from Satan, the Devil, the Serpent, from Lucifer.

What is to be done? Repent of this wickedness and beg, if possible, that this sin be forgiven you.

“How dare you command Me concerning the work of My hands!” – Isa.45:11.

33

What and Why

If all you know is What, you will never be more than an echo.

Only if you grasp the Why will you become a voice.

“He made known His Ways unto Moses, and His Acts to the children of Israel” – Ps.103:7.

Israel only saw the What; Moses perceived the Why. Moses spoke; Israel listened. That is the difference.

The men of Issachar not only “had understanding of the times,” the What, but they also had “knowledge of what Israel should do,” the Why – 1 Chron.12:32.

Many are beginning to raise the alarm about What they perceive as abnormal, corrupt, and wrong in the church of our generation. Good; we need such observations to awaken to the What of waywardness.

But how about the Why? Have the underlying reasons for the outward manifestations been grasped?

More importantly, do you know their solutions?

Few are grasping the Why of the remedy and thus are little more than an echo; the restoring voice of the Lord is not heralded thereby.

Any fool can throw stones; only the wise can build with them.

What and Why: which describes you now?

34

Sects

Eden's coolness spawned the first sect.

"God knows" – Gen.3:5 was its tantalizing allurements: a hint of a novel prospect, a hidden reality known only to the initiate biting its bait.

A sect, following this original serpentine suggestion, proffers exclusive insight, a lightened path, and fulfilling benefits unknown elsewhere. The shift is from the sufficiency of Christ Himself and His Word unto a particular view of Christ and slant on His Word obtainable only there.

Jesus becomes less and less the practical Head of His church while the group's emphasis predominates. Alongside the Scriptures, certain views and writings are counted as necessary to spiritual health. Questioning of its stance, leaders, and literature is discouraged or not tolerated at all.

Searching "the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so" –Acts 17:11 is feared by its hierarchy. Invasive directives about members' finances prevail in a sect.

And as Adam and wife discovered in an instant, the promised goods were not delivered; only bondage, shame and remorse were their portion when they joined that sect.

How long will it take us to realize that by the Divine power of Christ, everything necessary for life and godliness is granted through Him and His precious and magnificent promises [2 Peter 1:3,4]?

Get out of your sect and get into Christ.

Dust Bin Sermons

The world we live in is flat.

Clergy and laity is an evil distinction.

Vertical communication and control from the top down is passé.

The tsunami of social media and Internet access is threatening to sweep away the church as we know it in its deafening torrent of relevant collaboration, free expression, and deep data mining.

In its wake will only remain the scattered splinters of unyielding resistance strewn along the banks of its historical wreckage.

Mr. Pastor Man, you'd better listen up because this isn't going away.

Can you research commentaries? So can we. You can quote Greek words and their definitions? So can we. Everything you can do, we can do: faster and more comprehensively; and we are able to know any and everything about you and publish it to our world.

You collect our money to prepare for sermons in your office. We know and share for free on our Smartphones.

The era when you are the mouth and we are the ears is over.

Technology is forcing you to return to a biblical relevancy of interactive relational mentoring.

The alternative? We abandon your unbiblical and empty church-shrine and leave you to man the helm alone till it runs aground on the rocks of irrelevancy.

Oh, did we say biblical relevancy? Yeah, we did.

Check out the dynamics of "church" in Acts 15; and we quote:

“Certain men taught...dissension and dispute... describing... reporting...some rose up, saying...much dispute...rose and said... listened...declaring...became silent...answered... listen... then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church...teaching and preaching...with many others also... strengthening the churches.”

Sound like your typical Sunday morning routine? We don't think so.

We're tired of your man-made services.

Better throw your the sermons into the dust bin.

Better begin true discipleship and real participatory fellowship where every spiritual priest has something to contribute.

Otherwise, you may be blowing your sermons into thin air, echoing hollowly to now abandoned benches.

36

SAMMY GOES TO CHURCH

See Sammy go. Sammy is going to Church. Sammy thinks going to a place is Church. That is what Sammy has been told. It is all that Sammy has seen. Poor Sammy, he does not know any better.

The flesh yearns for the external, the tangible, and visible. It is why we “go” to “Church.” There, we imagine, we are entering sanctuaries of sacredness: places that will consecrate our failing flesh. This is grand deception.

“As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what magnificent stones and what wonderful buildings!’ Some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see all these great buildings? Not a stone shall be left upon a stone, which will not be thrown down’” -Mk.13:1,2; Lk.21:5.

It was not a holy place; it was a place of merchandise and corrupt religious business [Jn.2:16], a virtual cave for thieving robbers to hoard their illicit gain [Mt.21:13]. There in defiled courts, worthless sacrifices were offered along with the abominable stench of wafting incense that provoked the hatred of the Most High God [Isa.1:11-14].

“Do not trust in deceptive words, saying: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!’ See what I did to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel” -Jer.7:4,12.

“He forsook the dwelling place at Shiloh, the tent where He had dwelt among men, and gave His strength into captivity, and His glory into the hand of the adversary” -Ps.78:60,61. “Ichabod” was blazoned across the gate of the tabernacle: The glory had departed [1 Sam.4:21,22].

The tabernacle remained, but not the glory. The tent did not collapse, yet sanctity had. It was not a holy place. Neither was the temple in Ezekiel’s day.

“Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple. The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city” -Ezek.10:18; 11:23. But the temple stood for some time as a monument to the empty pretense of their religion, a building void of any sanctifying presence, though it was not the true house of God even while it was still standing.

“Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house” -Ezek.12:2. Eventually it was razed to rubble by Babylonian hands.

Only people can be holy, but not timbers and stones, bricks and mortar, goats and grain, or places and things. People are the dwelling place of God.

The burning bush was “holy ground” because of God’s revelation to Moses there, not due to the twigs and dust of those Midianite wilds being a hallowed center.

The bush did not become a fixed place of gathering or of periodic pilgrimage: a shrine, a place holy of itself. No edifice was erected to commemorate the Divine manifestation. Neither was it consecrated as a spot of pilgrimage and vicariously share in that visitation.

Sammy and the Babylonian Churches throughout Christendom may account their religious structures to be holy places, the Church, but Christ does not.

Buildings are not the Church. The Church is not somewhere to “go” and attend religious ceremonies and activities. Church “sanctuaries” and meeting halls are not holy places.

Worship existed long before Nimrod erected the first structure devoted to religious purposes. His tower became a rallying point for his agenda. It ascended as a monolith stretching into heaven.

Its establishment determined the terms of association according to the decrees of its custodian. It required devotees to come to its fixed location in order to “worship.” Money became a sacred necessity for its maintenance and perpetuation.

The Lord of heaven scattered this Babylonian enterprise. Neither shrines, cathedrals, buildings, nor sanctuaries are capable of containing the God of heaven; neither are they needful

for genuine worship. None of these things are the house of God. Listen carefully:

“The Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands; as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?’ says the Lord” -Acts 7:48,49.

True worship has nothing to do with sacred places, institutions, and religious structures. This was the startling revelation that Jesus made to a lowly woman of Samaria.

Like Sammy, she thought of worship as being localized in a special sacred religious spot. “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.’

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers’” -Jn.4:20,21,23.

What is the house of God? The true believers in Christ Jesus are that house, the church [1 Tim.3:15], and God’s building [1 Cor.3:9].

“Do you not know that you [plural] are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone corrupts the temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you [plural] are” -1 Cor.3:16,17.

Believers in Jesus themselves are that “spiritual house,” comprised of “living stones” -1 Pet.2:5.

“You [plural] are of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you [plural] are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” -Eph.2:20,21.

Yes, Christ is “Son over His house, whose house we are, if indeed we hold fast the confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” -Heb.3:6.

Going to Church is a Babylonian concept handed down from Nimrod. Spiritual individuals comprise the church that Jesus is building; that is His house.

See Sammy sit. Sammy sits down in Church. Sammy is quiet. Sammy just listens. Talk, talk, talk; listen, listen, listen. Sammy rides the Sunday Carousel. Round and round he goes smiling silently.

Nimrod's hierarchy of authoritarian rule does not invite mutuality of brotherly equality. Passive observation of ritual prescribed by custodians is all that is expected and demanded from those descended from Babel's legacy.

Programs are fixed from the top down without solicitation or participation. Consumers are served up a menu of the custodians' selection and preparation.

Passive observation of ritual, programs, and performances by a higher caste of "leaders" is Babylonian. The NT reality of the priesthood of all believers [1 Pet.2:5,9], having equal access to the Throne and each actively participating to build up and encourage one another, is given lip-service to in some circles, but rarely practiced by any.

Sammy's custodian will never welcome and encourage active participation outside the realm of his control. He is terrified by it.

His fear is that he may become irrelevant to the Church shrine. Recognition and dominion in his petty kingdom may begin to slip through his desperate grip.

The pride of life will never allow him to actually practice NT directives. The distinction of being above and in charge of the Church shrine and those under his authority holds sway in his heart. He must rule and direct and control; he is the custodian.

So, Sammy sits and listens. How could someone like Sammy have anything worthwhile to contribute anyway?

Sammy is not a custodian, he is unlearned, he is uninitiated, he is not in charge; Sammy is not one of "us."

"The king said to him, 'Have we appointed you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?'" -2

Chron.25:16. "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us? And they cast him out" -Jn.9:34.

"No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? This multitude who does not know the Law is cursed!" -Jn.7:48,49.

"The chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?'" -Mt.21:23.

"As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people" -Acts 4:1,2.

But the enforcement of Nimrod's hierarchy is not the Pattern of Christ. Observe the dynamics of the gathering of true believers in Acts 15.

"Certain men taught...dissension and dispute ...describing... reporting...some rose up, saying...much dispute... rose and said... listened...declaring...became silent... answered... listen...then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church...teaching and preaching...with many others also... strengthening the churches."

Is this what is found in Sammy's typical Sunday morning routine? Of course it isn't. This biblical example of brethren gathering is rather characterized by participatory interaction; even when people with strange ideas spoke up, the Scriptures were the basis of appeal to resolve issues raised, and any were free to contribute.

And why are we not obeying what is commanded in 1 Corinthians 14? And I quote: "Pursue love, especially that you may prophesy. One who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. I wish that you all would prophesy.

"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, let all things be done for edification.

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so

that all may learn and all may be exhorted” -1 Cor.14:1,3,5,26,29-31.

This is participatory fellowship that is the NT norm. Passive observation of the custodian’s performance, ritual, and ceremony is Babylonian, but not Christian. What characterized NT gatherings?

“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” -Heb.10:24,25. We are to encourage and stimulate one another to love and good works when we assemble.

Gathering is to be participatory. It is mutual. Each one has something to contribute to the encouragement and building up of one another in love. We gather purposefully with the intent of being a blessing to others.

True Christian gathering is quite in contrast to meeting in order to get, to gain for self, to build up myself. The focus is on others and not upon self.

Paul did so when among the brethren. He shared with them and they with him. It was a participatory fellowship, not a lecture and monologue.

“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them...and prolonged his word until midnight...and as Paul kept on talking” -Acts 20:7,9.

The word “talking” is what we want to consider. It is the Greek word *dialogomai*. It is where we get our English word “dialogue.” The Greek dictionaries define this term as: “to converse, reason, dispute, dialogue.”

These are all participatory ideas involving mutual exchange. There is no concept of one person presenting a monologue, a lecture, or speech while the audience sat passively and listened.

He spoke and they responded. He contributed and they did as well. It was more conversational and interactive than anything.

In verse 11 “he talked with them a long while until daybreak.” Here the word “talked” is from the Greek word *homileo*. It is the same word that is used in Lk.24:14: “And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place.”

They were in company, conversing with one another. They did not walk along the Emmaus road with one person lecturing while the other passively listened with no contribution. The word means: “to be in company with, to associate with, to commune.”

And lest you object that these are mere examples of certain kinds of gatherings in isolated contexts, hear further what all believers are commanded.

“But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” -Eph.4:15,16.

“We... the whole body... every joint... each individual... building itself up:” This is the “one another” dynamic of NT gathering. Everyone has something to contribute. Each member’s participation is necessary if the body is to be built up in love.

And it is commanded. It is not optional. No substitutes accepted. No rationalizations are approved.

And Sammy’s Sunday morning program fails on nearly every account. Nimrod’s legacy has inbred its evil virus into entire generations of passive, irresponsible, self-seeking consumers at man-made religious shrines.

See Sammy give. Sammy gives money at Church. Sammy does not know why. He does not know what he is giving for. He does not know to whom he is giving. Sammy gives anyway. Sammy is a good boy. He does what he is told.

Nimrod’s tower requires maintenance. Maintenance requires money. So a means of deriving contributions must be devised to insure the continued flow of “sacred” money into the shrines’ coffers.

Requirements of giving must become an incorporated feature of the shrine’s demands upon its members. To ease the pain of parting with one’s purse, the custodian benefactors deceive the laity that they are actually giving to God. They portray themselves as “earning” their maintenance fees.

But such giving may very well prevent Sammy from actually obeying God.

When a brother or sister is in need of daily food and clothing, and we provide nothing for them, of what use is that [Jas.2:15,16]? If we have placed money in the shrine's "offering," but do not know what it is used for, how do we know if our giving is meeting pressing needs? We don't.

And now we have nothing in hand to help those in distress.

That is ignorant giving. Let us rather labor honestly so that we "will have something to share with the one who has need" -Eph.4:28. Let loving giving pass directly from our hand to the one in need.

Did you know that there is not one verse in the entire Scriptures where tithes were ever money? That's right; not one verse. Nevertheless, "tithing" is the favorite club wielded to bludgeon Sammy into giving to the Church shrine's maintenance and its custodian.

But NT giving is not to be reluctantly by force. It is not obligatory. If it is, it becomes tainted when begrudgingly relinquished. "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" -2 Cor.9:7.

Let your giving be like that, Sammy.

See Sammy sing. Sammy sings songs. Sammy sings when he is told. Sammy sings what the Worship Team sings. They decide what to sing in Sammy's Church. Sing, sing, sing; now sit down quietly, Sammy.

Singing at the direction of another man is a fully developed Babylonian practice. It has been learned from the king of Babylon himself whose name is Lucifer. "Your pomp and the music/sound/noise of your harps/stringed instruments have been brought down to Sheol" -Isa.14:11.

Nebuchadnezzar had honed this practice to perfection. He gathered all to his magnificent shrine, established and directed the program, commanded the "worshipers," and provided the music whereby they were to bow down at his command.

“Then the herald loudly proclaimed: ‘To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and men of every language, that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute...in symphony with all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up’” -Dan.3:4,5.

Babylonian “worship” is an expected response from an otherwise passive audience to a commanded performance by selected representatives of the shrine’s custodian.

Quite in contrast to this is the Lord’s new song put into the heart of His worshipers in Spirit and truth: “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord” -Ps.40:3.

It is what we are to do in NT gatherings. “What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching...let all things be done for edification” -1 Cor.14:26.

The song came from God to the heart of each one. Each one shares for the building up and profit of all.

“In Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” -Eph.5:19. “With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace/thankfulness in your hearts to God” -Col.3:16.

This requires no bulletins and no “worship team.” In the NT gathering, Christ is the Chief Musician who sings in the midst of even two or three gathered unto His name.

“I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You” -Heb.2:12.

This is the new song put into the hearts of all who worship in Spirit and truth.

Sammy, say bye-bye to Babylon.

See Sammy’s Custodian. He is Sammy’s lord. Sammy does what he says. His Custodian decides what the Church does. He decides what the Church believes. Sammy’s Custodian makes nice programs. He is Sammy’s benefactor, that is, as long as Sammy behaves. If Sammy is a bad boy, Sammy’s Custodian turns into a nasty man.

Nimrod is the patriarch of all Babylonian custodians.

Jeroboam took counsel in his own heart, formulated a scheme, fashioned his program and props, and announced to the people the terms of engagement along with his expectations foisted upon them.

Control over the people's thoughts and allegiance were his motivations in squeezing them into the "worship" form devised in his own heart

Jezebel, a true daughter of Nimrod, simply slaughtered contrary voices.

Her husband, Ahab, hires 400 false prophets as his kingly counselors and casts the dissenting voice of Micaiah into the royal dungeon.

Nebuchadnezzar erects a magnificent image to be worshiped by custodial decree under the pain of death for non-compliance.

"No one spoke openly concerning Him for fear of the Jews" -Jn.7:13. "They feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be the Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue" -Jn.9:22,23.

"Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council and said, 'What are we doing? If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' So from that day on they planned together to kill Him" -Jn.11:47,48,53.

"Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the glory of God" -Jn.12:42,43.

"As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail" -Acts 4:1-3.

Nimrod's custodians are nasty men. Diotrefes was one of them. He loved to have first place among them.

He disdained the Word of God. He dominated in "his" assembly by intimidating and punishing any who truly loved and

wished to receive the brethren; he threw them out of “his” ministry [3 Jn.9,10].

But Jesus’ leaders are not custodians. They are servants, not lords, ones that lead by godly example coupled with the persuasive power of truth.

They do not dominate, cajole, coerce, threaten, or dictate; they are not in charge of the shrine. They rather demonstrate the obedient path by their own spiritual character and make appeals to other’s conscience by setting forth biblical truth.

Such were Paul and Timothy, who did not “lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy” -2 Cor.1:24. This was their method:

“We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” -2 Cor.4:2.

And so does the remainder of the NT consistently set forth the basis of true leadership: “Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you, and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith” -Heb.13:7. “...nor yet as lording it over the allotments, but proving to be examples to the flock” -1 Pet.5:3.

Sammy, Jesus hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans. There are even some among Jesus’ true followers that hate them as well, and Jesus commends them for it. “Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” -Rev.2:6.

Some things ought to be hated, and the deeds of the Nicolaitans are one of them. You are in fellowship with the heart of Christ if you do.

The term Nicolaitans comes from a combination of two words. *Nikao* means to conquer; it is used in Rev.6:2, 11:7, and 13:7. The second word is *Laos* from where we get our English word laity – the common people.

Conquering the common people by religious leaders is what Jesus hates. Do you hate that? Jesus does.

He hates it even more when the deeds become a doctrine, a set system articulated in doctrinal statements and church polity

and practice. Then the hated deeds have become institutionalized and are promoted as the expected and acceptable way of the Lord.

That is hateful.

See Sammy's Church. It is made of bricks. Sammy is a brick. Sammy is made to fit. All the others are bricks too. They all fit nicely together in Church.

Christ Jesus builds His church with stones: "Living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" -1 Pet.2:5.

Not so Nimrod; he builds his shrine with bricks: "Let us make bricks...and they used brick for stone" -Gen.11:3.

As made by God, clay is malleable and plastic, able to be easily formed and fashioned for countless purposes. Clay, in the hand of Nimrod, serves but one purpose, the crafting of bricks to his own ends.

Bricks, by pressure and furnace, have lost their native essence and potential. They lie, hardened without originality, as uniform components in one man's design.

A mold is crafted to predetermined specifications. Into it the clay is indiscriminately forced to conform to its proportions. Those who do not emerge identical to the mold are discarded as useless and disruptive to the enterprise.

The building plan does not allow irregularities and originality. They are counterproductive with no contributing place therein. Such must be rejected.

And so it is that the Nimrod's of this world ever cast out anything not conforming to their schemes. In their crafted traditions, conformity is accounted as communion and uniformity as unity. They are externalists; they can conceive of nothing else.

Sammy has a place and a role determined by his Custodians. Place is given for nothing besides.

"We need 3 more bricks for the children's program on Tuesdays." "2 bricks are needed to fill the void as greeters on Sundays; orientation and training provided."

Stones need not apply.

See Sammy submit. Sammy loves his Church. Sammy loves Babylon. In Sammy's Church they are willing followers of Babylon.

“An appalling and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?” -Jer.5:30,31.

“When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. The sons of Babel came to her, to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry” -Ezek.23:16,17.

O Sammy! Babylon brings pain, turmoil, harsh service, and slavery [Isa.14:3]. But when Babylon is judged, God's people will “turn to the Lord and seek the way to Zion and join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten” -Jer.50:4,5.

“Indeed Babylon is to fall for the slain of Israel. We are ashamed because we have heard reproach; Disgrace has covered our faces, for aliens have come into the holy places of the Lord's house” -Jer.51:49,51.

Come out of Babylon, Sammy, that you do not receive of her plagues [Isa.48:20; Jer.50:8,28; 51:6,45,50; Rev.18:4].

37

Killing Kids in Mother's Milk

Sorry for the revolting title, but it's what the Bible says.

You see, if a baby goat drinks directly from its mother, it is nourished, strengthened, and satisfied - It will live and thrive.

But if the mother is milked by the hand of a man and then that extracted milk becomes the soup-base for the demise of the kid, wickedness is brewing.

Should mothers give suck to their own offspring, or should those mothers be milked by shepherds to prepare a seething cauldron of death for the young of the flock so they can devour them and glut their own ravenous bellies?

How is it that the milk –the Lord’s very means of blessing and life– can be perverted into an instrument of death? You can blame milking the sheep by treacherous shepherds for that one.

“How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us’? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie” -Jer.8:8.

The Word of God in the hands of religious men becomes a lie, a message of death. And the flock then becomes devoured by them.

Better get your milk straight from the source, because all around, I already hear the crackling of thorns under countless thousands of pots.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk
Deut.14:21

38

Judging the Prophets

Our Lord Jesus warned us in Mk.4:24: “Take care what you listen to.” In Phil.1:9,10 Paul prayed that the believers might have “knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.”

We are truly foolish people if we believe everything we are told without judging whether it is true or false. Prov.14:15 says: “The simple believe every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.”

But we have not considered well our steps, what we are following, and who we listen to. Like so many silly children we accept without question all that we are told from the mouth of men.

Not only is this stupidity, it is disobedience to the commandments of the Word of God. If we do not judge, we are deceiving ourselves, leading others astray, and sinning against the God of heaven.

Listen to the command of Christ Himself recorded in Jn.7:24: “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” The undiscerning who evaluate by whatever meets their eye assume that any message spoken by a minister is a word from God.

The Lord Jesus condemns such folly. This is not righteous judgment; it is disobedient presumption leading to bondage and ruin.

Paul expected that even the least among the brethren would judge his message. Hear the command written by him in 1 Cor.10:15: “I speak as to wise men, you judge what I say.” Brethren, if we will be obedient Christians, we must judge.

The Lord Jesus rebukes any who do not judge as Lk.12:56,57 records: “Hypocrites! You know how to judge the appearance of the earth and sky, but how is it you do not discern this time? Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?”

How will we answer Christ’s question? What will we say? If we do not judge what is right, then we agree with error and come under the condemnation of Christ.

Loving truth also requires hating falsehood as is made clear in Ps.119:127,128: “I love Your commandments more than gold,

therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way.”

There were a group of believers who did this very thing and the Scriptures speak highly of them. Acts 17:11 commends them in this way: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.”

Brethren, if the Lord speaks well of these believers for judging even Paul’s message, how much more then should we be judging the preachers in our pulpits today!

1 Thess.5:21 puts it this way: “Test all things; hold fast what is good.” If we fail to examine everything carefully then we will be holding onto error and evil as well. The result is that we ourselves will be judged by God for failing to judge what we have heard from men.

Deceivers do not want you to judge them; they welcome no questioning of their words. Any Christian who dares to ask for a biblical explanation of their messages is angrily and arrogantly rebuked by these supposed men of God.

But if they were truly men of God as was the apostle Paul, they would rejoice and encourage the brethren to inquire about the truth of their pronouncements. But as it is, they are not.

Dear reader, let no one deceive you. You are commanded by God to judge the prophets.

1 Jn.4:1 directs you thus: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

And the Scriptures do not leave us in the dark as to how we can know the true prophet of God from self-appointed deceivers.

The Word of God gives us two very clear ways to discern who is truly speaking from God and who is not: [1] You will know them by their fruit and [2] by their doctrine.

Jesus Himself warns us about the coming of false prophets into the midst of His true flock. Mt.7:15-21 says: “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Not

everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."

False prophets are deceivers, pretending to be true followers of Christ. Outwardly they appear to be sheep, but inwardly they are actually wolves.

Wolves feed upon sheep; they kill and devour to fill their own bellies. That is what ravenous means: grasping extortionists. This is how you can know a false prophet; he is not concerned about the sheep but rather in the money that he can gain from them.

The fruit that Jesus is speaking of is summarized by doing the will of the Father in heaven. Obedience leads to fruit. Coveting after money and prosperity is not the fruit of doing the will of God; neither is pride.

No one who is proud receives anything from God. 1 Pet.5:5 declares: "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." A proud man receives no grace from Christ, and apart from grace, no fruit can be produced.

Harshness and anger only show that such men do not possess the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control.

If you meet a proud minister who loves money, who does not want anyone questioning him, and who speaks with annoyance to others, you have met a false prophet. You will know them by their fruits.

You will also know them by their doctrine. True prophets of God speak the Word of God to the convicting of sinners and the building up of the brethren. Isa.8:20 states this clearly: "To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them."

Neither allow yourself to be deceived by men who claim to perform signs and wonders by the power of God. If their doctrine is not according to the Word of the Lord, they are false prophets.

Deut.13:1-4 makes this evident: "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods and let us serve them,'

“You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.”

Even if his so-called prophesy comes true and even if a miracle is performed, he is not of God if his doctrine is wrong. If he is not leading the believers to understand and obey the commandments of God, he is a deceiving prophet and the Lord is testing us to see if we truly love Him with all our hearts.

O, how we have failed this test time and time again! We have been willingly deceived by false prophets who bring their own doctrines and not the true Word of the Lord!

And we have listened to them, they have led us astray, and we even bring our offerings to fund their deceptions! Woe unto us!

Jer.23:16-22 exposes the messages of these false prophets. Listen well to what the Lord instructs us there: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord.

“They continually say to those who despise Me, ‘The Lord has said, “You shall have peace”’; and to everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’

“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings.”

How do you know a false prophet? He tells stories but does not teach the Word of God. He speaks about himself and not about Christ. Smooth words roll from his lips to flatter evil doers.

He promises blessings and breakthroughs to self-centered men who live in sin and error. He preaches, “It is well!” “You shall be the head and not the tail!” “Today is the day of your divine destiny!” “Peace, peace, unto you!”

False prophets do not rebuke evil. They do not speak the Word of God to the conviction of sinners. They rather speak positive words of deception in order to gain from tithes and offerings.

Dreams, visions, and stories are the substance of their messages, but not the truth of the Scriptures. This is how you will know the deceivers.

The true prophet of God speaks the Word of God in truth to reprove, rebuke, and exhort in sound doctrine, calling men to repent and serve the Lord in sincerity and truth.

He compromises with no sin and does not look at the faces of men. His message is one and the same for all.

What will guard you from being deceived by these imposters? Blessed be the Lord who has not left us without His Divine protection and assistance.

1 Jn.2:26,27 speak these wonderful words: “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

The Word of God is there to inform you of the truth and the Holy Spirit is your portion who will guide you into that truth and not allow you to be deceived if you listen to Him. Abide in Him; abide in the Word.

Now hear this you self-appointed ministers! Beware when you mount the pulpit this Sunday! Fear to open your mouth!

The eyes of the brethren are now open, the Bible is in their hands, and the anointing of the Spirit is upon them. You will deceive them no longer; they will judge you according to the Word of the Lord.

*Let two or three prophets speak,
And let the others judge -1 Cor.14:29*

39

Brick for Stone:

Nimrod and Christ

In the beginning God created no religion.

Only the pure communion of spirit to Spirit prevailed with all the faculties of soul and body harnessed to that end. There were no rituals, ceremonies, shrines, or altars. Man was his own priest.

The revolt of self-will, sin, changed all. Fig leaves were donned instead of garments of light, shame supplanted purity, fear replaced devotion, while hiding overtook communion.

A terrible breach produced a terrible consequence. That brash eruption of lawlessness distorted the reflective faculties, alienated the soul, and darkened the understanding. Desperate substitutes were devised to amend for wayward choices.

Fig leaves, plucked from their living source, were crafted to cover shameful exposure in sin's wake. Makeshift garments were hastily sewn from now withering and soon decaying sources.

And this is the legacy of Eden's first religious act. Man-devised solutions to sin have no life, do not endure, address the externals alone, and are ultimately rejected by God altogether.

He, however, brings a solution from above; only the death of a substitute can cover the stain, corruption, and guilt of sin. And this He alone provides; it is not a product of human ingenuity.

The lamb must be slain to provide a suitable covering for lawless deeds. And the Cherubim are the solemn sentinels whose flaming sword testifies that death must be tasted ere forfeiture is restored, corruption is covered, guilt is erased, and life is procured.

And thus the closing verses of Genesis 3 portray the enigma of the ages that the rest of the Scriptures unravel; how can a lawless man who has lost all right to the Garden, enter and partake of the fruit of Life?

The sword of retribution must be satiated, everlasting justice satisfied. Moral crimes and spiritual revolt require execution. But if the man is slain, how then can he live? And if he continues in his state, he abides but a shell, void of that which is life indeed. Death is his portion either way.

Only God can resolve this greatest of all dilemmas.

Cain, following in the train of his father's legacy, proffers the same religious substitute: plucked items from a cursed earth, perishable and soon rotten produce of his own sweating toil. And, as Adam discovered to his shame and rebuke, neither did God have regard for Cain and his offering.

"Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin" resounds, echoing through the corridors of the ages. And why? Because the death of separation ensues the instant the heart rises in lawlessness: a death that cannot be remedied by human contrivance.

A fire must be kindled upon earth, a victim slain, and a sacrifice ascend before dark deeds be purged of their stain. Why so strange a manner, you ask? Because we must approach God in the manner He approached us.

He inaugurated the prototype by providing garments of skin for our first parents. It is witnessed to by the acceptable slain lamb of righteous Abel, Noah, and all the faithful thereafter.

It is in connection with Noah that we first encounter the term "altar." But the advent of that altar was not by human contrivance, for it was the Lord that directed him to take clean animals unto himself by sevens. It was God's provision of access to the Lord according to His revelation and means.

And these were offered upon an altar, an altar built by Divine direction:

"You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings.

"If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it" -Ex.20:24-26.

The altar of God is not left to human invention and craft. God reveals what are the suitable means of approach to Himself, the offering and worship that He accepts, and the manner in which it is to be presented.

God's altar is to be of earth, or if stones, uncut stones without ascending steps. What a provision! Stones and earth are readily available in any locale as divinely provided means to worship. Simple stones and earth both are created by God and sufficient to

convey true devotion independent of man's concepts of what is needful in religion.

Imagine! The dust of the ground can be employed in the adoration and service of the Most High. Dear Reader, earth is ever near you; access is readily at hand, none are excluded. Yes, the lowly and seemingly insignificant as dust have a portion on high if they will but build an altar of the ground from His hand.

Reflect further; man himself was formed from the dust of the earth. His body housed the breath of life from God and that living soul was supported and found expression through the earthly God-fashioned means. Thereby the earth became the outward means of offering what is of God within – that living soul whose origin is from the breath of God Himself.

And thus from the beginning, the external shell, this body of dust, is not the focus of significance. Dust of earth, either sculpted as man's body or arranged into an altar, are servants to greater realities than what is accomplished therein and thereby – worship in Spirit and truth are what the Father in heaven seeks.

Stones are diverse creations by God, each one unique, sufficient and desirable as He has made them. They are to be joined together in the altar uncut, without fashioning by man's craft and ingenuity.

From Eden's legacy, man would "improve" and re-manufacture what God has designed and created. Fig leaves are re-purposed to hide shameful deeds. Cain's produce that sprang from a then cursed earth is transported and proffered as religious fare. Self-will and human contrivance stained both.

And God rejects the religious inventions and traditions of men, every culture having its own modifications to the ceremonies and solutions of our first family. Substitutions to worship in Spirit and truth abound, and Nimrod institutionalized his.

His tower became the first religious structure in a fixed location [Gen.11:4], and the implications of this are staggering and far-reaching.

Permanence is established thereby; movement has ceased. No more is man free to worship as his own priest by God-given means of altars of earth and stone. His shrine demands that

participants come to its locale and be in subjection to ceremonies determined by others.

Worship in Spirit is quenched by external ritual. Worship in truth is supplanted by man-devised tradition and decrees. This is the legacy of Nimrod's tower.

His building will require maintenance, maintenance requires a custodian, and both require money. As such, devotees must be solicited and terms of engagement established in order to fund the enterprise. A "sanctified" means to ensure a continuity of contributions flowing into the shrine's coffers must be determined; the custodian must eat and the shrine must perpetuate.

The building of shrines eliminates recourse to earth and stones; they are inaccessible and out of sight, covered beneath the tower's foundation. Neither are they welcome inside.

Bring them within and they will immediately be cast out by the custodian and his cronies. What is of God has no place within Nimrod's structures.

He sprang forth from his father Cush -"black terror" is the meaning- and was aptly named with the sinister moniker, Nimrod: "one who rebels." He quickly rose to prominence as a wicked tyrant, a "mighty one upon the earth" -Gen.10:8, whose kingdom expanded by preying upon hapless and helpless souls.

"Therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord'" -Gen.10:9. He hunted and slew the souls of men by sword and sorcery, might and magic, as did his spiritual offspring in latter days [Ezek.13:18-21].

And this he did, "before the Lord." Not as if in the Lord's presence with His approval and applause, but rather brazenly in the face of, as rising up against in defiant rebellion.

He was before the Lord in the same manner as in 2 Chron.14:9,10 where "Zerah the Ethiopian came out before them with an army of a million men...and Asa went out before him, and they drew up in battle formation."

A kingdom of terror, darkness, and rebellion: one that slays all opposition in its tyrannical conquest: and this is the one who established the first religious structure in a fixed location and perpetuated his franchise from there.

“The beginning of his kingdom was Babel [confusion] and Erech and Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From that land he went forth and built Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city” -Gen.10:10-12. Here was an expanding dominion of scripted uniformity, all using “the same language and one and the same words” -Gen.11:1.

Together, utilizing components of his specifications, they erected their monstrous imitation of true worship of the Most High: one whose tower would “ascend into heaven” -Gen.11:4 upon forbidden steps of their own architecture.

By disdainful stones and re-manufacturing earth, Nimrod the Rebel substitutes “brick for stone and slime for mortar” -Gen.11:3. Hence mashed and molded, formed and furnaced, multiplied bricks emerge identically proportioned: hardened uniform components incapable of change.

Stones are made by God, each with its unique properties. Bricks are made by man, none with distinctive design.

The Lord Jesus builds His church with “living stones” -1 Pet.2:5. The Nimrods of this world fabricate their shrines with identical building blocks of their own scheme.

The building plan does not accommodate irregularities and originality. The uniqueness of stones are counterproductive to the building plan.

In their crafted traditions, conformity is accounted as communion and uniformity as unity. No dissenting voices crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the ways of the Lord,” can be tolerated.

Thus commences Babylonian rule by sanction, enforcing required behavior and external compliance. Bricks are forced to conform to Nimrod’s mold by subjection through threat, intimidation, and punishment. Those not complying are cast aside as worthless rubble in his greater enterprise; no tolerance for deviants is allowed.

But God put an abrupt halt to the ascending tower; it did not reach into heaven, but its ambition migrated to the furthest recesses of the globe when “the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth” -Gen.11:8.

Language was confused, but the pervasive mind-set was not. The same orientation and thought patterns prevailed though now expressed through diverse tongues.

The spirit of Babylon survived Babel's dispersion. The legacy of a shrine with its attendant tyrant custodian and man-made traditions is instinctively embedded in the pulse of every culture. Its spirit breathes in every ritual.

And it eventually will become a global unified perversion when "Mystery Babylon The Great, The Mother Of Harlots And Of The Abominations Of The Earth" -Rev.17:5 reigns transculturally once again [Rev.17:18].

BABYLON IS AN EVIL SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE WHOSE
ORIENTATION PREVAILS
OVER ALL RELIGIONS OF MEN

Christ

Nimrod

Christ is Lord	Rule of Man
I will Build	Let us Build
My church	Great City & Tower
For My Name/Glory	Name for Ourselves
Word of God	Word of Man
Equality	Hierarchy/Clergy
Humble Servants	Mighty Men
Altar	Tower/Shrine
Mobility/Movement	Rigid formulas/Tradition
Earth/Stone	Bricks
No Tools	Craftsmanship
No Steps	Ascend
Simplicity	Corporate Institution
Diversity	Conformity
Unity	Uniformity
Holy Spirit	Custodian/Unclean spirits
Active Participants	Passive Observers
Freedom	Bondage
Truth	Tradition

Peace Prevails
Liberty

Tyrant Force
Manipulation

Contrasts between Nimrod and Christ

[1]

Babylon [**B**] requires little but passive observation of directed ritual performed by its hierarchy of custodians. The primary contribution expected from attendees is monetary in order to perpetuate the shrine and its system.

The true Church [**Ch**] expects active participation in life with Spirit-prompted contribution. Each individual has significant involvement for the building up of one another in love. Such dynamics of mutual interaction are noted in Acts 15; 1 Cor.14:26,29-31; Heb.10:24,25; Eph.4:16.

[2]

B is animated by the concept of containment. The custodians of **B** present themselves as the sole possessors of the required knowledge by which their gods must be worshiped.

This is evidenced in their procedures, processes, traditions, codes, techniques, ceremonies, creeds, confessions, liturgy, rituals, programs, constitutions, by-laws, membership requirements, publications, and bulletins.

These ruling king/priests control the processes and outcomes in their “kingdoms” to maintain uniformity among participants in order to perpetuate the shrine’s traditions.

Ch receives light and life directly from above, from Christ by His Spirit. These are not second-hand benefits mediated by the group or its leaders [cf. Jn.3:27; 1 Cor.2:10-16; 12:3-11,18,24,28; Eph.1:17; 1 Pet.4:10,11; 1 Jn.2:27; et al].

Here, every believer is a priest with equal access to the throne of grace [Heb.14-16], and all are enjoined to offer their spiritual sacrifices unto God for the benefit of all [1 Pet.2:5; Heb.13:15,16].

[3]

From Nimrod's inception, **B** insists on a prevailing sacerdotal monarch, a priest who presides as king, a reigning enforcing religious mediator. Trace this central pillar of the **B** spirit in Nimrod, Saul, Jeroboam, Uzziah, Nebuchadnezzar, Pharisees/Rulers of Jews, Diotrefes, Muhammad, popes, pontiffs, priests, pastors, et al.

In **Ch**, Jesus alone is the Christ, i.e., the anointed King/Priest. For the **Ch**, there is no other king, no other mediator.

No one else shall rule our hearts; no other word/command has authority over us. No one else can intercede for us, represent us before God, effect reconciliation and forgiveness, dispense life, or direct worship.

[4]

B is the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. She is the source; she gives birth to spiritual daughters like herself [Rev.17:5]. And like her daughter, Hagar, she is in bondage with her children [Gal.4:25].

The mother of **Ch** is the Jerusalem above. This is a spiritual reality from God with a supernatural conception and development [Gal.4:26]. Life is imparted by the Spirit in a new birth through grace.

[5]

B - is a woman of illicit lust and adultery as seen in Hagar [Gal.4:21-31], the strange woman/ adulteress of Prov.1-9, and Jezebel [Rev.2:20-23].

B is a queen over all kingdoms [Isa.47:5,7,8 with Rev.17:5; 18:7], whose name is Wickedness [Zech.5], and who leavens the kingdom of heaven [Mt.13:33].

She rides the beast [Rev.17,18] and intoxicates the whole earth with the wine of her fornication [Rev.14:8; 17:2; 18:3].

But the **Ch** is quite the opposite: "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" -Rev.21:9. She is the joy of whole earth.

Can you see her, brilliant and blissful, honored among ten thousands of the choicest souls of the ages? Behold her, linen wrapped, bright and blameless [Rev.19:7-9].

Gaze at her glittering virtuous crown glorifying her Beloved [Prov.12:4]. And it is this **Ch** who has been betrothed to one husband, that to Christ she might be presented as a pure virgin [2 Cor.11:2], glorious, without stain or wrinkle or any such thing [Eph.5:27].

[6]

B prompts all to worship according to man-made ceremony and decree, glorying in the shrine, in distinguishing rituals to establish their name, being bound together by the enforced edicts of custodians.

In **Ch**, there is simplicity and liberty; the Holy Spirit prompts all to worship in Spirit and truth, to put no confidence in the flesh, and glory in Christ Jesus alone [Phil.3:3].

[7]

B is the religion of the Jerusalem from below [of whatever variety] who is in bondage with her children [Gal.4:26]. She is also known as Sodom, Egypt, and The Great City [Rev.11:8].

The Jerusalem from below lays stress upon the ceremonial aspects of **B** religion and the necessity of an established shrine.

Sodom portrays the luxury and sensual corruption found therein [Ezek.16:49,50; Rev.18: 9,10], while Egypt emphasizes its oppressive bondage [Ex.3:7-9].

“The Great City” of Gen.10:8-12 describes the spiritual franchise stemming from that polluted source. It multiplies throughout its spiritual domain with duplicate principles, methods, and force.

In its final developed form, the Great City extends its dominion worldwide, subjugating and seducing the whole world until judged by God [Rev.17:18; 18:21]. The Great City is also mentioned in Jonah 1:2; 3:2,3; 4:11; Zeph.2:13-15; Rev.11:8; 18:10,16,18.

Such is the prostituting contrast with Phil.3:20. There the **Ch** is a “commonwealth/outpost.” As Rome, in the expansion of its world dominion established key cities as outposts - little Romes, so too the **Ch** is an extension of the kingdom of life and light from

above. In that citizenship, the **Ch** is free and clean because of being born from above: the spiritual Jerusalem [Gal.4:26].

Daniel 3

Dan.3:1: The sullen horizon tumbled itself loose from night's dusky shrouds. A crimson fury on its furrowed glaring brow relentlessly encroached upon the defenseless plains of Dura. Washed now in morning blood, hints of glinting gold beckon trembling admirers from its lofty thirty meter pinnacle.

Unflinchingly erect, from haughty heights this monstrous monolith casts down disdainful glances upon low-life far below its dizzying apex. Yet another Babylonian shrine dominates the landscape in the still dawn's air, and scurrying preparations are underway.

"Test, test, test. Okay, can you turn up number three mike and lower the high frequency on number two? Yeah, that's better. Let's try a couple of more blue filters on the left side spotlights to balance out the yellows on the right. Okay, that looks good."

Dan.3:2,3: Soft robes assemble, glittering accouterments bedazzle admiring gazes as nobles grace the inaugural unveiling. From the four corners of the empire entourages converge, stylishly conveyed arriving at the king's behest. None dare absence himself from the summons.

"Make sure that we begin to boost the Facebook media blitz a month before the convention. I want daily Tweets -splashy ones-going out. Make it clear that this is a must-attend for all our members; we want everyone present to pledge their allegiance to this new phase of my ministry."

Dan.3:4,5: Custodians sound the clarion at the command performance with synchronized orchestration accompanying the climax. The terms of engagement are decreed, the ritual prescribed.

Passive attendees, more like props for the pageant that play their appointed role, is all that is expected from the reigning king/priest. Everything has been carefully choreographed beforehand behind the scenes without their solicitation or input.

Worship is dictated by external mandate: a hollow shell void of substance.

“We’re glad you’ve joined us this morning. We’re excited about what god is doing in our midst today. In your bulletins is outlined our order of service as well as our offering envelope. I’m going to invite our worship team to come forward now to lead us into the presence of god. While they’re taking their places, let’s stand to our feet as we pray...”

Dan.3:6: Prostrate or perish, bow or burn. Deviants die by Babylonian decree. Self-preservation motivates multitudes to flee the wrath of rulers in this travesty of worship.

Pressure, threats, intimidation, sanctions, punishment, and extermination are effective minions to enforce royal edicts. But no thoughts of fleeing the wrath to come course through their sniveling hearts. And so they succumb, fearing those who kill the body, but not fearing Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

“It has come to our attention that you take issue with certain points in our statement of faith and constitution and by-laws. You are aware, of course, that continuance in this ministry is contingent upon complete compliance with the central tenets of our church and its policies.

“Unfortunately, if you cannot agree with all particulars and comply with my authority over you, you should seek another place to join where your ideas will be welcome. They are not welcome here.”

Dan.3:7: And they comply. Willing lackeys all bow the knee to that greatest of all idols -Self. Like a rumbling mechanical thing in unison, multitudes collapse, prostrating before the horrendous invention towering over those quivering cowards and jaded sycophants.

Dan.3:8-15: All, that is, but three. See them unflinchingly erect with eyes fixed steadfastly into heaven, theirs a bold breach with flagrant disregard for the devilish decrees to enforce traditions of this custodian and his shrine.

See the tyrant priest seethe; pride is pricked and his blood boils. The truth be told, panic seizes his raging darkened heart; they are not under his control.

The horrid realization slaps him breathless; they serve another Lord with a power animating them far exceeding his own. Kingdoms he may subjugate, but not these three.

Dan.3:16-18: Applaud with cheers their burning words of conviction and rally your soul around such stalwart commitment. “Our God is able...but if not...we will not.”

Devotion was not determined by deliverance. Safety did not signal sanctity. Idols and the gods of nothing were flung to the moles and bats as the worthless delusions that they are. Unswerving devotion to the Lord of lords alone nerved them to risk all for the glory of His Name.

Dan.3:19-27: But this no custodian can endure; and so furious flames roar hatred and ruin upon the godly from Babylonian furnaces. Defy the custodian and the intensity increases.

But the Son of God is with us in the inferno. “In all their affliction, He was afflicted” -Isa.63:9. He is with us in the conflagration and holocaust as One who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” -Heb.4:15. And thus, whether spared from the licking tongues of fire or no, nevertheless, “not a hair of your head will perish” -Lk.21:18.

Dan.3:28: What will it require for repentant peals of praise to roll from tyrant lips? For servants of the Most High God to yield up their bodies in violating the king’s command.

How shall a testimony be established amidst the uniformity of Babylonian ruins? By refusing to serve or worship any God except Him who is true.

But Reader, beware. The choice is no small matter. Do you fear the furnace heated seven times hotter?

Listen, there is an everlasting fury of fire heated far beyond the likes of Nebuchadnezzar’s. Into it plunge all who yield up their bodies before Babylonian shrines.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship” -Rm.12:1.

Which king will you serve; whose decrees will you follow; to whom shall you yield your bodies?

You cannot serve Nimrod and Christ.

**Mystery Babylon The Great,
The Mother Of Harlots
And Of The Abominations Of The Earth -Rev.17:5,18.**

*Babylon is an evil spiritual influence
whose orientation prevails over
all religions of men*

On the following 2 pages are diagrams and descriptions of the **Babel Model** and the **Bible Model**. Reflect on them well. There are 12 descriptions of each type.

The numbers of the descriptions correspond with each other by way of contrast. For example:

Babel Model:

1. Man: Head of Organization
2. Man: Pastor/Shepherd

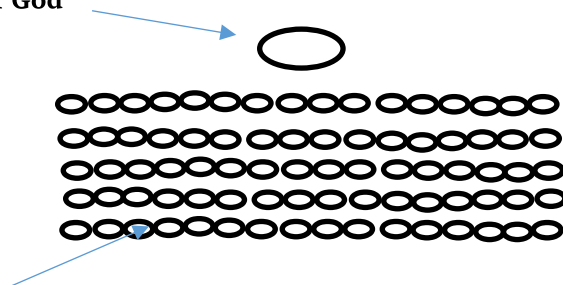
Bible Model:

1. Christ: Head of His Body—Col.1:18
2. Christ: One Shepherd—Jn.10:16

And so on through the 12 descriptions.

Babel Model

“Man of God”



“Laity”

Luke 22:25-27

2 Corinthians 11:19-21

1 Corinthians 7:23

1 Peter 5:2,3

Man Has First Place In Everything

3 Jn.9,10

- 1 Man: Head of Organization
- 2 Man: Pastor/Shepherd
- 3 Man: Founder
- 4 Temple: “Church” Building
- 5 “Church”: Divided Affection
- 6 Man is Lord
- 7 Gather to Receive/Gain
- 8 Hierarchy: Clergy/Laity
- 9 One man is Priest
- 10 Passive/Irresponsible/Carnal
- 11 Enforce by Threat
- 12 Rule with Authority

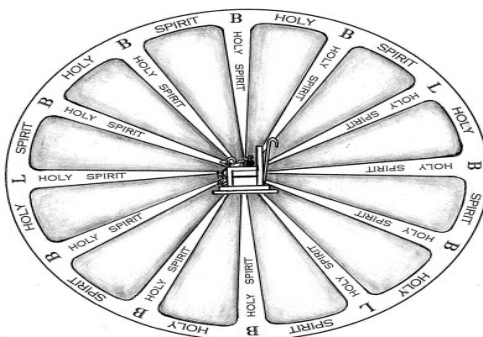
Antichrist

The prefix “anti” means: [1] against [2] in the place of
The **Babel Model** qualifies on both accounts

Bible Model

**Christ
Is Central**

Leader



Believer 

2 Corinthians 11:2-4 1 Corinthians 14:26,29
Hebrews 10:24,25 Hebrews 13:7

Christ Has First Place In Everything—Col.1:18

- 1** Christ: Head of His Body—Col.1:18
- 2** Christ: One Shepherd—Jn.10:16
- 3** Christ: Foundation—1 Cor.3:11
- 4** Christ: Temple—Jn.2:21. Christians: Temple—1 Cor.3:16
- 5** Christ: Bridegroom—2 Cor.11:2,3
- 6** Christ is Lord—1 Cor.8:6
- 7** Gather to Bless/Encourage—Heb.10:24,25
- 8** Equality—1 Cor.12:14-26
- 9** Christ: High Priest. All Believers Priests—Heb.4:14-16; 1 Pet.2:5
- 10** Believers: Participate Responsible Spiritual -Eph.4:15,16
- 11** Leaders Guide by Example: among but not over—1 Pet.5:3
- 12** Leaders Persuade by Truth: not by force—Eph.4:15; Heb.13:7

Christ is All—Col.3:11

Appendix 1

**BABYLON IS AN EVIL SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE WHOSE
ORIENTATION PREVAILS
OVER ALL RELIGIONS OF MEN**

B is a transcultural spiritual power that seeks to wantonly and illegitimately steal and destroy as does its father, the devil, comprised of “a bitter impetuous people who march the breadth of the earth to take possession of dwelling places that are not

theirs, they are dreaded and feared; their justice and authority originates from themselves” -Hab.1:6,7.

God’s people are oppressed and held captive by **B** who refuses to let them go [Jer.50:33].

B has no spiritual right to be among the people of God; they are “aliens in holy places” -Jer.51:51.

B has “engaged in conflict against the Lord” -Jer.50:24 even as Nimrod came against the Lord as a warring enemy.

There are no spiritually acceptable gleanings, nothing salvageable or worth building upon in **B** [Jer.51:26].

Their shepherds have led them astray [Jer.50:6; cf. Jer.10:21; 12:10; 23:1,2 and 5:30,31].

B is animated by unclean spirits [Rev.18:2] and ultimately by Lucifer, the king of **B** [Isa.14:3-23].

The king of **B** subdues and weakens nations with unrestrained persecution and wrath [Isa.14:6,12].

B “made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners” -Isa.14:17.

The king of **B** ruined his country and slew his people [Isa.14:20].

“Prepare slaughter for his children because of the iniquity of their fathers, lest they rise up and possess the land, and fill the face of the world with cities” -Isa.14:21: to multiply the Great City with its wicked franchised uniformity.

This same sentiment is echoed in Ps.137:8,9 : “O daughter of **B**, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy will be the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!”

Judgment on **B** is vengeance for His temple [Jer.50:28; 51:11].

Judgment falls upon **B** arrogance by the sword [Jer.50:29-32, 34-37]. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God [Heb.4:12].

God’s professing people are willing participants in **B**. “When she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. The sons of Babel came to her, to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry” -Ezek.23:16,17.

B brings pain, turmoil, harsh service, and slavery [Isa.14:3].

When **B** is judged, God's people will "turn to the Lord and seek the way to Zion and join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten" -Jer.50:4,5.

The command is certain: Come out of **B** [Isa.48:20; Jer.50:8,28; 51:6,45,50; Rev.18:4].

Zechariah

Chapter 4

God's house being built in accordance with the plumbline by the power of the Spirit brings joy to the eyes of the Lord however small the day shall be.

Zerubbabel was preserved and taught by the Holy Spirit, though according to the meaning of his name, he was "grown in Babylon."

He builds with no **B** principles of might and power, but by the Spirit of the Lord in harmony with a Divine standard that measures all from above. He builds with the plumbline, not with **B** bricks.

Contrast the 2 anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth [a picture of Christ who endlessly supplies the oil of the Spirit] with the 2 unclean women who stand by the wicked woman of the whole earth in chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Here is the wicked woman going forth into all the earth from her established house/shrine in **B**. There are 2 women with wings as storks; they are unclean demonic daughters of the wicked woman of **B** [Rev.18:2: **B** is a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. 2 is the number of testimony. Stork is unclean (cf. Lev.11:13,19)].

The **B** mindset/spirit was scattered throughout the whole earth by God in Gen.11. Here it moves by spiritual powers in the heavenlies, the spirit of the prince of the power of the air [Eph.2:2], utilizing his unclean "birds" that move in that realm [cf. Mt.13:4,19; Rev.18:2].

Chapter 6

The true house of God is built by Christ, the Branch [v.11-15]. He is the only legitimate King and Priest united in One [unlike Nimrod, et al]. The Lord Jesus will establish an everlasting testimony even in the day of small things.

In the message of Christ to the seven churches, **B** elements are pervasive. He states that He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans [Rev.2:6: a compound Greek word meaning: I conquer the common people].

In Pergamos [meaning: thoroughly married] the hateful deeds of enforced dominance of the common people by mandated conformity have become entrenched and perpetuated by the “doctrine of the Nicolaitans” –Rev.2:15.

Here lording it over men by the ruling hierarchy is not merely practiced but is institutionalized. This is the church where Satan’s throne is, where the doctrine of Balaam that the end justifies the means prevails. It is linked to immorality and idolatry.

In Thyatira, Jezebel, the immoral idolatrous prophetess who slew the true prophets of God, was not only tolerated but followed. This is where the deep things of Satan can be known.

Sardis holds to the form of godliness though having denied the power thereof.

Laodicea [meaning “the people’s rights”] has democracy – man’s will, wisdom, and decisions - but no Christ; He is outside.

In their **B** system, Pharisees built a hedge about the law as custodians of their shrine – a man-made code vainly imagined to secure sanctity. Such **B** regulations are condemned in Col.2:20-23.

God’s commands are not burdensome because they are attended with power from on high to perform them. **B** decrees are a wearisome weight because the Holy Spirit does not support them; we are left on our own to comply with those man-made traditions.

The true bride of Christ is spiritual, having the commonality of the indwelling Holy Spirit. **B** is also spiritual, having the

commonality of an indwelling unclean spirit [Eph.2:2] along with the power of sorcery and spells [Isa.47:9,12; Nah.3:4; Rev.18:23].

Finally, **B** the Great will be hated and devoured, leaving all to worship the beast/dragon [Rev.17:15-18].

Appendix 2

Babel in Hebrew means “confusion;” in Akkadian [Bab-i-lu] it means “gate of god.”

The Enuma Elish are Babylonian Cuneiform tablets, 7 in total, from about 1,800 to 1,200 BC. It was used as a "ritual", meaning it was recited during a ceremony or celebration, probably the Akitu festival, or Babylonian new year.

Tablet VI, lines 50-60, shows striking parallels to the biblical account while emphasizing the decidedly spiritual purpose of Nimrod's tower. This section recounts the purpose to construct Babylon as a heavenly city, the gate of god, a dwelling and repose of the gods, with Marduk being the supreme. Each brick was inscribed with the name of Marduk.

*“Let us build a shrine whose name shall be called
‘Lo, a chamber for our nightly rest’; let us repose in it!
Let us build a throne, a recess for his abode! On the day that we
arrive we shall repose in it.”
When Marduk heard this,
Brightly glowed his features, like the day:
“Construct Babylon, whose building you have requested, Let its
brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it ‘The Sanctuary.’”
The Anunnaki [a group of lesser deities, 300 in heaven and 300
on earth] applied the implement;
For one whole year they molded bricks.”*

As a legacy following the dispersion of Babel, deeply ingrained throughout world cultures, the high places are

consecrated as shrines of worship in reminiscence of Nimrod's tower as the "gate of god."

Appendix 3

You Know You Have Entered Babylon:

When you encounter a religion that is ruled by a man in charge of the Shrine/church, you have met Babylon.

When the Shrine/Tower/Building is referred to as "church," a Babylonian orientation is prevailing.

When members of that institution are expected to conform to established standards, Babel's brick mold is being employed.

When the Custodian rules and lords it over the laity/common people, Babylonian evil is dominating.

When money is required and/or demanded from those who gather at the Shrine, Nimrod's pattern is at work.

When those attending the Shrine's gatherings are expected to passively observe the performance of the Custodian and his assistants, you are in the midst of Babylon.

When other documents, traditions, confessions, standards, statements, creeds, and denominational distinctives are mandatory for membership, you have encountered Babylon.

When the truth of the Word of God is compromised by Denominational Traditions, Babylon is to blame.

When the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched, Babylonian custodians and unclean spirits are operating.

When there is no liberty for you as a spiritual priest to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, you are abiding in Babylonian death.

When you attend the gathering in fellowship and leave grieved and vexed, you have entered Babylon.

When the Custodian is a Giant Mighty Man and not a humble serving brother, he is a son of Nimrod held fast in Babel's claws.

When the Custodian takes offence at being called brother and requires instead titles of honor, he is a slave of Nimrod.

When pressure is applied on you to conform to a man-made system and standard, know that it is the brick mold of Babel you are being forced into.

When the Custodian becomes annoyed and utters threats should you question his decrees and formulas, you have met Nimrod's dog.

When men tolerate and bow to the Shrine's Traditions and Expectations, they are bewitched by Babylon.

*Flee from the midst of Babylon!
Run for your lives!
Do not be cut off in her iniquity,
For this is the Lord's time of vengeance.*

*We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed;
Forsake her! Return now to your own land,
For her judgment has reached to heaven
And towers up to the very skies
Jer.51:6,9*

Babylon can neither be healed nor destroyed. But she can be forsaken. Persian conquest of the kingdom of Babel did not rid the world of her influence. One outward form being destroyed does not purge its spiritual pervasiveness. Babylon lives on.

Sever one of her Hydra heads and two more emerge [In Greek mythology, Hydra was a nine-headed serpent]. Exterminating one present threatening manifestation does not slay the beast. Only God in His day of vengeance can rid the universe of Babylon.

What then can be done? It is left for Christ's remnant to rather come out and be separate, to forsake what is manifestly Babylonian. Two masters cannot both be served.

Continuing to practice what is positively Babylonish will both grieve the Spirit of God and keep us under her bewitching spell. Returning to the simplicity of Christ as recorded in His most excellent Word is our only refuge. Nothing else will avail.

40

Pillars of Death

These following remarks have particular reference within the context of West African Christianity with its prevailing emphasis upon Prosperity, Positive Confession, Spiritual Warfare, Tithing, Oral Tradition, and digital Media. Applications to other contexts are relevant.

[1] We Preach a Doctrine of Demons, Pursued by Satanic Means, While Praying to the Devil

I think we are lost. Deception could not get any more thorough than this.

Prosperity is a Doctrine of Demons

Observe, if we imagine that “godliness” is a means to financial gain, we’re definitely lost. “Men of corrupt mind who are destitute of the truth think that godliness is a way of making profit” -1 Tim.6:5.

Becoming religious to become rich: Now that’s decidedly demonic. Didn’t Jesus drive those out of His Father’s house with a whip of cords? Pretty sure He did. If Prosperity has its hook in your heart, you’ve already swallowed this Doctrine of Demons hook, line, and sinker: Utter ruin and wrath await.

“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and some by longing after it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows” -1 Tim.6:9,10. Thinking, wanting, lustfully desiring, loving: these are all matters of the heart.

“Breakthrough, Promotion, Divine Destiny, Uplifting, Success, Hundredfold Return, Prosperity:” all qualify to pave your way to Hell. Yet we still preach Prosperity, but it is a Doctrine of Demons.

Positive Confession is the Satanic Means

And we avidly pursue it by the Satanic Means of Positive Confession. Satan is its inventor. Yes, Positive Confession is devilish, even from days immemorial.

“O Lucifer...you said in your heart: ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God...I will sit on the mount of the assembly...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High’” -Isa.14:12-14.

That is the origin of this Satanic Means of Positive Confession. But it didn't work then and it doesn't work now. Here is the Lord's reply to Satan's positive confession: "The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked...you have fallen from heaven...you have been cut down to the earth...you will be thrust down to Hell, to the sides of the pit" -Isa.14:5,12,15.

Nevertheless, the devil still uses it, even against the Lord Jesus. "Since You are the Son of God, Command that these stones become bread!" -Mt.4:3.

"Command, Decree, Confess, Claim, Speak the Word of Faith, Prophecy into your life:"

These are Satanic Means. Believing that your spoken word has creative power is devilish. But it is what we do.

We Pray to the Devil

The final crown of dung in this trilogy of demonic delusion is that we now Pray to the Devil. "I want you to come against every principality and power; begin to take dominion in the spiritual realms."

And then like one monstrous machine, grinding and groaning, hundreds of heads begin to shake and the auditorium breaks into a cacophony of pandemonium as warriors raise their battle cries.

"I bind! I cast out! I destroy! I come against! Every witch and wizard: every principality and power: Die! Die! Die! Holy Ghost: Fire! Holy Ghost: Fire!" And the acrobatics repeat meeting after meeting.

The devil isn't bound: "Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" -1 Peter 5:8. Witches and wizards are still flying. Fornication has not ceased. We are deceived.

We no longer pray to the Father in heaven; we have turned to shouting at evil spirits. With crowns of tinsel and swords of straw, we take dominion in our shadow kingdoms of sand. But the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, lies rusty, unused, under mounds of rubbish in our homes and sanctuaries.

And the devil is amused while heaven weeps. That's where we are. We are lost.

[2] Tithing is not Christianity

Tithing is to our modern church what circumcision was to the NT church. It is a desperate struggle between 2 opposing and mutually exclusive systems; mixture destroys both.

Moses and Christ have not forged an alliance to save your soul. “For the Law was given through Moses; Grace and Truth came to be through Jesus Christ” –Jn.1:17.

The Law demands but makes no provision; it requires but supplies no power. That is the death sentence of the Old Covenant; you are left on your own ability to comply, and your failing flesh is not equal to the task.

Christ supplies in us what God requires of us. He performs in us what we could never do left to ourselves. “Apart from Me, you can do nothing” –Jn.15:5. That pretty much sums it up.

The conflict is between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant; Law & Grace, Bondage & Freedom, Priest-Craft & All Christians as Priests, Works & Faith, Fear & Fellowship, Cursing & Blessing, Hierarchy & Equality, Professional Ministry & Participatory Sharing, and Institutionalism & Simple Gathering.

“As many as are the works of [Moses’] Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law to do them’” –Gal.3:10.

In contrast, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us” –Gal.3:13. Christ cancels the curse of the Law for everyone abiding in Him.

Moses’ Law is the “ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones” -2 Cor.3:7. But the New Covenant “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” – Rm.8:2.

Moses Law leads to bondage: “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” –Acts 15:10. Quite in contrast is the grace and truth in Christ: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of bondage” –Gal.5:1.

Old wine must be retained in its old wineskin. New wine necessitates a new wineskin. An attempted mixture is disastrous to both [Luke 5:36-39]. The ceremonial system of Moses is incompatible with the Simplicity of Christ.

It is commonly stated that “Tithing is the backbone of the Gospel and the source of spiritual blessing.” Oyedepo declares: “Anyone who does not Tithe is under a financial curse.” Adeboye decrees: “Whoever does not pay his Tithe will go to hell.” Christ Apostolic Church, when asked at their national convention what the unforgivable sin is, answered: “Failure to pay your Tithe.”

These are all false gospels by false religious leaders. All of those statements make salvation and blessing dependent upon paying money. 1 Peter 1:18,19 says: “You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you by tradition from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect.”

“If righteousness comes through the Law, Christ died in vain” –Gal.2:21. But Christ did not die in vain and righteousness does not come by keeping the Law of Tithing. “If a Law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the Law” –Gal.3:21. But no “obedience” to Law can ever give life and no righteousness is ever obtained by it.

“All who rely on observing the Law are under a curse” –Gal.3:10. If you think you will be saved, or become holy, or accepted by God through Tithing, you have already placed yourself under a curse. You have rejected Christ, trusted in your own religious works, and called His sacrifice worthless.

“You have been alienated/estranged from Christ, you who are seeing to be justified by Law; you have fallen out of grace” –Gal.5:4. The Law of Moses represented by Tithing is “a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance/body/reality is Christ!” –Col.2:17.

Keeping the Law has “the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion, and false humility, and harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” –Col.2:23.

If any so-called minister, who is actually a fake 419 lover of money, tells you that you are cursed if you do not pay your Tithe,

he is a deceiver and a liar. Why? Because “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” –Gal.3:13. Jesus death alone redeems from the curse of the Law.

The Law of Tithing is part of the ceremonial Levitical system of the Old Testament Law. Christ has already redeemed us from all of that curse. Any fake minister who threatens you with cursing for not paying Tithe is a wicked man. He is preaching a destructive false “gospel,” bringing you into bondage and ruin if you do.

Jesus said to “Make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe whatever I have commanded you”–Mt.28:19,20. Jesus never commanded Christians to Tithe. Why are denominations teaching that? Jesus did not.

The true church is “built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets” –Eph.2:20 and is devoted “to the Apostles’ teaching” –Acts 2:42. The Apostles never taught Christians to Tithe; that was not part of their teaching nor the foundation they laid. Why are denominations teaching Tithing? The Apostles did not.

The Doctrine of Tithing is a deadly struggle between life and death. The fake preachers declare that you will die if you do not Tithe. Christ and the Apostles say you will die if you think Tithing is the way of salvation, blessing, and acceptance. I choose Christ. What of you?

[3] Oral Tradition & Digitality are Bondage

Analytical critical thinking skills are a rarity. The very idea of deriving truth for oneself from what is read is a culturally foreign idea to many.

To overcome centuries of bred-into-the-bone rote memory and repetition of what has been orally received by tradition is a paradigm more daunting than the 60-foot-thick walls of Jericho. The entire traditional African culture mitigates against development of independent assessment and drawing of conclusions other than what has been transmitted by Oral Tradition.

The task of gospel teachers is not merely to proclaim a true message; that must be done. But there is also an entire re-orientation of how truth is derived and processed if our Christianity will endure beyond our lifespan. Writing is a cultural revolution in and of itself that confronts Oral Tradition and Digitality both.

The progress of genuine Christianity must be prosecuted on two levels if it will be sustainable into succeeding generations; [1] we must present the true written content of the Scriptures and [2], address the very mental mechanism by which it is apprehended. Without the latter, our content will soon be overtaken by the weeds of Oral Tradition and no fruit brought to maturity.

Oral Tradition [Orality] fosters and creates hierarchy. Writing places every individual on an equal plane. Orality keeps subordinates dependent. Writing liberates the individual from those shackles. "Truth" in traditional societies is the privileged portion of the elite. Truth via Writing exposes its message to all irrespective of status or station.

And it is here that a great cultural upheaval must take place for the truth of the Written Word of God to take deep root and spread throughout the land. It is not merely that the new content of the gospel must be received. If it is received within the traditional paradigm of Orality, then the default mindset will twist even that message to conform to its presuppositions and world-view.

And it takes years of repetitively requiring people to reason for themselves via inductive questioning that a new mind-set emerges. And there are no shortcuts that are apparent to hasten this development.

By engaging men thus, the individual is ennobled as a dignified person equally created in the image of God. By doing so, it gradually will dawn upon him that he has something worthwhile to contribute, that his thoughts and reflections have value.

He will realize that not only is he no more in bondage to others' unquestioned directives, but that he also has a voice with something significant to say. By developing his reasoning process

through repeated solicited responses to inquiries, he learns to analyze on his own. Confidence is thereby instilled that he is capable, not only of receiving new ideas from the Word, but also of discovering them for himself by the illumination of the Spirit.

Thus by stimulating, activating, and training his own inherent reflective skills, he is weaned from dependence upon man and gains trust in the Holy Spirit's instruction to his heart apart from human mediators. He will know the truth, not only that of new content, but the truth of the Spirit's enablement of his enlightened mind. And those twin truths will set him free indeed.

And if this is not forthcoming, our Christianity will remain held captive by the new Oral Tradition of the "Man of God," the Ifa of the sanctuary. That is our daunting task and the gravity of whether or not Nigeria will emerge as the next global torch bearer as the sun sets on the Western world.

It is not by coincidence that Gutenberg's printing press was perfected only some few short years prior to the Reformation in Europe in the 1500's. Literature fuels reformation. Apart from that, either the bondage of Orality remains in force, or the onslaught of the visual media of Digitality will overwhelm.

Biblical truth, in WRITING, cancels hierarchy, ennobles the individual, liberates the mind, enhances reasoning, and transports beyond the narrow canyon walls of one's own cultural experience.

The Scriptures supplant Oral Tradition. That Word is external, objective, and verifiable. It is preserved in durable form available for all to read and judge whatever anyone says concerning it.

Oral Tradition follows the crooked trail through the bush over centuries of time. Each individual is expected to walk in the same path established by the ancestors without questioning. Because it is passed on orally, manipulation and misrepresentation are easily achieved in the mouth of the one in authority who speaks it.

Orality is purely subjective. Its message is completely dependent upon the one speaking. The speaker can invent whatever he wishes to influence and control others: and the hearers have no way of knowing whether he has done that or not.

This is what is meant by subjective: Nothing outside the man's own report exists to verify his statements.

Writing, however, places every man on the same level. Each must interact with the message and decide for himself. The Word judges every man, both elder and youth alike. And at the same time, the reader is judging what he reads in order to understand its content.

And thus by the very fact of having a written Word, the evil of ruling over others in the church is cancelled. The oppression of clergy dominating the laity [common people] has no place when there is a written Word available to all: "I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say" -1 Cor.10:15.

Orality also reinforces tribalism. Only the message of one's particular tribe handed down by the elders has validity in African Traditional Religion [ATR]. Other traditions and customs are therefore looked down upon as inferior, weak, and irrelevant.

The written Word, however, eliminates all basis for tribal superiority. All are equal members of a new family, a new community, a fellowship that does not take into account any man according to what he is in the flesh. "Therefore from now on we regard no one according to the flesh: He is a new creation; the old things have passed away" -2 Cor.5:16,17. "All of you have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" -Gal.3:27,28.

Oral Tradition keeps one a prisoner of his own isolated world. He knows nothing outside of what he has been told to believe. Other perspectives are suspect and resisted. What others think and practice is rejected as alien, inferior, and threatening.

But with Writing, one is transported beyond the limits of his own immediate experience. Vast new vistas of knowledge are opened up to the mind to consider. And the Scriptures go even further; they carry us beyond everything known here below on earth to now view life from a higher, heavenly, and eternal standpoint.

"As it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man:' to us God revealed them through His Spirit; not in words taught by

human wisdom, but in those taught by the Holy Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” -1 Cor.2:9,10,13.

Quite in contrast to Orality, Writing and the Word of God are objective. They are not dependent upon the man who is speaking about them. They are outside the man, can be read by all, and each person can judge for himself whether what the man is saying is what is actually written.

3 global paradigms affect every person Orality, Writing, Digitality

Orality is the oldest of the three historically. The other two have emerged later as cultural revolutions.

In Orality, the ear is the gate to dominating subordinates. In Writing, the mind is the gate to liberating individuals. In Digitality, the eye is the gate to manipulating the masses.

In Orality, the entire traditional culture mitigates against development of personal opinion and inventiveness. Independent reflection and assessment is discouraged and even forbidden. Ancestral tradition handed down via the elders must prevail. Any deviation is punishable.

Writing is truly a cultural revolution in and of itself. With Writing, there is an entire re-orientation of how truth is derived and understood.

Writing presents an external, objective, and verifiable referent for ideas and truth. Each person must interact with concepts for himself, regardless of what others may think or say.

But presently we are faced with yet another powerful threat to the extinction of the objective content of Christianity. The global storm looming on the horizon is the paradigm shift of Digitality.

Images signal the demise of Writing. All is processed via edited icons of pixelated portrayal [Pixels: tiny areas of light on a display screen which make up an image]. Reality is not actually viewed, but a carefully selected visual stimulus is presented as truth.

Digitality results in the resignation of reflective rational properties that are replaced by sensual impressions absorbed via

edited images. Images are not the essential and substantial form of things, but only project a representation and manifestation of the editor's message.

This visual medium signals the onslaught of a highly manipulative communication means that is processed subjectively by the viewer. The stream of these impressions is emotionally judged by the sensual effect they have upon the individual. Feelings thus influenced incline the observer towards the direction of the digital composer.

32 frames per second in video production present the illusion of movement. The viewer is unaware of fixating upon a sequence of recorded pictures rapidly passing before his eye. The bombardment of stimulus at such a rate is accepted as reality without engaging reflective mental analysis. The relentless digital flow of images precludes studied contemplation by the speed that successive pixels assault the eye, leaving their subjective impressions as they swiftly pass.

In both Orality and Digitality, the individual is a receptor, but is not engaged as an active participant. In neither are the agreement nor contribution of the individual expected or solicited.

Writing anticipates and requires interaction, assessment, and invites the participation and consideration of the reader. Writing not only permits, but demands critical judgment of its content.

Orality and Digitality proceed with their fables and films without allowing the hearers and viewers opportunity to reflect, analyze, and conclude. They are fluid mediums and stream without interruption.

Writing is static, accommodates the pace and capacity of the reader, and welcomes periods of unhurried reflection before resuming the writer/ reader dialogue. Orality and Digitality both are monologues of motion that invite no interruptions.

Only in Writing is the individual a participant. Writing asks the question: "What do you think?" Orality and Digitality pose no such query. They simply pontificate with their predetermined and expected outcomes resulting from hearing and seeing their respective diatribes.

Witness in Mt.4 how each cultural paradigm is employed by the devil against the Lord Jesus. He first assaults Christ on the basis of Orality: “Command these stones to become bread.” Appeal is made to the authority of Oral Tradition in the mouth of the speaker, in this case, that of Satan himself.

The devil also is adept at employing Writing in attempts to lure astray not only Christ, but the godly as well: “Cast Yourself down, for it is written.” Here the content he quoted from Ps.91:11,12 was correct, but the reasoning process used to assess the Word was not.

The devil tempts by presenting the Written Word from his standpoint of Oral Tradition: It means what I say it does. He did so in the Garden of Eden and continues to do so up to today.

And thus unless both content and its assimilating procedure utilized to gain understanding and to interpret truth is transformed, content will revert to its default of Orality; it will mean only what the speaker says it means.

Finally, the tempter employed Digitality to impress and overwhelm; he showed Christ “all the kingdoms of world and their glory in a moment of time.” Imagine the sensual bombardment of this, leaving one nearly stunned by the rapidly flashing images passing before one’s awareness. It may prove at last to be the most threatening and effective medium of mass manipulation.

Christ counters all three paradigms of temptation by a single recourse: “It is Written.” The unchanging Word of God in its durable written form is the only effective means of escaping the tempter’s snares of both Orality and Digitality.

In both Orality and in Digitality, the direction of the life are governed by internal, subjective, and non-verifiable sources: either submitting to Traditional perspectives via Orality or to Sensual Impressions by means of Digitality.

The Written Word of God safeguards against both. It is external, objective, and verifiable. It is not dependent upon verbal report from an elite eldership as in Oral Tradition. Neither are the Scriptures to be received and followed based upon emotional sensations absorbed through Digitality’s sensual impressions.

IT IS WRITTEN cancels the bondage of Orality. IT IS WRITTEN subverts the sensual impressions of Digitality. IT IS WRITTEN establishes the truth of the Word of God interpreted in context, illumined by the Spirit, proclaimed fearlessly, and upheld without compromise.

IT IS WRITTEN: “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven” -Ps.119:89.

IT IS WRITTEN: “I esteem right all Your precepts concerning everything; I hate every false way” - Ps.119:128.

IT IS WRITTEN: “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; the counsel of the Lord abides forever!” -Ps.33:10,11.

IT IS WRITTEN!

41

One Another

The solution to the Babylonian departure of the professing church is to return to the simplicity of devotion to Christ and His own Pattern.

The practical expression of that is contained in the variety of “One Another” passages in the Scriptures.

If we would truly practice these, all men would observe our love and know that we are the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ indeed.

The Name of God would cease to be blasphemed among the nations and Jesus Himself would no longer have cause to remove our lampstand and vomit us out of His mouth.

Let love of the brethren continue
Heb.13:1

We are members of one another [Rm.12:5; Eph.4:25]

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love [Rm.12:10]

Be of the same mind toward one another [Rm.12:16; 15:5]

Love one another [Rm.13:8; 1 Thess.3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet.1:22; 1 Jn.3:11,23; 4:7,11]

Building up one another [Rm.14:19; 1 Thess.5:11]

Accept one another [Rm.15:7]

Admonish one another [Rm.15:14; Col.3:16]

Greet one another with a holy kiss [Rm.16:16; 1 Cor.16:20; 2 Cor.13:12; 1 Pet.5:14]

Have the same care for one another [1 Cor.12:25]

Through love serve one another [Gal.5:13; 1 Pet.4:10]

Bear one another's burdens [Gal.6:2]

Bearing with one another in love [Eph.4:2; Col.3:13]

Be kind to one another [Eph.4:32]

Forgiving one another [Eph.4:32]

Submitting to one another [Eph.5:21]

Teaching one another [Col.3:16]

Comfort one another [1 Thess.4:18]

Encourage one another [1Thess.5:11; Heb.3:13; 10:25]

Consider one another to stir up love and good deeds [Heb.10:24]

Confess your sins to one another [Jas.5:16]

Pray for one another [Jas.5:16]

Be hospitable to one another [1 Pet.4:9]

Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another [1 Pet.5:5]

Fellowship with one another [1 Jn.1:7]

Take the lead in showing deference to one another [Rm.12:10]

Let us not judge one another [Rm.12:16]

Regard one another as more important than self [Phil.2:3]

Live in peace with one another [1 Thess.5:13]

*If these are yours and abound,
You will be neither useless nor unfruitful
In the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*For he who lacks these is shortsighted,
Even to blindness, and has forgotten
That he was cleansed from his old sins.*

*For if you do these things, you will never stumble;
For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom
Of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Will be abundantly supplied to you.*

2 Peter 1:8-11

42

Christ Head of His Church

The Nature of Christ's Church

The church is portrayed in several ways in the NT. Living things cannot be reduced to strict mechanical definitions. They must rather be expressed by illustrations and accurate descriptions.

The NT describes who the people of God are as distinct from the world. It also tells of the relationship that exists between these people and their God, and between these people and each other.

In the discussion of the following passages, various NT Greek words will be referred to. They will be identified by writing them in *ITALIC CAPITAL* letters followed by the actual Greek letters themselves.

Foundation

Mt.16:16-19

No blessing comes to any man who has a deficient view of Christ. Imaginary “christs” can do nothing for anyone because they do not exist. Only what is revealed about Christ to the heart of a man by the Father in heaven will result in blessing.

Jesus is the Christ: the Anointed Priest and King. As Priest, there exists no other Mediator between God and man. No other sacrifice will avail to cleanse from sin.

No man can do what He does. He alone is the Priest that can safely represent man before God without rejection.

As King, He rules and governs the heart of His servants according to the law of His kingdom. No other rulers, no codes or traditions can be accepted by His subjects. His Word exclusively must command His people.

Christ alone is the Rock upon which His church is built. The confession that there is no other King, no other Priest, is the unshakable Rock that all of hell’s wisdom and might cannot overcome.

Hell cannot undo what has been supernaturally imparted to the heart of a man by the Father in heaven. There is no other means of entrance into this church that Jesus is building.

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” -1 Cor.3:11. “That Rock [*PETRA*, πετρα] was Christ” -1 Cor.10:4.

Peter [*PETROS*, πετροσ] is not that Rock [*PETRA*, πετρα] upon which the church is built. Peter is a stone [*PETROS*, Jn.1:42], like all believers are “living stones” -1 Pet.2:5, but he is not the

foundational Bedrock [*PETRA*] upon which the church stands: That is Christ alone.

Keys of the kingdom [Mt.16:19] were placed in his hands by the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter was the initiator, a pioneer, who accessed several new gateways into fresh spiritual realms for the saints of God to follow thereafter.

Pentecost found him unlocking the stiff rusty gate of tradition unto the flooding light of salvation and a New Covenant for the Jew. Three thousand gladly rushed through the opened passageway to eternal life, accessed by the Key of the Gospel in his hand [Acts 2:14-42].

Through him doors of mercy swung wide unto the afflicted and sorrowing. Miracles were first introduced through the church to a suffering world at the Temple's Beautiful Gate [Acts 3:1-10], and Peter held that Key of Compassion.

It was Peter who first passed through the door of persecution, imprisonment, and stripes for the sake of the Name [Acts 4&5]. The Key of No-compromise gained admittance to that prison cell of suffering in behalf of Christ.

Reluctantly, a key was withdrawn from an Israelite's robe to extend salvation's blessing beyond the borders of Judea unto the remotest part of the earth. Peter's narrow thinking required arresting by repeated visions before that key would be inserted to unlock blessing to the "unclean" Gentiles [Acts 10:9-16].

Yet he yielded to the message from heaven. Peter arose without misgivings and threw open the barred door to the heathen in Cornelius' house [Acts 11:1-18]. Thereafter, every tribe, people, tongue, and nation have thankfully streamed through it to the glory of God.

This final Key pulled from Peter's robe, was the golden one of Obedience; Peter's own obedience, which led to "the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" -Rm.1:5.

Peter, thus, is simply a servant in the kingdom, but not the foundation of it. Christ alone can support the church that He is building. It belongs to Him.

He says it is "My church" -Mt.16:18. We dare not shift to another foundation, another priesthood, another Christ, another Gospel, another ruler, or another code of law.

This is the foundation of the church that is Jesus' possession and is the first mention of the church in all of Scripture. Study it well; the key lies at the door to all that is contained therein. There is no other church membership that will take you to heaven.

Father & Children

2 Cor.6:18; Mt.23:8,9

The life of the Father is the common portion of all His children. He is exalted over all to whom all owe everything within the family.

In this family, all are brothers. None have any place of superiority over others. Love and consideration characterize them all and obedience to a Father's will is their crowning glory.

Master & Slaves

Rm.6:15-23

Slaves are purchased possessions. They have no rights, and their independent opinions and desires are not the concern of the Master. Their one concern is to know and obey the command of their Master [1 Cor.6:19,20].

No man can serve two masters. There exists no place for men to lord it over fellow slaves in the church of Christ. "You have been bought with a price; do not become slaves of men" - 1 Cor.7:23. Jesus alone is Lord.

Shepherd & Sheep

Jn.10:1-28

There exists but one flock with one Shepherd [Jn.10:16]. Men are no substitutes for Christ. His voice alone is heard and followed by His flock. The voices of strangers will not be listened to or followed. Rather, the sheep will flee from any not speaking the Word of the Shepherd.

This identifies what true shepherd care is: speaking with the voice of Christ, leading in His paths of righteousness to feed upon His Word.

This is what a shepherd is according to the heart of God [Jer.3:15]. Any who would draw men after themselves, speaking man's wisdom and tradition, are thieves and robbers [Ezek.34:1-16; Acts 20:30].

Foundation & Temple

1 Cor.3:10,11,16; Eph.2:19-22

In God's temple, everything says, "Glory!" The outshining of His character is seen, the excellence of His moral perfections shine forth. Truth is dispensed, sacrifices rise, and the Lord dwells in the midst with holiness overshadowing all.

Christ as the Cornerstone is the reference point for all that is built upon Him. He is the foundation that the Apostles and prophets have laid.

Everything rests upon Him and He determines the dimensions and scope of the building. Man's substitutes and carnal contributions are rejected as worthless and not according to the Pattern of Christ.

This is the church that Jesus builds. It is not built with wood and cement. Living stones grow into a holy temple in the Lord. The church of the Lord Jesus is the pillar and support of the truth [1 Tim.3:15], upholding and proclaiming the everlasting Word of God of Him who dwells within His spiritual house.

High Priest & Priests

Heb.4:14-16; 1 Pet.2:5,9

A throne of grace is open to all who draw near to God through Jesus, the only High Priest who always lives to intercede for His own [Heb.7:24,25]. Each believer has equal privilege and access to the God of heaven, for all are spiritual priests.

From every believer without distinction, offerings are brought: Bodies are presented as living sacrifices [Rm.12:1,2],

praise rises from grateful and fruitful lips [Heb.13:15], and good deeds of sharing abound [Heb.13:16].

No such thing as clergy and laity exist in the NT church patterned after Christ. No separate class of men officiate and rule over the spiritual life and ministry of the believers. All are priests.

Vine & Branches

Jn.15:1-17

“Apart from Me, you can do nothing” -Jn.15:5: nothing to glorify the Father, nothing to truly benefit man. The life of the True Vine courses through each and every branch to produce the fruit of that Life: fruit of “goodness, righteousness, and truth” -Eph.5:9.

Fruit cannot be imitated as spiritual gifts and miracles may be.

Death has its own odor that cannot be masked. The fruitful fragrance of Christ is what is evidenced in all who are in living union with Him. Life produces fruit that no ceremonies, regulations, associations, or traditions could ever do.

Head & Body

Col.1:18

One Head governs the one body of Christ. There are not multiple heads in His church. No one’s body could live and function with two heads.

The members of the body receive their life, guidance, and spiritual assignments directly from the Head, not from fellow members [Mk.13:34].

The hand does not dictate to the foot. If one suffers, that member sends a message of distress to the Head. The Head then orders the response of the other members to relieve the suffering member.

All is orderly and coordinated because the Head governs all. No imposed structure from without directs the church. Christ is truly the Head of His Church, not merely a figurehead.

Captain & Soldiers

2 Tim.2:3,4

Soldiers do not entangle themselves in the affairs of everyday life. Conflict for the sake of the kingdom is their concern. Commands from their Captain are all that they listen to.

Hardship, self-denial, and discipline are what their lives consist of. Pleasing the Commander and gaining victory over the foe fills their waking moments.

The church fights the good fight of faith, not with carnal weapons and fleshly might, but with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Error, evil, and hate are fought with truth, righteousness, and love. Only then is victory sure.

Bridegroom & Bride

2 Cor.11:2,3; Rev.19:7-9; Eph.5:25-32

Affectionate devotion and determined purity are what characterize the bride. She has an eye for none other. Her love is reserved for One alone.

She despises that friendship with the world which would defile her into harlotry [Jas.4:4]. She makes herself ready for the glorious day in which she shall appear spotless and radiant, with no stain or blemish.

Righteous deeds weave the whitened fabric of her beautiful dress while she gladly submits to His good pleasure. And so it is that the true church of Christ can say, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is for me" -S. of S. 7:10.

Leadership in Christ's Church

No Lords in Christ's Church

Luke 22:24-27 Matthew 20:25-28 Mark 10:42-45

Ruling and lording it over the people of God are never to be found in the true church of Jesus Christ. He forbids it to be so.

Dominating and exercising authority over inferiors is what the heathen do. It is worldliness and completely unlike the Pattern of Christ.

He humbled Himself as the lowliest of servants. This is what constitutes leadership in His kingdom, in His church: serving as a slave.

Leadership consists in performing loving deeds of service, not by exercising authority over others. True leadership, according to Christ, is by an example of humbly serving others, not by having others perform my will. The youngest is the greatest.

In Lk.22:26, the word “chief” [KJV], “he who governs” [NKJV], “the one who rules” [NIV], and “leader” [NASB, NET, NLT], are all translations of the word *HEGEOMAI* [ἡγεομαι].

Jesus here says that the *HEGEOMAI* is a servant. This is the sense in which we must understand the meaning of this term in the church.

Without controversy, servants are not rulers; they are ruled. Therefore, the ideas of chief, ruler, or governor cannot possibly be the proper sense of a *HEGEOMAI* in the NT church.

The meanings, “leader, guide,” are correct, as they alone are consistent with being a servant. A servant can lead and guide by an example of devoted care and truthful words. But no servant is a ruler, governor, or chief; that is a contradiction in terms.

Elders/Overseers

Acts 20:28-32

Elders who are equipped by the Holy Spirit to oversee, are capable of shepherding the flock of God. It is the work of God to make a man in this capacity. Man’s appointment and ordination cannot make a man into someone and something that the Holy Spirit has not already done.

Elders [Acts 20:17,18] and Overseers [Acts 20:28] are terms describing the same individuals.

An Elder [*PRESBUTEROS*, πρεσβυτερος] is an older man of proven spiritual maturity. An Overseer [*EPISKOPOS*, επισκοπος] describes the work that an Elder performs.

That work is watching over and tending to the needs of the flock as a Shepherd would do. But it is not lording over the flock, for the man who leads is himself a sheep. Christ alone is the one Shepherd.

The work of a shepherd is essentially two-fold: to lead the flock to good pasture and to watch over them so that the wolf does not attack and destroy.

The means provided by the Lord to accomplish both of these services are one and the same. The Word of God is what the believers are led to feed upon by mature godly teachers. That same Word, skillfully used by overseeing shepherds, is the means of protection for the flock against error and evil.

Elders Are Among, Not Over

1 Peter 5:1-6

Once again, it is the elders who are performing the work of overseeing. Overseer is not a position or office of higher rank than that of an elder. The two words are simply describing the same individual, considered from different aspects of his qualifications of service to the saints.

Leaders, here called elders, are among the brethren, not over them. Peter himself does not assume a ruling position over the brethren or other elders. He simply calls himself, “your fellow elder.”

Here it is clearly seen that an overseer who watches over, must not lord it over. Overseeing is therefore never legitimately ruling and exercising authority over the brethren.

Rather, elders/overseers are to be examples, both in loving and humble service, as well as in purity of life and of doctrine. They do not dominate, they demonstrate.

Persuasion By Leaders

Hebrews 13:7,17

NT church leaders [*HEGEOMAI*] are not rulers. This has already been seen by our Lord Jesus' use of this same word in the discussion above from Lk.22:26. They are guides: servants who lead by loving godly care while speaking the truth.

Believers are to carefully reflect upon both the godly lives of their leaders and the Word that they have taught. It is then that they are persuaded to imitate their faith and submit to their guidance and example.

They obey because the leaders' doctrine and lives are persuasive to the spiritual hearts of the godly. The church does not obey because leaders rule over them with authority as lords. Christ's leaders follow His Pattern by guiding according to example, combined with the persuasive power of truth.

The most frequent word in the NT for Obey is [*HUPAKOUO*, 'υπακουω]. It means TO OBEY, in the sense of submitting to authority: such as a believer to the Lord [Heb.5:9], a child to his parent [Eph.6:1], or a slave to his master [Col.3:22].

However, in Heb.13:17, a different word for Obey is used. That word, [*PEITHO*, πειθω], means TO CONVINCe, PERSUADE, OBEY. The obedience called for in Heb.13:17 is based upon godly spiritual persuasion, not upon submission to one in authority over others.

Thus, the meaning of the command in Heb.13:17 can better be expressed in this way: "Be persuaded by your leaders and submit." Believers' submission is to the truth of their leaders' teaching from the Word that is also evident in the convincing example of their godly lives.

Qualifications

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Oversight is a good and desirable work. It is truly a work of service, not occupying a position or assuming an office. The overseer must possess essentially two qualifications. [1] He must be blameless in character. [2] He must be able to teach.

Thus the overseer must have a consistently spiritual example and be able to teach the Word: the same qualifications as were seen in Acts, 1 Peter, and Hebrews.

He must be one who manages [*PROISTEMI*, προϊστημι] his own household well. If he is not a good example, leader, and caring helper there, how could he possibly be qualified to help the church?

PROISTEMI is a word that means, literally, TO STAND BEFORE, and is translated as LEAD, ATTEND TO [with diligent care], MANAGE, MAINTAIN, CONDUCT, BE CONCERNED ABOUT, CARE FOR, GIVE AID, DIRECT, RULE.

This wide-range term describes someone who is standing before others as an example of devoted service, help, care, and direction to them. [All NT references: Rm.12:8; 1 Thess.5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4,5,12; 5:17; Tit.3:8,14].

The sense in which Overseers are to “rule” [1 Tim.3:4,5 KJV] their household well is explained by the use of the term “take care of” in 1 Tim.3:5. The word “take care of” [*EPIMELEOMAI*, επιμελεομαι], is used in only three verses in the NT: Lk.10:34,35 and 1 Tim.3:5.

In the Luke passage, the good Samaritan did not rule, lord it over, or exercise authority over the man who had been robbed and beaten. Rather, he Attended to, was Concerned about, Cared for, Gave aid, and Directed for the care of the man in need. Provision was made at his own expense for the well-being and blessing of the wounded traveler.

This type of care is what is needed in the church and in the home. If one cannot Attend to, be Concerned about, Care for, Give aid, and Direct the members of one’s own family, how could a man ever be of benefit to the church, the family of God?

Ruling and exercising authority as a lord does not fit or qualify a man to either lead in his home or in the church.

Exhorting In Sound Doctrine

Titus 1:5-9

Elders [*PRESBUTEROS*] and overseers [*EPISKOPOS*] are addressed as being the same individuals as we consistently have seen in Acts and 1 Peter. There exists no hierarchy of one over the other or of either over the brethren.

Any true Overseer must be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. Such is the work of a Shepherd: to feed with the Word and to defend with the same.

Elders Who Care Well

1 Timothy 5:17-22

Those Elders who care for [*PROISTEMI*] the brethren well are worthy of double honor. And that is not because they are Rulers, but because they attend to, are concerned about, care for, and give aid to the people of God.

They should be worthy, not only of honor, but even of financial support since they are working hard at preaching the gospel and teaching the believers.

Know These Leaders Well

1 Thessalonians 5:12,13

Leaders are noted for their diligent work of caring for [*PROISTEMI*] and admonishing the brethren according to the Word of God. These are the ones that we should draw close to in order to observe, know, and highly esteem their worthy examples and sound doctrine. Because of their good work, we love them dearly.

Here, it is those who are attending to, caring for, giving aid, and directing the brethren by their laboring in teaching and admonition that the saints are to lovingly esteem. They are not “over you” as ruling authorities, but are standing before the church as teachers and examples.

Leadership: Plural or Singular?

Throughout the NT, leadership in the local assemblies was a plurality and not singular. In other words, there was not one man who was the leader of a church or group of churches. There is to be more than one Elder/Overseer/Pastor in a local church gathering.

There is no one “priest,” bishop, reverend, pastor, primate, general overseer, or “man of God” who determines policy or who directs the actions of the believers and affairs of the church.

The modern “pastor” as we have conceived him to be from the time of the Reformation, is not found in the pages of the NT. “Pastor” is a carryover from the Roman Catholic system of man-made priesthood. No such “office” is to be discovered in the NT Scriptures.

No one man has the needed wisdom or spiritual gifts to be able to attend to all the needs of an assembly. Jesus sent His servants two by two; Paul always was in company with other leaders.

The following passages show plurality of leadership in the NT church: [Acts 6:1-6; 13:1-3,13; 14:23; 15:2,4,6,7,12,13,22,32,35; 20:17,28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12,13; 1 Tim. 1:3,6,7; 3:1,8; 4:14; 5:17-20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:5; Philemon 1-3; Heb. 13:7,17; Jas. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1-5].

Leadership: Male or Female?

There is no reference in the NT of a woman being a pastor, elder, overseer, or teacher in the church. The command to Christian women is clear; A woman is not allowed to teach or exercise authority over a man [1 Tim.2:11,12].

This is not a command limited to a particular situation or culture, but is the directive of God for all believers in every place at all times [1 Cor.1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 14:37].

By creation, she is a follower, not the leader; a helper, not the initiator; the responder, not the director [Gen.2:18; 1 Cor.11:9; 1 Tim.2:13]. She is indeed a fellow heir of the grace of life [1 Pet.3:7], but not a fellow overseer in the church as men are.

Though one in Christ where there is neither male nor female with respect to salvation and its blessings [Gal.3:28], she is not given the same sphere of ministry by God as are men.

Her God-given realm is in the home: loving her husband and children [Tit.2:3-5], raising her children [1 Tim.2:15; 5:14], and working at home [1 Tim.5:14; Tit.2:5] so that the Word of God will not be dishonored [Tit.2:5].

Her sphere of teaching is in practical instruction in godliness to other sisters and children [Tit.2:3-5]. Doing good by helpful works of service [Lk.8:2,3], giving to the poor [Acts 9:36,39], and kindly deeds of hospitality [Acts 16:15,40; 1 Tim.5:10] are some of her great and needful contributions to the work of the gospel: fellow workers and helpers, not competitors or usurpers.

Believers: Inferiors or Equals?

Christians are addressed as spiritual equals in the NT. There are no classes or ranks among the brethren. None are inferior to some who supposedly are ruling over others. [Acts_ 17:11; Rm. 15:14; 1 Cor. 5:12, 13; 10:15; 12:7,18-27; 14:26,29-35; 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 5:1; Rev. 1:9].

Churches: Assemblies or Rulers?

The Epistles in the NT that are addressed to assemblies are not addressed to the “rulers” in those churches. They are addressed to the entire fellowship of the brethren, not to an imagined hierarchy within it. [Rm. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1].

Christ the Pattern

Paul wrote so that believers would know how they ought to conduct themselves “in the house of God, which is the church of the living God” -1 Tim.3:15.

Throughout the Scriptures, there has always been a pattern for the house of God. The Tabernacle had to be built according to the pattern shown on the mount [Heb.8:5]. Solomon’s Temple had a divinely revealed plan [1 Chron.28:12,19].

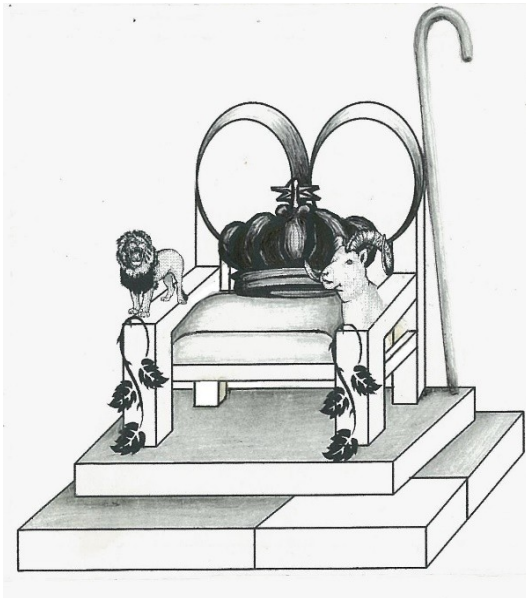
The re-built Temple in the days of Ezra was built according to the absolute standard of the plumb line that measured all from

above [Zech.4:9,10]. And Ezekiel's Temple of the future has a carefully revealed and measured pattern [Ezek.40:4; 43:10-12].

There exists a Pattern for the church as well, which has Christ Himself as the standard [1 Cor.3:9-17; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:3,37,38; 2 Thess.2:15; 1_Tim.3:15; 2 Tim.1:13,14].

In the NT church, everything revolves around the Lord Jesus Christ. He truly has "first place in everything" -Col.1:18.

Illustrated following is that throne of grace to which every believer is urged to draw near with confidence in order to "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" -Heb.4:16.



Upon the throne is found a great HIGH PRIEST who "always lives to make intercession for us" -Heb.7:25 represented by the Lamb. There is no other "mediator between God and men" -1 Tim.2:5.

Christ Jesus is the LORD and KING as shown by the Lion. None other is to command and rule His people for "you were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men" -1 Cor.7:23.

"No man can lay a FOUNDATION other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" -1 Cor.3:11. He Himself is the "CORNERSTONE, in whom the whole building is growing into a holy temple in the Lord" -Eph.2:20,21. The church of the Lord Jesus is built on nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else than Christ Himself.

There exists no other source of life and fruitfulness for the church except the Lord Jesus Christ, the TRUE VINE. He says: "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" -Jn.15:5.

He guides and feeds His flock as the GOOD SHEPHERD as pictured by the Shepherd's crook. There is but one true Shepherd in His church [Jn.10:16] and His "sheep follow Him because they know His voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers"-Jn.10:4,5.

As the BRIDEGROOM, seen in the heart-shaped back of the throne, He has exclusive right to the love and devotion of His bride. "I betrothed you to one husband, to Christ" -2 Cor.11:2.

No one's body has more than one HEAD. All life, direction, coordination of, and rule over the body comes from the Head, symbolized by the crown. Christ Jesus the Lord is "Head of the body, the church" -Col.1:18.

In the NT Church

In the NT church, everything revolves around and is measured by Jesus Christ the Lord. He truly has "first place in everything" -Col.1:18.

All life [Col.3:4], direction [1 Cor.2:16], enabling [1 Cor.1:24], and gift [Eph.4:7,8] come directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, the HEAD of the Body, His church.

As HIGH PRIEST, He is the one Mediator between God and man [1 Tim.2:5] and all believers as Priests have equal access to Him enthroned.

Christ alone is qualified to command and rule His Servants as their KING and LORD. “You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men” -1 Cor.7:23.

No traditions of men, rules, codes, ceremonies, or formulas can save or improve our condition. Christ is the TRUE VINE and source of all fruitfulness for every believer abiding in Him [Jn.15:5].

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is built upon nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else than Himself as its FOUNDATION [1 Cor.3:11]. With Himself as the CORNERSTONE, the perfect reference point for the church, the whole “building is growing into a holy Temple in the Lord” -Eph.2:20, 21.

The church is not a literal building made of cement and wood, and does not depend upon any man, ministry, or denomination for its existence, guidance, or progress.

Sheep in His flock listen to and follow the voice of their one SHEPHERD, Christ Jesus. All other voices and messages are those of thieves and robbers and will be fled from by Christ’s sheep [Jn.10:4,5].

Purity from the defilement of the world is evident in His Bride whose devotion and affection is reserved for Christ alone, the BRIDEGROOM of His church.

No man governs and rules. The Lord Jesus alone has the right as Lord among His people.

Christ Jesus dwells in the midst as the focus of every obedient, worshipful, and loving heart [Rev.2:1].

Our Lord leads, commands, directs, and draws out a response of love from those belonging to Him [Rev.19:7,8].

He is truly honored as Lord as there are no competing “lords” among His people [2 Cor.1:24; 1_Pet.5:1-3].

Leaders are among the flock, not over them.

Overseers watch over as servants, but do not lord over as rulers.

All is done “decently and in order” -1 Cor.14:40 because He is “not a God of confusion but of peace” -1 Cor.14:33. Yet no pre-arranged program is needed to direct the worship of the church.

The Spirit of God, whose work it is to “glorify Christ” -Jn.16:13,14, will lead the people of God “to worship the Father in Spirit and truth” -Jn.4:23.

Unity exists, not by outward conformity and association, but because the Spirit of God joins all to glorify Jesus as Lord [Eph.4:3,4] in a common life of godliness [Jn.17:21-23].

Each one contributes for the edification of all [1 Cor.14:26] and all judge what is spoken by any [1 Cor.14:29].

Everyone submits to one another in the fear of Christ, whether believer or leader, young or old alike [Eph.5:21].

The Breaking of Bread [Lord’s Supper/ Communion meeting] is the commanded meeting of the church. “Do this in remembrance of Me” -Lk.22:19. Other gatherings are secondary or even optional.

Disobedient brethren are lovingly restored back into the way or regretfully removed from the fellowship by the church, and not by its leaders alone [Gal.6:1,2; Mt.18:15-18; 1 Cor.5:1-13].

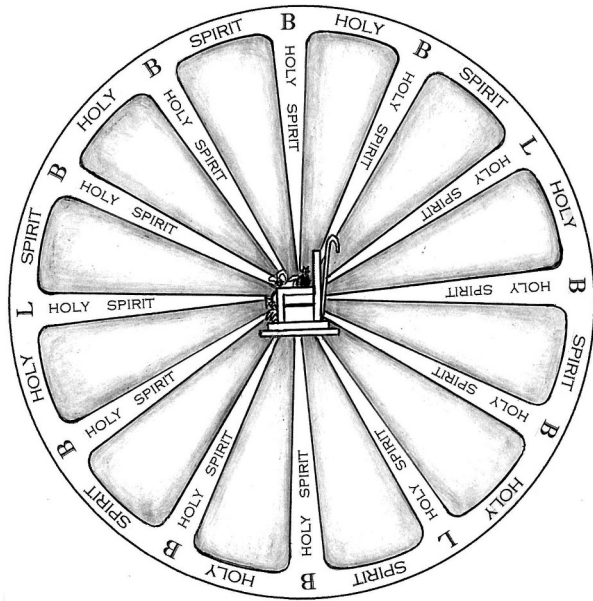
The following diagram illustrates the relationship of Christ to His church and of the believers [**B**] to Him, one another, and to leaders [**L**].

Christ is in the midst as Lord represented by the throne. His life extends to every member of His body through the Holy Spirit, the only light amidst the darkness of this world.

Leaders are among the believers, not over them. All believers have equal access to the Lord Jesus as the Great High Priest over the house of God apart from human mediators.

As Head, He directs the members of His body. Since He is the Bridegroom, all devotion and affection is focused upon Christ without rivals. And as Lord, His Word commands His servants, not the commandments and traditions of men.

Believers live in harmony and love one another as brothers since they share a common life in the Spirit of God being joined to Christ as the True Vine. In the church that Jesus is building, He has “first place in everything” -Col.1:18.



Breaking of Bread

Do this in Remembrance of Me
Lk.22:19 I Cor.11:24

In this simple request is contained the only command from our Lord regarding the meeting of Christians. All other purposes for gathering, however beneficial they might be, are secondary or even optional. This one is not. Several profound truths are contained in this text.

[1] “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

The Lord Jesus is the central object and reason for the gathering. The focus is upward, upon Him. While there is undoubtedly benefit and blessing to the brethren, Christ is to have “first place in everything” -Col.1:18. In our remembrance of the Lord Jesus with thanksgiving, the assembled brethren are stirred up to love and good deeds [Heb.10:24,25].

[2] “Do this in Remembrance of Me.”

One cannot remember someone he has never known. It is a meeting for true believers. Its purpose is not for other reasons.

It is not a teaching meeting, though teaching is there. It is not a prayer meeting, though prayers are surely offered. Evangelism is not the focus though the gospel of the death of Christ must certainly be mentioned.

If unbelievers happen to be present, the church’s devoted reflection upon Christ will surely bring conviction to their hearts as His person and work is remembered [1 Cor.14:23-25; 11:23-26].

[3] “Do This in remembrance of Me.”

Do this refers to something. The Lord Jesus said these words after He had done something: He had just given thanks. We are to do as He did.

We are to give thanks for all that the bread and cup represent. They are symbols of His person, His body, and of His work of redemption, His blood. Who He is and His work at the cross to secure salvation are the cause and focus of our thanks.

[4] “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

The command is plural. It is not a directive for one only to do this while others sit passively by. Each one is to have something to contribute to the collective giving of thanks in the remembrance of Christ [1 Cor.14:26].

In that first meeting recorded in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus was the central focus in their midst [Lk.22:15-20]. Prayers of thanks were offered [Lk.22:19,20], teaching occurred

[Mk.14:22-25], exhortation was given [Lk.22:21-23], hymns were sung [Mt.26:30], and they shared a meal together [Mt.26:26].

These are the key elements in our remembrance of the Lord Jesus. No formula or ceremonial pattern was laid down by our Lord to dictate our expressions of love to Him, though these essential elements will surely be present.

This gathering is actually an acted-out parable of sorts, expressing the life in Christ that is among believers collectively.

Jesus Christ has first place in the midst as the adoring object of every worshiping heart. Love to Him as the Bridegroom and obedience to Him as Lord are the basis of unity among the saints.

Each are guided by the Good Shepherd and share a common life received from the Head of the body. Through the one Great High Priest, their sacrifices of praise ascend unto the throne of God. Fellowship and harmony prevail among the children of the one family of God.

Christians did meet for other reasons as well, but we must not neglect what is commanded for that which we think is beneficial. The types of meetings in the NT are shown in the following.

[1] Breaking of Bread [Acts 2:42-47; 20:7-11; 1 Cor.10:16-22; 11:17-34].

[2] Prayer [Acts 1:14,15; 4:23-31; 12:12; 21:5].

[3] Fellowship [Acts 2:42-46].

[4] Teaching [Acts 5:42; 8:25; 11:26; 13:1-3,42,43; 14:21-23; 15:32-35; 16:40].

[5] Mission Report [Acts 14:26-28; 15:3,4; 21:19].

[6] Elders Meeting [Acts 20:17-37; 21:18].

[7] Church Discipline For Doctrine [Acts 15:1-30]. For Morals [1 Cor.5:1-13].

[8] In General [1 Cor. 14:1-40; Heb. 10:23-25].

Church Discipline

Christianity is a fellowship of love: love to God and love to the brethren [1 Jn.4:7,8]. Love to God requires obedience or it is not love at all [Jn.14:21; 1 Jn.5:3]. True love can never be pleased with unrighteousness, but ever and always rejoices with the truth [1 Cor.13:6].

Love therefore is always concerned about and cannot be content when sin is present in its own or another's life. Obedience to truth is to be the characteristic of all believers.

The Lord has so composed the body of Christ that "there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" -1 Cor.12:25,26.

The fellowship of the brethren is maintained only while we walk in the light as Christ is in the light. If sin enters in, that fellowship is spoiled.

"If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" -1 Jn.1:7.

Filled with both goodness and knowledge, mutual admonition maintains that purity among brethren in loving fellowship [Rm.15:14]. Those who are overtaken in a fault, are to be restored in gentleness by those who are spiritual [Gal.6:1]. In this way the burdens of brethren are borne and the law of Christ is fulfilled [Gal.6:2].

But there are times when erring brothers do not heed loving correction to forsake their folly and live. It is always a serious matter when brethren harden their hearts when reprov'd. Severe warnings are given against this.

"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" -Heb.3:12,15.

Such refusal to repent and return to walking obediently on the way of life calls for further correction. If a brother does not heed the first attempts at correcting his sin in private [Mt.18:15], it becomes necessary to bring one or two more along to confirm the misdeed and impress upon the brother the seriousness of his actions [Mt.18:16].

Some still will not listen. It then must be brought before the entire church that unitedly they might speak to the brother to turn him from the error of his way [Mt.18:17; Jas.5:19,20].

If he will not listen to the admonition of the church itself, he has rejected the Word of Christ who is speaking in the midst of His people [Mt.18:18-20]. He is then to be put out of the fellowship of the brethren until such time that he repents [Mt.18:17; 2 Thess.3:6,14; 2 Cor.2:6-11].

The Lord Jesus says this is a matter finally for the church to decide, not for the leaders only. "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses to hear even the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" -Mt.18:17.

All believers are to say the same thing with one voice about sin that has not been repented of. "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" -1 Cor.1:10. It is the church itself that is the final decision making body in these matters, not the leaders alone.

Paul speaks to the entire body of believers at Corinth as being responsible to exercise this type of discipline. "For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'" -1 Cor.5:12,13.

Sin that is not repented of, whether moral [1 Cor.5:1-13] or doctrinal [Rm.16:17,18; 2 Thess.3:14; Tit.3:9-11; 2 Jn.9-11], is a serious matter. God takes up discipline of a believer when that of Christ through the church is rejected. "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" -Prov.29:1.

Discipline and correction is designed to lovingly restore the erring brother to fellowship and blessing. It is also designed to prevent corruption from spreading within the fellowship of the brethren who might be tolerating its presence rather than disciplining the transgressor.

“You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

“Clean out the old leaven! I have written to you not to keep company with any so-called brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. Put away from yourselves the evil person” -1 Cor.5:2,6,7,11,13.

Leaders Who Became Lords

Jesus Christ the Lord, who has the central place among the lampstands, His churches, [Rev.2:1], hates “the deeds of the Nicolaitans” -Rev.2:6. He hates the evil of ruling over the brethren, because those leaders attempt to take over His rightful place as Lord.

Nicolaitan is a compound word in Greek. It comes from joining the words *NIKAO* [νικαω] TO OVERCOME and *LAOS* [λαος] THE PEOPLE.

Jesus hates the deeds of those who “Overcome the People.” Great men ruling the common people [Laity in English comes from this word] and exercising authority over them is what the rulers of the Gentiles do. It is what the rulers of the churches do. And it is hated by Christ.

There is a man in the NT who ruled in the church. He was a wicked man. He did not accept the Word of God. He oppressed the brethren who wished to follow the Scriptures.

Those who loved the brethren were forbidden by him to do so. And those who would not obey his rule were thrown out of the church [3 Jn.9,10].

The root cause of his evil exercise of authority was that he “loved to be first among them” -3 Jn.9. He is chief of all church rulers who follow in his steps, loving positions of power and authority.

The Scriptures state that Christ is “to have first place in everything” -Col.1:18. But Diotrephes loved to have that first place.

Yet two cannot possibly both have the honor of being first. One must of necessity occupy second rank. There cannot be two heads in one body. Two kings have never sat together on one throne.

If Diotrephes and the church rulers walking his crooked path would have first place, Christ must be pushed aside to make room for them. That is antichrist.

This is the heart of the matter

