

The Plow

Planting Hope & Vision



*“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when the reaper will be overtaken by the
ploughman and the planter by the one
treading grapes. New wine will drip from
the mountains and flow from all the hills.”*

Amos 9:13

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As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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Below is the list of titles in a 10-part series of books about Foundational Issues of the Kingdom of God and the Bride of Christ.

www.JesusLifeTogether.com/foundations/

THE HAMMER—Breaking Down Misconceptions

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” Jeremiah 23:29

THE PLOW—Planting Hope & Vision

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.” Amos 9:13

THE SCALES—Holding to God’s Standards

“The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.” Proverbs 11:1

THE CRUCIBLE—Refining and Melding Relationships

“The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.” Proverbs 17:3

THE SICKLE—Clearing the Land and Harvesting Change

“As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” Mark 4:29

THE TROWEL—It Matters How We Build!

“This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” Hebrews 8:5

THE SWORD—Cutting Through the Fog

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matthew 10:34

THE CHISEL—“I Will Build My Church...”

“In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.” 1 Kings 6:7

THE ANVIL—Forging Out a Life

“See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work.” Isaiah 54:16

THE PLUMB LINE—True Foundations

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty... Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God Bless it!’... Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.” Zechariah 4

The World Will See Jesus Again!

December 1986

The purposes of God for an individual and the corporate body of Christ are that the Agape Kingdom of God would be spread to every nation and then the end would come. The agape of many would wax cold because of the increase of wickedness. But some despise the increase of wickedness and have made God's enemies their enemies and God's passionate love their passionate love (they can't tolerate it in their bones as it says in Peter's epistle about Lot). For those people who despise that wickedness, God's kingdom is going to spread over all the earth—and then the end will come. It is fully God's purpose to show the world Jesus Christ again.

Before the end shall come, the world will see Jesus Christ again *in the Body of Christ*. It is going to happen. His CHURCH is going to be the precious, blameless, spotless Bride of Christ without any wrinkle. The Bride of Christ in all of her Glory is going to be a people who are living out the purposes of God just as Jesus did. The kingdom of this world is going to see the King lived out in the body of Christ, and to that they are going to be accountable. They will be in the valley of decision where they will have to decide what *they* are going to do with Jesus Christ. Are they going to crucify Him again? And, in fact, as we know from reading Revelation, they will. Many will desire to crucify Him again.

Some will yawn and walk away apathetically. But others will see Jesus Christ again in the full expression of His character in the Body of Christ, and will respond to that as they did in the first century. The way is still narrow, but the bushel basket will not hide the Light of the Glory of God. The city will be set on a hill where it cannot be hidden! *That* is God's purpose. The mount of the Lord's temple will be established as "chief among the mountains." The Glory of this house will exceed the glory of the former house. The ever-increasing government of God—that was the purpose of Jesus Christ establishing His reign. It says,

“The zeal of the Lord God Almighty will establish an ever-increasing government.” And for those who are looking for the Church to start off with a big bang in Acts 2, and then drift into obscurity and irrelevance and a pitiful weakness with no witness at all—that cannot be so! That cannot Biblically be so. What we’re seeing now is not the end of the story. *God will have that Bride that has made herself ready.*

The Elijah of God, the John the Baptist of God, will prepare the way for the Second Coming of the Lord also. The people of God will prepare the way for the Second Coming of the Lord. People will see Jesus Christ on earth again. So, our job, especially in the light of being overcomers, is to join ourselves wholly to that purpose and not be distracted by anything—not be a double-minded man who is “unstable in all his ways.” To have an undivided heart and to go after that with all our energy—everything, all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength—that’s the only definition of a Christian. And that’s what it’s going to take to be that people who are ready for the return of Jesus, and have made the way ready for Him.

In order to be that people, there is something that is absolutely essential: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, it is built in vain.”* These things will be done by the zeal of the Lord God Almighty. Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” *“Unless the Lord builds the house, it is built in vain.”* So there is something that God is going to accomplish in His people as He makes a name for Himself by taking a people that were not a people. Do we qualify? It’s all prophetically there in the Old Testament. You were nobody. You were the smallest of nations. You had nothing going for you. You didn’t have anything to brag about or boast about. You weren’t so smart; not many of you were wise or noble by human standards. That’s *not* what the Kingdom of God is all about—to somehow be so big and tough and strong and have our methodology so precise and well-tuned that we can accomplish God’s purpose by fleshly effort! We’re not going to build a tower of Babel and reach God. It is not going to happen, no matter how smart we think we are.

Here is the point: How are we going to accomplish that if we’re not the ones who are going to accomplish it?! We have a choice of whether or not to be in on that. This is one of the mysteries of God that I want to share with you. It is our inheritance in Christ to *experience* the Glory of God that we lost when we sinned and fell short of that Glory. We are

meant to *experience* an ever-increasing Glory (2Cor. 3:18). You won't be able to do that out of the flesh. *God* gives the increase. Men plant seeds; they water, but God gives the increase. You'll not be able to beat your way back into the Glory of God by some man-made way of doing it. Your zeal won't do it, your Bible knowledge won't do it, and your sincerity won't do it. There have been sincere people for generations, for centuries even! Are you any more sincere than any of them? I don't think so.

But something about the nature of God is that there is ever-increasing revelation. It's like being in a funnel, and you look up and all you see is this little bit. But then as time moves on, you can see from Genesis to Revelation. As you move up and the circumference of the funnel gets a little bigger, you can see more of the universe, more of God's precious truth—1 Corinthians 2 is a good example of how that is so and God said it is so!

As the apex of the ages, the fulfillment of the ages as it says in 1 Corinthians 10, comes upon us, we are moving higher and higher up into that funnel where we are seeing more and more of the Mind of God. We're building on those things that were revealed before us. God over and over again said, "As I said to Isaac..." "As I said to Jacob..." "As I said..." "As I said..." God does not mean for us to criticize the past, or anything that ever was. What He means for us to do is build on that. "As I said unto Isaac..." "Listen, guys. Think back. Grow. Build on what you have already received, but don't stop there. Do not let anything be your ceiling. Do not let your father or your mother be your ceiling. Do not let anyone ever be your ceiling. Go for all that I have for you, and don't stop short because of any peer pressure, because of anything under the sun. Do not stop short. Promise? It's not worth it to live in poverty for someone else's sake. It can't be!"

The Son of God— Expect His Life In Every Locale

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’

“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven’” (Matthew 16:16-19).

“... if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:16-20).

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

“...and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

We have seen that the Church is actually in Christ. He is ACTUALLY and TRULY in the Church. Jesus is God’s temple, God’s dwelling place. It is in Him that we find God. He serves the purpose of all that the Church is intended to mean. The Church is fully in Christ, and Christ fully in the True Church. But so far as the world is concerned, the Church is Christ distributed, though not divided. Not a bunch of Christs, but One Christ.

If you remember, Paul equated the subtle comparisons the Corinthians were making with each other as a dividing of “Christ” Himself. They were, if it were possible, tearing Christ Himself apart by the way they were treating one another.

The Vital Character of the Local Assembly

Please understand as you hear the previously cited verses, that this is the vital character of the local assembly. “Where two or three are gathered in my name” and all the like passages indicate a precious, though almost unknown truth: Jesus is present in a much more profound way when two or three are gathered together because He has committed Himself to His Body.

To gather “in His Name” does NOT mean that we sing lovely “praise and worship songs” to Jesus. It means that we are consecrated to Him in our life’s purpose and obedience. We are under His Holy Authority and accurately represent Him and His Spirit in what we love, and what we hate. We cannot be lukewarm, or love the world, or live in undealt-with sin or with those who do, and still “gather in His Name.” It is not Biblically possible. Do remember this, as you consider in the years to come whether or not “two or three” are TRULY “gathered in His Name.” Is “leaven” an undealt-with part “of the batch”? If so, then you did not meet “in HIS Name.” “Your meetings do more harm than good” in such a case, and we bring judgment on ourselves, according to the very Voice of Almighty God and His Chosen One, Jesus. This is very important. Most things that are today called “church” are most definitely NOT a Church, by GOD’S definition. They may be “teaching places” or social clubs with a Jesus logo on the sign, but they cannot be

legitimately called “Churches” if they are not gathered “in His Name” as the Bible defines it and has been capsulated moments ago. Please do not forget this point, because you may never hear it again. Certainly you will not hear it from those that have mobilized “attendees,” and have extracted monies from large numbers of people for their own ambitions and pocketbooks, or misguided man-orchestrated means of serving God by their organizations.

God’s Mind is upon the corporate, the many that are truly daily ONE with Him and with one another. Nothing else will fulfill His Heart’s Desire! “The body,” Paul says, “is not one member, but many.” While it is true that the Lord does live in each one of us individually, and that each of us can have a personal relationship with the Lord, the Lord has bound Himself up with His Church, His TRUE Church, when it comes to the matter of His Manifestation.

What I mean is this: Though you may be saved, though you may know the Lord, though you may do many good works, you are unable to manifest the True Full Life of the Lord. It is a corporate issue. The Lord is limited, and I mean severely limited, when He is only expressing Himself through an individual; because no individual is Jesus. *But, He is fully in the Church*, “the Pillar and Foundation of Truth.” “The Habitation of God, by the Spirit.” The Church, which “the gates of Hell cannot overcome.” “The FULLNESS of Him that fills everything in every way!” The True Church, which lives His Life, together, daily. A “CITY” set on a hill that can’t be hidden.

Now, keeping in mind what “in My Name” truly means, Jesus did not say, “Where there is ONE present in my Name, there I am.” Now He could have said that, but He did not. But what did He say? He said, “Where two or three are together in My Name, there I *AM* in the MIDST of them.” Notice what this passage deals with in the first place. It is a practical matter. According to God’s Word, out of Jesus’ mouth, there are certain people in the Church who must be disciplined. And when they are dealt with by the “Church,” in the Lord’s view, it is dealing with Himself. That is what He is saying. Notice it is not merely representatives acting on His behalf as it would be in the case of the individual, but it is HE HIMSELF, expressing Himself through a corporate unit. He is present. It is He who is acting. He is connected in an executive way. He said He would be, and He meant it to the fullest extent. That is so, for any True Church which is His Body, and

functioning together daily connected as “every supporting ligament.” It is NOT simply “figurative.”

Some Fatal Hindrances to God’s Purpose

(A) Individualism

I say that it has been a fatal mistake. It has been fatal to spiritual growth, fatal to spiritual fullness, to spiritual power, to spiritual light and to spiritual life.

There are a great many Christians who are occupied with the salvation of the individual. And well we should be, but the Lord saves the individual *with the Church in view*. He created the PLANET, “for the church.” It is important that we must settle this matter! In this age, from the ascension of Christ and the giving of the Spirit right on up to the end of the age, the Lord is working to secure for Himself a Body, not simply the salvation of individuals.

In most cases, initial salvation is as far as it goes, and it repeats itself in a very shallow, though evangelistic cycle. All that is accomplished is personal salvation; in the sense of forgiveness of sins and peace with God—those rudiments of the Gospel—and people stay in this condition for 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 years. When you meet them, you would think they had made no spiritual progress. Their growth has been stunted. And there is another odd characteristic besides having their growth stunted. They lack the spiritual senses or desire to apprehend more. They are quite content in this stunted condition. For the most part, when you share with them more of God’s full thought regarding His House, they cannot apprehend it. They do not understand it. There is an acute dullness to the revelation of God’s heart for His people. This is heartbreaking to the Father, and the cause of such shallowness and dryness and dullness is criminal in the courts of the Most High. It is NOT optional in God’s House to grow daily into the image and likeness of the Beloved Son.

(B) The Prevailing “Church System”

Another fatal thing is that which is represented by the present “church system.” This, by far, occupies the largest realm of “Christendom.” It is congregations of INDIVIDUALS who gather for preaching and services

and then go back to their homes. While there may be exceptions, this is by far the norm.

It is *NOT* a corporate expression of Christ! This is *NOT* the Body of Christ. This is not the Body locally expressed and functioning. It is something far less. And what has been the result?

The same result as in the first case...namely, very little spiritual growth. I am being very frank now, but I must bear my heart because of where the Lord wants to take us in this hour. And I must run the risk of stepping on some people's toes in order to get there.

We are everywhere finding people today in the present Church system who do not have a glimmer of light on the Lord's fuller purpose and do not know what we are talking about—and the bulk of them have no interest in anything else. They are content, with little real hunger for more.

This thing, this going to “church,” this going through rituals, this public worship line of things has usurped the place of the true local expression of the Body of Christ, and has set it aside.

Today thousands are in a state of spiritual infancy and immaturity and unenlightenment even after all these centuries. People born and brought up in it do not grow spiritually. I know there are some who do grow despite it, but I am speaking of the thing itself. It has become a fatal menace to the real purpose of God.

Now understand this, satan is not opposed to all of these services. Christian “meetings” of all sorts can go on for literal centuries with little or no opposition. There also seems to be little satanic opposition to the host of Gospel missions throughout the world. Thousands of missionaries traverse the earth with a message of salvation from sin, and face little opposition.

But satan is adverse to local families—local expressions of the Body of Christ. Just let some folks begin to take seriously this matter of the House of God, and watch the opposition flare up out of nowhere. Satan's effort and energy are spent in the purpose of breaking up and scattering corporate life, intimate daily Life together amongst all of God's People in a local assembly. He attempts—by slander, or unBelievers' hatred, or fear, or confusion by lies he authors—to bring an end to their practical functioning together.

The Purpose and Function of the Church

(A) The Meeting Place Between God and Man

The temple of old served this purpose. It was the meeting place for God and man. The Holy of Holies in the midst of the temple was the place that signified coming into the presence of the Lord. This was Holy ground. It was the place of meeting directly with God.

Christ was that temple in the fullest sense—and we know that God said that the true Church is in and a part of Christ in the fullest sense; “the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.” While this certainly doesn’t apply to the majority of the world system’s marketing and religious weekly expressions, when it is a daily-intertwined expression of His Life, He means this literally.

Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days.” He made it clear that He was not speaking of the old physical structure, but of Himself. Now listen to Paul’s words to the Ephesians:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a Holy temple in the Lord. (That, God insists, is His Life in His Church.) And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Now it simply follows that since Jesus is the temple of God, and we are also spoken of as that temple, and since we are an expression of the fullness of Him, that the Church is to be the place where men meet God. Not to merely hear truths about God, but to meet God Himself—because He is to be expressed through His Church.

I recently read a writing that questioned whether Jesus would be pleased if He were to visit our “services” today. While the article made some challenging remarks, it also revealed a disturbing view of things.

Is this our conception of things? You see, that suggestion implies that the Church is one thing and Christ is another. It also implies that it would be out of the ordinary for Him to “visit” us. (And we do not refer to an emotional high manufactured by pre-planned “worship” and “preaching.”) If He

did visit, in this way of thinking, it would still be a visit as a separate entity—“descending” to participate in and to ascertain how He liked “our” “service”.

Oh, no! That’s not God’s Church! God’s Church is very much Christ Himself, if it is truly, legitimately, observably “from the least to the greatest”...HIM. And where you find the Church, according to God, there you find Christ, and no disparities, no inconsistencies, no contradictions; it is the Lord. *The Church is a real, connected part of Christ, and when men encounter the Church, it is the Lord’s intention that they encounter Him.*

Now I am not saying that we ourselves, as individuals can bring men into direct contact with God. Nor am I trying to make the Body of Christ as an equal with God. A bride is an equal yoke, but not an equal; so also is Christ and the Church. “The two shall become one flesh,” Paul reminded us. While that phrase speaks secondarily of marriage, it speaks primarily of Christ and the Church. The Church should never be thought of in any terms that are less than these!

If the Lord is in His people, then when men meet His people, there is a sense in which they meet Him as well. But if He is not in us, we may talk about God until Doomsday with 100% accuracy, but men will not meet Him! When the Church is truly constituted, it is the ground upon which men meet God and God meets men, and that ground is Christ Himself.

There shall be a far greater impact of the Lord registered upon men by a company of Christ-indwelt men and women being together in the power of the Holy Spirit, than can be by ANY number of isolated Christian units.

(B) The Embodiment and Expression of God’s Thoughts

God’s spiritual House, as Peter said, should “show forth the excellencies of Him who has called us from darkness into light,” and as Paul said that “now through the Church God’s manifold wisdom should be made known” to both the seen and unseen worlds.

The Church is meant to be an expression of God’s thoughts and mind. We are again not referring to sermons and truths (though they may be present), but the unveiling, through an open Heaven, of God’s current

mind. We live by “...every Word that continually proceeds from the mouth of God,” “...and we have that Spirit.”

(C) The Sphere of Divine Government and Authority

When a crisis in the New Testament is at its peak, the final thing to do is “to tell it to the Church.” It is the Church who is to make the final call. Those that “will judge angels” are, because of God’s Plan to inhabit His True Expressions of Church, “the Pillar and Foundation of Truth.” Jesus has said that where there is a corporate expression of Himself that has bound a matter on earth, that matter will be bound in Heaven as well. If the Church looses a matter on earth, then that matter is loosed in Heaven as well. We have generally not believed this to be true (in spite of the fact that GOD has said it) because we have seldom SEEN churches that are truly Churches, by God’s definition. Those with much to lose have always claimed that Acts 2:42-47 is merely a cultural phenomenon rather than simple consecration of a People “called out” for the Lord, and living like it.

Since the Church is an expression of the Fullness of Christ, it cannot help but express some of His Divine Authority. Since there is Authority in Christ Himself, it must also reside in the Church, because the Church is not “about” Christ, but it is an expression of Him. The only way to conceive that the Church would have no authority would be to construe that Christ Himself had none, or that the Scriptures are in error. For the “Head” is Christ, and the “body” is also Christ, as “the two have become one flesh.”

I do want to say this to you from my heart, that it is necessary for you, dear friends, to be a part of, to be in the midst of, to have behind you a living, functioning company of the Lord’s people. I know the difference, and many of you know the difference—the difference it makes in depth and in strength. For many years, I was a minister, as we say, of different “churches,” congregations. But oh, I know the difference between that, and what has been obtained since. It is not a difference of the natural caliber of the people at all, but a difference in kind. The one was a part of a system largely organized and run by man for religious purposes; the other is something formed of the Spirit; and that is an immense difference.

Hold out for the true vision and do not settle for anything less. Call out to the Lord of the harvest that you might see His Kingdom expressed

on earth as it is in Heaven. As by the Lord's Holy Call in His teaching of the merchant of pearls, pay whatever cost is before you to attain it. You will reap the reward of His heart, for Eternity, "along with persecutions" and "with much tribulation."

TS, NNM

What Jesus Called Good News

Jesus Christ was a master communicator. He was the Living Word, the self-disclosure of the eternal, invisible Creator. Heb. 1:3 informs us that “the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” Jesus Himself said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

He did a superb job of revealing truth in language and word pictures that His hearers could understand. The response of the people was dramatic. “Never has a man spoken as this man does!” “He speaks with authority, not like the scribes.” “Where else could we go, You have the words of eternal life.” The crowds thronged around Him, eager to hear Him speak.

What was Jesus sent by the Father to communicate? The Gospels contain several summary statements that give us an overview of Christ’s message. We often state it as, “Believe and receive, you’re forgiven, you’re going to heaven, welcome to God’s family!” But after Jesus’ baptism and temptation in the desert, He began to explain the true beginning of discipleship: “From that time on Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Mat. 4:17). And after that, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming *the good news of the kingdom*, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (4:23, emphasis added).

His message did not change in three years of visible working life amongst Humanity.

But he said, “I must proclaim *the good news of the kingdom of God* to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43, emphasis added).

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming *the good news of the kingdom* and healing every disease and sickness (Matthew 9:35, emphasis added).

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, announcing *the good news of the kingdom of God*. (Lk. 8:1, emphasis added).

When Jesus prophesied that the same gospel would be declared until the end of the age, He removed any question that the gospel might lose its kingdom overtones. “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be asserted in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*” (Mat. 24:14, emphasis added).

Why am I emphasizing this point? I assure you it’s not some academic exercise. At stake is appreciating the full content of the gospel. If we don’t include the kingdom, repentance, and growth in kingdom living in the good news we declare today, we reduce and alter the message of Jesus and are guilty of devising a different gospel. The gospel is “the kingdom.” I didn’t say that, Jesus did! The good news is that the dominion of God can be reestablished over human hearts. A way has been made. There is a door of entry—none other than Jesus Himself!

Looking Through the Door

Jesus’ mission on earth was to provide access to the kingdom of God for all who would repent of their insurrection and revolt against the Creator. He did this by substituting Himself as the lightning rod for God’s righteous indignation and justice. Without question, God’s offer of reentry into the realm of His eternal kingdom is only available through the work of the cross.

Yet Jesus did not call the cross or His death and resurrection the good news. For Jesus, the kingdom was the good news. The magnificent work of the cross is the beginning. Atonement, reconciliation, redemption, justification, and propitiation are all essential ingredients of the gospel, but the theme of the good news is the rest, freedom, peace, and high investment value of living life under the leadership of the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

The message of the Christian gospel over the past fifty years has increasingly emphasized the access door to the kingdom instead of

what is behind the door. Jesus certainly did say, “I am the door.” But we’ve overemphasized the door imagery as though “getting saved” is all there is to it. Christian evangelists and missionaries have worked so hard at marketing the entrance that it has itself become the gospel. Now, getting through the door of opportunity produced by Calvary’s costly love is crucial and should never be minimized. But the “pearl of great price” is living in and inheriting the kingdom of God, not merely entering it. The focus of the ticket of salvation is the eternal party going on behind the gate inside the King’s palace.

What this overemphasis has produced is a generation of believers who think the issue is getting in and getting others in. Recruiting. Not training. Not much attention is paid to what they are getting into—a whole new way of life! Getting in on eternal life in heaven is vastly different from welcoming heaven’s reign here and now. What we are saved from is a big deal, but more important is what we are saved unto. Christ is our “door,” but He is also our life beyond the door. When the eternal kingdom is welcomed, appreciated, treasured, and enjoyed, salvation has accomplished its intended purpose. God’s human creatures have been restored to following their loving Leader.

What the Apostle Paul Called Good News

Those who insist on a gospel of grace minus the kingdom and repentance believe that they get their model from Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. They assume that the gospel of Jesus and the disciples went through a transition during the early days of the church; that as the gospel to the Jews moved to a worldwide audience, the ingredients changed from kingdom language to relational-reconciliation language. Without question, the end result is that the kingdom and repentance are forgotten, or else viewed by many evangelicals today as unnecessary in explaining the gospel.

This is a serious mistake. It is a misunderstanding of the key role of the kingdom and repentance in the pattern that Jesus gave us. And there are significant consequences. *The transformation process is severely weakened in those who accept salvation without understanding the significance of the kingdom component.* We now have a gospel that changes us only a little, or not at all....

Is this assertion about Paul true? Did he discontinue using the kingdom emphasis of Jesus? Now, there is no question that the apostle Paul championed the revelation of the grace of God that he had received. He certainly clarified and defined the gift basis of salvation. He was strong on the fact that good works, religious practice, and keeping the law are not ways to earn favor with God. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit made it clear that acceptance and inclusion in the kingdom is without question a gift of God received by faith.

The big question is, What *else* did Paul teach about salvation? The best summary is found in Acts 20:20-27, which is in the middle of his farewell address to the elders of the church in Ephesus. He knows he is likely to be imprisoned in Jerusalem, and doesn't expect to see this group of friends and fellow workers again. In wrapping up his assignment from God with them he summarizes what he has done there and elsewhere.

Paul's self-analysis contains three ways of saying the same thing.

- Verse 21: "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that *they must turn to God in repentance* and have faith in our Lord Jesus."
- Verse 24: "If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of *testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*"
- Verse 25: "Now I know that none of you among whom I *have gone about declaring the kingdom* will ever see me again."

I am convinced that if we could ask Paul if he proclaimed a gospel of grace, he would answer with an emphatic yes. If we asked him, "Did you declare a gospel of the kingdom?" he would answer, "Of course." If we asked him, "Did you teach a gospel of repentance?" he would answer, "Certainly." He would have no problem affirming all gospel ingredients because he saw them as three ways of describing the same message.

In another summary statement, Paul attempted to put his assignment from God into a nutshell for King Agrippa. In Acts 26:17-20, he describes his commission from Christ on the road to Damascus.

"I am sending you to them [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so *that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*"

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I *announced that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.*”

Once again the message of faith and forgiveness is set alongside the kingdom message of repentance in a way that makes it clear that Paul saw no distinction between the two.

At the end of his life, under guard in Rome, Paul was still proclaiming this combination. In Acts 28:23 and again in 28:30-31 the Scripture affirms that he was a kingdom teacher. “From morning till evening he explained and *declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus*” (Acts 28:23, emphasis added).

The significance of this is huge. The gospel of Jesus and the gospel of Paul were identical. Paul’s message contained a further clarification on the distinction between law and grace, or salvation by works and salvation by grace through faith. Yet, he never left the kingdom theme of Jesus.

What happens to the gospel if the key ingredients of the kingdom and repentance are eliminated? If salvation is presented as only a gift to be received, or an offer of forgiveness to be accepted, or a relationship to be reconciled, what is the result?

When the kingdom is dropped out of the gospel message, repentance ceases to make sense. Instead of being forced to deal with the issue of control and leadership (that is, my kingdom versus God’s kingdom), I am only asked to accept the work of Christ on my behalf. Repentance without the kingdom becomes an awkward idea and is usually dropped out of the mix. If included, it is defined as grief over sin and turning around or changing one’s mind. Believing, receiving, or accepting Jesus and His redemptive reconciling work on the cross is partial language. It is essential but incomplete.

If I want the benefit of salvation, it will cost me my personal sovereignty, my independent autonomy, my own agenda, my “throne.” Why? *Because that is exactly what I must be saved from in the first place!*

What We Accept In Place of the Original Good News

During the twentieth century, science and technology have affected our world and our lives in an accelerating process of change....One significant change in an attempt to serve God has come as the science of marketing has been applied to packaging the gospel presentation. Sales training called Personal Evangelism Classes has become standard procedure for any outreach-oriented church.... Millions of believers are now “trained witnesses.” Memorized proof texts, linear logic, convincing arguments, and closing techniques are all practiced and firmly in place. Most sincere Christians are equipped to make the offer of eternal life to their lost neighbors and friends.

On the surface, we appear to be effective. At least one-half—some researchers say more like 60 percent—of the American people have prayed a salvation prayer and made a decision to receive Christ. They, therefore, are considered to fit the general category of having been evangelized or “born again.” And here we must face a troubling and uncomfortable reality. A.W. Tozer, in the introduction of his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, tells it like it is:

“The loss of the concept of majesty has come just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several hundred years. But the alarming thing is that our gains are mostly external and our losses wholly internal; and since it is the quality of our religion that is affected by internal conditions, it may be that our supposed gains are but losses spread over a wider field.”

We have discovered, to our dismay, that the majority of these supposed converts are no different after they bought our gospel than they were before. In fact, many who show up in Bible-believing churches exhibit scant evidence of more than superficial subculture adaptation. They learn the evangelical jargon, become comfortable in the church society, listen to Christian radio, but in reality remain very much like their nonChristian neighbors in values, moral conduct, and lifestyle.

How can this be? *Where is the supernatural process of transformation?* Why are professing believers so often closed to the life-changing presence and power of the Holy Spirit? I ask you to consider with me the possibility that the application of marketing and sales expertise

to evangelism has actually changed the content of the good news. Tweaking and massaging the gospel for ease of mass consumption has gradually changed the content—and killed its original *power*.

The Effects of Marketing

The cardinal rule of salesmanship is to concentrate on the attractive features, the advantages, and the benefits of the product. The lion's share of good sales technique is “hyping” the value and the reasons why customers owe it to themselves to become proud owners or proud members. The intent of this portion of the persuasion process is to create a desire for the product.

What piece of information is held back until “the close”? The price! And then the cost is minimized and customers are encouraged to think they're getting a great deal at an extraordinarily low price.

When this approach is applied to the gospel of Jesus Christ, modifications to the biblical model are inevitable. For instance, the benefits are easy to promote.

“What's your felt need?” a presenter may ask. “You say your life is in turmoil and you're stressed out? Well, if you let Jesus come into your life, He'll give you peace and inner tranquility.” Then he or she might say, “Are you discouraged? Oh, you say you've really been down and blue? Let me assure you that when you open your heart to Christ, He'll give you the most fantastic joy imaginable!”

Then, of course, the “offer you simply can't refuse” comes into play. “It's free! It's a gift! There's nothing you can do to earn salvation. You can't pay for it even if you want to. Jesus already paid the price. He took the consequences of your sin upon the cross. All you have to do is receive the forgiveness and love of God and enter into the abundant life!” The presenter continues. “Now, why wouldn't you want to have eternal life? You do want to go to heaven when you die, don't you? Is there any reason why you couldn't receive God's offer of love and forgiveness right now? Let me explain the prayer.”

“...The problem lies in the substantial modifications that have been made to Jesus' message. The effect of using marketing and sales techniques in evangelism is that they change the message. And when the message is altered, what the message produces is also changed.

Salespeople do not make good evangelists if they depend on their craft. We must all depend on our Leader and His example for success. Our message must be His authentic kingdom gospel of grace in its entirety if we want to see its original life changing power.

You may be one of those who, without realizing it, received an incomplete gospel. You assumed that the doorkeepers who stood at the entrance and introduced you to Christ knew what they were doing and you complied. You believed, prayed a prayer of accepting or receiving Christ, asked for forgiveness, and invited Christ into your heart and life. You have waited, but so far you've experienced disappointment, frustration, inability to change, and finally boredom. You may actually have come to the point of despair, thinking that you are somehow an exception and that it just doesn't work for you.

If so, what's happened to you is most likely a consequence of a gospel that has been altered. This is not your fault. The version you were led to believe would accomplish your salvation simply did not have the essential component of humble surrender in repentance. Since the heart of our sin problem is our self-centered need to be in control, unless that is addressed in salvation, and the back of our resistance is broken through repentance, nothing really changes.

Grace, the supernatural forgiving love and transforming power of God, is released through the deliberate act of giving up the kingdom of self. Giving up is not a "work." It is a cessation of resistance. It is the losing wrestler surrendering to the winner. God repeatedly makes it clear that He resists the proud (those who are full of their own egoism), but gladly gives grace to the humble (Ps. 18:27; Jas. 4:6-10; 1Pet. 5:5-6). The faucet that turns on the pipeline of saving grace is the voluntary choice of humility. This is the heart of repentance. The event of salvation then immediately becomes the process of humble obedience. And enabling grace keeps on flowing.

If the conflict over control has not yet been resolved in God's favor in the core of your heart, now would be a good time to settle it.

...repentant faith. It is giving God permission to make your turf part of His dominion. It is welcoming His will. It is embracing His leadership and embarking on a life of followership.

That kind of prayer is the beginning of true worship. It's beautiful music to God's ears and a lovely fragrance to His nose. It contains the

essence of what He has been waiting to hear from each person born on this planet.

When His kingdom comes—what a difference! When salvation embraces the kingdom, a new government arrives. True, you will have to learn to live *under new management* in all areas. You are no longer an entrepreneurial independent. You have joined the corporate kingdom of the most high God. The ultimate issue of who is in control is the focus of all your choices from now on, day by day, for the rest of your life. He is your Leader. You are His follower.

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Ishmael's "Fading Glory"? or Isaac's "Ever-Increasing Glory"?! Part 1

1990

The Artisan's Hammer

The Scriptures on several occasions speak of our God, our Father, as a craftsman, or a potter. God Himself is actually dedicated to skillfully reshaping our lives into the image of His Beloved Son Jesus. I'd like to suggest to you some reasons for that "hammer" of the blacksmith. Did you know that the travail of barrenness, and the aloneness of the nighttime of our lives, is often an act of His love and grace? Barrenness and failure are not always a curse that we must endeavor to go around. We don't have to dull our senses by filling our minds and time with the possible "Hagars" of sports, television, computer junk time, "R&R," that good old inalienable right: the family vacation, sex-drugs-alcohol, man's version of christian (or other kinds of) "religion," shopping sprees, accumulation of material goods, or our jobs. Without additional comment, let me say that to run from the stigma and hurt of barrenness, or failure in our lives, into the arms of fleshly gratification or the security of systematization, will rob you of the very things that you've always really wanted. To turn to these substitutes for "life that is truly Life," rather than turning to a living Jesus in those difficult seasons, is to forfeit:

Victory Over Sin

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased

from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (1 Peter 4:1-3).

“Though He [Jesus] was a Son, yet [even] He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:8-9).

“...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’

“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:2-11).

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:28-29).

Fruitfulness In Christ, as a Priest of the Most High God

“Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18).

“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31-32).

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified [made useful]” (Hebrews 10:14).

“And Jesus said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’ So Jesus said to them, ‘You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized” (Mark 10:36-39).

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’ Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered...” (John 12:27-29).

True Worship and Fellowship With HIM

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:3-8).

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

“But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28-30).

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:1-5).

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him MY FATHER will honor.

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your

name! Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again' (John 12:24-28).

Can you hear the song of the blacksmith over the raging fire's roar, and the clang of the hammer on the anvil of your faith? There are no accidents in God's sight. You can be sure that the God who knows every sparrow and lily has not overlooked your condition. He loves you. He cares. That's just our God! Still, we must come to know that He is after something much bigger than just supplying us with perpetual comfort. The trials, the failures, and the heartaches are not random. They're not accidental. He's after our character, not just our rendition of "success for Jesus." In our personal lives, as well as the church, He does NOT see success the way that we do. As Oswald Chambers has said, "How successful was Jesus? All of His labors, all that cost Him His very life, could fit in a rowboat when he left." Everything is not always as it appears. Do you know that? Will you remember that truth as you face personal trials and failures and loneliness—and NOT grab the "Hagar" of men's vices or religious gimmicks to try to fill the void?

As you, in the church world, face the call of the "Great Commission"—the failures, by any honest, Biblical measurement, of the programs and gimmicks and man-made structures and things to "attend" of the past, and the thousands of other needs that are so prevalent—would you PLEASE not resort to turning to Egypt and Babylon—or Hollywood, Madison Avenue, Wall Street, or the Silicon Valley—for your answers? *Hagar can only have ONE kind of baby: ISHMAEL.* For those who are WILLING to be "naked" and vulnerable before their God, without answers and "how to's" (even those really "good" answers from the Tree of Knowledge), the Father has some awesome Plans. *Can we return to the Way of vulnerability and simplicity, the way of the Garden, and the Way of Jesus of Nazareth?* A Place where we don't have to prove anything or be anybody. We don't have to have all the answers. All we have is God. Minute-by-minute friendship with Him in the cool of the Garden, with the quiet whisper of His reassuring Voice as our direction for our today. Throw the "Day Timers" and appointment books in the commode; "Take no thought for the morrow;" "Do not say, 'We will do this or that.'" Return to the Garden-of-Eden joy of being "naked" and very dependent and vulnerable—"naked and UNASHAMED." Barrenness is nothing to be frightened of. Not with Father counting the very hairs on our heads. Turn to GOD, not synthetic expedients and props. Hagar is NOT the answer, as "logical" as it may seem to mate

with a “good idea” to accomplish the task, or a vice to dull the pain. For those who “love the Lord and are called according to His Purposes,” for those who will trust in HIM with all their hearts whatever the “results,” there is something very special going on (in ever-increasing measure!) as we approach the end of the age.

For it is written: *“Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband” (Galatians 4:27).*

Ishmael's "Fading Glory"? or Isaac's "Ever-Increasing Glory"?! Part 2

1990

"BURN-IN" for the ULTIMATE Final Product

To explain why the Father drives us to our knees in desperation or anguish or confusion at times, a brief "high-tech" illustration might be beneficial. Jesus lived in a world of farmers and fishermen. I'm an engineer. What can I say?! Be patient with me!

The computer manufacturing industry discovered, after carefully evaluating computer failures, that the vast majority of computer chips that fail do so within the first six months after the computer is put into operation. Generally, if a chip in a computer makes it through the first six months, it will last a long, long time. As computers became more and more a part of extremely critical systems in hospitals, aircraft, national defense and other high-risk operations, it was apparent that "no" failures of the computer chips could be allowed. Yet, realistically, some failures, due to manufacturing defects, vendors' quality control and uncontrollable circumstances, were just going to happen. So what could the chip and computer manufacturers do?

One of the premiere computer makers, in recognizing that virtually all of the chip failures were going to happen in the first six months (if they were going to happen at all), had an idea. They decided that they would ship only computers that had been "run" for six months in order to prove their reliability. This would guarantee that there would be statistically very, very few failures due to manufacturer's defects after shipment. But it also would create another dilemma. How does

a company run every computer that they manufacture for six months before they ship them? Practically speaking. And still make money. Stay with me now.

“Aging” the chips for six months before the product is delivered to the customer is achieved, not in buildings crowded with hunchbacked employees pecking away at computer keyboards for six months at a time, but in one weekend in special ovens. The process is known as “burn-in.” If the chips typically operate at five volts, then they might be “exercised” at about seven and one half volts, under an electric field, in 85 degrees Centigrade. In this way, with all of the additional load, the chips “age” six months in two days—and are proven reliable, or faulty, before the true tests (in space shuttles or cardiac care units).

That’s man’s wisdom. Can you see why, just possibly, in Almighty God’s Wisdom He might press you to the limits of your endurance? El Shaddai, Jehovah, Adonai, the Creator of the Galaxies has a mighty Task to do in the next few years, it would seem. And He’s pledged to use men, walking in the same Fellowship, clothed with the same Power as the Man Jesus to do it.

For a Holy Cause like that...could you step outside your own plans and priorities and desires and feelings and pain in order to offer your life up for His Purposes? Will you allow Him to refine you and take you through a “burn-in” process? Without you jumping to grab a “Hagar” of worldly “logic” at the first sign of “a cup” or “an hour” or an offense to your ambition and pride?

Hear me! I’m not into being “stupid”—but I jealously defend the essentiality of “leaning not on our own understanding.” “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” is not a verse about “evangelism” alone. It is the whole battle of man’s existence. It is Nimrod’s Tower of Babel. It is Saul’s “sacrifice.” It is Moses’ staff shattered on that Rock. It’s Moses’ appetite for the humanistic counsel of his father-in-law, a pagan priest! It is Korah and Miriam’s rebellions. It is Uzzah’s error, the Israelites’ golden calf, Nadab and Abihu’s “strange fire,” Adam’s Fall, and Abraham’s baby boy Ishmael. It’s so natural, so “logical”—and so unfruitful and dangerous. And it certainly doesn’t have to be that we would fall for this “oldest trick in the book” when there’s a job to be done, a problem to be solved, or hurts to be healed. We can, if we know God’s nature and have a selfless heart, stand fearlessly “naked and unashamed.” Vulnerable to criticism and scoffing, and in

full knowledge of our inadequacy for the task of living...yet unwavering in our trust of God and refusal to take matters into our own hands.

Our Father and the “Captain of the Lord’s Host” are looking for seasoned, wise, valiant warriors for the mission that our generation has been assigned. He can “make a man out of you” and bring you to the Field of Battle much wiser and stronger than your physical years would predict—if you’ll yield to the training, the “burn-in.” *Will you allow God to take you to a place that you’ve studied all about, but may never have really been to—the Cross? Your cross?*

The rebuke of Jesus: “Get behind me, satan!” was to one who wanted to “short-circuit” the walk of the Cross. The objectionable nature of the “injustice” of our pain (in the rare cases when we don’t truly deserve the pain) will always test our Faith, as will our pride or ambition when we’re on the verge of some perceived form of failure in our church. It will place us in a situation where we will turn to our own resources, or the resourcefulness of the world system (Egypt) with its marketing ploys, manipulation, and cheap psychology, in order to energize this baby! Or, if we’re not quite so talented, we may be tempted to quit altogether. Or, if we’re really “on,” we’ll do the thing that is a “stumbling stone” to the religious, and “foolishness” to the intellectual and seasoned businessmen—we’ll “wait on the Lord” (hand and foot!) and more fully trust in Jesus Christ and His Father than we ever have in our lives, no matter what the challenge or difficulty! Hallelujah, what a Savior! How else will you ever know Him, or yourself? How else will He ever transform you into the Image of the Son, in Glory? A BIG, BIG job like that is going to take some heavy-duty burn-in, wouldn’t you say!? Don’t fight God and answer your own prayers, and rob yourself of His supernatural Work, OK?

Certainly this book is about the Church, yet it is inescapable that if we, as individuals, turn to “Egyptian” means to “help God out,” we can do no differently as a church. As disciples of His, Christians, our objectives for our life and family are to be the same as those of the church, not in separate categories. It is impossible to function in communion with Him in so-called “religious” areas if our lives can’t readily be described (by any unbiased observer) as “in Him we live and move and have our being.” You knew that.

Are you willing to suffer injury and affliction and humiliation, rather than run ahead of God? Can you “wait on the Lord,” even an entire

lifetime if need be, before you will “bail yourself out” and answer your own prayer? Will you trust your Father, the Almighty Equipper, to “finish the work” in you? Are you willing for your church or life to be a “failure” rather than turn to “Egyptian” marketing schemes, impassioned motivational appeals to carnal appetites of pride or power or position in the church (“You too can be or have _____!”), peer pressure, flattery, guilt techniques, and slick church “growth” methodology?

Most of the last 2000 years of religious history is the chronicle of tens of thousands of individuals, families and churches naïvely birthing a battalion of Ishmaels, to the devastation of the “Peace that passes understanding,” “life abundant,” and the Eternal Purposes of God.

Nobody, including Jesus or the unbelieving world, much likes what we’ve had to show for our “beginning in the Spirit and now trying to attain our goals by mere human effort.” You don’t...I know you don’t. You can’t like seeing the lukewarmness around you that dares to wear Jesus’ wonderful Name (meanwhile claiming “grace” to cover the shame of their worldliness and attitudes and speech). So unlike the life and teaching of our Jesus. You can’t possibly enjoy the politics and greed and deceit that fills the “church” world. You can’t be at peace with the likelihood that the person you break bread next to in the gathering of the church could easily be a practicing homosexual. Or possibly the “member” next to you “lifting unholy hands in prayer” is a selfish, hateful parent or spouse, or a materialistic unbeliever—and you are virtually helpless in your environment to even know, let alone help.

A man on TBN recently quoted a national survey that says that even the leaders of the majority of “churches” see the futility of it all, in its current form. Their broken dreams and unfulfilled lives say it all, unfortunately. Seventy percent of the full-time leaders of churches in this country would quit, if they felt as if they could make a living doing something else. That can’t be right. Can we please rethink all of this!!!!

Revelation vs. Accommodation

Generations Growing From Glory to Glory

Thursday Morning, October 19, 2000

(A living room conversation about some aspects of the History of Christendom, virtually guaranteed to excoriate and exasperate the status quo. Best read and understood by deciding in advance to enjoy the seed rather than to battle details. Try to stay relaxed! ☺ And ignore the style, grammar, small particulars, and all of that?)

It was just a conversation, with some folks from different states who also desire God's Heart for His People in their locales.)

Throughout history we can see that God has used individuals to restore understanding to His People on various subjects and different aspects of His Fullest Intention. As Josiah's people found the scrolls buried in the temple, and earnestly desired to put into practice what had been there all along, every generation has unburied yet another portion of the scrolls. God has slowly restored Truths that were lost for centuries as we were able to bear it, and even then, not without major opposition at times. And generally, the people He has used, who have been given a major puzzle piece, even a corner piece, often have had a very skewed understanding or no understanding of other aspects of God's Truth. Usually they are still carrying much of the baggage ("empty tradition") that has been handed down to them by their forefathers. Still, they have done us a great service. God has used them to bring us some very needed lights. Even through very flawed individuals, like us.

For instance, Charles Finney had some baggage. Now, you could say, because of his baggage, that Finney was a pretender and everything he did was a sham and everything he said was ridiculous because there

were so many flaws. I wouldn't do that if I were you! On the other hand, you could say Jesus is opening the scrolls and we need to build on what Finney did, not discount it. Neither should you consider God's work through Finney as the final word on every subject. "Well, if Finney brought 500,000 people to Christ and he didn't know anything about the Church (and he DIDN'T!), then there must not be anything about the Church we need to know. Obviously Finney was touched by God, and he didn't deal with anything about the local Body of Believers, and his practice in his day totally contradicted many Scriptures about what a Church is to be. So, we can ignore anything that he didn't teach about the Church or practice, because God was working through him, so he must have been right. That proves the Scriptures about what the local assembly should be as an organic, daily expression of the Life of Christ aren't really important."

Well, Charles Grandison Finney may be totally right in several areas and yet be totally wrong in others. That's not necessarily the product of his lack of relationship with God, or a flawed life. Nor is it the final word. It is simply a building stone, a building block, in the restoration process—and we need to embrace it as such. If he lived today and built the way he did THEN (just speaking at meetings with clergy and laity and no Kingdom of Priests or daily Life, and leaven throughout the batch because of this lack of relationship), it would be a heinous crime before God, and totally inexcusable. But, the scroll had not been unfurled just yet. Many things had not yet been Seen. Azusa Street wasn't on the map yet, and Matthew 28:18 did not yet make sense.

The same is true with Watchman Nee. Oh, what awesome insights into so many things! What a tremendous contribution Nee made to the People of God! And yet, he wrote a book that, how shall I say... absolutely stinks. ☹ It's totally wrong. It needs to be in the trash can. It's worse than your average watered-down, fleshly denominational stuff. He knew almost nothing about some subjects. In his day, the context of corporate church life was, in part, that of having a holy person descend once a week to teach a group of people with pens and papers and ascend back into the clouds (back up the stairs of the "house"). Then the wise sage would bring another message from God next week, same time, same place. In that context, that's the best book on that subject he could write. Had he lived in a later generation where the scroll had been opened a little further, he would have been ashamed of that book. He would have burned it, but he would have kept 90% of his other

writings because those really were from God and were things that Jesus was unrolling in the scroll.

Unfortunately, in his era, the “leader” was “da-man” and did not allow his life to be as accountable and accessible in daily life as any other brother. “Call no man teacher, leader, father...for you are ALL BROTHERS!” At the time, it may have been all that there was available. What would be totally defiant of God and disobedient today may have been somewhat okay then. It’s not now. The “talking head” that is assigned (or exalted as the big cheese “speaker” or “author”) for this conference or seminar or “service” is *not* God’s way, and will never again be something that God overlooks. In times past, He winked at our ignorance. It is man’s way, not God’s.

This whole subject of “only Jesus is worthy to loose its seal and open the scroll” first started occurring to me back when we were just leaving New England, years ago now. I wrote something called “Mission Possible.” Basically, it was written because the elders at the denomination I was leaving were saying, “We understand that you’re going to another city and that you have to do this for God. But could you at least capture some of what it is you are Seeing and what you’re doing and write it down for us so we can benefit from it, too?”

So I wrote it down in three parts. It occurred to me about a year after moving, after the scroll had been unrolled a little further in our lives, that Part 1 was revelation about what a Christian is and what leadership is (very different from the lukewarm modern day, unbiblical culturally acceptable definitions and practices today). Part 2 was revelation about what the Church is to be (also very different from the lukewarm modern day, unbiblical culturally-acceptable definitions and practices today). But, Part 3 was accommodation, NOT REVELATION. It was like, I know these things are true and I know what things cannot be true any longer, since they are disobedient to Jesus’ Teaching, but I don’t know what things OUGHT to look like, practically speaking. Maybe it looks like this. Maybe it looks like that. And I just made up some stuff for Part 3 that seemed, at the time, to somehow fit with the two things that were revelation. “Obviously the Bible shows us clearly that Believers met in homes, not in buildings. SO, we’ll just split up into more and more ‘house churches’ when we get to a certain size. After all, that would be logical and expedient, and facilitate good group dynamics and participation and relationships. And ‘evangelism’ will

happen this way. And Korah leadership style, instead of Balaam's or Cain's. And Ted Mack Amateur Hour open meeting style, with time limits on speaking, and and and... And how about a 'ladies' day' meeting where only ladies can hear God and speak? And an every third Saturday prayer breakfast? And the homeless will be fed this way. Yadda, yadda, yadda." I'm exaggerating my own foolishness, but truthfully, it was utter nonsense.

No matter how well intentioned, it was wrong. Good ideas, but NOT Revelation, nor Apostolically grounded. It was accommodation. I was accommodating my craving of Spiritual Truth and Christ's Life in the Body of Christ (a good thing) with the Ishmaelic "ordinary logical way" (Gal. 4) "wisdom from the earth—wisdom from below" (Jas. 3). Later it was obvious that numerous Scriptures make it clear that no such "splitting up" house churches when they "got to a certain size" ever happened, even when there were as many as 15,000 with common leadership in Jerusalem. The "accommodation" I had to come up with—because of insufficient Revelation—was worthless. Accommodating my own "common sense" when I was coming up empty handed as to HOW to go about God's business was, and is always, such a temptation. Saul did that with "the sacrifice"—and lost everything. Israel did that by wanting to "accommodate" their common sense and search for practical administrative answers by wanting a king. And God's People were REJECTING GOD HIMSELF by their great ideas of how to administrate—according to God Himself. This is serious stuff!

This is the same thing that happened to Abraham. He hears from God that he is going to be the father of many nations. Well, he has to have babies to do that. He heard from God. Then his wife has an idea and he figures, well, this seems to fit; perhaps this is right. And he produces Ishmael. He had true revelation, but then he used accommodation in order to accomplish the revelation because he didn't know how to make it happen. It didn't make sense to him, so he just grabbed the best idea he could. He did it out of a clear conscience. This was not sin on his part, in the strictest sense. But it was accommodation and not revelation.

So basically, the history has been the scroll unrolling and then individuals gaining revelation of some truth, like discipleship. The scroll unrolled a little bit, and Simpson, Baxter, Mumford, Tomzak,

Mahaney, Derrick Prince and all these guys embrace this truth. Ultimately, you have Kip McKean and Chuck Lucas building an entire theology around it. These guys said, “This is awesome, this is true. Obey it. Teach them to obey everything I command, not teach them everything I taught them. This isn’t a bible class. Teach them to obey everything I commanded. That’s discipleship. That’s training. That’s personal. ‘You will obey this,’ not, ‘You should know this.’ That’s a whole different way to have Church. That’s right. It’s always been in the Scriptures. Here are 38,000 other Scriptures that say the same thing. Why didn’t we see this before?” That was revelation. Accommodation was, “I know. I am more spiritual than you are, so I’ll make you obey. And you’re more spiritual than they are, so you make them obey.” They started creating pyramid schemes with people assigned to different people and systems to accomplish what had been revealed. It was an accommodation of a revelation and it ended up having man’s greasy fingerprints all over it. It was legalistic garbage and it got all twisted up.

We need to go back and extract the revelation without accommodating the flesh with some sort of a program or convenient well-administrated calendar-ized slick way to make it work. We need to glean the truths these folks discovered and embrace them, while begging God to help us remove the Ishmaelic inventions that were added out of good intentions.

Question: We clearly see now that God intends that we function as a priesthood of believers, encouraging one another daily, each one using whatever gift he has to build up the rest of the Body in love, no longer walking in the foolishness of a clergy/laity system. But this truth has only been clear recently. Was Watchman Nee or Charles Finney in sin when he violated these truths that have always been a part of God’s heart? Weren’t these truths just as true then as they are now? Was it that Nee couldn’t see because he didn’t want to see because of something he was holding on to, or was it that Jesus prevented him from seeing it because of His own Sovereign timing? “This is a truth now that I want you to recognize, now.” Then ten years later, “Here’s another truth.”

Jesus said, “No man comes to the Father unless the Spirit draws him.” So for the light bulb to pop on, the Spirit must do His work. All truth already exists, but the Spirit brings it into remembrance. The Spirit will teach you everything I taught you. So basically, it comes back to the fact that we are incapable of approaching spiritual things as if it’s

calculus. If I study harder, I'll learn it. If I learn it, I'll know it. If I know it, I'll apply it. Now I have it. But, the spiritual realm isn't like that.

Jesus said clearly, "No man can come to the Father unless I draw him." "I praise You, Father, because you've hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children." In other words, it is possible to have spiritual truth right in front of you and not be capable of seeing it. Now the reason why God did that is Kingdom Principle #1: "...lest any man boast" (Eph. 2:9). In other words, man is incapable, regardless of his effort, his sincerity, his devotion to God, his intellect, his study habits, to really comprehend truth—revelation, the light bulb popping on—apart from the Spirit of God making him aware. You can read it, study it, be sure you're right, and yet be totally wrong. "You've hidden these, Father, from those who are proud, and revealed them to little children." To the scripture experts of His day, Jesus said, "You are in error because you don't know the scriptures." They ate, slept and breathed the Scriptures, but they were blind to what those scriptures had the potential to reveal. They "could not hear the voice of the prophets that were read every Sabbath." The Truths of God, as well studied as they may be, "are foolishness to the unSpiritual. They CANNOT understand." A lifetime of study could not produce a spiritual revelation. You can't study hard enough to get there in the spiritual realm. In the academic realm, if you have enough intellect, you can do it. Some denominations approach Christianity as an intellectual endeavor. You study diligently; you use the scientific method to establish truth; the eldership, church organization, the order of worship, the five steps of salvation. You approach the whole thing with the scientific method. If/then statements. Just analyze it all and then you have truth. You do truth. Extract it from the Bible and you go from there.

However, the Scriptures are very clear. Jesus' teaching is very clear that the only way we can truly understand truth and see things is by God Himself. Truths can be hidden from us or revealed to us by God alone. This takes *intellect and mental gymnastics* as the means of understanding right out of the equation. The Words of God are "SEED" according to Jesus, Peter, and Paul. They are meant to be planted, not dissected. Dissection KILLS the life of the seed, it does not give you power over it. You do need to study intently and "search intently with the greatest of care," as it says in 1 Peter 1:10-11 *to find out what the Spirit of God is pointing towards*. So, you have this supernatural aspect

that requires humility and prayer and fasting, and God's kindness—lest any many boast. No man could, then, ever boast. "I know these things because I'm smarter, I study harder, I pray more. I have achieved greater knowledge because of..." God will not permit that. So there's a supernatural issue of being able to see or not see, to understand or not understand. That's where the scrolls are unfurled.

You can see, beginning in Genesis 2, bits and pieces of the puzzle being disclosed to humanity. Adam prophesies about the serpent striking the heel, the head being crushed, and a man shall leave his father and mother. Well, what are a father and mother? Adam didn't have one. From Genesis 3, if you keep tracing these prophetic things through the Old Testament, we are given glimpses of the scroll, but it is still somewhat of a mystery. And we need, as Daniel identified Him, the "Revealer of Mysteries." In Isaiah, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* A **child** is given to us. Yet, He is Everlasting Father. How can that be? The Son is given to us. Yet He is also the Everlasting Father. He's a baby, and yet He is a Father at the same time. That was a new revelation. They didn't understand what that meant. The scrolls opened a crack further and provided another clue in the Mystery of the Ages. It had been many centuries earlier that they received the revelation in Genesis 3. They'd been functioning with that for a long time. Now they have the ability to discover that the Messiah is a Father and a Baby. "Wow, what is this? This is odd. We had no idea."

This has been the process. The scroll is slowly unrolled as the Father has seen fit to give us Grace. And with the invention of the printing press and all of the tools we have for understanding languages, the pace of discovery has really accelerated, at least intellectually. But the potential for revelation that exists now has increased dramatically in this century.

I can remember something that happened to me a few months after I became a Christian. I was sitting in a pew someplace, and I read in Ephesians 3:10 where it says, "His intent was that **now, through the church**, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." I remember excitedly yellow highlighting that verse and leaning over to someone and saying, "Can you believe this? This is incredible!" And she said, "What does it mean?" And I said, "I don't know."

And I didn't know what it meant then. But at the time, it struck me as, "This is incredible! This is unbelievable!! This is huge!!! This is going to change everything!!!!" But I didn't know exactly why or how or anything like that. It was just a light bulb that popped on, by God's Grace. He unrolled the scroll just a little bit, showed me a peek and then rolled it back up again. Just to tantalize me. It was probably four or five years before I really understood what that meant. But it worked on me. Rarely did a day go by, in those four or five years where I didn't ask God what that meant—where I didn't roll around the carpet a little bit trying to find the meaning of it. What will this look like? I could see the Scripture. I could analyze the Greek (which I did many times, but I still didn't get it). What does it mean? What does it look like? What am I supposed to do about it? It was just a riddle to me. It was killing me.

But that's how God does it. He just opens things up. Somebody, some place, at some time, saw, "Teach them to obey everything I command you." And that person said, "We have not been doing this. We have read this Scripture for 1900 years and we have always read it, 'Teach them everything I taught you.' That's what our eyes saw when we read this Scripture. But that's not what it ever said. It said, 'Teach them to obey everything I command,' not, 'Teach what I taught.' Why didn't we see this before?" And then here's where the trouble begins. "Okay now, what should we do about it?" Where's Hagar? "I know. We'll assign partners and now we'll be obeying this for the first time ever. Hallelujah. Everybody will be obeying this. We'll set up a whole system so that everybody will have a partner assigned to them as soon as they become a member. And now everybody will be obeying the Scripture. We finally did it. Okay. On to the next one!" Ishmael is born. Born out of good intentions.

Notice that we had read that Scripture forever, and yet no one ever really saw what it said. At some point, in recent history, this was a major revelation (although many still haven't seen it)! It was a supernatural occurrence. And we need to recognize it as such and not get our grubby hands all over it and turn it into a program. Let's never forget what Watchman Nee or Charles Finney or whoever else brought us. Let's graft those revelations into our lives. Let's not reject their puzzle pieces because of the Ishmaelic abuses. Let's forget the Ishmael part, but let's not forget God's part of this thing. "*Test everything. Hold on to the good*" (1Thes. 5:21).

If Watchman Nee lived in this generation, he would probably be teaching all of the same things that he taught. But he would be doing it as a brother amongst brothers instead of a holy man who arrives to deliver his speech and then goes back to his room to meditate. He would just be a brother amongst brothers. At the time, he was probably living up to all of the things he could see. He did the best he could. What he did for us needs to be embraced. We need to build on it. If you come across something in his teaching that is off the mark, you can simply recognize that, “Well, the scroll wasn’t unrolled far enough.” A.W. Tozer said some amazing things. Charles Spurgeon, amazing things. But they did it in the middle of a ridiculously unbiblical denominational system. They threw firebombs into the denominational system, but then passed the basket and took their money as one of their own. As hypocritical as this would be today, they did the best they could (as far as we know) with what they had been given in their day.

One of the classic illustrations is John Wesley’s father. The guy was a good man, but some members of his own congregation burned down his house. The incident almost killed young John. He had to be thrown from a window to save his life. They burned down his house with his family in it because they didn’t like his preaching. This was on a Saturday. On Sunday, he went up to his pulpit and “preached” his “sermon” as if nothing had ever happened. This was viewed as the most incredible act of spiritual maturity you could ever imagine in a thousand lifetimes. What a man of God! Well, you and I would read about that today and say, “He was foolish and disobedient.” He had a bunch of murderous people sitting in front of him, “leaven in the batch,” which was FORBIDDEN by God, and he was hypocritically giving a “sermon” to them instead of asking them out into the yard and asking, “Why did you burn my house down?” A mature believer will not take revenge or go burn their houses down, but will offer it up to God. However, it is not “maturity,” but hypocrisy and disobedience, to not talk to them about it, and then bring two or three, and then bring a matter of unrepented sin to the Church. JESUS said DO IT. That’s not maturity to go on as if nothing happened. God said, “Admonish one another daily.” God said, “If any man sins, go to him and him alone. If he won’t hear you, bring one or two witnesses.” He was disobeying Jesus. But at the time it was considered spiritually mature because he could “preach a sermon”—with his suit still smoldering—as if nothing happened.

(At that time there was little to no revelation of the nature of the Church. Check the reading material from the era. NO ONE understood what the Church was supposed to be, as a Body of Believers “joined and knit together,” “contending as one man for the Faith,” “bearing one another’s burdens,” “confessing sins one to another,” Life-giving, gates-of-hell-busting, organic, daily entity. No one understood the Church in that era. It was something you joined and attended. We know that is absurd, but they did not.)

The “members” probably weren’t even Christians if they attempted to kill a family while they were sleeping. Odds are, they were probably not saved. Yet he was “preaching” a “sermon” to people as if they were saved, when they probably weren’t. His whole paradigm of Church was in error, but in his context, he was probably doing the best he could. It would be total hypocrisy to do that now. We know better now. We have greater revelation.

So, we go back and find all these awesome things different men discovered. And yet they also had major blind spots, things they just couldn’t see. But what those guys contributed is still unbelievable and they are, no doubt, innocent for the vast majority of the things that they didn’t know. They did their best. We’ve all encountered similar situations in our own growth. We look back now and say, “I can’t BELIEVE I used to think that, or do that!” One for me was my experience with that verse in Ephesians 3:10. I read it, I knew it was important, and yet I didn’t understand what it meant. The light bulb popped on, but I didn’t have the slightest idea how to go forward with it. So you read the same thing again and again, and one day on the 40,000th time, you say, “The ‘Great Commission’ doesn’t say to go teach people what Jesus taught. It doesn’t say that.” Or (in the parable of the wheat and tares, in Matthew 13), “Wow, *the field is the world, not the church*. That means there are weeds in the **world**, not in the church! 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and all of the other verses make sense after all!” My eyes always saw it one way. Now God has turned the Light bulb on and I can see what it really says now. We’ve all experienced that.

My perspective would be to recognize that those men probably did the best they could with what they could see, and just extract as much as we can from them and continue building on it. If you happen to read one book out of twenty that Nee wrote that turns out to be

junk, just pitch it. It may well be an accommodation rather than a revelation. Every generation has had revelation and accommodation. Just grab the revelation, learn to correct the accommodation in your own life and help those around you. Don't condemn those men of the past for what they didn't know. Just continue building on the revelation that they received and passed on to us. "Test everything. Hold on to the good." Don't stop building. Be faithful with what we've inherited, and don't turn to Hagar for help in getting "practical" with what revelation we do receive. Wait on God for the Real thing!

Ishmael's "Fading Glory"? or Isaac's "Ever-Increasing Glory"?! Part 3

1990

Ishmael Was a Dead Ringer for Isaac

"Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now" (Galatians 4:28-29).

"It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son'" (Romans 9:6-9).

You've encountered someone in school or on the street that you were sure that you knew, but knew that you didn't. They just had a very familiar look, though possibly totally unfamiliar features as well. And then it hit you: "You must be Bruce's sister! Yepper, no doubt about it!" Family resemblance is one of the fun things of life. But not always so fun.

Ishmael and Isaac had the same dad, Abraham. Ishmael's mom was an Egyptian, while Isaac's mom was God's Promise and God's Spirit. Along with Sarah, of course. But they both had the same father, and no doubt there was a distinct "family resemblance."

The spiritual disaster of Ishmael and Isaac looking like identical twins at times has been a curse to Followers of Jesus throughout church history. And, as our brother Paul, the apostle, said regarding Ishmael and Isaac, “It is the same now.”

The Application

The deceptive factor in satan’s work (to immobilize and paralyze the church these last two thousand years) has always been for his work to appear very, very similar to God’s Work. In the Garden of Eden satan appealed to a twisted manipulation of God’s Word. “Did God really say...?” In the wilderness, satan again tried to manipulate Jesus by an appealing mutation of what was originally the Father’s Word. Satan has a long history of using an uncanny resemblance (to the naked eye) in his work, the counterfeit to God’s true Work.

“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The apostle Paul was sent out by the church in Antioch to do the Work of advancing the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom. His first serious opponent after he went out was a man, “a sorcerer,” on the island of Cyprus. The man was slick. Everyone was fully persuaded that Elymas was the answer. Sergius Paulus, “an intelligent man,” and the Roman Proconsul (no slouch), was fully taken in by this sophisticated emissary of the wicked one. Paul had no patience for one who intentionally interfered with the Purposes of God and His Gospel, and responded accordingly.

“When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.’ Immediately mist and

darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (Acts 13:6-12).

Mark it down as no accident that when the Kingdom of God thrust forward into new territory, the kingdom of darkness had already attempted to set up its phony counterfeit—governed by Elymas Bar-Jesus—El (meaning God)-ymas, Bar-Jesus (meaning offspring of Jesus).

When a cold front and a warm front collide, a violent storm results. “The Kingdom of God is entered forcefully—and the violent take it by force.” A storm like the one on Cyprus will likely occur if we’re on the right track. And, to our dismay, the black kingdom that is there to oppose us seldom looks as dangerous and wicked to those around it as it truly is. Satan is a master of disguises, and generally his mask will be one of religion and good works (or entertainment). The “father of lies,” as Jesus called him, will wear the cloak, not of hell and death, but of light and “love” and Bible “scholarship.” El Bar-Jesus. The enemy often masquerades as God and God’s Work.

Peter, the rock, couldn’t distinguish between Truth and satan’s counterfeit early in his walk with Christ. In Matthew 16, Jesus praised Peter for having correctly discerned an inaudible Voice from the Father in Heaven. What a glorious breakthrough! Then, moments later, Peter “did God a favor” out of his carnal sympathies and appetites and Jesus soundly rebuked Peter as heeding and quoting the very voice of satan, prince of hell. Satan does a pretty good imitation for those that are not well trained.

Just as God had Twelve Tribes with twelve Princes—His “church” of that era, Ishmael’s offspring were known as the “Twelve Princes of Ishmael.” A counterfeit kingdom.

Just as Jesus is the “Balm of Gilead,” so also the Ishmaelites come bearing the soothing balm.

Though, no doubt, some would want a different kind of Christianity, Jesus is the only one who gets to make the rules. And He said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ (christian counterfeits, claiming Rom. 10:10) shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in

Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Mat. 7:21-23). Why so many falsely thinking they are ready to meet Jesus on great terms, under the impression that they, too, are washed in His Blood? Because this Ishmael and Isaac deal even involves the nature of Salvation itself! Paul said more than once that Salvation was for those with “the Faith of Abraham”—those are “Abraham’s descendants!” Obeying God and trusting Him, even with a barren womb, is at the very core of what it means to be a CHRISTIAN! “Without Faith it is impossible to please God...” (Heb. 11:6).

There are many attractive counterfeits to true Christianity. There are many clones for the Church that JESUS is building. Very often, more often than we’d want to admit, men are building their own thing, using Hagar to have babies and multiply, and adopting Jesus as their logo or trademark. Thus Paul, the apostle, was to say, “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2Cor. 11:14-15).

The Moral of the Story

The moral of the story? Everything that looks like a “good work” by “good folks” is not necessarily what it appears to be. “He’s a good man and preached good sermons.” “They have a good heart.” “What’s wrong with a ‘prayer meeting’ every Wednesday night? You got something against prayer?” “What’s the matter with a bible study for all the singles every Friday night? Don’t you study the Bible?” Does it make a difference how we perceive these things? Is it really harmless to commend everything that is done “in Jesus Name”—as long as someone might get helped by it? It’s not harmless at all, though I hate (truly) to say it. In the end, the son of Abraham’s good intentions to do something for God in a way that wasn’t God’s...in the end “the child born in the logical way will persecute the child born of the Spirit. It is the same now” (Gal. 4:29).

It surprises folks to discover that neither Jesus (the “master teacher”) nor the apostles ever had prayer meetings or bible studies some certain night, for a certain amount of time, and then refreshments. “Devoted to the apostle’s teaching” and “prayer” is really entirely different than “having bible studies” or “house church meetings” on

some pre-programmed night at a certain time and place for a certain amount of time.

Haven't you been in "bible studies" where many of the people there had little or no relationship with the Son of God (and their lives and families and priorities reflected something far different than Jesus)—yet they had quite a lot to "say" during the hour? This is a very serious matter. "A little leaven leavens the WHOLE batch." This catastrophe is virtually impossible to remedy when we are using men's gimmicks and programs and traditions and human logic and a religion of convenience to serve God. Ishmael does look much like Isaac, but there is a supernaturally powerful and wonderful difference if we only have the courage to find it.

It's not that some don't benefit from these creative ways to do God's Work. Of course they do. But you need to remember a couple of extremely important principles. First of all, programs and preset long-term agendas are misleading to those who are not following Jesus in a way that glorifies the Father. In fact, a person could even remain totally unsaved and unconvicted about his condition for forty years of attending religious events. He or she might even remain totally unaware that they are in grave danger of eternal devastation, while in the midst of God's people for their entire lives! We should never do anything that would allow this tragic possibility. And we don't have to.

Imagine with me that we have created a format or method based on world principles ("If we have food or entertainment, or a celebrity, more people will come!"), psychological group dynamics ("Thirty people maximum, then start a new group" and "Try this manipulative technique: _____—it's a proven icebreaker!") and expedients ("If we always do it at the same time and place, then we can be sure to fit it into our busy schedules and visitors will know where to find us!") One obvious, extremely well-documented, universal pitfall is that the event can be viewed as an "end in itself" by anyone who shows up "regularly." In other words, one could "attend" some such "bible study" or "worship service" or "prayer meeting," view themselves as "members," *and not have a single real, exposing relationship with God or man.* Yet they feel entirely "a part of things." Why, again, this terrible deception for them and others? Because they are "there" each week faithfully and "participate." They're not at ease and comfortable in their lives because they know God or are walking in Truth and

righteousness, but because they are involved in religion! We shouldn't do anything "for God" that allows, by its very nature, a way to feel justified while not truly in Christ.

A second, but very related Principle that highlights the error of the man-made expedients to do God's will (the stuff that can be put indefinitely on the calendar) is summed up in the Spirit's Words, "A little leaven leavens the whole batch" (Gal. 5:9). If we really believe that this Scripture is more true and immutable and non-negotiable than the Law of Gravity, we should consider the practical and deadly ramifications of this Truth. "A little leaven leavens the whole batch" means that if someone, anyone, can remain in our midst unchecked in hidden sin or unregeneracy indefinitely (because of lack of relationship and scheduled "hiding places" of events on the calendar), then every single one of us, as well as every good thing that we do and God does in our midst, is hindered, diminished, or destroyed by disease.

At one point, I was spending a couple of weeks with some Believers in a southern city. I was, along with those who had traveled with me, invited to a church-sponsored bible study one evening. One man, the host that evening, was especially vocal and certain of himself as a teacher. Sixty minutes later the session was over and everyone drifted off. I was driving home and realized that my jacket was still in the corner of the room at the home where the event had taken place. We drove back to the house, the front door was ajar, and I gently knocked and leaned into the living room where I had left my jacket. (Very low) and behold, the man who had hosted the "bible study" and had taken the status of teacher throughout the evening was, not on his face praying for those who had just left his home, but sprawled out on the couch watching a cess-opera, vile television program. Not ten minutes after the last people had left the "bible study"! This man has, happily, since repented in tears publicly (because someone was willing to break religious protocol and address sin in his life and home) for not being who he had let everyone believe that he was. Yet it is still an amazing testimony of the reason why "bible studies" were never in Jesus' or the apostles' agenda. There are far worse and more obvious stories available to illustrate the point, but most lovers of Truth have already experienced their own heartbreaking illustrations.

Jesus never held a Tuesday night, 7 PM, verse-by-verse study of Leviticus. Why? Because "bible studies" don't get the job done, no

matter how true to the Scriptures they may be. It just is NOT the way that Jesus taught us to impart His Word. It sounds like a super idea (“What could be wrong with that?!”)—because the family resemblance between Ishmael and Isaac is so profound. There are bible studies all over every city in the Western Hemisphere every day—and yet the cities are untouched by the gospel, and the divorce rate and teen pregnancy rate amongst the “attendees” are statistically no different than that of the world! The “gates of Hell” ARE prevailing—because we are not letting Jesus build His Church!

What’s the point?! How about some practical, modern day examples of what are usually Ishmael (attempting to use man-devised, world system techniques to have babies)? “bible studies” and “worship services” or “christian concerts” or “parachurch” organizations (“Joe Schmoe Ministries”), church growth techniques, and “cell group” stuff. Some of these events headline and showcase mere men in brochures, advertisements, or posters. Some of these things are expedients, designed (if the truth be known) to accommodate our worldly lifestyles and priorities, or to accommodate certain “leaders’” desire for continued control and financial security. Some of this is birthed because the church isn’t who she is supposed to be and people with genuine gifts don’t want to invest in the church that Jesus was willing to die for, at the cost of their personal “ministry.” Some of these things are simply methods, drawn from the well of good intentions and man’s wisdom, to get a baby for God when the womb seems barren and things aren’t working.

All of the events, programs, and “ministries” sound so right. Nevertheless, none of these normal, unquestioned, aforementioned practices are anything like what Jesus and the apostles taught or experienced, *per se*! At least these are not God’s Way, expressed as they are today. The fruit is a dead giveaway. Literally. (Actually, they aren’t usually a “giveaway,” they’re often “peddled for profit.”) The priesthood of Believers is crushed, and mere men are exalted to positions that men should never be tempted by (on the stage, in the lights, on the marquis, on the bulletin and letterhead and pyramid organizational chart). Meanwhile, satan continues to steal our children, blind our relationships, and wear us out with programs, committees, good deeds, and short-lived church fads.

As God so often works (while in relationship rather than form), a brother sitting three feet away from me as I typed this page asked a question about something that he was reading in 2 Samuel, chapter 6. “If God was upset about the Ark being carried in an oxcart (the method being wrong—Num. 4:15; 1Chron. 15:2), then why didn’t He stop it at that point, instead of waiting and killing Uzzah later on for doing the ‘good deed’ of trying to keep the Ark from falling out of the oxcart?!” The answer is important to all of us as we consider this topic of whether or not “methods” mean anything to God, one way or another. Is it not “the heart” and the motive that He is after, rather than the “method”?

This illustrates so well what I am trying so very hard to put words on, without confusing or frustrating anyone unnecessarily. God didn’t kill Uzzah because the “method” was wrong, but because he was irreverent! (2Sam. 6:6-7). The man-made, high-tech “method” simply set Uzzah up to fall into a trap that would never have been there otherwise! Can you see it? The programs, gimmicks, hierarchies, and scheduled events aren’t the enemies, per se. They are born of a desire to do God’s Work (the Promise to Abraham), but utilize man’s wisdom (Hagar) to have a “baby” for God. In so doing, they simply set us up for a fall that will eventually come. Don’t forget, it took Ishmael many years to show his colors. The baby that is born of man’s desire to do a work for God using his own ingenuity and skills and intellect and talents and experiences will ultimately, eventually, bring chaos, division, and pain—and people like Uzzah will die unnecessarily.

Our Supernatural Inheritance

There is another way of looking at the cost of doing things for God, with men’s wisdom, rather than calling out to the God of the barren womb and obeying minute by minute. According to the Scriptures, “the child born in the logical way” will never have the super-natural inheritance that God intended. The simple saints of the first century experienced walking in the ways and power and fellowship with the Father that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, experienced. Most today have no idea whatsoever what this means. But you and the body of Believers that you are a part of can experience the supernatural blessings and Life of God, just as some other mere men just like us did in Acts, chapters 2-4 and onward. Really! How?

For starters, seriously consider this essential, Eternal Truth: “The LIFE becomes the Light of men” (Jn. 1:4). “The Word became flesh, and dwelt for awhile AMONG us” (Jn. 1:14). God’s Way to relate to one another is not in a “service” or during an “event” or classroom, but as we “rise up, sit down, and walk along the way.” “Mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands.” The way Jesus lived with us! “Making disciples,” as Jesus commanded, is apprenticeship; it’s relationship, not classroom knowledge impartation (that we are so fond of in our generation) or events. Hey, it’s risky to not have the props of structures, hierarchies, five-year plans, committees, pre-planned speeches and worship, and “small groups.”

But God is the God Who loves a vulnerable People, with an admittedly barren womb. Their whole trust is not in themselves or the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but rather fully in the God of the barren womb, a truly awesome God.

Satan has counterfeited the real stuff—the organic Life of a People living every minute of every day for Jesus and each other (rather than religious events and independent, self-centered lifestyles). I just have to belabor the point to make certain it’s not forgotten! “Bible studies” and “worship services” and these other things sound like they ought to be good things, don’t they? But, then again, Ishmael and Isaac have the same dad, and look a bunch alike.

“So what could be wrong with having a preacher or a pastor or a priest or Elders? Don’t those words show up in the New Testament?” Please don’t confuse the Ishmael of hired hands and official Sunday speech presenters and administrators with the Isaac of organic “gifts” (not offices) of Ephesians 4:11, and elders of 1Timothy 3! They have nothing in common, in their origins or their daily functioning amidst the Body of Christ.

Now don’t go off and get cynical and skeptical about everything that crosses your path. On the other hand, don’t think for one minute that everything that looks spiritual and “fruitful” is automatically from God. It ain’t necessarily so. The remarkable similitude of fraudulent church stuff will easily fool those who are not leaning fully on God and obeying Him in their lives, as well as those with ulterior motives of pleasing men, or financial security, or any number of other placebos. A man once said, “The fact that preachers and writers spread and write God’s Word is no proof that they are God’s men. The devil quoted

Scripture. It is possible to word a prayer without praying. It is possible to know the words of Scripture and be able to quote them without being scriptural. We are undergoing a poverty of the Spirit that leaves our religion an empty shell. Our concern (in most of the church world) is for the shadow and not the substance. Oh, Lord, make our religion real! Make it Life itself!”

Ishmael is a serious contender for the throne of your life and the invisible leadership of your church. His charming good looks and persuasive speech will often fool you into mistaking him for Isaac, unless you care to know the difference and demand to see the Fruit in your lifetime of “on earth as it is in Heaven”—not just words or smoke. If you really do care, then God Himself, if you’ll really risk everything for Him, will stand by you to give you the discernment and courage and compassion you need to change your life, your church, and the world around you. Jesus Himself, in the Power of His immutable Word, said “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mk. 10:29-30).

Do you have any idea what that means?! Can you grasp what it would mean to truly have hundreds of true fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and children? Does that sound like Acts 2:42-47 or what?! What an awesome church Jesus described. And it can be that when it is made up of people who want something more than events to attend and a “worship service high”—folks who have given up their entire lives to see Jesus’ Return for a spotless, blemishless, beautiful Bride!

“Put the slave woman and her child out of the House, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance” (Gal. 4:30). God ONLY saves His best “Wine” for those who call out to Him with barren wombs—turning away from manmade props or test-tube babies, and turning unwaveringly to Him.

Not Hidden Under a Bushel Basket... a City Set On a Hill

Thursday Night, September 9, 1999

...Whose Builder and Maker Is GOD

A letter excerpt..... Shouldn't we accept life around us as it is, because "there are no perfect churches"? Just "bloom where you're planted." It's all about you and your personal relationship with God anyway. YOUR church—is you and God, and doing the best you can with whatever comes up around you. Not your local church or congregation. That's unrealistic. Now, there are other individuals "out there" who love God, hidden in other religious facilities on Sunday morning. The "true" church is just the invisible collection of the folks that really care and aren't living hypocritical compromising lives like many are. You won't ever find a congregation of people who "from the least to the greatest ALL know Him." That's, as I said, unrealistic. The real church is just invisible scattered individuals here and there that make up the true church. Lower your expectations or you'll burn yourself out, and you're just being judgmental and a malcontent anyway! Love one another. Right?

Some DO say these things! Even "famous teachers and preachers and pastors and evangelists" have been heard to say such things! Some will resort to the above way of teaching because they have never *experienced* what true Church can be. Many of the leaders have started out with Vision and have become disillusioned through pain and failure. Now they are trying to hold something together for various reasons—some sincere, some personal. They're covering their tracks to explain their current state of leaven and "10% committed." This type of "teaching" is often to quiet those who desire the REAL DEAL—"Admonish one another daily, so that NONE are hard and deceived," "...bearing one another's burdens, and SO fulfill the Law of Christ," "Confess your sins

and pray for one another, THAT you may be healed,” “one heart,” “one mind,” “contending as one man for the faith...”

Obviously, if we find ourselves *for now* in a situation filled with contradictions, we certainly *do* need to keep our eyes on Jesus and find great Comfort and satisfaction in Him—without being bitter or caustic or weird. Sometimes we have to “make do.” But that is not God’s overall intent for a “Bride that has made herself ready.” That compromised stuff can never satisfy our hearts, nor can we be forever enslaved by the religious machinery to a life watching ourselves and our children and our neighbors be ruined by accepted sin that is only “preached” about. “A little leaven leavens the WHOLE batch.” God did NOT intend for us to be “one loaf” with such. He Himself said that, in such a case, “Your meetings do more harm than good, no matter HOW good ‘the worship time’ is! Your disconnectedness and lack of discernment of what the Body of Christ truly should be...brings God’s discipline. That’s why some of you are sick and some are dying!” It *matters* to God that we truly live out the Life of His Son together, rather than just teach about it and sing about it!

We’ve GOT to keep the Vision where God wants it, no matter what anyone’s (bad) experiences are. As Luther might have said, “Show me Teaching in the Scriptures that we should be happy with mediocrity, lukewarmness, and leaven in His Church, and that the gates of hell should be able to prevail daily in the lives of those in the church...and THEN I’ll recant. Until then, *kill* me if you must. I *will not* accept a lower Vision for His local assembly than what the Scriptures teach we should live for and be willing to die for!” Without *His vision*, the people cast off restraint. They’ll settle for the television, the VCR, the DVD player, the World Wide Web, “family outings,” “family vacations,” and more and more work and worldliness...if they can’t SEE it. “Repent... for the *Kingdom* is at hand.” Why? “Because there is something to truly *live* for now! Not just the King, but the *Kingdom*, too!” “The splendor of Holiness” is only truly appealing in the midst of the genuine pillar and foundation of Truth, the Household of God, Bethel—the stairway to Heaven.

This isn’t meant to be some imaginary, unseen, invisible, theoretical thing. There is no Scripture to support that God intended the local assembly to be anything *other* than “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament” and none saying to another, “I have no need of

you until the next theoretical meeting and singing time.” From DAY 1, it was totally about *Life together in Him*. Three thousand Jews who didn’t know each other much, with various language and cultural barriers, financial problems, and no New Testament to read about it and rationalize it all away, were “*all together*” as one People, every day, and “NO ONE counted their possessions as their own.” From Day 1, it was about a Life together in Him that could not and must not be hypothetical and “invisible”—but rather impossible to “hide under a bushel basket.” Even the pagans will “praise Him on that day” because of those who were once “not a People” but “now *are* a People.” The *world* will *see* it. “THIS is how all men will know you’re Mine...” “The manifold wisdom of God is made known to the principalities and powers (who aren’t impressed by anything theoretical, but only that which is as real and tangible and visible as JESUS was in time and physical space) through the CHURCH, now.” Fifteen years of seeing it lived out visibly with somewhere between 200-300 people, and growing in other countries like wildfire, makes a pretty strong case, too, for me.

Green Beret Brotherhood

Friday Afternoon, December 28, 2001

Often we are asked in various cities and countries about the Quality of Life that Father desires for His People: “A HUNDRED mothers, brothers, sisters...”—INTIMATE DAILY RELATIONSHIPS, centered in Christ Jesus.

One question that arises frequently is, “So, how do you live out that intimacy and vulnerability together, year after year, in Truth? How can it be that sixteen years plus can be explored and enjoyed Together—without splits or factions, with zillions of people, young and old? How is that possible? We’ve only heard of denominational expressions and ‘house churches’ either falling apart—or using compromise, lukewarmness, disconnectedness, programs, meetings, buildings, showmanship, hierarchy, or personality as the glue to hold themselves together. How can it be that ‘joined and knit together by every supporting ligament’—‘contending as One Man for the Faith’—‘from the least to the greatest’ (no periphery) can happen? Clearly the Scriptures Teach that this can and must happen...*but how?!*”

Essentials

There are CLEARLY Essentials in God’s Mind relating to this, but good intentions, desperate desire, and knowledge...will not accomplish much of anything by themselves. One can know all the words, and desire it all deeply for Jesus’ sake (though some want it for themselves, rather than for Him)—and still be a thousand light-years from *Reality*. Believe it or not, there are people even writing books about “how to have church” who are not living in it, and submitting to it, themselves. They are traveling to “speak” of these wondrous things, creating “web sites” and newsletters, often self-aggrandizing. Truth be told, follow most of any of them home, and follow them around, and most times you’ll find there is little to nothing to show for it all in their own lives. The Quality

of Life in a Daily Priesthood (Acts 2:42-47; 1Cor.12; Heb. 3:12-14...) does not exist in the place where most of the “experts” live, or any of the places where they have lived. Obviously, INFORMATION is very different from IMPARTATION.

So, as the questions seem to go (and go and go): “*How can we see this daily, priestly quality of life where we are?!*”

First, there is the matter of *Sovereign Choice*. GOD decides where a Lampstand will be. (And, even in the mighty Ephesus, the Christ of God can *remove* a Lampstand that has been. Christians located in a place do NOT equal a “Lampstand”—a Church.) WE cannot conjure such a thing as a Lampstand—a place where Jesus circulates and enriches and enrobes and dwells in Purity and Life and Wisdom.

Even if not part of a true local Church, of course we can be as “saved” and washed in His Blood as anyone in all of history—His free gift to all who abandon themselves into loyalty and trust in Him. We can always love Him. We can still obey Him. We can LISTEN. And, in lieu of a Lampstand where we live, our job is to be Faithful with our “Bulldozer Assignment”—clearing the Ground, Preparing the Way. We are “voices crying in the wilderness” when we are in this position. We will find ourselves aggressively working to clear the stumps and the rocks, and sow the Seeds of His Glorious Life, on earth as it is in Heaven. We will *make the time* in the evenings and on the weekends to visit places and people—shaking, beseeching, imploring, rattling cages, shaking boats, praying valiantly, loving emphatically. And then, as *we* are prepared in this way, and *perhaps* the place where we live is prepared for Him, He Sends to “every town and village where He is about to go.” HE “determines the exact times and places where men should live.” If we are “seeking first the *Kingdom*” (rather than our li'l ol' jobs, our preferences about climate, nation, housing, biological relatives and the like), we will be able to HEAR Him better and know where those “exact times and places” may be. *Hearing* Him is directly related to being *abandoned* to His Voice, in utter and radical obedience (Rom. 12:1-2; Jn. 7,8,15).

And, what does it mean to “seek first the Kingdom”? The Kingdom, as you know, consists of a King...and some dumbs. ☺ The Kingdom is about *people*, not just the King. “Seek first the *Kingdom*”—not just the King. “Seek first” the Expression and Life and Benefit and Subjects of the King. If His People are *listening* to the Shepherd’s Voice, He’ll

direct our steps into His ultimate plan for publicly humiliating and defeating the enemy. That's WHY we're still on this planet. "God's Intent, NOW through the CHURCH, is to make known His many-faceted and powerful Wisdom, even to the principalities and powers" and to impart His Life as He "builds His Church that the gates of Hell cannot withstand."

Second, the Tools for the Task of Building are invested by the Owner and Builder into the Work Site—GIFTS. Please refer to Book 10—The Plumb Line for more writings on this subject. No group of Believers will long avoid the necessity of this Issue either.

Third, how do we build into our lives together with intimacy, vulnerability, humility, self-sacrifice, truth, and passionate love for Jesus—and for those who are His? How does Father mesh our lives together—with such diverse backgrounds and "educations" and "occupations" and "religious backgrounds" as we all have had? Assuming the first two Essentials above are true, even STILL—*how do our lives then come together in the deepest of ways?* As we've been asked this question around the world, it has often been answered this way:

There was an occasion not long ago when some Green Beret "special forces" men were asked to join a mission. They were asked to assist in freeing a country from a ruthless government. A 30-year-old West Point graduate, a captain in the Green Beret, was asked how he and those who had come with him to this foreign land could possibly be trusted. How could they work together with those who were of such a different background? He answered this way: "We needed to develop the bonds of brotherhood. We did that by being shot at together, by being together when things were being blown up around us."

Risk TOGETHER in the Trenches

I would submit that there is NO WAY, even WITH the first and second points in place, that any Body of Believers (or individuals) will ever experience what LIFE is truly about—"the Bonds of Brotherhood" in daily Life—unless they are being *shot at together*. If we are not DOING the Work together—risking job or reputation or promotion, or home or sleep or safety, or comfort, or the affection of pagan (once-born) biological relatives, or our "retirement income," or even our LIVES for the sake of Jesus and His "ever-increasing Government,"

then we're dying, not Living. If we're not risking in our workplaces together, risking in our neighborhoods together, visiting area religious folks perhaps (to extend God's Life and Love and Truths to those who deserve a chance to consider them), risking with biological family members who are lukewarm or worse, risking our health and physical possessions TOGETHER for other Believers and unBelievers in cities and countries...unless we are risking in the trenches TOGETHER, we CANNOT have intimacy with one another, truly. Our religious stuff will only be like plastering on facial makeup to cover up the unattractiveness of reality.

We *must* also risk with *one another*—in “wrestling to present one another COMPLETE in Christ,” laboring for one another “in the pains of childbirth until Christ is fully formed” in all. This is a MANDATE from Father. “See to it, brothers, that NONE of you has a sinful unbelieving heart,” and “remove the leaven from the batch—or the whole batch will be leavened.” Perhaps this Calling (of loving our brothers and sisters into greatness) is as costly as any other Command He has given us. Paul spoke of it as such. And, as our brother Paul, we passionately look towards our “first Love”—and then we live to express that love to one another, and to others. And this we do at any cost, any price.

If we are not “*being shot at together*”—we will never know the exceedingly rich and living Hope and Promise and Life that He means to entrust to us: “A **HUNDRED mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, possessions.**” If we're not LIVING together, risking together, then we are dying! Let's all have some fun and get shot at together. ☺ The third point is as Essential as the first two. If we would experience “life that is truly Life” and experience the full meaning of being “baptized by one Spirit into one Body” (described in detail in the interconnected Life together in 1Corinthians 12, and by Jesus as “a hundred mothers, brothers, and sisters,” and by Luke in Acts 2:42-47), it is important that we are RISKING together...DOING the work together...GETTING SHOT AT TOGETHER. And as the Master has said, “signs follow” when we're risking for the Assignment of Participating in His Quest—to make His enemies His footstool.

Exactly the Opposite

Saturday Morning, December 29, 2001

Good morning, Saints (depending on which side of the world you're on, of course! ☺)

Someone has just asked, "I'm a part of a 'house church' situation, but certainly our situation is not much nearer God's Heart than when we sat in pews on an assigned day and hour (rather than tomorrow's sofa). It's clear to me, and to others, that we traded in one system for another—and still are not experiencing 'a hundred mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, and possessions' as Jesus Promised and Called us to. Beyond question, it is due to 'leaven in the batch' that we have been unwilling to deal with, as well as at least the last two points that were made in 'the Green Beret Brotherhood' that was sent yesterday. With God's Help, we WILL go there, and do what it takes to bring pleasure to Jesus. But MY question is THIS! Is there any 'short' answer to what it is like to have 'a hundred mothers, brothers, sisters'—instead of just some 'good ol' boys' to shoot the breeze with about sports, or externals like that? What would it 'feel' like? I can't even picture it!"

The answer..... You asked for a "short" answer, so let me just say it this way:

Picture yourself as a 9-year-old child, happy in your home life. And then something tragic happened. All in one moment, in a terrible auto accident, your mother and father and brother and sisters...all were killed. Can you project yourself into that situation? What would you feel like? Can you imagine the immense darkness that would descend upon you, as a 9-year-old in that situation? And then, unthinkably, it got yet worse. That same day, your grandmother died of a heart attack, and your grandfather went into the hospital and was comatose. Imagine the anguish, the aloneness, the confusion of all that would happen inside of you in those dark moments, stretching to days and months. Imagine the horrors of all that you would feel inside if

all of that happened. Imagine the change of life for you—how every morning would be different, awakening to the emptiness and stillness of nothing. Put yourself in the place of that 9-year-old. Picture it, feel it. Project yourself into that lonely, lost feeling.

What is “a hundred mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, possessions”—the true Church Jesus is Building—*REALLY LIKE*, you ask?

It is the *exact opposite* of that horrible experience we just pictured together!! All of the pain, aloneness, anguish, and confusion—*flipped over into their exact opposites*, stretching to days and months and years and decades!!!!!! Consider it—take those terrible experiences and hideous feelings, and ponder the depth of love and life and fullness in the exact opposite experience. THAT is His Intention for His “City set on a Hill”!

Not that there will never be moments of difficulty and challenge and heartache—of course. It is Jesus’ Life and Work we are Participating in—and, of course, He paid a price—as will we. However, the *PEACE* and *STRENGTH* and *CLARITY* and *LIFE* and *LOVE* and *HOPE* and *CAMARADERIE* in the “trenches”—“from the least to the greatest” (not just a clique or “bestest buddy” counterfeit)—is the staggering and joyous and immensely powerful Inheritance, according to Jesus, of those who will “lose their life” for the Master and His People. To never again worry that you will be talked about behind your back. To never again worry that you must suffer alone. To never again be dependent solely upon your own abilities to “pay the bills,” or “raise or educate the children properly.” To never again be totally dependent upon your own abilities to find enough time or energy to clean the house or be qualified for a job or... To never again be totally dependent upon your own abilities to know how to pray, or to have the strength and understanding, alone, to solve problems of sin and temptation, or to bear fruit in others’ lives. To never again be dependent solely upon your own abilities—*because we were DESIGNED to be Together in a Synergy of Life where your Gifts are mine, and mine are yours*. We’re not competing—we are the SAME! We were CREATED to be TOGETHER. Not a bowl of potatoes, but a bowl of mashed potatoes!

“His Body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way”
(Eph. 1:22-23).

We are “*being built TOGETHER to become a dwelling place in which God lives by His Spirit*” (Eph. 2:22).

Consider the worst imaginable pain of lost relationship in a world that you can comprehend... And then know that His Life—in HIM and in HIS BODY—is the exact opposite, multiplied by infinity! As the Angel said to our brothers, “GO! Tell the people the FULL MESSAGE of this NEW LIFE!”

“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this provision was given me: to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the practical working out of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His Intent was that now, through the church, the rich and many-faceted wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. This is according to His eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence....

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:8-21).

A Perspective on 100 Fathers, Mothers, Sons, Daughters, Lands, Possessions, ETERNITY in Our Hearts! 😊

Saturday Afternoon, April 20, 2002

Blow the Trumpet in Zion!! Very Coooooo!!!!!!

And He said to them, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive a hundred times as much (houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—with persecutions) at this time and in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30; Mark 10:29-30 NKJV, NIV, etc.).

I just wanted to share a new twist for me on this subject, because I’ve always thought of that Scripture as something I would receive from God, as He promised, but what about the side of it that means that I ought to be thoughtfully, responsibly parenting a hundred children???? Just a thought... Clearly it is our Union with Jesus that makes something from nothing and Life from death, but if we all have a hundred _____, shouldn’t we also be thinking of giving as _____ a hundred-fold?? Shouldn’t it NOT be a few parenting a hundred, but rather all, as Able

and Led, caring as parents or siblings or neighbors for a hundred?? Not only that I will receive, but also that I contribute to the fulfillment of that scripture merely by being sensitive to care as a mother or brother or neighbor far and wide beyond my own four walls?? Looking to *give* as a father, not simply to have a hundred fathers. If I have a hundred fathers, by the Goodness of God alone, am I also willing, as God leads and enables, to be a father to a hundred? I'm speaking of sensitivity and willingness and responsibility, not of gifting or authority. This is simply a matter of care and open eyes and ready hearts, expectantly looking to take care of others outside of the natural and expected requirements of nature. It was Good for me to think of it as not merely a receiving thing, but also a giving one, as the thought dawned on me...and I KNOW I needed it to open my eyes.

-Elise

MORE Perspective on 100 Fathers, Mothers, Sons, Daughters, Lands, Possessions, ETERNITY in Our Hearts! 😊

Saturday Afternoon, April 20, 2002

“Children should have adult relationship(s) and visit the peer relationships...not the other way around.”

I was just thinking about that and how I viewed that thought when I first heard it. I viewed that in a way that said, “I have to make sure my children have primarily adult relationships and not peer relationships.” However, TODAY when I reread that, it created a question in me that I am finding quite *inspiring*. The question was this: Do I carry myself in such a way that is making this possible and true *in the lives of the children around me*? Do I just “visit” the children? Or do I walk and live in such a way with them to make the above statement true? *“Children primarily have adult relationship(s) and they visit the peer relationships...not the other way around.”* I certainly can’t expect it to be left up to the children, especially the little ones! And I certainly know that it is not an issue of “time” and “numbers” (make sure that the children spend more time in minutes

with adults than they do children, or make sure that they have more adult friends than peer friends).

Anyway, thinking through all that just really encouraged me to not “visit” the children, but to really be there for them. It was just a wonderful reminder to walk with them in such a way that it could be said... *“Children primarily have adult relationship(s) and they visit the peer relationships...not the other way around.”*

Litmus Test of Reality

Monday Night, March 26, 2001

Regardless of your biological earth-age, whether you are 10 years old, or 45 years old, or 105 years old...this is a trustworthy saying worth full acceptance:

“You’re just not LIVING if you can go to bed at night, and there is NO chance at all that you’ll frequently find some part of Mr. Potato Head’s anatomy, or a Tonka truck under your covers or in your pillow!” ☺

What would you *expect* it to be like if you *really* have 100 children??!! And you *should* have, according to Jesus!!! ☺

“Let the little children come to me!!!!” (Matthew 19:14).

“And He said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive a hundred times as much (houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—with persecutions) at this time and in the age to come, eternal life’” (Luke 18:29-30; Mark 10:30 NKJV, NIV, etc.).

Oasis

Tuesday Night, June 24, 1997

God provides an oasis for His betrothed, His beloved. Oh, yes! His Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Wonderful Counselor! What a nightmarish life to not have constant and true Companionship in the Person of the Spirit of Christ Jesus! WHAT A GIFT! And yet, did He even stop there, as He seeks to bring us real and constant hope and life and truth and love? NO, there's still MORE! "I will build my CHURCH—and against THAT, the gates of Hell itself will crumble—in your life, and in the lives of those you love!" Just as the Father sent the Son—the Word became visible, touchable FLESH...there is, again, Treasure in EARTHEN vessels: the very BODY OF CHRIST... There is an Oasis in His Church!

"This is what the kingdom of God is like: A man scatters seed on the ground night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up. The seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head" (Mark 4).

When you are inside of God's Holy City, there is an awesome thing that happens. God's Holy City is one that is functioning as it should out of relationship and not attendance. It is a City defined by commitment to one another on a daily basis. It is not defined by *where* you show up or *what you believe* or *who you know*. It is defined, instead, by how much your heart is open to receive and to give on a daily basis. In a City like this, the awesome thing is that the seed grows into full maturity and fruitfulness, *and we don't even know how!* That really strikes me as awesome. Because if I plant myself in that environment, and if I stay in that environment, then I don't even have to "figure out" how to grow. The Word of God is going to come at me in so many different ways that I don't have to spend my energy "figuring it all out." Maybe you have lived in situations where most of what you got was on Sunday morning, if then, and there weren't people in your life who were watching, involved, caring, loving and praying for you every day. Maybe it was just a collection of people who showed up someplace. You know good and well how difficult it is to grow in a situation like that. It's difficult to even stick to your own, sincere commitments to

live for Jesus. You know how easy it was then to get off track. But, something is very different when you're living in that City—that Oasis. The seeds sprout and grow “though you know not how.”

I'm not saying everything is easy when you're inside His City. It's still not easy! My flesh and my spirit wage war with one another. Paul didn't say, “Your flesh and your spirit wage war with one another, unless, of course, you happen to know the right people.” No, I'm sorry. It's a battle until the day we die. That's just the way it is. Until we face Him, and see Him, and become who He is because we have seen Him face to face, the spirit and the flesh will wage war with one another. And part of that is good. God left the enemies in the Promised Land in order to purge His people and teach them war in the wilderness. He needed to teach them how to be warriors. Part of this is preparation in being overcomers so that we can sit with Him and rule with Him. Part of the pain and struggle is very, very necessary. A cup and a baptism are required in order to be useful to God. No question about that. The seed must fall to the ground and die, otherwise it abides alone.

Do you want to be the loneliest person on the earth? Then just avoid dying. Just avoid it, avoid it, avoid it. Avoid any kind of pain. Avoid any kind of fear and rejection. Avoid any kind of cost at all in your life. Avoid obedience that hurts. Avoid all of that—and guess what? You have a guarantee from the Son of God that you will remain alone. You will be a lonely, empty person your entire life if you won't let the seed fall to the ground and die. If you won't give away your life regardless of the consequences, you will be alone. That's just the way it is. That's a promise from God.

But the neat thing is that if you will abandon yourself into the process of living life in the Kingdom of God on a daily basis, then you will grow and you won't even know how. Time will pass and you won't have had any bible studies, any systematic format for discipleship growth, any prayer partners, any “prayer meetings” (per se), or curriculums, or “vacation bible schools.” You won't have had anything but people who loved you every day of your life and who helped each other live out the Word of God out of their own weaknesses. But the seed grew and you don't even know how. The seed has to fall to the ground and die (that means you are going to suffer various things along the way), but the neat thing is that there is nothing systematic or programmed about it.

You will become a different person from the very process of letting the seed be in the soil of God. We “know not how,” but the seed grows. That’s a beautiful thing to me.

Maybe it is a child born of the Spirit rather than a child born in the ordinary, logical way. Maybe it’s not to borrowing western technology and the scientific method, but just abandoning ourselves in love. Perhaps then the seed will grow up to the full head and the multiplying seeds will allow us to fill the earth 30, 60 and 100-fold. But the fun thing is that we don’t even know how that seed grows. There is something simply supernatural about “I will build my church that the gates of hell won’t prevail against.”

“Happy are those who can live in your house always singing your praises... Happy are those who are strong in the Lord” (Ps. 84:4-5). Who are the “those”? “*Those* who set their minds on a pilgrimage” —to Jerusalem, to the City of God, to the Oasis that God has planned! We set our heart and our mind on that. (Heb. 11—“I’m looking for a City whose Builder and Maker is God, and I’m not going back to the old country. I’m looking for a City. And God will be pleased to be called my God if I am looking for a new Jerusalem—one that is descending from Heaven, becoming a habitation of God by the Spirit. If that is what I set my mind on, I will be strong in the Lord.”)

“When they walk through the valley of weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs where pools of blessing collect after the rain” (Ps. 84:6). Guess what? There is still weeping there. But if you are on a pilgrimage to the Holy City, your tears become springs of blessing.

“They will continue to grow stronger and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem. O Lord God Almighty hear my prayer! Listen O God of Israel! (Interlude) O God! Look with favor upon the king our protector. Have mercy on the one you have anointed. A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else. I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in homes of the wicked” (Psa. 84:7-10).

We all remember that verse, “I’d rather be a gatekeeper in the house, than live a single day with evil people out in the world.” But can you see why he says that? You can if you read the earlier verses, right? “Because my pool of tears becomes a pool of blessing in the house of God.” God miraculously turns the water into wine. He turns the water of your

tears and the water of your sufferings into the wine of glad singing—if you are in the Oasis. If you are not, it doesn't work that way. It's vanity. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the House. I'll be the butler or the baker or the candlestick maker. I don't have to be important. I don't have to be recognized. I don't have to have anything. I just want to be where tears turn into the oil of gladness. That's what I want. That's where strength comes. We need to apply the Word of God to our own personal lives and existence, corporately and individually. But the fact is, God is strongly desirous of raising a City set on a hill throughout the world. People we know, people we don't know—7,000 or 700,000 who haven't bowed a knee to baal.

Have a passion to apply it to your own life and to recognize that God is calling His people by His Spirit all over the world to the common ground of life in Christ in a real, corporate sense, not just individually. The Holy Spirit is crying for the wall to be built around His people around the world. And if He is merciful to weak people like us, perhaps we can be blessed enough, fortunate enough, and obedient enough to be a part of that! God does want to do that. He will have a Bride that has made herself ready. Come, Lord Jesus!

The Miracle of His Life, HIS Way ☺

...a brief snapshot

Wednesday Morning, January 3, 2001

If you've ever seen a real Church function, day to day, "as you rise up, as you sit down, as you walk along the way" (rather than something to "attend" in a building or living room), then this "shadow" that Father created in the human body is AMAZINGLY insightful!

Ten percent of all bone in a person's body is replaced every year. A person 85 years of age has no bone older than twenty years in his entire body. Spiritually, in a Real Body, it is so. Just like 85-year-old Caleb at the foot of the mountain of giants: "Man, there aren't any of you half my age any more able than I am to take this mountain away from those bad boys! I'm as fit and ready now as I was forty years ago—I'm hungry for ALL God wants! Let's go!" And so it is in the Church, as well as the individual.

The renewing process is not without violence! "*The Kingdom is entered forcefully, and the violent take it by force!*" In order to renew the life and strength in the human body, cells known as "osteoclasts" squirt an acid onto the bone to remove older layers. This acid is strong enough that it can burn a hole in sheet metal. That is happening in your body continuously, to strengthen you and protect your future. There can be no new growth and health and strength within us, without the burning away of that which is old and losing flexibility and strength. "Osteoblast" cells follow behind and rebuild what the acid has burnt away. "*In the Body there are many gifts!*" Both prophetic and circumstantial "burning away"... AND the mercy and patience and wisdom that rebuilds the dross that was burnt away in our lives. We are truly "refined as by a fire"—if we're alive at all.

In the case of trauma, such as a broken bone, the UGLY and PAINFUL swelling and blood clotting serve a purpose! "*The Kingdom is entered*

through much tribulation.” Even in the case of a terrible tragedy in the body, or the Body, if there is LIFE in the body, “daily in public, and from house to house,” “night and day, house to house,” “when one part of the Body suffers, the entire Body suffers,”... it will only cause a strengthening! Just as the body surrounds the injury with protection with pain messages and swelling, that same hematoma, the swelling and the blood clotting later is miraculously transformed in the body from blood into BONE! The stem cells that build new life, and once divided every two days, now are summoned for duty and divide and accomplish in three minutes what was done in two days, in a non-traumatic environment! And so it is, in the Body of Christ.

Miracles of healing happen, and the pace of relatively peaceful and invisible growth in a normal world, shows the full beauty and magnitude of what God has Designed, during “the unlikely event of an emergency landing.” God is Good and His ways are PERFECT! Get in on it!!

TRUE Life Never Fails to Overcome

1950s

The armchair critic must leave his armchair if he is to join the number of those who become convinced that Jesus is Truth.

It appears that the strategy of Christ was to win the loyalty of the few who would honestly respond to the new way of daily living together in Him and in one another (not simply a new way of believing, or a new place to “attend”). They would be the pioneers of the new order, the spearhead of advance against the massed ignorance, selfishness, evil, “play-acting,” and apathy of the majority of the human race. The goal which was set before them, for which they were to work and pray—and if need be, suffer and die—was the building of a new Kingdom of inner supreme loyalty, the Kingdom of God. This was to transcend every barrier of race and frontier and (this is important) of time and space, as well.

The “Church” has become the name of the spearhead. The true Church is at any rate trying to carry out the divine plan. And in so far as it is working along the lines of real Truth and real Love, it cannot fail (of course) any more than God can cease to exist.

The follower of the new way is therefore called to do all he can to spread “the good news of the Kingdom,” but to realize at all times that the success or failure of the Kingdom can never be judged by simple reference to statistics of “christians” at any particular time. The Kingdom is rooted in *Real, visible Life*. “THIS is how all men will know.” What we sometimes call “eternity,” experienced in this life and the life to come, is the nature of True Life in the Church and in its deep relationships amongst those belonging to it and taking part in its activities.

Critics often complain that if the world is in its present state after nineteen centuries of christianity, then christianity cannot be a very good religion. They make two ridiculous mistakes. In the first place,

Christianity—the real thing—has never been accepted on a large scale and has therefore never been in a position to control “the state of the world,” though its influence has been far from negligible. And in the second place, they misunderstand the nature of Christianity. It is not to be judged by its success or failure to reform the world that rejects it. If it failed *where it is accepted*, there might be grounds for complaint, but it does not so fail. It is a revelation of the true way of living, the way to know God, the way to live life of eternal quality, and is not to be regarded as a handy social instrument for reducing juvenile delinquency or the divorce rate. (False Christianity will provide little true change in these areas, though they may speak of it some and create short-lasting gimmicks, programs, parrot-rituals, and repeat-after-me “worship” and “services” and “ministries” to address some issues.) Any “religion,” accepted by the majority of people, can exert words of restrictive pressure—but its results are far less than the energy required to promote the man-created means. The True Life of Jesus Christ in His Life-centered daily Church changes people (if they are willing to pay the price of being changed) so that they quite naturally and normally live as “sons and daughters of God,” and of course they exert an excellent influence on the community—in the work place and places of interchange. But if the real Church, the true Body of Christ fails, it fails for the same reasons that Christ “failed”—because the world with man’s religion “hates the Light,” as the Master foretold—and any condemnation rightly falls on the world that rejects both Him and it.

(by JB Phillips et al)

Trivial LIFE

Example: Living In the Center of the River

Thursday Evening, May 3, 2001

Hi...a “trivial everyday” example and testimony of Life—Life in the “centurion’s Faith” of comprehending others’ gifts in our lives...and the 1 Corinthians 12 “Spirit Baptism” into One Body:

As a potential additional opportunity to share Jesus, four weeks ago a brother in the Church here suggested that some of us join a golf “men’s club” which plays at 6:30 or so every Saturday morning. No one was certain it was a good idea, for any number of reasons, but we wanted to give it a fair try if a brother thought it might be worthwhile. Nine brothers, added to sixteen pagans, now constituted the “men’s club.” A “trust” and attitude of “submit to one another out of reverence for CHRIST” (Eph. 5:21) characterized the decision for the guys, as always. Practically speaking, several who might have “joined” weren’t really needed and therefore easily opted not to get up that early. ☺

The first two weeks, for which I was present, were peaceable opportunities with at least two brothers in every group of four, and nothing foul, drunken, out of control, or un-influenceable with the unbelievers. The opportunities may be there, and there seemed up to that point, nothing strong on the downside. Now, with the third and fourth weeks approaching, travel will keep me, personally, from being present for the “appointed rounds.” ☺

Now, here is an aspect worth noticing as a small glimpse of the Life and Freedom we share. Here’s a small “video clip” of “the Dance” we have together of 1 Corinthians 12 Holy Spirit Immersion. It’s some simple

1 John 1 Light, Fellowship and Joy—some Swimming in the Son’s Life top to bottom, in and through: Insanely obvious, and practical, right?! If I return from two weeks away and the brothers reach a conclusion that this particular environment of the golf “men’s club” is too costly, too un-influenceable, or inappropriate as an activity and Habitat for reception or transference of Life—I would *never dream of second-guessing or ignoring the discernment of the “eye.”* It would NEVER, ever enter my mind that “that’s just their problem, and when *I* was there, *I* didn’t see any problems *MY*self. So, *I* will do what is right in *MY* own eyes, until *I* ‘see’ it for *MY*self.”

Surely, I would ask what they “saw” and how they reached that decision, and might probe a bit, particularly if I didn’t understand. But in the end, pride, arrogance, lack of trust and loyalty, determining to be ‘god’ of every circumstance in *MY* life that *I* don’t myself “see”—as if I were the lone “eye”—would only prove my lack of Baptism and lack of centurion Faith. Prideful independence would only rob me, and those who depend on me, of the Fullness of Life that Jesus Desires! If it’s not practical and observable and life and decision-altering, IS IT REAL?! Hmmmmm. ☺

“And we being many, are one.”

“When you’ve seen me, you’ve seen them...”

“Father, may they be one, in the same way You and I are One” (John 17:21).

“Contending as one man for the Faith” (Philippians 1:27).

“Joined and knit together by every supporting ligament” (Ephesians 4:16).

“Submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

“If you have any encouragement from being together united into Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any intimacy with the person of the Holy Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by having the same union of heart and mind, having the same intimacy of love, being ONE in spirit and in purpose...” (Philippians 2:1-2).

“Do everything then, without complaining and arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure. Live the Life of children of God without fault, regardless of the pressures and ways of this crooked and depraved

generation. And then, as you hold out the Word of Life, you will SHINE like stars in the universe!” (Philippians 2:14-15).

“THIS is HOW all men will know you are MY disciples—by the love that they witness you pouring out for one another” (John 13:35).

“Members of One Another” Goes for Prophets, Too

Thursday Night, September 26, 1991

Question: You spoke of people having prophetic insight into what needs to be said. Is that something that requires a lot of prayer before you dare share that insight? Do you really weigh that out, or is it something that is fairly quick? Or does it vary depending on the situation? I see a danger in someone being a false prophet. I've seen that happen—where someone claimed to have insight when they didn't. But it's faithless to say that God won't put insights into people.

I think a lot of the reason for false prophets in our generation, and in previous ones, is that the whole thing was approached in an Old Covenant way rather than in a New Covenant way. When you read about the gift of prophecy in the New Testament, you'll find that virtually every time that gift is mentioned in the epistles, it's in the context of being members of one another... the hand not saying to the eye, “I have no need of you.” Check it out—it's *always* mentioned as part of the nature and substance of the Body of Christ. Eph. 4, 1Cor. 12, and Rom. 12 all speak of gifts in the context of being members of one another, being compacted together, and being joined and knit.

The Hebrews writer began by saying, “In times past God spoke through the prophets, *but now...*” Does that mean there are no prophets now? If he's saying there were prophets in the past and he's contrasting that situation with the way things are now, he seems to be *eliminating* prophecy. Well, obviously that can't be true. The New Covenant not only discusses that there is that gift, but Agabus and Silas and others are mentioned as prophets. So the Hebrews writer can't mean there are no such things as prophets now. But what it *does* mean is, “...but *now* through His *Son*.” The nature of a prophet *now* is that he or she

is embedded in the Body of Christ as a finger or a knee or a foot—actually, in truth, as the eyes, as a part of the Body.

In times past, prophets were intermediaries between God and God's People. God's People had no clue about the Word of God, except for what was written in the Pentateuch (the Law of Moses) and what the prophets would tell them. Otherwise they were clueless. They didn't have the Spirit of God. All they had were these external means of input and their own will power to accomplish this thing—and they failed miserably. The Hebrews writer says that God found fault with the first covenant because of the people. The words were all true, but He needed to put His Spirit in us to give us the power to walk this stuff out. Otherwise we wouldn't have a chance. So He made us part of Himself because only HE could keep the law. Only God is righteous, as Jesus said to the rich young ruler. *Only God* can keep His own Law, so He made us and melted us into His Body. Jesus is the Head, and we are the Body. “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” “So it is with Christ...” speaking of the church (1Cor. 12:12-13). So God had a plan to fix the problem!

In the past, we had this prophetic element that was *over* the people and connected God to the people. *Now* the prophetic element is *part of the people*. That's the difference. It's part of Jesus, like all the other parts of the Body are also a part of Jesus. The prophets just happen to be the eyes. So it's different now; there's a whole new level of accountability. And frankly, most of the people who have passed themselves off as being prophetic in our generation and in the recent past have functioned like Old Testament prophets. They're really not “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament.” They're really not “compacted together” with others. They're really not PART of the Body of Christ. They're functioning as if they are bringing some “oracle from God” to a bunch of dumb people who can't know God for themselves, and the people better obey them, because they have the final word. And they're not even accountable with their own lives, for the most part. They're not “daily, in public and from house to house.” They're not “admonished daily, so that none may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness” (Heb. 3:13).

What do you think is going to happen to a man who calls himself a prophet but is not admonished *daily* by other saints? You might think he's above all that because he's a prophet, after all! But they *will be* hardened and deceived by sin. And they're going to be much more

likely to be hardened and deceived by sin than the average person, because they're presuming to be teachers. They'll come under a more severe judgment. There will be more penalty, more opposition from the enemy, and more possibility of error. The more you open your mouth, the more chance there is of error. Of course, it's error not to open your mouth in many cases, too! But the point is that those who presume to be teachers are really in a lot of trouble if they're not walking closely with God. And they can't be close to God on a sustained basis if they're not admonished daily by other believers. If they're *outside* of the Body of Christ, bringing these oracles "in", then they **will be hardened and deceived by sin**, according to the Hebrews writer—the same man who said "in times past through the prophets...now through the Son."

So now, the prophet works *through* the Body of Christ. The prophets are not these men who "bring the oracles of God," and everyone better just shut up and listen. Now they're brothers and sisters who have a gift of eyesight. They have the vision *to see*. Primarily they have vision to see glory or lack of glory, the presence of Jesus or the lack of His presence. Occasionally it will be related to the future but will always involve seeing Jesus or the absence of Jesus.

Now there's a difference between a *person* who has the gift of being a seer, and the whole body functioning as a prophetic people. The New Covenant says that the Kingdom of Priests shall be a Prophetic People. So in one sense, the whole Church should be seers. But in another sense, "God gave some to be apostles, *prophets*, evangelists, shepherds and teachers." And, "First apostles, then *prophets*, then teachers..." The *gift* of prophet is distinguished from the entire Body being prophetic. There's an element of prophecy in all of God's people, but the prophet is especially adept at being the eyes, at detecting the presence of Jesus or the absence of Jesus.

In the midst of an assembly like this, a prophet is probably not, Biblically speaking, going to be standing up, saying "Thus saith the Lord!" in some Old Testament fashion. Primarily he's going to be able to see, as he looks around the room, the brothers and sisters who are walking in some way, shape, or form outside the Spirit of Christ. He's going to be able to see ambition, pride, apathy, hypocrisy, or some sort of deceit in their heart or their life. He'll hear, in what they say, something troubling. Other people may hear the same thing and will say, "That was pretty good; can't argue with that." But a man who has been given

the gift of being a seer will wince in pain. He'll hardly be able to sit there, because he's troubled so much by the origin of what was said, not necessarily the accuracy of it. The context of the person's life that said it will somehow grate against and grieve the prophet. He'll be able to feel what God feels, not just hear what everybody else hears. *That* will far and away be the most prominent and frequent thing that will happen in the gift of prophet—not necessarily a forth-telling of future events. It will be to see and smell and hear with the senses of Christ, and to know what's happening even though it's not obvious to the naked eye, or to other believers. A brother or sister with the gift of encouragement may say, "That was good! I think God is really doing a work in you." But the prophet's going to grab them by the elbow and say, "Man, what gave you the right to say that? Tell me about your relationship with your wife." That's going to be the ongoing, day-to-day functioning of the gift of prophet in the context of the Body of Christ, instead of the Old Covenant version of the thing.

Now we've seen some things that have to do with forth-telling—like something fulfilled in 24 hours in the presence of thirty witnesses. That's part of the whole package, too! Amos said, "God does nothing without first telling His prophets." Jesus said, "You're My friends, and I want to tell you My plans. You aren't My slaves, where I leave you out of everything, and the world gets wound up, and you've got to do the best you can. You're My friends, and I want to let you in on the way things are, why they are that way, and what's yet to come."

It's part of His friendship with us. It's not a weird thing. It's part of the fact that we're partakers of the Divine Nature. Together He wants us to feel what He feels. If one part of the Body suffers, the whole Body suffers. If one part rejoices, the whole Body rejoices. Well, isn't your head part of your body? Mine is! Jesus is the Head of the Body, right? He's part of the Body, and we're connected to the Head, according to Ephesians 4. So if Jesus grieves, shouldn't the whole Body grieve? If Jesus rejoices, and we're really connected to the Head, shouldn't the whole Body rejoice? So it's not just limited to ourselves. It has to do with our relationship with the Head, Jesus, as well.

It's the New Covenant, plain and simple. I've not found a third covenant in the Bible that misses all of that! I'll grant you that it's been incredibly abused and turned into a gimmick far and wide, but that doesn't negate the precious truths of the Word of God.

Foundational Gifts: Organic vs. Organizational Authority

Tuesday Morning, January 12, 1999

A follow-up discussion to “Do We Need Church Planters?”

At times, the expression “foundational gifts” has been used in various writings, without much explanation included. I thought I’d say a bit more about that, for whoever may be interested.

When speaking of “foundational gifts,” we are referring to the thought of Eph. 2:19-22. This phrase certainly has large-scope implications for the whole Body of Christ for all time, as well as implications practically for our time and space, when exposed to the same gifts. You can also consider these passages when trying to ascertain the “value” of what we’ve called “foundational gifts” to the Body of Christ Jesus...(1Cor. 3:10; Eph. 3:9, 4:11-16; Rom. 12:8, as well as others you can think of easily).

A Lever and a Place to Stand

Some of the previous thoughts referring to one of the primary foundational gifts, and its role amongst the Believers:

“The best masons, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers in the galaxy cannot build a house without the additional gifts relating to seeing the DESIGN of the house in that locale. Paul called it the gift of ‘architect.’ This gift can ‘see’ how it all fits together. This gift helps give the other Believers the freedom to develop and use their gifts. The ‘apostolic’ gift helps the other gifts to not step all over each other ‘laying dry wall before the plumbing is installed.’

“And the troublesome situations so often experienced certainly *would* be much helped and eventually resolved (one way or another) by involvement of the gifts that lay foundations (Eph. 2; 1Cor. 3)—‘the apostles and prophets.’ This, of course, is NOT about the charismatic movements’ versions of gifts: bending spoons, memorizing birthdays, and stained-glass voices prophesying flattery or doom. ‘Church planting’ is NOT really the issue, either. But the GIFTS mentioned, ‘first apostles, second prophets, then teachers,’ are necessary for the nine or so amazing and wonderful things God has listed. ‘Two or three gathered’ can have a measure of good stuff going on. However, you will also find heartache, confusion, leaven, domineering flesh and a bunch of other stuff that can RARELY ever really be resolved without these Gifts being involved. I wish it wasn’t that way, but it is. Both Scripturally, and Experientially.

Let me give you an example from the world. A guy named Archimedes discovered, around 250 B.C., what is referred to as ‘the lever.’ This device allowed a man to move objects weighing many times a man’s weight from one place to another. He is quoted as saying, ‘Give me a lever long enough, and a place to stand, and I can move the entire world!’ THIS is the awesome Gift of God in the ‘foundation of the apostles and prophets.’ When a foundation is laid in a relationship with foundational, architectural gifts, there is Spiritual ‘leverage’ to move the ugly, complicated, unSpiritual problems that inevitably come up. There is A PLACE TO STAND to resolve the issues and the challenges of daily life in the church.”

This is what the “foundational gifts” are “for”—the Gifts that Jesus “ascended on High” to give to His Church.

In simplest terms, as we try to understand “GIFTS,” know that Jesus gave ALL of Himself to His Body, in the Gifts of the Spirit, granted “as He wills.” All together, they represent the whole giftedness of Jesus of Nazareth (Col. 1:18-19, 24, 2:9-10; Eph. 1:22-23; 1Cor. 12, and others). Now, within that array of multiplied thousands of Gifts that Jesus possessed and spread out amongst His Spiritual Body here on earth, there are particular gifts that we MIGHT dare to call “leadership” as in Romans 12:8, and Ephesians 4:11-13. These gifts are often counterfeited by those who love to be seen of men, love to be called by titles in the marketplace, and love to be first. But, *that’s* not what I’m speaking of here. The true Gifts of leadership are involved in laying foundations of

local assemblies and allowing “the administration (the practical daily working out) of the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3). These gifts are the “poured out” particular Gifts that Jesus possessed, and has granted as a gift to His Church (Eph. 4), that allow the other gifts the freedom to express themselves. This gift brings out the best in others, and pulls them forward to know Him and serve Him with understanding and love. They are *not* positions of “authority” in churches, per se, but *gifts* with His “anointing” evident for a particular area of service to the saints and to the world. They facilitate, rather than dominate.

Brother Amongst Brothers

Now, foundational types of gifts may be more visible than most other gifts (such as mercy, helps, generosity, or even shepherds) in certain circumstances. Notice Peter’s place with Ananias and Sapphira, and with Dorcas, personally assigned to visit Cornelius, etc. Nevertheless, even foundational gifts or more visible gifts are not daily “bosses” of the church. No gift or position, biblically, is in that role. “It must not be so with you,” saith the Lord.

And certainly, there is no gift set out by God that is permitted to “run the meetings.” There is NO biblical record of such an animal as “the official or expected runner of meetings.” Not a “pastor”—not a “priest”—not a “reverend”—not an “elder”—not a “minister”—not ANYTHING. No “official runner of meetings” existed in the New Testament Church, with its foundation laid by those who walked with Jesus daily. That job description (“runner of meetings”) is a new addition, added by fearful men. They may be afraid things won’t go smoothly, or won’t be upbeat enough for visitors, or have too many quiet moments, or they are afraid the big bad wolves will get them.

Sometimes this unBiblical role of “man up front” is claimed by ambitious men. “God ‘called’ me to dominate all of you and persuade you to revere me, call me by a title, and think that I’m holier and more spiritual and better ‘connected’ than all of you. I wasn’t bright enough to be a candlestick maker or Indian chief, and I didn’t want to get my hands dirty as a grease monkey, so mom thought this would be a great career path.”

Or sometimes this clergy thing happens at the hands of lazy or fearful saints (“Give us a king like the other denomi-nations!”). Oh,

PLEASE, let's not underestimate the mystery withheld for ages and generations, the *CHRIST OF GOD WITHIN* those who truly trust and live in Him!

Visible leadership at times? Perhaps. James facilitated when he spoke up in Acts 15 and said, "I perceive that _____." He didn't dominate, but he provided "sternsmanship" (leadership—Rom. 12:8). He facilitated order by taking the pieces that were there, provided by the Great Shepherd of the Sheep to individuals one-by-one in that gathering, and helping to put them together in an orderly way. He didn't decide *for* everyone. (And that's good, since he was one of the last ones to get a grip on this Jew/Christian puzzle being discussed in Acts 15. Remember "the party of James" which misrepresented the Gospel to the gentiles in Antioch? Remember that Paul did battle with Peter over James' buddies' misunderstandings "in front of them all"? I don't know that James was as messed up as his close friends were about the Gospel, but James didn't help them much either, obviously.) Still, James was *visible* and very respected in that setting in Jerusalem in Acts 15, but not "the boss." And he might have stayed invisible for hours on end, or days on end in any given setting. He wasn't the big cheese or official holy man. He was a brother who functioned as a brother amongst brothers, but was not ashamed of his gifts. (1 Corinthians 15:7-10 is so important to *feel* in your heart—a deep need to show gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for you!)

Organic, Not Organizational

Is it possible that God does not intend to have a generic "no gift," "no foundational gift," church? Consider this "teaser": An angel at the empty Tomb said, "Go tell His disciples, *and Peter*, 'Jesus is going ahead of you into Galilee.'" Here's the million Euro question: Why did he single out Peter? "Go tell His disciples, *and Peter*." After all, "We all have the Holy Spirit!" so Peter shouldn't be singled out. Right? And yet, a spokesman for God, an Angel, highlighted Peter and mentioned the other brothers generally.

Another "teaser"? Peter, after being freed from prison by an angel, knew that he could find some brothers and sisters together even at that late hour. He arrived at a surprised room of folks praying at John Mark's mother's home. And what did Peter say? "Tell James and the brothers about this!" Why single out James? Why does James get special notice?

He wasn't even one of the Twelve! Why single him, or anyone out? Just maybe that's okay, if seen *organically* rather than organizationally.

Why did the "household of Chloe" travel hundreds of miles to find Paul and present him with a rather long list of sins and problems in the church they were a part of? Shouldn't they have been able to handle it on their own? Don't they all have Jesus? Couldn't they just take a vote at a "men's breakfast" or something, and not have to ask some mere man, from the outside no less, to help? Perhaps they understood "gifts" better than most in our age do. And perhaps THAT is because so many people today are wounded from the abuses of self-proclaimed authority figures. We've become fearful of God's Way because so many "leaders" are living in the spirit of "king" Saul—rather than Melchizedek, Samuel, or Jesus, or Paul.

Still, if we can get over our owes long enough to consider the beauty and life of God's Plan regarding *organic* leadership, it's time to move ahead. There certainly is an undeniable implication in the Scriptures that everyone would know who THEIR leaders are, those who have lived the Life and have spoken His Words (Heb. 13:7). And they would be glad to "submit" to those who "watch for their souls" as those who "will give an account." That "leadership" is clearly recognizable, *but not as the Gentiles!*

WOW! This is so unheard of. God, give us grace and have mercy on us. No one "running the meetings" (except the Risen Jesus, rising up in His priesthood! 1Cor. 14:26-30). No one whatsoever with a title, or even viewed as the "head librarian and greek researcher," or "official speaker." In God's true Church, there are NO King Sauls running God's People. And yet there is every possibility that God can raise up many Samuels at His pleasure, with their obedience. Yes! And these will be men and women OF God, who can hear Him, and hear His children, and help them find each other on a daily basis. NOT speeches, books and meetings...but "hand to hand, eye to eye, and mouth to mouth" as Jesus did. "The LIFE becomes the light of men"—NOT the other way around.

His Anointing

Here is another way to look at it. Stay with me here. "ALL authority" belongs to Jesus, now and forever more! Right? So why the contradictions

with “authority figures”? There IS no authority, right? Just me and my conscience, RIGHT? Whatever’s right in my eyes flies because “we all have the Holy Spirit.” But then, why do we find ourselves needing to disobey dozens of Scriptures about obeying and submitting, and about leaders, in order to hold on to this viewpoint the way it is sometimes interpreted? Here’s the key. YES, Jesus does have all authority, which means it is His *ANOINTING* on His Gifts, case-by-case, day by day, that we respond to! NOT titles and positions, like the gentiles. We respond to His Presence and His Voice wherever He chooses to express it!! We watch for ANOINTING! His anointing is a part of His Life that He has deposited in that situation. (And I surely don’t mean human charisma or personality or talent! Yuck.)

Practically, in a situation with children, or relating to music, or physical needs, or illness, or discouragement, or unBelievers...someone in particular may have an anointing, a Life, a gift that is clearly from Heaven. The voice of God rings clearly through the hushed Children that are listening for the Shepherd’s Voice. And the fruit of His Anointing is beyond human organizational skills, motivational gimmicks, gadgets, borrowed ideas, man-made psychology, intensely researched or carefully crafted words, or self-proclaimed authority (“Touch not God’s anointed!”) or flexed muscles. It is God’s Fruit. Jesus has passed this way. We all feel the Wind of Heaven and humbly bow down.

In this way, as a Priesthood, *any* saint, *anyone* with JESUS living inside can be chosen and anointed for a task or a purpose, or at a crucial moment. We speak of daily, intertwined Life, but meetings are okay, too. He gives His authority to the parts of Himself that are distributed in the Gifts in the Body of Christ. He does NOT invest it in a title and position, but in Gifts. Overseers are facilitators, not bosses. There *is* such a thing as Leadership in God’s economy, and God forbid that we would destroy God’s Plan of how to build His Body. We must not pooh-pooh ORGANIC, ANOINTED leadership and thereby rob His People of embracing those five gifts in Ephesians 4, and the thirty thousand others that Jesus has, and poured out. And yet, it is a rare thing in this confused religious landscape to see GIFTS rather than POSITIONS. *Anointing* rather than tradition, hierarchy, and habit. GOD is after Samuels—*people who know His friendship intimately*—in every area of giftedness! They demand nothing, but give all. We no longer need Sauls, who steal our children, steal our vision, and steal our money (and all of the other things mentioned in 1Sam. 8). It is

truly to “reject God” when we handle leadership as the gentiles do. It is equally damaging to do the “Korah” thing and cry out, “We ALL have the Holy Spirit” and despise or ignore anointing and giftedness.

Probably it’s better to ask God to show us HIS way, as unheard of as that may be! Wouldn’t you all agree?? ☺ xXxoOxoxOo

The Need For Christ- Consciousness

1964

We will ask one question. What is the dominant necessity? The answer is twofold. The dominant necessity is a Christ-consciousness! To experience the realization of God's desire—the bringing in of His House in its beauty, in its love, in its grace, in its fellowship, in its peace, in its order, in its divine manifestation—we **MUST** have an ever-present, all-encompassing Christ-consciousness! Perhaps that does not convey much as it is stated. But what you and I need perhaps more than anything else is more of this Christ-consciousness. Are we not ever and always challenged in our hearts when we hear Paul say, “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died...that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him... Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh...” (2Cor. 5:14-16)?

Are we not always challenged in a wonderful way by that? Do we not in most places know one another primarily after the flesh? When you see another that is truly a Child of God, their life given to Him to do as He wills—do we *See Christ in them*? Do we make conscious effort to See what God says is supernaturally Real? Or do we primarily focus and see that which is yet unchanged in them? Discernment—to help another grow—is essential, but do we see what God has *supernaturally planted within* them, as well as that which is still being refined? Do we see the Miracle there, and embrace it, and act as if it is so, when we look at and interact with one another? Do we honor what God says is so, for those who have taken up their cross daily, and have fallen upon His?

Oh, for this Christ-consciousness—that we might give ourselves more to this laying hold of what there is of Christ, however small, and making the most of that. If we would do that, the House would be

built, God would find His House and commit Himself all the more fully. As He circulates amongst those that are truly Lampstands, truly Churches—those that are glorying and living daily together in His Son, and Christ-conscious in their daily work-a-day lives, and as they relate to one another—He will inhabit us and manifest Himself all the more. God help us! And Christ-consciousness means House-consciousness, fellowship-consciousness, relatedness-consciousness, that we are members one of another, so that the hand cannot say to the foot, ‘I don’t need you, I can do without you!’ It is this corporate consciousness that is so needed today to destroy all that is disintegrating, divisive, weak, shallow and worldly.

God grant that something of the impact of this may come upon our hearts, and lift us out of our all-too-small conceptions of the House of God. May it govern our attitudes in relation to all—all who rest upon the love of God, all who rest upon the grace of God, all who have come to see and to acknowledge that it is only by the wisdom of God, in solving all the human problems, their own and others...

...that God will at last find what He is seeking—a place in which to dwell.

T. Sparks

Living in Awe of God's House

Sunday Evening, December 5, 1993

Jacob spoke about a “dread.” *“How dreadful is this place”* (Gen. 28:17). The question was asked, “What does dread have to do with anything? Why is it dreadful that this would be the House of God?” There are other ways to translate the word “dread,” such as, *“How awesome is this place,”* but the point is that there IS a right view of the Body of Christ. That view of the Body of Christ has to include a certain sort of dread or awe at the House of God. Otherwise you are missing it, and you will make major tactical errors in your life if you don't see it properly. If you see the Body of Christ as something that angels ascend and descend to, if you see the House of God, Bethel, as being the very gate of heaven (Everyone wants heaven, right?), there IS going to be a certain dread in your heart.

In truth, the way God means for the Church, the Body of Christ to be viewed, is that it has to include that dread or awe, or we are not seeing it properly. *“And all the believers were filled with awe”* (Acts 2). There was some sort of transition that took place the moment they saw the Church in Acts 2. Something very dramatic happened in their lives to the extent that all the believers were together and had everything in common. “Yeah, yeah I know, they loved Jesus, they gave their life to the Messiah who they realized had come, and they repented of acts that lead to death.” But something else happened, too, and that was that they were devoted to the apostles' teaching, devoted to fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of bread—all these things that have to do with other people, with the Church. They instantly had a regard for *Ekklesia*, not just praying in their prayer closet and then acknowledging these other people, “Well, they are Christians, too. I'm going to live for God and they are going to live for God, and so we ought to at least try to get along and attend something together regularly at least.” That isn't how they viewed it.

The way they viewed it affected every ounce of their being. When they saw the House of God, Bethel, the gate of Heaven, something radical

happened in the way they began to function with one another, to where this person owns my chariot as much as I do, and this person owns my house as much as I do. That isn't just simply, "I believe the Messiah has come." Something happened in the way they viewed other people. This people that were once not a people, but now are the people of God. They saw that. Something about Christ with His head in Heaven and His feet on earth was awe-inspiring to them and had a dramatic effect on their lives. It was a dreadful thing, not in the negative sense, of course, but there was something very awe-inspiring about that and they responded to it.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul spoke about not discerning the Body, and he went on to say that this simple fact of not discerning the Body brings judgment and so much anger from God, in the sense that He wants all men to be redeemed of it. There is an energy in God so that He's even willing to kill people over it. "That's why some of you are sick and others are dying (falling asleep)," Paul said. God has a lot of energy in His heart towards there being a dread or an awe about the Body of Christ. So much, in fact, that He is willing to take people out. He's willing to take people out of the physical realm and remove them entirely from the lives of other people—mothers with young children, if necessary, grandmothers, and children growing up. He's willing to destroy life, as men see it at least, in order that the Body of Christ would be discerned.

That's why He said that many of you are sick and some are dying. It's because you don't discern the Body of Christ. You don't see it the way God sees it. You are running ahead of each other. You are not caring for each other's needs. Some of you are well fed, others are going hungry. You are living independently, you are living selfishly. You don't have awe when you see the Body of Christ, and that's why some of you are sick and others are dying. God takes that very seriously.

God's Wrath on the Babylon of the Institutional Church?

Friday Afternoon, October 03, 2003

A question from someone new to New Wineskins:

Hey... Lately here we've been discussing organized churches and the spiritual nature of them.... The harlotry of the thing, etc.

Actually, I've been really torn up over this, seeing the body in the organized churches. Some here believe that anyone associated with an organized church is going to face the Lord's wrath when He returns.... I'm trying to figure out why I feel God's presence when I'm in the midst of people worshipping in organized churches. We go round and round here discussing, "How can God's presence be in the midst of a bunch of people singing songs to Him that don't live for Him the rest of the week... that follow a man (pastor) instead of the Lord, that have little to no relationship with each other, etc.?" Am I totally deceived? Is it not the presence of the Lord? Or is what I'm feeling, just His Spirit bearing witness to the words of praise, regardless of the people singing them? I don't know. Can you help? Your sister, Holly

Holly,:) "Some here believe that anyone associated with an organized church is going to face the Lord's wrath when He returns...." This is a **VERY, VERY WRONG VIEWPOINT**. Jesus' **BLOOD** is the **only TRUE** issue related to "the Lord's Wrath"!!! Now, each will "give an account for deeds done in the body" and many will have their work "burnt up" because it is nothing but "wood, hay, and stubble." Wood, hay, and stubble are cheap and earthy materials. They, unlike gold, silver, and precious stones, can be acquired easily just laying around on the surface with no need for mining deeply. Wood, hay, stubble are, amongst other things, the "ministries" and "institutions of men." These are prime examples of Ishmael—born half of God's promise and heritage, and half of the "Egyptian woman" who is of worldly

thinking and sins. Of Egypt's "wisdom" and "merging" with God's *True Idea*, the Lord said, "Get the slave woman and her child OUT of my house!" Ishmael is unwelcome. And then God cared for them in the wilderness, even with some miracles—but, it was out of compassion, not out of affirmation. There is a huge difference. But He did involve Himself somewhat, even though He had them thrown OUT of what He was REALLY doing.

But, the Lord's WRATH, for "attending" something? NO! That is a *BLOOD* issue, *ALONE!* It is certainly a "work burnt up" (1Cor.3) issue, which ought to be *very* sad for those "builders" (1Peter2) who build out of man's traditions, rituals, hierarchies, and disobedience to so much of God's Heart and Command (Heb.3:12-14, 1Cor.12-14, Acts 2:42-47, Luke 9:57-62, 1Cor.5, etc).

The "leaven in the batch" in ALL institutions (and most "house churches") because of lack of discernment, lack of courage, lack of passion and love for Jesus, disobedience to Commands ("If you love Me, you will obey Me."), love of their *own* sins, lack of apostolic Quality of Life..... that "leaven" WILL "leaven the whole batch" and rob EVERYONE of God's Highest Intent for their lives, beyond question.

This is *heartbreaking* for the Father, but He WILL have His House that is *visible* ("all men will see how you Love one another" as you "shine like stars in the universe" and "the Bride makes herself ready" becoming an "equal yoke" with "ever-increasing Glory, by the Lord who is the Spirit"). There is great loss in the institutions, and with those who claim "house church" but are not. But, this loss is *very* different than awaiting the Lord's Wrath—and shame on anyone who does not so See and appreciate the Blood of Jesus that they could say such a thing. Such pride is as destructive as the "institution" is. And, by the way, an addendum to Keith Green's quote would read like this: "Going to church, whether an institution OR a living room, doesn't make a person a Christian any more than sleeping in the garage makes a person a car."

It is about bringing *pleasure* to Jesus, and maximizing *growth* into His Image and Intimacy—which cannot be had particularly well in Laodicea, whether institutional Laodicea OR living room Laodicea. Anyone can make music that stirs the flesh, even the religious flesh. Anyone can give stirring "speeches" that make the flesh, or religious flesh, rise up to great emotional highs. History is filled with such examples, for both "good" and for "evil." This is NOT how anything

from GOD must be evaluated. Jesus said it is *fruit* that gives us insight into authorship, not even miracles (Mat.7)!!

Music and speeches are small potatoes compared to miracles right in front of you, and even *that* is insufficient to mark something as “from God.” Are men and women being brought into the image and likeness of Jesus of Nazareth, or is leaven being left unresolved, therefore undoing the Work of God in everyone? Is the Body of Christ “from the least to the greatest” looking like 1Cor.12—God’s PLAN, or are the gates of Hell prevailing by sin, teen rebellion, divorce, independence, pride, gossip, worldliness, and the like? If it’s the latter, it is *not* the Church Jesus is building, according to Jesus Himself! Will that (the fact that leaven runs rampant and the gates of Hell are prevailing) “stunt” someone’s growth that IS in the Blood of Jesus, but is corrupted by “bad company” and Ishmael’s lukewarmness (though he has a “family resemblance” to Abraham, of course)? Beyond question. “A little leaven leavens the *whole* batch,” saith the Lord.

But, does that mean that God will bring fury and wrath upon anyone who is *genuinely* under the Blood, marked clearly (read 1Jn.1–1Jn.3 for “proofs” of Salvation) by the Spirit’s Presence? Without these “proofs”, they are NOT Saved, according to God. These “marks” of the “deposit guaranteeing the Inheritance” are listed so that we will not accept the many counterfeit christians (“MANY” will say to me on that Day, “Lord, LORD!” but I *never* knew them). A person that *says* they are a christian and tells a marvelous story is *not* necessarily Saved, according to Jesus. The “*proof*” is in the accountable Presence of the Creator of the Galaxies *living within*, and *showing Himself miraculously* in a person’s life. This is what the Bible says. All who claim to be christians are NOT, and only those who show the marks of the “Downpayment that guarantees the Inheritance” (1Jn.1–1Jn.3, etc.) ARE Saved by the Blood. This is one of the great tragedies of the institutions and the fake “house churches”—they mix the Holy with the profane, and fake Christians never have to face Reality, because they are ALLOWED to be self-deceived by the poor Quality of Life that will never expose them and bring them to the Cross, for REAL.

Yet, for those who ARE marked by the Spirit and are THEREFORE washed in His Blood: “There is NO condemnation for those who are IN Christ Jesus” and there will be no “WRATH” for never making it out of the institution. They will pay a high price for this

sloppiness, perhaps losing their children or spouse to the world. And, they *certainly* will never get CLOSE to who they were to have Become for Him (“a little leaven leavens the WHOLE batch”). But, even though they will suffer great loss with their “works burnt up”, if they are TRULY in the Blood, marked by the Holy Spirit’s Evidences (1Jn.1–1Jn.3), then they will not experience His wrath. And, not only will a Blood Bought, Spirit Indwelt One not suffer His wrath for such ignorant choices and weakness, but **ONE WHO IS TRULY IN HIS BLOOD, SPIRIT INDWELT, WILL NEVER EVEN COME TO TRIAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

It is the nature of Grace, Substitution, and Love. The sins of those who TRULY are abandoned in Faith, into the Atonement Death and Life of Jesus, are forgiven—as far as the East is from the West. All accusations against those who *have* given all to Him on their “daily Cross” are **THROWN OUT OF COURT, and NEVER COME TO TRIAL AT ALL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

It’s hard to experience “wrath” when you are on angels’ shoulders being ushered into a PARTY for those who are IN CHRIST by dying to self and calling on Him, and allowing the Lamb’s Blood to wash them. There **IS NOT EVEN A TRIAL** for such as these!!! Hallel-jah!!! Got it?!!

Love, mike

God's Solution to Human Mania: Environment Matters

Sunday Afternoon, August 30, 1998

A brother recently wrote about the sad condition and the unwillingness of most he knows in his country to pay a price to “make ready the Bride” for the return of the Groom. He wondered how to view it, and what to do about the “lazy, convictionless lives” and “the slow-growing cancer that sucks the very life out of the victim without him even knowing—until an emergency happens, where he finds little faith in his heart to trust God.” Here are some thoughts...

I saw a news documentary, actually this evening, about a college professor and research scientist. He put an advertisement in a local newspaper asking for students. He offered to pay them \$15 per day if they would play a little game. Half would be prisoners in jail and the other half would be prison guards. There would be no physical abuse—only play-acting. The results were incredible. In just five days, all of the “guards” had become hostile tyrants, endlessly inventing deviant mind games to torture their “prisoners” with. And all of the prisoners (formerly strong, stable, intelligent college students) were encountering depression, hallucinations, and other manias. One by one, they literally crumbled emotionally and intellectually. They had *forgotten* that they were all (both guards and inmates) just college students playing a game. In FIVE DAYS! They were so mesmerized and intoxicated by their expected roles, and the “white collar expert/authority figure” that gave “credibility” to the happenings, that they lost touch with what was real and became people they never wanted to become. In five days.

The Kingdom message may be obvious, but I'll say it anyway. There are a TON of good people out there, earnestly desiring to be devoted to Jesus and to grow in intimacy and maturity and self-sacrifice with Him—that fail again and again and again. They become people that they never intended to become. They fail throughout their lives, either becoming comfortable with compromise, worldliness, religious rituals, and a seared conscience, or living in misery. *Why?!!* Because God has Designed an environment that will help the frail human mind, and weak will, to Know Him and overcome sin. *"I will build my church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against!"* Jesus, knowing our frail frame, birthed His Church to allow "common" Christian men and women to be Overcomers. And, of course, when I say the word "Church," I certainly do NOT mean anything that can be "attended." I mean what the Scriptures mean when that word is used. I mean what Jesus meant when He used that word. I mean deep relationships (which can NOT be "attended"!) where the Word of God is lived and applied in every man, woman, and child, *daily!* (Heb. 3:12-14; Acts 2:42-47). I refer to the "Church" that Jesus said HE would build where every man, woman, and child has "a *hundred* mothers, brothers, and sisters, lands, possessions, persecutions, and after that, Life Eternal." Nothing else is truly a Church. But IF a Church, it must be characterized by *every* true member loving Jesus and knowing Him, while "bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the Law of Christ," "confessing sins one to another," "serving one another," "loving one another," and so many other powerful "vital signs" of a real Church. Anything else has lost, or will lose, its "Lampstand" and will not be considered a "Church" by Jesus, the Christ and Head.

IF a Church by God's definition, the gates of hell cannot prevail any longer. We'll not lose our teens to the world and the spirit of the age. We'll not lose our men's minds and energies to mammon and prestige. The list of victories is endless, *when* the Church is really the Church rather than a pep rally to attend on Sunday. Wannabe big shots playing games with "perception management" by orchestrating the "perfect" show on Sunday to excite and entertain, and perfect programs to get everyone's egos stroked so they won't leave—that's not a church, you know. Even if the songs are great and the "preaching" is "scriptural" and helpful, it cannot be considered a true Church simply because of these things. "Church" MUST be defined as GOD defines it (Mat. 16:18). Every member with a true supernatural experience "that flesh and

blood did not reveal,” but God the Father personally touched and revealed. And, (1Jn. 1:7) the way to have “fellowship” is not related to “attending” or “eating”—but it is all about “walking in the Light, together, as He is in the Light.” If we’re not letting others *inside* of us, and vice versa, we’ll never know the Kingdom and its Benefits. It is, after all, “neither here nor there, but *within*.”

If we are really functioning in God’s Ways rather than the traditions of men that nullify the Word of God—if we’re really, *really the Body of Christ* in a functional, daily way as He intends, the “guard/prisoner” problem is solved! At last, normal people that honestly *want* to live for Jesus rather than for themselves can see their deepest problems rooted out and their greatest potentials realized. God *knows* how frail we are, and how *easily* we fall into the “guard/prisoner” insanity referred to above. The “expert/authority figures” in the workplace, and in government (or religious) schools frequently have the same hypnotic effect on us toward evil. “Bad company corrupts (even) *good* character!” OUR ENVIRONMENT MATTERS!! The average man (or woman) in the workplace, the average child in a government or religious school, or the average woman at home—all have far too little relationship, direction, and help in growing in depth of reality with Jesus and others. They are left to the world of peer pressure, greed, fear, lust, ambition, laziness, depression, and spiritual psychosis of every kind. They are in the false world of “guard/prisoner” that the world system has set up, and there is no defense—without Jesus in His Church, that the gates of hell cannot withstand. About five days is all the average person can be “big” enough to stay clear of “leaven” and the deceptive problems that follow. *That’s* why GOD said, “Admonish one another DAILY, as long as it’s called ‘Today,’ so that NONE will become hardened and deceived.”

It doesn’t take long for any of us to get in a confused state (like the students above) concerning where we really are and who we really are. Jesus knew we would desperately need God’s Ways in *daily heart-rending* and *exposing* and *teaching* in the Church. That corrupting influence of the bad company unchecked has happened to a HUGE percentage of christendom at this very hour.

Sure, there can and will be weaknesses and mistakes no matter what our situation, or how wonderful a real Church may be. But there is

only one Place designed by God to give us the Resources to grow into the “full measure of the stature of Christ,” “no longer infants tossed to and fro.” And that is in DAILY revealing relationships in a true Church—one that is defined by a revelation of Christ in every “member” (Mat. 16) and a connectedness for real (1Cor. 12) to the Body of Christ in daily Life. Only there will we recover all of the ground that the enemy has meant to take from us when we DO make mistakes out of our ignorance or our flesh. There, in His Church, the gates of hell will NOT prevail.

So, “What to do?!” when it isn’t that way where we happen to be? What is our part when our environment is NOT a *daily* expression of the life of Christ, but rather attending some cool meetings and then going back and living in the world, disconnected from *daily* bonding and light-walking and self-sacrificing, burden-bearing in the Church? I can’t make it any more uncomplicated than this: 1) Pray fervently and fast to the Lord of the Harvest, both for laborers and for harvest. The more it matters to us, the clearer and more persistent we’ll be. Be a worshipper in the secret place, and a worker on your knees; 2) Leave no stone unturned in laying down your life for others NOW, daily, nightly, “serving,” “confessing your sins to one another,” and all the “walking in the Light as He is in the Light” that can possibly be squeezed into your days and evenings. Leave the rest to Him.

The “Mark of Life”

Wednesday Morning, January 1, 2003

In Ezekiel 9, there is a verse and Life we all have had to weep over and grow into, since many years ago God showed us this: to love ONLY what God loves. A friend of the world is “an enemy of God” —ouch! And further, initially a surprise to all of us: a person who will NOT hate and cry over the sin they see amongst those who call themselves by Jesus’ Name around them, but rather defends or protects it, or ignores it as “not my problem” and “God will take care of it, so I can disregard it”—such a person does not know God.

“For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within (any man that is called a brother)? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” “If they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned the people from their evil way and from the evil of their doings” (Jeremiah 23:22).

That is as powerful and personally life-altering as it is True. God was clear: Those who truly Know Him are always very purposeful about defending God’s Honor and “hating even the clothing tainted by evil flesh.” God’s Will has always been that we would “have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” Those pleasing to Father have always been that way. Remember WHY “Phinehas was credited with Righteousness” (Ps.106:30-31, Numbers 25)? That’s how the Bible reads. Always has.

And yet, THIS Truth in Ezekiel was still more STAGGERING to us, as a People in this city, many years ago now.

And the LORD called to the man dressed in linen who was carrying the writer’s case. He said to him, “Walk through the streets of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of all those who weep and sigh because of the sins they see around them.”

Then I heard the LORD say to the other men, “Follow him through the city and kill everyone whose forehead is not marked. Show no mercy;

have no pity! Kill them all—old and young, girls and women and little children. But do not touch anyone with the mark. Begin your task right here at the Temple.” (Ezekiel 9)

WOW! The “mark of Life” is ONLY for those who WEEP and SIGH over sin. We must CARE, or we are not in His Spirit. “Avoiding sin” isn’t going to save the lives of those of Ezekiel’s day. The only ones saved were those who CARED DEEPLY about the sins around them—not just themselves. Everyone else died! While most will not even deal with themselves for the Blood of the Lamb, even JUST that (dealing with one’s own sins)—is not the end of God’s Heart, obviously. We are called to WEEP and SIGH “because of the sins we see around us,” and then “wrestling to present others complete in Christ.” THAT’S the Mark of Life that Father is looking for!

That is Jesus’ Life within those who are Twice-Born. And we’ll decide, each of us, if we will be co-workers with Him and embrace His Spirit, or if we will quench it or oppose it. THIS is the Spirit that was upon Him, and can be upon us—if we would allow ourselves to pay the price Jesus paid for it!

“And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to proclaim good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

“And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. You shall be named the priests of the Lord, they shall call you the servants of our God.”

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for the sake of God’s People I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.”

But WITH Vision...!!!

Wednesday Afternoon, June 21, 2000

“Without Vision, the People cast off restraint.”

Few expressions are as painful to ponder as this. The reality of watching this happen—visionless people throwing off Life and Reality—people who sell their dream, JESUS’ Dream is an unthinkable tragedy. And yet these wasted lives and potential, these wounds to Jesus, mark 99% of christendom in this Laodicean age in which we live.

BUT THAT CAN CHANGE!!!

Consider that the first air travel was in 1903, when Dayton, Ohio’s Wright brothers accomplished a 12 second and 37 meter flight. By the end of that day, they had set a new record—a 59 second flight, covering a whopping 260 meters. Now consider that in barely more than 65 years after that first North Carolina short-beach-walk-of-a-“flight”—men had walked ON THE MOON—a 384 MILLION METER FLIGHT from earth. And back. In only 65 years of progress!

Do we REALLY doubt then how marvelously and quickly MIRACLES can happen in Jesus’ Name, when mere men can do such things as we’ve just described? The awesome things GOD wants to do in our lives, and in His church worldwide, for her to be “prepared for the Return” of her Groom, Jesus—these are not even DIFFICULT, no matter how far away they may seem to human eyes!

In spite of the setbacks that come to “test our faith,” many WILL still passionately love and long for and live for Jesus’ Dream, to have a visible People, once not a People...like a city set on a hill! They will spend their last breath for a People that look like HIM, an equal yoke for His Return and Wedding!

“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to proclaim to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to

make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:8-11).

What happens when we strive for “the Glory of God!!” and we don’t see the manifestation of His Life in our environment? What if few seem to care in our small part of the world, and even those near us with “similar ideas” are hard to get along with and not entirely impressive in the way they live out Jesus’ Life? What if “our” best efforts are weak or worthless? What if we don’t personally see the identifiable local church that “the gates of hell cannot prevail against,” “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament,” “where one part of the body will not say, ‘I have no need of you,’” and we “contend as one man for the Faith,” “admonishing one another daily so that none are hardened and deceived by sin” and visibly loving and serving one another “that the world may know”?

Historically, in many parts of the world, we’ve seen a number of reactions to the disappointments and fatigue that inevitably set in by God’s Design.

- 1) Some get busy with institutional “church work” and bury themselves in programs and good deeds and attendance and stuff.
- 2) Some get a “hobby,” such as “anti-whatever” or “missions,” or are crazed by Y2K phobia (which will evolve into something else now, obviously), or home school or health food.
- 3) Some will get swallowed by the machine, and digested and inebriated by its digestive juices...and get “promoted” up the ladder. They’ll be coaxed and flattered by mom and other leaders to get legitimate and go to “seminary” and thus be educated into being a “man of God.” Or they’ll just read some Dale Carnegie, Toastmasters, Zig Ziglar, or “Deep Truth” books that they can regurgitate from a pulpit, to everyone’s delight. Or they’ll “start a ministry” and make themselves feel busy and fruitful and important by promoting their names and their sweet stuff, and doing newsletters, websites, special appearances, “mission trips,” and the like. Photographs, bios, posters...man-centered, man-promoting, Jesus-robbing stuff. All in His Name. But, they have no

fruit of corporate daily Life of Jesus. Are they just words? In many cases, even their families are worldly-minded. “Wisdom is proved right by her CHILDREN”—not by “her fan club” or “her audience.”

It is relatively painless to be a traveling hero or a talking head, or an invisible writing hand (an “author”). It is a hiding place from the REAL thing! OH, what Life could be like if we Built Jesus’ Way, and all of His Gifts and Resources were used His Way! How sweet Life could be—and the multiplied fruitfulness would be staggering! And those who THOUGHT they had no Gift to speak of would be drawn into amazing Usefulness and staggering Places, if they had the courage to go there.

4) Some, when they drift away from God’s Heart and God’s Vision will get lazy and cold and become “sitters,” while they invest their energies and resources in the world and in their biological family units. Very sad.

5) Some will become disenchanted by people or events and become bitter and hostile, explaining their sins away by forever whining, “I was hurt! I was damaged! I was used and abused!” These will either be quitters, blaming others for their disobedience to God, or they will become prideful and ambitious and show the world that THEY can do it “right” when no one else is. They’ll start their OWN li’l ol’ thang, for Jesus. Or make a hobby out of lashing out. It is a reaction, not Revelation, and will fail. But they don’t see that, yet.

6) Some will intellectualize away the Desire of God’s heart—for visible expressions of His Reign in local life. “We being many are ONE!” Some will use “scholarship” or “Greek” to attempt to dismantle the Picture of Life in Christ, together on a daily basis. It’s a devious game, emanating from their own hurt and failures and lack of experience of Reality in Christ together, as He intends. “NOW, through the church!” Most “doctrines” are created, not out of “scholarship,” but out of their own hurts and failures that they cover up with. “Oh, well, it’s not SUPPOSED to be that way, anyway!” Then I don’t have to hurt or take responsibility for my own failures or worldliness. It’s easier that way. Nearly all “doctrines” of woe and failure and “the invisible church” and “predestinational aberrations” are formed by pain and lack of experiencing true Life, not by honest views of the Bible. But it all sounds so impressive.

7) Some will try a “house church movement.” Kinda cutting edge stuff these days, eh? And yet most “expressions” are either group therapy

sessions, or “Ted Mack Amateur Hour” (everyone gets a turn!), or miniature versions of the institutional “services.” Few “expressions” are apostolically Life-filled, life-changing encounters with the Living God through His Vessels, His Body on a daily basis—“from the least to the greatest.” And I am not speaking of “meetings”! Ah, so this disappointment in the failure of the “house church movement” should lead us to choose, say, #4 or #5 or #6, right?

8) Some will keep going through the external motions of “wrestling to present others perfect in Christ,” even sacrificing sleep and entertainment and relaxation and family approval, but the whole time on the inside doubting if it will make any difference in anybody’s life anyway. And they rebuke themselves for it, knowing it’s unbelief. And they wonder what happened to their joy, and rebuke themselves for that, too, because after preaching to others that self-pity is a sin, they find themselves fighting against it pretty unsuccessfully a lot of the time. And in the meanwhile, their doubts become a self-fulfilling prophecy—all their efforts are pretty ineffectual because there’s not a robust faith in Jesus at the core. And they’d really like to blame someone else, to be a victim, but they know they can’t, so they accuse themselves in their minds constantly. They know if they don’t start drinking of the Living Waters, other vices and diversions will rush to try to fill in that vacuum, and the Testimony of Christ in them will be little more than an educated lukewarmness, where words substitute for what was once Reality.

THESE VARIOUS FALLING-OUT PLACES HAVE HAPPENED TO MANY! WE ARE NOT UNAWARE OF SATAN’S DEVICES! DON’T LET ANY OF THIS NONSENSE BE YOU!!

Jesus’ Plan has not failed, and we don’t need excuses or pseudo-scholarship to explain away the mediocrity that surrounds most people for all or most of their lives!

“Without VISION the people cast off restraint, they perish!”

But then, as sons of Abraham—BECAUSE we have “the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4), we COULD take a different view of it all and NOT fall into any of the #1-8 traps above, right??!!

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know

where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:8-10).

“...All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Okay?

Don't let anyone, ever, steal your Dream to See Christ's Life Manifested Daily “from the least to the greatest” in a Visible, Connected Corporate Life of Believers—SINCE IT IS, IN TRUTH, JESUS' DREAM—ZOE LIFE IN HIS PEOPLE TOGETHER!!!

No matter the setbacks, no matter the experience (good or bad), no matter whether you know of an example anywhere or anytime, no matter how many times you may have been “hurt,” no matter who goes with you, or NOT...be one of the few with “the faith of Abraham” who will remain “Unwavering, fully persuaded, giving glory to God!” even if you are “as good as dead.” That's when He does His best Work. ☺