

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 Crucible

Refining and Melding Relationships



As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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The Crucible

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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

We Would See Jesus

1958

“**O**ur service for our fellows does not come from strained efforts on our part to live for them, but rather from seeing Jesus doing so, and then simply making ourselves available to Him that we may be the channel of His grace and power to them. This was the way in which He walked in His relationship with the Father, and it is the way in which we must walk in our relationship with Him. Said He, ‘The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He Seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise’ (Jn. 5:19). And we, too, can do nothing REAL but what we See the Lord Jesus doing, and participate by yielding in Him. We can only TRULY bind, “what we see being bound”—by current fellowship in Him. Our theories, archived knowledge, good intentions, and good deeds mean next to nothing, and most of this ‘will be burnt up.’ Until we see that, we are helpless, and our service is nothing more than self-initiated striving. Most in religion and attendance, rather than Daily Life in Him and His People, are more subject to ‘powerless effort,’ than the ‘effortless Power’ that is in Him. But if we will first seek to See what the Lord Jesus is doing in a situation, then we can move with Him, even as the Son moved with the Father, and in that co-operation between man and God the true works of God are produced. Ours is not to originate well-intentioned programs, social activism, do-gooding, anti-this-or-that, this “ministry” or that. True Christianity, demonstrated in that First Christian, the First-Born, Jesus Christ—is simply to yield ourselves moment-by-moment, watching Him in CURRENT relationship and communing Life ‘together with all the Saints,’ to be the channel of what He initiates and carries through. We trust Him to do so through us, and through any channel or circumstance or timing of His choosing. Hallelujah. What Freedom!”

©Hession

Am I My Brother's Keeper??!!

Part 1

Wednesday Night, February 20, 2002

Recently, a thirty-second pitch for some computer product demonstrated a trait of human nature, and an un-crucified life. You'll see the point.

A man dressed in black, obviously a criminal, is seen running through hallways and down stairs, trying desperately to elude two security officers in a high-speed foot chase. The uniformed men are carrying guns and communicating with walky-talkies to their superiors as they make the chase. In the background are the sounds of sirens and horns, and a loud-speaker voice yelling, again and again, "INTRUDER ALERT: SECTOR 12!..... INTRUDER ALERT: SECTOR 12!..... INTRUDER ALERT: SECTOR 12!"

The two uniformed men give chase, running and jumping barriers, following closely on the heels of the criminal who is attempting to escape from the scene of his crime. The music is intense, the sirens blaring, and loud-speaker is continuously shouting "INTRUDER ALERT: SECTOR 12!" Clearly the nature of the crime and the chase are very serious.

As the security guards nearly apprehend the criminal, the two armed officers suddenly stop running and come to a complete stop, and the criminal continues running, disappearing from sight. The camera pans to the wall above the two guards, where in large block type it is painted, "End of Sector 12. Beginning of Sector 13."

The guard brings the walkie-talkie to his mouth, presses the button, and declares to his superiors, "Sector 12 now secure! I repeat: Sector 12 is now secure." ...as the two security guards holster their guns and turn around and walk slowly back in the direction from which they were running. The criminal has escaped by now, having done his destructive deed, and easily left the premises—once the guards had abandoned the pursuit at the end of their own personal "Sector" assignment.

I know the point will be clear to many of you, regardless of your nationality as you're reading this—*because you've seen this same attitude of heart as a temptation within yourself.* And, beyond question, you've seen people in

the religious system take this same attitude as a hiding place for laziness, irresponsibility, and lukewarmness. “HEY! I’ve got MY relationship with God! The rest of that sin around me—the lukewarmness and compromise in ‘church’ is ‘not my problem.’”

“SECTOR 12 is SECURE!” “Hear no evil, See no evil.” Or, like Sergeant Schultz, “I see N-O-T-H-I-N-G!”

Well, obviously, *that* attitude of caring only about myself, and not His People as a whole, can’t be God’s Heart. Such an attitude of irresponsibility can never be acceptable to GOD. It’s not His “style.” NOR, does it “work” to disconnect from taking responsibility for others’ lives! It hurts Jesus, hurts those we love, and it hurts us! Why is it NOT okay with Father and His Christ to disconnect? Why is it WRONG to just “plug in” for a meeting or “service” now and again, and just lead my “christian life” at home? Why is it virtually worthless to be a “hero christian”—an “independent” “free” christian—putting out a newsletter or web site to say spiritual things—but staying disconnected from the daily Life aches and pains and sweat and tears? Why is it *virtually never okay with God* for us to just strum our guitars, living out in the boonies or the mountains or farms by ourselves, or in our ivory towers—eating health food, “home schooling” and sauntering across someone’s life now and then for lunch or a “meeting”? Why is that *not* spiritual (“not like Jesus”)? *Why* is it NOT okay with God to be disconnected from DAILY experience of Life with others? Why is it criminal to not experience others’ daily pains, be by their sides, helping in their daily temptations? Why is it a shame and waste if we are not sharing in the church’s, the Body’s daily joys—participating as Family in daily life and deeds and chores and errands and “admonishing one another DAILY, so that NONE are hardened and deceived by sin?”

Why? One reason is because, “A *little* leaven leavens the WHOLE batch,” saith the Lord. IF there is so little relationship amongst the Saints that there can be pockets of sin here and there, unrepented of and undealt with and unnoticed—the “*whole batch*” is leavened, including YOU. Bummer, huh? But there’s no way around it. *You* will be leavened, without even knowing it. God said so. You are leavened, if there are others around you wearing Jesus’ Name, who are lukewarm or compromising in their daily situations. What do you really know about their family or child-rearing or job, or their personal entertainment, internet wandering, lustful food or vice indulgence, or sinful habits? There’s no way around the absolute necessity of taking responsibility for the lives of those around us, to “wrestle to present *everyone* complete, perfect in Christ.” “A *little* leaven leavens the *whole batch*.” “See to it brothers that *none* of you have a sinful, unbelieving

heart.” “From the least to the greatest, they *all* know Him.” In a well-known Old Testament example, “for our learning,” God demonstrated HIS view of undealt-with sin “in the batch” with the absurd and humbling defeat of Israel, at Ai. For the sin of one man, Achan, all of Israel paid a massive price. God has not changed, and is clear on the same matter in the New Testament as well. It’s just His Heart.

Only hard-hearted Cain, with “sin crouching at the door,” would say, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

“Sorry, I’ve done MY job! MY ‘relationship with God’ is fine, and the rest is not my problem. Sector 12 is secure!”

Was that how Jesus viewed it? Oh, my! What hope would we have?! Or Paul, “in the pains of childbirth,” “wrestling mightily to present everyone perfect in Christ.” Is that a passive “us four and no more” mentality? ANY man or woman of God, with Jesus living inside, will view life as Jesus did and does. (1Jn. 2:6) God first, family second, church third? Where did THAT come from?! Not the Bible. “I’m fine with strolling through the garden, humming spiritual songs to myself, having a ‘family devo,’ and rising from my pedestal to pump out a newsletter or website or book, pontificating on ‘what it’s all about.’” Can *that* be Jesus? No, of course not. *He writes living letters*, not just notes on the page. The REAL Jesus is IN the trenches—not just humming about it from a sedate self-serving setting or life-style, or writing pretty words about it all. You know?! ☺ I know you do.

Now, what’s the alternative to all of that? How should we then see our Roles in life, in a Habitat, a true Church, where Jesus can Reign in His Priesthood? What *should* we consider our role, instead of the simply “guardians of our own little sector”—the “us four and no more” mindset? What is the alternative to the unBiblical, fallacious and ubiquitous philosophy of “god first, family second, and church third?” As Jesus said, “Who ARE my mothers, my brothers, and my sisters?”

What Vision does Father have for the nature of (100%) of His Church? Who are these with a *second* birth—dead to the first birth? (Gal. 6:14; Rom. 7:2-4) What is my part? What Responsibility has He granted and called me to 1) with those who call themselves by His Name, 2) with unRegenerate unReconciled relatives and acquaintances, neighbors, co-workers, and 3) with area religious facilities? Do I have a Responsibility? Yes! It is your Highest Privilege to not only be Saved with Him, but to Participate and suffer with Him in “bringing many Sons to GLORY”—“COMPLETE in Christ!”

“The Spirit AND the Bride” say “COME, Lord Jesus!”

With a heart to be RESPONSIBLE, “as if God were making His Appeal through you”—how might we grow into that Holy Place of usefulness to God? “If ANY man speaks, let him speak as the very ORACLES of God!” “You ALL ought to be teachers by now!” “In the Race, ALL the runners run.” “See to it brothers that NONE of you have an unbelieving heart.” “Let NO MAN steal your crown” by convincing you of a clergy/laity system where “it’s not my problem—I can’t do it.” Consider the brief picture that the Apostle John has given us, as a “road map” of sorts, for our Growth into taking responsibility for serving God in others’ lives. Father has called us to be a *Holy Priesthood*, in the Spirit of His Risen Son. HE has called and empowered all of His People to be *ambassadors* of Christ, “from the least to the greatest.” The apostle John, in the context of *relationship* and hating the distractions of the world system, gives us this to ponder. Though it is an odd sequence, John mentions it twice for emphasis, to make certain we didn’t think he got the order wrong:

*I write to you, little children,
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.
I write to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one.
I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.
I have written to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men,
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,
And you have overcome the wicked one.*

Can we be determined together that ANYTHING our Jesus values...IS our “Sector”? Are we willing to pay the price for the Pearl—and to “seek FIRST His Kingdom”?

Consider these thoughts as some incentive to care for Him and His, to take responsibility to resolve all issues of “leaven in the batch” along with your brothers and sisters.....and we’ll talk more later about Children, Fathers, and Young Men. But first, a dream that seemed pertinent to the topic.....

Am I My Brother's Keeper??!!

Part 2

Friday Night, February 16, 2002

A Vision, Recalled

I was in South Carolina on a trip with some brothers, when I had something like a dream or a vision. I can remember pictures in my mind, but I don't remember what form they came in. I talked to maybe 10 brothers at dinner about it that night.

In this sleepy, sleepy dream or vision of some sort, there was a garden and a variety of plants. I remember having very little interest in that garden, or anything to do with it.

BUT, something very serious happened inside of me. At some point I shifted my perspective entirely—and began to have *a great deal of intense interest in this garden, and these plants*. I then *poured* myself into cultivating and caring for the plants, and learning everything I could about it all.

Then, someone asked me, “Why do you care so much?” And the answer that I had for them was, “Because the One who died cares so much—it is my obligation to have the same heart for the Garden that He has.” I wept when it happened. I couldn't stop. I feel the tears behind my eyes as I am retelling it now. I remember tearing up at the table at dinner in South Carolina. Some of the brothers will remember this. I felt very strong emotions and reconfirmed convictions for my life at the time of this dream—and I've tried to live my life that way ever since.

“Hey, I could care less about this plant. This gardening thing is a pain. I don't know anything about it. I don't know that I care anything about it—maybe it's not really my problem. After all, what can I do? They're not my plants, and I don't like plants all that much (it's not my 'thing'). I don't know what to do anyway.” Somehow, though, I had to turn my mind and efforts around. It was essential that I get my emotions involved in taking responsibility for making that garden lush and fruitful and safe. Why? *Because the one who died and left this small plant and this garden*

to me as an inheritance—HE CARES. HE CARES. HE CARES. This is His stuff—and He has entrusted something to us—so it is not a matter of just “tolerating” it. I must emotionally care as much as He cares, and pay whatever price He has paid or would pay! And His Plant, His Garden is surely not to be neglected or forgotten, while my affections or busyness are elsewhere.

Beyond all of that, “*the goal of this commandment is love, springing forth from a pure heart.*” A pure heart is to have the same affection for the object of His Love that He does, untainted and undiluted by “self” interests and agendas.

So, I poured myself into it. I just sobbed over these plants and loved on these plants. In myself, I thought these plants were stupid and worthless and had no particular value. And even if they would have had value and had been delicious green vegetables, I would have *never* eaten them. (You know how I am with veggies. ☺) It had absolutely nothing to do with me—no personal desirability at all. Yet, I made my heart to feel the same tears, the same joy, and the same love over this garden that the One who entrusted it to us had.

Beyond question, this picture, which was and is so dramatic for me, describes what must define our lives for Him. *I must lay down my life and my emotions for individuals and His People in this way*—for His Garden, His Bride, His visible Church as HE defines her in Acts 2:42-47, Matthew 5:14 and 16:18, Hebrews 3:12-14, Ephesians 3:10 and 5:27... accepting nothing less, ever. I have *made* myself cultivate a love and affection in areas that perhaps didn’t start that way necessarily, or might have been squashed by pain, had I allowed it. But as I have now seen how *He* views His Plant and His Garden, I have sought to bring my heart totally into being submersed in all the same feelings that He has.

There is no greater satisfaction in the world, no greater joy in the world, than that. It seems costly on the front end, very costly. But there is tremendous value in paying the cost of loving and caring for and protecting His Plant, His Garden. It is our High Calling and our privilege. Together with Him, we take up our cross daily for others. It is our joy and our crown.

Oh, Father, help me to care about your Garden with the depth and passion and sacrifice that you have demonstrated for that Garden—Your Chosen, and for those who might be.

*I write to you, little children,
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

*I write to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one.*

*I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.*

*I have written to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

*I have written to you, young men,
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,
And you have overcome the wicked one.*

Am I My Brother's Keeper??!!

Part 3

1986, 2002

Consider the brief picture that the Apostle John has given us, as a “road map” of sorts, for our Growth into taking responsibility for serving God in others’ lives. A Holy PRIESTHOOD. AMBASSADORS of Christ, “as if God were making His Appeal through us.” Ponder the thought, and odd sequence, which John mentions *twice* for emphasis:

“I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:12-13a).

Notice the sequence there. He writes to 1) children, 2) fathers, 3) young men, in that order. Now he starts over again to make sure we didn’t miss the sequence:

“I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:13b-14).

God doesn’t make mistakes. To the human progression, that’s out of order. He ought to have children, young men, and then fathers. In a human progression it’s out of sequence, but in God’s progression it’s exactly right. First Children, then Fathers, then Young Men.

Children...

Remember that the first step is to be a child—born not once, but twice—and now *your sins are forgiven*. “I write to you children.” How did we reach this first category of Maturity in the Lamb? Because our sins are forgiven! Spiritual “children” have become aware of sin and their need for God’s forgiveness. They have been supernaturally touched by the bountiful goodness of God’s Mercy. All newborns, all “children” have seen and felt God’s nurture and nature in their spirits (Mat. 16:17; Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:9-11).

But children, by nature, are consumers without much regard for others. They're cute as all get out sometimes, and we rejoice in the smallest gurgles and coos, and then the first attempts to talk and walk. It's not even a problem when the meatloaf is worn on their heads like a hat! They're CUTE! But...they don't pay the bills, and don't thank you for doing so. They often cry at the worst times, and dirty their diapers and make demands passionately, without ever asking how we feel or what they can do for us. ;) They are primarily, in this state of maturity, consumers. The same is true of us Spiritually, if we do not mature. We take, and seldom give. We consume and contribute little. And while this may be fine in the early stages after our second Birth, it is *highly* unnatural and improper if still the case years after conversion. "Children" is only meant to be the earliest stage of natural, or Supernatural life!

Being a child includes learning all the foundational stuff that all children must learn. They are learning how to read and write and talk and walk, identify colors and shapes. They get a little older and then maybe they can identify street signs and learn how to drive. There are even advanced "childhood" things, all of which are still "fundamental" things. And there is nothing more fundamental than the fact that "*He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*" (Heb.10: 14). Everyone that has entered into covenant with God through Jesus has been made perfect. No matter what you think about yourself, *if you are in Christ*, you are **absolutely perfect**. However, the second part—"being made holy"—is an ongoing, continuous action. We are *being made* holy. We are *made* perfect, and we are *being made* holy.

As children, we are made perfect. Our sins are forgiven on account of His name. But being made holy? What does the word "holy" mean? It means "set apart," "useful for God's purposes" or "set apart for use by God." We are "being made holy," which means we are being made useful to God. We are being cleansed from all the flesh, from all the things that hinder our walk, that encumber us, that trip us up, as Peter said. We are being freed from those things and we are being made holy. As Paul said, "with ever-increasing glory we are being transformed into the image of Jesus"—*ever-increasing holiness and usefulness to God*.

Now, if as children we stop and camp out on the fact that our sins are forgiven on account of His name, then we will never be made useful to God, will we? It is God's desire for children to GROW and be made useful to God. We all know that if a child is not growing in very tangible ways, then something is WRONG and he needs help. Babies kick and scream and cry when they need something (or think they need something). But, if

a 15-yr-old does that, you have a serious problem. Ah, we must continue to Grow! We must, whether man or woman, go on to be Fathers, Spiritually. As the Hebrews' writer would say, "You all should be, by now!"

Fathers...

"I write to you fathers because you have known Him who is from the beginning."

Am I my brother's keeper? Not if we're still but "children" years after conversion. But, THAT'S not God's Plan for us! Of course, He desires that we are His Ambassadors "that He might make His Appeal through us!" Only a child would NOT seek to pour themselves out for others, day and night, without consideration for their own "private" affairs.

If we'll ask Him, God can open our eyes to see His Fatherhood. "Abba, Daddy" is something only God can show us. If you want to be a father in His House, pray that you would first see His Fatherhood because the love of God shed abroad in your heart *is not a theory*. You can't study it and make it happen. The love of God flooding over your soul puts a spring in your step and a light in your eye, *and has a power that is unquenchable*.

And once you KNOW your Father, you will begin to become a father yourself. A father has dealt with those fundamental things in his own life and now is dealing with them in other people's lives, not just his own. He protects, nourishes, provides for, mentors, instructs, corrects and produces children. Fathers and mothers are people who have learned the fundamentals and those things have become second nature to them now. They know how to drive; and they don't even have to think about it anymore. They know how to read and write and do math. That stuff is second nature to them. It's not that there's not more to learn as a father or mother, but it's on a whole different level. It's not the fundamentals. The Hebrews' writer said to go on past the rudimentary or the fundamental things into more advanced things. Spiritual fathers and mothers are going on to more advanced things while they are *helping others* come through the basics, through the fundamentals. They love children and help children because they have been there themselves. They help turn children from their sins and toward their loving Father.

Now, back to our Sector 12 scene from earlier (part 1 of 3)...If we don't care for our Family (and not just ourselves and how things affect us) aren't we "worse than infidels"? If you belong to Christ it is your job to "wrestle to present EVERYONE complete, perfect in Christ" and to "See to it brothers that NONE of you have a sinful, unbelieving heart." If your heart and focus

and mind aren't moving towards God's Fatherheart, then you are not walking in agreement with God (Rom. 3:3). If you want to be in the mainstream of the river of God's purposes on planet earth, you have to graduate from being a child—one who is always dependent, always drinking milk, always getting, never giving—then you must give your life away!

How many of your children give very much? They try, but it's pretty meager. But there comes a time when you are a father and your schedule is not your own anymore. You don't own your life anymore once you become a parent. That is exactly the same way it is spiritually. When you are fathering and mothering people in Christ, your life is not your own anymore. Your sleep patterns are not your own, your money is not your own, your emotions aren't your own—you don't own anything anymore when you are *fathering* and *mothering* in the Kingdom of God. When you are fathering or mothering, how much time you are away from your "family" is not your choice anymore.

I overheard a little girl today saying, "I wish I was grown up so that I wouldn't want to play anymore. If I didn't like to play, then I wouldn't have trouble doing the things that are *really* important. So I just wish I was older so that I wouldn't enjoy playing so much." Her much older and wiser brother said, "Oh, that's just not true. Daddy still *likes* to play. He would play all the time if he could. He just knows that he can't do that anymore because he has to work to take care of us. He loves to play too but he knows he has other responsibilities."

If I asked you if you wanted to be in God's purposes, I hope you would say "yes." I hope that you are not settled to stop with the forgiveness of sins as a child, but you instead want to go on and be a father to others. You can't walk with God and stay in fellowship with Him if you are not walking in agreement with Him—if your mind isn't set on *His* purposes. And His Purposes will include having that Fatherheart that He has—the heart that CARES and takes it upon yourself to love and to give and to lay your life on the line for the children in the House.

Romans 12:1-2 talks about offering your body as a living sacrifice—laying it all on the line. A living sacrifice doesn't have any future plans, any wealth, any pride. A living sacrifice, lying on the altar to be burned, doesn't have a lot of things that it is grabbing onto. No reason to. I've been crucified with Christ. I don't live any longer.

It is so important that you have a vision of what God is doing in you and through you, and that you yield to that vision. "*Where there is no revelation the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.*"

A servant cannot be corrected by mere words; though he understands, he will not respond” (Prov. 29:18-19). I can give you mere words. I can show you things in the Bible that you don’t want to do. But I can’t correct you with mere words. Even if you understand exactly what I am saying to you, if you don’t have a vision of what God is trying to do in your life, you are going to just make excuses—“Oh, I don’t have to because after all that’s not my responsibility... That’s someone else’s responsibility (someone else’s ‘sector’).”

But if you will see the vision, if you can catch a glimpse of what God wants to do in your life and what you were destined for, oh, how different life would be! We were predestined for the Glory that Jesus had on this earth. Jesus—the man who walked on water, the man who said, “Peace, be still” to the storm. Joshua—who made the sun stand still. Elijah—who made the axe head float. Paul—who raised someone from the dead. Those things are not reserved for Jesus alone. If you go through all the miracles, Old Testament and New Testament, you will see that Jesus never did anything that a mortal human being didn’t do at some time or another as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. In fact, a couple of men did something Jesus *didn’t* do. Jesus died. Elijah didn’t. He was caught up in a chariot of fire. So what I am saying is that Jesus came to show us *what is possible*. He didn’t come just to forgive our sins. *He came to show us what intimacy with the Father, with the glorious life of God, is all about.*

Many Sons to Glory

The nature of the Fatherheart of God is to bring many sons to Glory (Hebrews 2:10). As we graduate into fathers, *our nature is going to be to bring many sons to glory*. In Matthew 23, Jesus looked over Jerusalem and wept. He said, “I wish so much that I could have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not, so therefore I am going to leave your house desolate.” He passed judgment on them, but His heart was one that was crying to bring many sons to glory, to gather the people. If you are walking in agreement with God, that is going to be your heart. You are going to live and breathe as Jesus did, to seek and save that which is lost. You will leave the ninety and nine to go after the one—leave this group and go after the one, if necessary. You will pay any price. That is the heart of Jesus, the Everlasting Father, as He is called in Isaiah 9. That’s the heart of the Father, our Father who art in heaven. *It is His heart to bring many sons to glory.*

Read Luke 4:18-19, John 10:11-18 and Matthew 18:12 (the Good Shepherd), John 17:6-18; Revelation 5:6-9. You are worthy, O Lord! You are the Lamb that was slain. You purchased men for God with Your blood.

That's why You are worthy. You were willing to seek and save the lost, You were willing to lay down Your life as a ransom for many.

The nature of the life that is walking in agreement with God is that the heart is the same heart that He has—a Father Heart. It is a heart that will nurture and reach out to other people and bring many sons to glory. It is a heart that will do the work of God on a daily basis.

Into Intimacy and Into Glory

Neither zeal nor obedience can be a foundation for spiritual fatherhood. There are three characteristics of fathers. First of all, *maturity* (hopefully, you can judge for yourself how you do in your own family, but there *should* be a maturity in our lives to be fathers.) Second, there should be a *birthing* people into the Kingdom of the beloved Son. There is no such thing as a father that never had a child. I don't know any other way to put it. While the birthing may take on different forms, the miracle of spawning supernatural Life is a non-negotiable aspect of any True father. "You had 10,000 tutors and 'talkers' in your lives...but not many FATHERS." And then, thirdly, there is the characteristic of *nurturing* people in their lives. Every father must also nurture. "Bring them up, Fathers, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." That command is not to mothers, it is to fathers. Nurturing and admonishing in the Lord is the Fatherheart of God. As we are progressing from being children with our sins forgiven into the next step of life in Christ, there has to be a fathering. We can't stay in God's purposes without walking in agreement with Him, and *fathering is His nature*.

"I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning." "When a student is fully trained, he becomes like his teacher." In order to be a father in kingdom things, you have to have intimacy with Him who is from the beginning. This is the key step: to *have intimacy with that Father* who is from the beginning—that Zoe Life that always was.

Genesis 2:7—The wind of the Spirit was blown into man and he received the glory of God into his being.

2 Corinthians 3:18—We are transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.

1 Peter 1:8—We are filled with joy inexpressible, full of glory.

Romans 8:29, 12:2—We are "glory-fied" by the renewing of our minds. Renewed to what? We are renewed to the glory of God and to the image of Jesus Christ—the mind that was with the Father, the Ancient of Days. The word becoming flesh in us in that "glory-fied" Life.

2 Corinthians 4:7—There is a treasure in earthen vessels. Where is that treasure? The verse before that says that the glory of God was made to shine in the face of Jesus Christ, and we are now vessels that hold that treasure. "...the glory of God in the face of Christ." In the full measure of the stature of God, of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:27—"...Christ in you, the hope of glory." Glory, through the transfiguration that we are destined for.

Hebrews. 2:10—It is God's intention to bring many sons to glory, not to salvation only.

Joel prophesied about the Holy Spirit that would Come. In John 20:22 it says that Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." You can see that it's happening. He breathed on them. Just like it happened in Genesis—God breathed on them and they came to life. And now we can be born again of water and the Spirit. Jesus breathed on them the breath of heaven.

John 7:38 says that rivers of living water are gushing out of our bellies. The river that flows in front of the throne of God flows through us and out of our bellies. We receive it from God, it comes from the throne of God, and we father others with that life. That river that flows in front of the throne of God flows through us and brings that glory to other peoples' lives. The rivers of living water that gush out of our bellies are said to be given to those who believe in Him. It's not some weird, super-spiritual thing at all. It's to those who believe in Him who would come after He was "glory-fied." *That's the norm. It's our destiny. It's what we were created to be.*

2 Kings 4:34 talks about Elisha being hand-to-hand and eye-to-eye and mouth-to-mouth with a man he raised from the dead. And that is exactly what happens when we are fathering other people into the glory of God. We are getting hand-to-hand and mouth-to-mouth and eye-to-eye with them and we are breathing the glory of God, the new life, into them. We cry their tears, bear their burdens, help them avoid the avoidable and deal with that which is not. We spend the night in prayer for them, spend our money and time on them when they would never know we have, watch their back sides when they are not, and allow them the pain of mistakes when that is appropriate, quickly loving them back into His Peace. That's the fathering. You'll never do THAT from a "lectern" or "pulpit" or "meeting-based life." That's the REAL thing. And that's walking in agreement with the Fatherheart of God—to be able to go hand-to-hand and mouth-to-mouth. Elijah did that, also, in 1 Kings 17, and Paul did the same thing in Acts 20:10. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, Paul said, "I dared to share not only

the gospel with you but my very life. I was a father to you. I nurtured you. I was a mother and I fed you.” God is going to have to bring us through in learning to walk in agreement with His Fatherheart and with His nature.

Young Men...

1 John 2: *“I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one...I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”*

This is the most exciting one to me. It should excite you as you see God’s progression here. He has not overcome evil *deeds*, but the *evil one*. Anyone can overcome bad habits. It takes a little time, but with the right drugs, the right help, the right encouragement and the right Zig Zigar techniques, you can do it. We are not talking about that. *We are talking about overcoming the evil one.*

Jesus says the Son of God was manifest that He might destroy the works of the devil. To not just survive life, but to take it right to satan and wipe him out. “I will build my church and the gates of hell can’t prevail against it.” *The gates of hell are overcome by a Body of people who are Young Men—who are Overcomers in the fullest sense.*

Young Men—the Ancient Life welling up inside of us, and the Word of God living in us. We are living in it. We breathe it. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are living in the Word of God and we are young men—overcomers. We have overcome depression. It still attacks us, but we have learned to Look to Him and draw on His Life, and make our bodies and emotions “our slaves” as Paul described. We have overcome relationship struggles; we don’t let them wipe us out anymore. We have overcome hormonal things; we don’t let that knock us out of the ballgame. Oh, YES, they do hurt, but we carry on, with our eyes on Him and our love of the lambs driving us forward. We’ve overcome the frustrations of life. Oh, we will feel them intensely, and perhaps MORE than most as we would be FAR more of a “target” for the enemy, than someone who does little to impede his progress or threaten his dark kingdom. Yes, there will still be pain and temptation, but “dead to the world and the world to us” we would, if Young Men, take our Place seated with Christ in Heavenly Realms, and say and do and feel only “as the Father speaks.” We may weep and perspire blood in the process and under the targeted attack of the enemy, and “the daily concern for the churches”—but Young Men have learned to be “inwardly renewed day by day” rather than to fold under the pressure. Young Men have left behind need for position, need for respect,

need for possession, need for power, or need for miraculous things to happen in order for them to feel loved or useful or Spiritual. They don't listen to "cast yourself down and let the angels catch you" for the Sign of Jonah IS sufficient. Whatever else Father chooses and we respond to is His Business, not for our ego or consolation. They don't have to have that anymore, *because they know Him who was from the beginning*. And now you live in the Word, you live in Jesus—the Word. You live and move and have your being in Him. And now you can overcome not just the evil things—but the evil one.

"When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet; the chief men refrained from speaking and covered their mouths with their hands; the voices of the nobles were hushed, and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths. Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban.

I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger.

I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

I thought, 'I will die in my own house, my days as numerous as the grains of sand. My roots will reach to the water, and the dew will lie all night on my branches. My glory will remain fresh in me, the bow ever new in my hand.'

Men listened to me expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel. After I had spoken, they spoke no more; my words fell gently on their ears. They waited for me as for showers and drank in my words as the spring rain. When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it; the light of my face was precious to them. I chose the way for them and sat as their chief; I dwelt as a king among his troops; I was like one who comforts mourners."

"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back."

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor and

the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God.”

We destroy the works of the devil. We are not only defensive in surviving the works of the devil, but we are offensive and we destroy the works of the devil. We go over the top of those things and kick down the gates of hell. It's God's purpose that we graduate from being fathers into kicking down the gates of hell, seeing the representation of the evil one on this earth and then kicking it down. Offensive warriors. Overcomers. No longer defensive survivors.

The “*full measure of the stature of Christ!*” is what you were destined for before the world was. If God destined that it would be the end result of your life, if you crucified the flesh and renewed your mind with those thoughts, do you doubt whether or not you can live that way? I don't. It *has* to be able to happen because God said so. He, in His mind, said, “This is My goal: If they will get out of My way, I will have My purposes wrought out in them, and the evil one will have no hold on them. I will build my church, and guess what! In reality, not in theory, it will kick down the gates of hell. It will be an Overcoming Force, with ‘greater Works’ than even My Son saw in His days of Life on earth! The Spirit AND the Bride say ‘COME!’”

“*...Overcome the evil one.*” That sounds really good to me. And I suspect there probably haven't been a handful of “young men” in the last few centuries. There aren't many Fathers, said Paul by the Holy Spirit. You have ten thousand tutors—big deal—but not many fathers. Lots of “preachers,” lots of “pastors,” lots of teachers, but not many fathers. And if there are not many Fathers, I wonder how many Young Men there are—how many Overcomers, who have taken it to the streets, and villages, and religious empires—taken it to the evil one.

It's safe behind a “pulpit”—that unBiblical coffin-on-end. It's “safe” creating a “web site” or writing a “newsletter” or “book” or “starting a house church,” or a franchise of a denomination. It's really safe. I'm not talking about that. It's also nice and safe in our big ranch house 50 miles from civilization, or

in home-school-mecca. “Us 8 and no more” is pretty safe living. So, that’s not what I’m talking about either. I’m talking about taking it to the evil one and ripping out hell by the roots. And that MUST be done “amongst the people.” There is nothing “theoretical” about it. Hell can’t prevail against those of us who will join our purposes to God’s purposes. He is going to do it. He said, “I will build my church. I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. I will raise them up to be a mighty force, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a mighty nation. They’ll be strangers and aliens in this world. They won’t fit in. They won’t be conformed. But rather, they will be a conquering force empowered from the heavenly kingdom.” God said that He is going to have that people. He *will* have that people.

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you,” he asked. ‘Who do you say that I am?’

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ (In the Greek it says, literally, ‘the Son of the God, the Living.’)

“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, [you are stone] and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven [not to the kingdom, but of the kingdom of heaven.]; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:13-19).

You can see that Ancient Life living in them, that same Life that enabled Jesus to say, “I don’t do anything I don’t see the Father doing. I don’t say anything I don’t hear the Father saying.” You see that life welling up to bind what has been bound in heaven, to loose what has been loosed in heaven. You see the power of having the authority of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Notice the rock that He is going to build all of this on and that He is going to use to bowl down the gates of hell. The rock that He is going to build His church on that the gates of hell cannot stand up against is a revelation of the Son of God, the Living. It is a confession of a revelation that the Father has given. Flesh and blood didn’t give that revelation, but my Father in heaven. That revelation is of God, the Living, and the Son of the Mighty God, the King of Kings. It is being able to see heaven open and the angels ascending and descending from the Son of Man, being able to see the Son

of God, the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of the glory of God. It is having a revelation in our being of the Son of God, the Living.

The Reality and the declaration of that is what the gates of hell cannot stand up against. It is something that man cannot reveal to you, only God can. That confession of that revelation to your being is what is going to kick down the gates of hell. It is going to make you an overcomer. It is going to allow you to have a bone-fire that will not be subject to embarrassment. It will not be subject to cowardice. It will not be subject to materialism or pride or any of those things. That revelation will so open you up that it will be blatant disobedience to do anything less than take it to the streets, to be bold as bold can be, whether you are on the job or wherever you happen to be. Because that revelation will burn in you, and it comes not from man but from God, from our Father in Heaven—the confession of that revelation of the Son of the God of the Living; the Living, Risen Jesus. He is alive! He rose from the dead! He's alive!

And the revelation of the fullness of that is what will make you an overcomer. 2 Corinthians 5 says that we don't see any man after the flesh anymore, though we once saw Jesus that way. We once knew Jesus after the flesh. Once there was a time when we knew Him only by what we read about Him, or what other people told us about Him, or we studied about Him. There was a time when we knew Jesus only by human sight and hearing and touch. There was a time when we knew Him only after the flesh, but then there was a revelation that flesh and blood could not reveal.

There is a revelation that God is working in your heart, as you crucify your flesh and open yourself up to it. It's a revelation that enables you to no longer know Him after the flesh by the five senses, but to know Him in a way that you can't explain to anyone else. You know Him in a way that no one could ever duplicate by studying what you studied. You can't tell them. You can't explain it to them. You cannot bring that revelation to them. Otherwise they would know it after the flesh. It would be flesh and blood revealing it to them. But there is a revelation for those who are willing to pay the price to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness and to be purged from all the material things, as Jesus was. Those people will be led out of the wilderness in the Spirit of power, as He was.

It's a Journey...

Children, then Fathers, then Young Men.

2 Corinthians 10:4 says that we have divine weapons to destroy satan's strongholds. Either that is theory or reality. I say that for those who will pay that price, it's reality.

"We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our service will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses..."
(2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

Are you ready for that? Are you ready to be an overcomer—a young man?

"...in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights..."

Are you even ready for sleepless nights for His name's sake?

"...and hunger..."

How about hunger?

"...in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as imposters; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich..."

Fathers.

"...having nothing, and yet possessing everything..."

The weapons of righteousness in the left hand and in the right. Having the power of God, the Glory of God, dwelling in our souls and in our beings, that overcoming life that you and I were meant for before the world was.

God knew you by name. That was His destiny for you, and all other things work for that good according to Romans 8:28-30—for that good, and that good alone. Not so that you will enjoy yourself more, but so that you will be changed more and more unto the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 8:29; Phil. 2:14-16).

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing" (Philippians 2:14-16).

Shine like the stars in the universe. Hold out the word of life. That's the Christian message. That's the Christian life—not having our sins forgiven only, but shining like stars in the universe and holding out the Word of Life in Power and Glory and Authority, eating from the hidden manna, being nourished by the bread of life, the bread from heaven. Don't settle for less.

1 Corinthians 10:1-16 speaks of a people who settled for less. They were given the land. They were given every opportunity and they bailed out. They didn't need to bail out, and we don't need to, either. Philippians 3:12 says that Paul lived for that which Christ apprehended him for. His purpose for living was to look at the reason God apprehended him and to lay hold of that. It is so important to have vision—without vision, the people perish. Without revelation of the glory of God and what He is trying to do in our lives, the people cast off restraint. We are to live for that which Christ apprehended us for.

Ephesians 5:27—Christ's purpose is to present to Himself a radiant church without stain or wrinkle—no age marks or any blemish, but holy and blameless. That's His purpose. That's the Bride prepared for the return of Christ. Guess what? The Bride makes Herself ready, the book of Revelation says. We have to enter into that. We have to pursue that. God isn't going to do it totally apart from our wills.

*“[God's] 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. In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory” (Ephesians 3:10).*

God's purpose was that through the church His manifold wisdom would be made known to the principalities and powers. Who are the principalities and powers? Angels—all the beings in the unseen world, all the hierarchy of power—the archangel, the cherubim, the seraphim, the devil and all his helpers. God's purpose was that His manifold wisdom, His awesome wisdom, would be made known to the unseen kingdom, to the angels, through the church.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11).

That, as an aside, is a definition of “how to study your Bible” God’s Way. It’s not the westernized, unBiblical “cerebral” approach—but it is God’s Way. “There’s a way that seems right to a MAN, but in the end it leads to death.” It is SO different to, “search intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them is pointing.” As Rabboni, the Master Teacher Himself has said, it is disaster to “diligently study the Scriptures” and yet still neglect to, or “refuse to come to Me” as the Author and Perfecter, and God alone. And to those who knew Yahweh well, Peter said it was *revealed* to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told to you by those who have preached the gospel by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even the angels long to look into these things. I want you to realize that these things are not milk. This isn’t stuff like “Now I lay me down to sleep, deliver my soul at the hour of my death. Amen.” This has to do with God’s Eternal Purpose, looking at it through His eyes and what He is accomplishing.

Here is the really neat thing. According to these Scriptures, He apparently never told the angels what He was going to do! He didn’t tell them! It’s God’s purpose to make His awesome wisdom and power known to the angels, to impress the angels with His awesome wisdom and power by what He is doing in the church, and even the angels long to look into these things. You may not realize this, but there may be one hundred or one thousand angels around you right now taking notes. God’s wisdom and His power is going to be displayed through the people that will somehow lay their lives into the hands of God and serve His purposes at any cost—*at absolutely any cost*. God is going to astound the angels with His power and wisdom through the visible Church (not the imaginary, invisible “church” that people who are experiencing little of God’s Plan have to speak of to salvage their consciences and credibility). Mortal human beings just like us “will demonstrate to the principalities and powers the manifold Wisdom of God!” And the angels say, “Could it be possible?” Without vision, without revelation, people cast off restraint. You won’t follow through on all of this unless you see these things, unless it’s revelation to your spirit and soul. Let it in! Focus! Drop to your knees before Him! “I will settle for nothing less than God’s purpose. God says so. His Divine Will will be fulfilled. I will be in on it no matter what happens. *I will be in on it*. I’m going to be in on it, whatever my part is, by His Sovereign choosing. I’m going to pay the price.”

There will be a people, God said, who will kick down and destroy the gates of hell. The overcomers will “hasten the return of the Lord.” It can be any of us or all of us. And the angels are saying, “Go for it!” You be those people. Children? Fathers! Young Men!!

Just Like Television

Friday Evening, September 6, 2002

Ever wonder why so many folks SO jealously cling to rituals, traditions, and programs in their christian worlds? Is it perplexing to you how comfortable some can be with form, liturgy, and pastors/priests/clergy positions in their christian attendance-based homes and religious facilities? Ever wonder WHY things so NOT in the Bible have such an appeal to so many, and they can't even IMAGINE what life would be like without these things?

Many have just never questioned the lack of fruit and the unBiblical nature of what they've always done. And besides, "everybody's doing it." Some follow after sensual stimulation (they LOVE the adrenaline rush of the music or the "sermon"), some after the social stimulation (lots of friends and family to have picnics with and meetings, and maybe to find someone to marry). Some follow after a salve for guilt (rather than falling in love with, and obeying Jesus), and some are there, as in the Rotary Club and other social organizations, to make business contacts. Some hang around to please their spouses, or grandma, though they have not died to themselves or even considered doing so. Okay, we all know these things are the reason Jesus said that the "road to destruction is broad" even amongst those who say, "Lord! Lord!"

But, apart from all of that. WHY do even some HONEST disciples of Jesus slump into the programs, pre-determined clergy and clergy control? How could it be so easy to allow that, and even defend the practice? Clearly, only in ignoring multitudes of Scriptures, and totally overlooking the Life and practice of Jesus and the Apostles He Trained, could we ever consider clergyism, ritual, liturgy, programs, and traditions of men. How do we fall into all of that so easily? How did we plummet to the ritual christian form of pre-determined day and time of meeting, and even pre-determined "odor of service," when Life with JESUS was nothing like that, and IS nothing like that?! How do we give in so easily to the dress-up attendance game?

It's exactly the same reason the vast majority of parents in the western world LOVE the television (and more recently the Internet)! Most parents, if they were totally honest, can't even imagine what life would be like without the television and computer and their associated videos, movies,

sports, and children's programs and "surfing" the "Web" and hiding in "discussion lists" and "chat rooms" and "social media."

How is this television and computer thing similar to why we so easily give up on True Christianity, as Father described it in Acts 2:42-47 and 1 Corinthians 12, and how Father described it in the Logos and THE Life—the Teachings and Life of Jesus?

YOU figure it out.

Here's a hint: Consider what your life, and the lives of your children, would be like every day—if the television and computers were totally GONE from your home. Picture your days. Picture honestly your evenings. What *would* daily life be like if we were to deal with the children as *real people*, and take *total* responsibility for their lives, education, time, character, and futures.... In this world, we find out who WE really are. We can't hide behind the "baby sitters" of passive junk. If the job's not getting done, WE are exposed! ☺

Now consider what it would be like in the world of greatest Importance—the Purposes of God in His Bride, the Church: GONE with all of the clergy (automatic "leaders"—in a living room, or "building"), GONE with the programs, GONE with the "automatic meeting times" and predictable or pre-planned "sermons" and "worship." Take away the props and gimmicks and mental and emotional pacifiers, and the illusions of creativity, relationship, and value created by the props and clever pre-planning... and live Life face to face, every day, in every way. BE like Jesus, in all of your time and decisions and relationships, rather than living in two, three, or four separate worlds (unChrist-like, when not interwoven with the Saints and His Purposes, every day) of occupation, phamily, recreation... and "church." No props! Just every day—"WHO WE ARE"—with nothing to hide behind to make us feel like we are something, or know something, or are "Spiritual" simply because we've added a few "good" things to our "personal" lives we've never truly abandoned into Him. In this World, we find out who WE really are. We can't hide behind the "baby sitters" of passive junk. If the job's not getting done, WE are exposed! ☺

Let GO!

That sounds, to most, inconceivably SCARY!

Just as with removing the television external and emotional *simulation*, and *stimulation*, when we are no longer in the iron lung of religious form and hierarchy and scheduled religion, we FIND OUT WHO WE ARE! Scary...*BUT WONDERFUL!!!*

If we TRIED...we might find that He meets us there on that Holy Ground, the place of trust and worship and taking responsibility for our minds and hearts, and for those around us. We just might find out that He is ALIVE and LOVABLE beyond words, and ready and ABLE to work His Wonders in your life and your surroundings, changing your life and “bringing many sons to GLORY!”

“..CHRIST in YOU, the hope of GLORY!” (Colossians 1:27).

“Rivers of alive water gushing from the inner man, for all who truly believe!”

Obsession or Jesus

Sunday Morning, January 31, 1999

Question: We just wondered how we should view the fact that SO many people around us in christendom seem to be OBSESSED with “prophecy,” or “rapture,” or “health food and homeschool,” or “Y2K fixation,” or headcoverings, or one kind of clothing or music or money-management over another, or obsession with the “arts,” or BLAH BLAH BLAH. How can we sort out all of these things?! Do we have to pick which obsession club we can live with and just join in, so as not to be “judgmental” and “independent”? That is NOT our heart, but it seems like people don’t “light up” and get excited about Jesus and His Bride and His Truth, NEAR as much as they get pumped when you push their “child-rearing” or “Y2K” buttons! Then they have a LOT to say. “Jesus plus NOTHING” is the motto, but one would never suspect that there is any truth to this motto, in practice. What a shame. And, to make it worse, if we don’t jump in with their enthusiasm on these favorite side issues, we are viewed with suspicion or even blackballed. We DON’T want to fight. Oh, PLEASE! But, we can’t really join in the reindeer games, either. How can we proceed? Any thoughts?

Start by knowing that solid Christ-centered child-rearing, much prayer, and excellent, open, daily relationships in the church are essential. But there are major problems when you add to your list a fetish for “child-rearing” books, exclusive “intercessors” groups, “male bonding” organizations and a million other non-apostolic obsessions or preoccupations. And the Solution is the same in every case.

And, I suppose that over 13 years of “daily in public and from house to house,” Jesus-centered, “joined and knit together,” “we being many are One” corporate Life (with a whole slew of people locally, of every background) should give some credibility to this answer. It’s really NOT just a theory amongst borrowed theories that could be offered by an “author.” I’m not an “author”—of at least *that* much you’ll soon be convinced. ☺ Actually I have no interest in writing literature anyway. “Living letters” are all that matter in the end. And that is why I can’t resist answering an obviously pain-filled letter such as yours.

What do we do about the schisms and multitudinous voices, all shouting different themes, and representing more “flavors” of favorite religious

topics and techniques than Baskin-Robbins? What can we do about the wild, controversial fist-pounding special subjects that people seem to get caught up in so easily, whether in denominational environments or “house church” cultures? They do, as you say, drain the Life out of the Body of Christ, and keep her fairly impotent to change lives and to experience Him day to day. They do, as you suggest, keep Believers apart from one another. Why? And what can be done?

Keep in mind that most of these ancillary fascinations only even EXIST because of our failures to follow God’s Ways. Specifically, the local Church is so *far* from the quality of daily corporate Life that Jesus intends—that it has caused innumerable tragedies. These other para-church and adrenal (C₉H₁₃NO₃) topics are the product of men’s desire for VALID expressions of Jesus or their desire for uncompromised “Truth” (“What IS the woman’s role in the church, anyway??!!). But, like Saul’s sacrifice, these energized pursuits are ill-advised replacements for the Real thing. The Real thing, flowing with God’s current grace, would SOLVE all of the dilemmas anyway! I do want to repeat this: these digressions are generally born out of hunger for true things. And “agree to disagree” is a tragic error. God’s heart is “unity of the Spirit” AND “unity of the Faith.” There is a Way, a misplaced port-hole into God’s heart and mind, that brings that unity and mutual understanding, with “ever-increasing glory!” It’s Real! It’s the Place of His Love and Mercy, sustained and cohesive, where the entire local church is connected and immersed in mutual Life (1Cor. 12, 13, 14:26; 2Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Here’s the starting place. The very best thing that can happen for folks who are off on tangents is fairly simple. Set Jesus before them continually, loving Him as a way of Life. “I will draw all men to ME.” No goopy or hyper-spiritual stuff. Just simple passion for, and fierce loyalty to Jesus.

Now *practically* there is something we can *do* to help people love Him and spend their passion on Him (Eph. 3:8-10, the “administration” of the “unsearchable riches of Christ”). A related issue that makes it *possible* to Know Him and See Him is fairly fundamental. We can help folks to see the Truth that God speaks of often:

WHO can ascend God’s Holy Hill? Those with clean hands and a pure heart.

Or, from Paul’s perspective as he spoke in the Spirit...“Some have wandered away from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. And, in so doing, though they want to be passionate experts, they don’t know what they’re talking about or what they are so confident of.”

In other words, until folks are dealing with sin in their own lives, they can’t get close to Jesus or to His Purposes. Unless they are obeying God

in resolving leaven in their religious environments they will be opposing God. Remember, it was GOD who commanded that those who call themselves “brothers” in the churches, but choose sin instead of Him, must not be permitted to “use up the ground.” The Master taught, “one more year.” God said, “Warn once, a second time, and then...” The King commanded, “Everyone that won’t listen will be completely cut off from amongst the people.” The Master commanded, “and then tell it to the church.” God said, “Don’t eat with them, don’t associate with them, and expel them from your midst.” The Master spoke of how we must feel, if connected to the Head, about those who are “lukewarm.” Though much help and patience should always be exhibited, it’s NOT our choice. The Church belongs to Jesus, not us. It’s His call, and He’s not to be “over-ruled” by those who deem themselves wiser and more loving, and less legalistic than their Creator and Savior. This just had to be said. It is often disobeyed, with the hope that in our disobedience to these Commands, we’d be doing God a favor by being more loving than He is. We can’t hope to please Him by disobeying Him in these things. God is far Wiser than we give Him credit for. OFTEN, the ONLY hope we have for having a REAL brother or sister is to lovingly, patiently expose those that are not really living for Him “heart, soul, mind and strength.” This is a wonderful Tool in God’s Toolbox for redeeming the nearly unredeemable. This is not some bad idea that God had and that we need to ignore because “it’s not practical” or very “nice.” TRUST Him. He knows what He said, and it is part of HIM!

Why? Because Jesus IS Truth. Jesus IS the Word, which became flesh. That’s why He was so clear: “If you love Me, you will keep My commands.” Loving Him can’t be separated in any way from loving Truth and obeying Him. The Word was with God, the Word was God. That’s why Paul could say, “Some agape the Truth, and so are saved.” And Peter could say of those with Jesus’ Spirit that “like newborn babes, they crave the pure spiritual milk.” We “live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

This painful scenario of needing to deal with sin in more than a “to him and him alone” sort of way...will come up only rarely. That is, only rarely when the quality of daily Life is as Jesus has ordained. In HIS Church, His Truths for responding to unrepented of sin...mustn’t be ignored. It’s even right there in what has been christened “the Great Commission.” “And teach them to obey everything I’ve commanded you.” Not “teach them everything I’ve taught you.” He said “correct, rebuke, and encourage” My People with My Word, not “entertain, educate, and intrigue” My People. He said His Word was “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” not that His Word was “useful for word studies, bible

studies, crossword puzzles, memorizing contests, debates and profiteering from pulpit sermons, conference speeches, religious books, and music.” If we’re not taking responsibility for helping others to be OBEDEIENT to Jesus in their lifestyles, decisions, habits, and personal practices...we/they CAN’T SEE GOD, or HEAR HIS VOICE!

“Without holiness, NO ONE can see the Lord.”

It was God Who said that ONLY those who are “living sacrifices,” no longer “conforming to the world’s ways,” can ever know “the good, perfect, and pleasing Will of the Lord.” Everyone else has accepted a substitute for the Person of Jesus. We really do need to “see to it brothers that no one has a sinful unbelieving heart” and “see to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up among you, defiling many.”

So, if we want to help one another find our ecstasy and “rapture” in “*amour*” of Jesus, we must help one another rid ourselves of the idols and affections and diversions that blind us to Him. God said that this is a “daily” life and death thing (Heb.3:12-14). It is our debt of love to Jesus (Gal.6:1-2) to care for others’ spiritual well-being. One of the many sins of Cain, prophesied to be a last days crisis as well (Jude 10-16), is to make a mocking response to God when He asks us about the well-being of our brothers. From the beginning of time, the spirit of Cain has mocked God’s call to care for our brother’s well-being. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” As Paul said, regarding Cain’s cousin Ishmael, “It is the same now.” Those same fatal diseases are still incubating in the religious world and spreading, unfortunately.

According to John, an apostle and our brother (1Jn. 2:10-15), spiritual “children” are conscious of sin and their need for God’s forgiveness. And they have supernaturally touched the bountiful goodness of His Mercy. All newborns, all “children” have seen and felt His nurture and nature in their spirits (Mat. 16:17; Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:9-11). But children, by nature, are generally consumers without much regard for others.

The “fathers”—the next step in maturity according to the apostle—take responsibility for others. The “fathers” (whether physical species or SPIRITUAL species) help birth, provide for, teach, mentor, and protect offspring. They, according to John, now “KNOW Him who is from the beginning.” (The “young men,” the warriors that *really* make a difference on a broad scale in this world, bust satan directly in the chops. But “young men” must pass through the other two levels, “children” and “fathers.”) To be a “father” we must by definition help turn others away from the sin that will prohibit them from ascending the Holy Hill. If we don’t care for God’s family, wouldn’t we be “worse than an infidel”?

“If a man stands in MY Counsel, he will turn My People away from their sins” (Jeremiah 23).

All of that to say, it is AMAZING how easily the issues that “side-track” people onto religious hobby-horses seem to fall away when our lives are more and more free from sin, and closer to Jesus and each other (1Jn. 3:7-10; 1Jn. 1:5-7). Side issues are *very* inferior to falling in love with Jesus. And falling in love with the REAL Jesus CANNOT happen without turning away from SIN. Pride, laziness, fear of men, worldliness, unforgiveness, lust of any kind, pessimism and unbelief, lying, instability and moodiness, disloyalty, selfishness, gossip, slander, wasting time, lack of sowing good Seed, rebellion against authority, did I say pride? THESE are the things that cause blindness and allow us to get side-tracked on peripheral issues and man-made, well-meaning systems and schemes. “If you OBEY ME, you can KNOW ME.” (Jas. 4:4,8; Jn. 7; Jn. 8; Mat. 7:20-23; Lk. 9:57-62). You really won’t ever need to deal long with all of the extraneous and Life-diverting stuff if you are helping them have Eyes to see Jesus. And this is greatly aided by helping them get rid of the stuff that blinds them to the authentic, Biblical, Truth-incarnate Jesus.

If, with wisdom, grace, love, patience, and forgiveness YOU will, 1) lay down and turn away from areas of your personal life that dishonor Jesus, 2) willingly open your life to others for input into your life (there are areas that you can’t see, but God will allow others to see *for* you, so that you “will have need of them” (1Cor. 12)), 3) be loving enough and obedient enough to help others pull the weeds in their personal lives and relationships that “choke” the Jesus Life out of them, and 4) hang out with others that want the same...*then* you will be very pleasantly surprised at the Glory that will be manifest. Yes! It is true; helping men be more Christ-like at work, or helping others to overcome sinful habits of vice, or of being moody or temperamental or prideful or lazy...results in fuller access to, and deeper Understanding of, His Truths. YES! It is true that in overcoming sin, we “grow in unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God.” Yes! There is a direct connection between learning to obey God—and learning to hear God. Yes! There is a direct connection between raising our children God’s Way, and understanding God’s viewpoint on eschatology, women’s roles, and a thousand other previously difficult or divisive topics. SIN is the largest barrier to knowing Him and “having the mind of Christ.” The carnal and worldly people—those who live like “mere men”—can never “discern all things” (1Cor. 2-3). But, as we turn to Him and away from sin, TOGETHER, we will not lose our way and lose sight of Jesus as our all-in-all. The hobbies that have secretly given us an identity and something to “stand for” will fall aside. Simon the zealot and Matthew the tax collector,

in the Presence of Jesus, though previously philosophical adversaries to an extreme, no longer have much to fight about. They are lost in Him, and put aside their sin.

Hope it is Clear...It's a great Journey.

“Genesis” of Organic Church...

Tuesday Morning, January 19, 1999

*“The Day Of Small Beginnings”
and of BIG Difficulties ☺*

Many worldwide, it seems, have had their eyes opened by the Spirit to what is NOT Church:

“Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open the doors and here’s all the people!”

Change that song to include padded seats in a “multi-function building” or “cell groups” or “house church” ...and “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet!” The emperor still is going to catch his death of cold.

These thoughts gathered here, in letters from and to saints in various places, are about this subject:

“As we’re beginning some ‘day of small beginnings’ and desiring to express ‘Church’ in a more Biblical and fruitful way than the popularized version of today, what do we do when our ‘situation’ is NOT GOING WELL?!!”

First, some background, necessary for some... MANY have “Seen” that Jesus is after a BRIDE, and that she is not an “invisible” Bride—any more than He was invisible when He was here physically. That “invisible church” thought is “ecclesiastical gnosticism” to coin a phrase. Really, that thought is not God’s Thought, but was born to try to describe what we see around us, rather than what God wants and expects. Jesus wants a REAL Bride,

a “city on a hill that *can’t* be hidden!” And this will be built out of, and *defined* by, Relationship—with Him, and with one another.

His Church is not defined by “attendance,” or an agreed-upon belief system, or unfortunate non-apostolic emphasis (such as gathering around Y2K phobia or homeschooling). “Church” will exist in the realm of love and self-sacrifice, and bearing one another’s burdens, the Law of Christ. Those who have not had a “revealing” of Jesus which “flesh and blood did *not* reveal to them” are not yet a part of the Church He is building. “Members” must, “from the least to the greatest, ALL know Him”—if it’s HIS church. They must have “intimacy” with Father, “the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom He sent” if they are saved with Eternal Life in them, according to Jesus Himself. And the local assembly (according to God’s Mind revealed by those “carried along by the Spirit” in His Word) is to LOOK LIKE THIS, not simply “contain a few folks” that know Him and love each other. The local church, which is very much a part of the teachings of Scripture, is to BE an assembly of those who are intimate with Him and one another, with all loving the Light (not defensive about it) and carrying the Light to others. Leaven (those in sin who do not desire to repent and change, and therefore don’t love Jesus, 1Jn. 1-3, 1Cor. 5) and disconnectedness (1Cor. 11, 12) are NOT welcome in the local assembly, according to the Head of the Church, Jesus. If these are welcome, it is not yet *His* Church, and the gates of Hell will prevail: teenagers lost, worldliness untouched, shallow relationships, etc, etc.

Jesus and His healthiest and most fruitful disciples have learned to walk and think “way outside the box” of men’s plans and hierarchies and systems and programs. All the stuff that sounds so noble (“seminaries,” “missions,” “ministries,” “para-church organizations,” “pastors” running “services,” and such) can’t be found in God’s Record of Jesus-life descended from Heaven. Not even “bible studies”? Nope. There is something else, far greater, far more pervasive and extraordinarily life-changing. It’s called, by poor translation, CHURCH. IT supersedes, replaces, fulfills, and dramatically makes obsolete all of those other “things” we have invented to “do God’s will.” It is the 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 3:10, Matthew 16:18, organic “joined and knit together” corporate Christ-Life... the Bride of Christ manifest in daily life. The local church! “From the least to the greatest, they all know Him.”

Jesus’ Church is not ever allowed to be a disobedient paradigm (1Cor. 5) of 1) a 10% “committed nucleus,” 2) hidden within a bunch of sin and worldliness melted into the assembly, 3) unrecognized (for lack of Light and Love daily relationship), and 4) unchallenged (for lack of love, discernment, or courage).

So, now a bunch of good folks know this and are willing to risk their lives, if necessary. They would do ANYTHING so that Jesus, the Word, would become flesh in His Bride. Now many are “attempting,” but often with great difficulty, to live out “Church” as God has declared it can and should be. You should know that there are some “stages” that it seems most people have gone through in their pursuit of a “city whose builder and maker is GOD.” The passion for the organic, rather than organizational, local Church will LIKELY go through some stages. The following two sections are brief responses to some folks in a couple of different “stages” of pursuit of His Will (Life that is truly Life) for their lives and churches.

One or two families that See “God’s Intent, through the Church” (Eph.3:10), but are “all alone,” without other Believers to walk with:

“We’ve come out of the institutional church setting, but we’re all alone now! We don’t want to be bitter or angry at anyone, so we reject that as something Jesus would never author. But, we can’t seem to find anyone to Walk with our family as FAMILY, either. We know we have Jesus always, but we also know that we really NEED other Believers with Gifts and experiences and maturity with God that we don’t have, in order to not get stale or ingrown. We need people to give to, as well as to receive from. Don’t we? What should we do?”

“How do we start something that looks more like Jesus and His Word than what our consciences forced us to leave? What do we do now?! We’re lonely! If that’s what He wants, that’s okay with us, but we also know that He wants a Testimony of Life in the local church, not just a few families scattered around here and there doing their own thing. It’s clear that God was right (Ha!) when He said we would be hardened and deceived if we did not have folks ‘admonishing us daily.’ So, we truly want the ‘hundred mothers, brothers, sisters’ that Jesus called us to desire, and promised to His people. But right now it’s just us. What should we do? If you have any thoughts for us, we’d appreciate it.”

I know these can be painful and confusing times. But know that you are not alone. “Your brothers throughout the world” are encountering similar testing and refining and Instruction as Jesus builds His House. There are some things, though, you should consider in your situation.

For one, be sure that the *reason* you live where you do is because you are “seeking first the Kingdom.” If you live where you live for *any* other reason, and try to *add* “the Kingdom” to what you want to do—then you

are doing no better than “seeking SECOND the Kingdom.” The “Kingdom” is the *Expression of His Reign* amongst His People, just as any earthly King’s Kingdom would be. So, to seek FIRST His Kingdom would mean that ABSOLUTELY you are first of all living in “the exact time and place” where He wants you to be living. You have chosen to live there for the *purpose* of growing and giving within His Kingdom.

How else can I say it? If you live where you live for ANY other reason than because it is the best place for you to grow in Jesus (unless there by gunpoint of an unbelieving husband...and even then...), you are in jeopardy. If you try to ADD “seek first the Kingdom” to the place you’ve chosen to live for some earthly reason—then you are doing no better than “seeking SECOND the Kingdom.” If you *chose that place to live*, or continue to live there, *because it is seeking His Kingdom first*, then great. But it CAN’T be that you live there because you got a good deal on the land, because you inherited it, because it’s close to physical family, because the scenery is good or the taxes are cheap or it’s near employment, or “away from other people”! How sad any of those reasons would be for choosing to live somewhere. That is as deceptive and deadly as choosing a wife or husband because they look good to the physical eye when they’re 20 years old. How foolish. How dangerous. How common. Don’t do that to Jesus by choosing where you live for earthly or human reasons, and then think you can “add Jesus” like you would add water to freeze-dried potatoes.

Now, after purging your motives, maybe you’ll see you need to move to town, or the part of town, where other Believers are. That may not be what Father wants everyone to do, but what IF that’s what He wants you to do? Let’s say He does, for you. *Why* would He want you to live near other Believers? So you can be involved with others in Jesus... SPONTANEOUSLY! Although people who have never experienced much wouldn’t believe this, the stuff that happens spontaneously brings about 90% of true *Life!* *Real Life* happens...when you’re running errands with a disciple, or doing chores and pitch in at your neighbor’s. It happens when you’re passing by a neighbor’s (Believer’s) house and stop through to discover a child who has just hurt himself so you help them and pray with them. *Real Life* happens when someone sneaks up on you while you’re getting the mail, and you end up praying and worshipping with a brother or sister. *Real Life* happens in ten thousand ways that flat can’t happen on a schedule or specified day on a calendar, or in some meeting-centered existence! What a loss of growth in Jesus, for you and your children, when you seek the Kingdom second, or third, or ____.

So, a little known fact: most folks should be as near as possible to people that *genuinely* want to abandon their lives for Jesus. Now, notice I *didn't* say that most folks should live as near to folks that “want to have ‘church life’ like we do, and believe sorta-kinda like we do.” This is where *major* mistakes are made, world-wide. Take note of this. There are many more people (a hundred times as many) that want a “cool ‘church life’ experience” for themselves and their children, than there are people that want to abandon their lives for Jesus. Don't confuse the two, or you will walk into great, great misery. Health food, homeschool, Y2K, despising authority, family idolatry, not liking the “pastor” (or secretly wanting to be one), wanting to be cozy and small, and a zillion other issues motivate many folks to want to have “house church”—instead of whatever they left. DON'T BE FOOLED by that kind of thing. Care about those folks, love them, reach out to them...but you will *not* be able to *Build* with them. And if you try, you will be bloodied, and your children hurt deeply.

Everyone says they “love the Lord” and all that, but what does this mean? It is frankly a cover-up for religious nonsense in many, many cases. You want to be with people that *really* do love Jesus. And if they love Him, they won't be offended by Jesus' clear teaching: “If you *really* love Me, then obey My commands.” Real love of Jesus means abandonment to Him and His Ways. THOSE are the kinds of folks you want to move near to, and get into your life on a daily (Heb. 3:12-14) basis. DON'T move next door to people who seem to have similar ideas. Move next door to people who love Jesus enough to die for Him, and truly “love the Light.” “THIS is the verdict,” saith the Lord (Jn. 3, 1Jn. 1).

Did I say “next door”? Yes. I did not say two blocks away. WHY? Because, as I said, 90% of Life is getting close enough to be pulled past “planned” spirituality into the spontaneous opportunities that the Spirit of God will give! We've had folks who lived a block away from where the daily action was in a cluster of homes, and they eventually moved closer! Sound crazy? Ask them if they would do it again in a heartbeat! What inconvenience of packing and moving, or what dollar price tag would YOU put on your children being able to be shown Jesus DAILY by the lives of Paul and Phoebe and Abigail and Timothy and Samuel and Agabus? And it wouldn't hurt YOU any, either! ☺

As far as opportunities to discover other seekers of Jesus' Life, there are likely to be some opportunities right in front of you, too. If you don't have God's Impetus to go elsewhere at this time, that's fine. But you also *don't* have His permission to just hang around quilting and having “family devos” and “bible bowls.” Get busy! Give and send good books

and cassettes to everyone you think may have a heart for Jesus and His Ways. Take a chance or two—life is short!! How many people can you think of? Maybe a hundred? Act on it. And, do you have any neighbors? Do you ever see a car with a bumper sticker that exalts Jesus? Put a note or a book on the windshield! Ever pass a religious facility on your way to the market? Stop in, brothers, and introduce yourself and see if there is anyone who may be seriously in love with Jesus, and with Light!

No doubt there are numerous people from your old place of “attending” that you felt were top class disciples: true-hearted, Light-loving, and abandoned to the love of their life—Jesus. (Actually, there is NO way to really know whether or not this is true unless you have seen them face “skandalon”—a “valley of decision” relating to hard, practical decisions in following the Lamb *wherever* He goes.” Most anyone can *look* like they “love” Him until light exposes them in the inner man. At that point, Jesus said, some “love the Light” and some “hate the Light” and will tell you to “get the log out of your own eye” and give them their space to include the world in their lives.) Find the folks that *really* want to live for Him, for *Real*. If you remember anyone who you think may be like that, get involved in their lives, frequently! Show up at their workplace and take them to lunch, with some other brothers. Drop by their home and help them do a repair job. See what Father may build out of helping each other get to know Jesus better.

Don’t make it your goal to try to “build” anything—just love *people* and help each other get close to Jesus. Leave any “building” to the One who builds the only House that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against. Any other building, orchestrated by men’s ideas and ways, is mostly “in vain.” But you knew that, from experience, as well as from the Scripture, right?

IF you’re busy about the Father’s Business in your town or city, and are willing to move anywhere or risk everything, He’ll direct your steps. He doesn’t “steer parked cars.” He wants us all to be moving forward, doing what we can, and then He’ll show us what the next step is. DO risk in the local assemblies where some of the Believers “attend” by getting to know people and getting involved in their lives, as mentioned a minute ago. Don’t do this in order to get them to do something, or leave this and join that—whatever “that” may be. But rather, just spread the Gospel of the Kingdom to every living creature, and help every individual that you meet to know Jesus better, love Him more, and obey Him more absolutely.

In helping others to get the “weeds” out of their lives (sins and ways that choke out Jesus’ Life), you will be helping them to See Him better. You will be freeing them to *know* what His Will may be for them. As Paul

said, folks can *only* see what the “good, perfect, and pleasing Will of God” is for their lives, when they 1) are learning to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, 2) no longer desire or appreciate what the world does, and 3) let their minds be transformed by God’s perspective and Life. As we all help one another do these things (Heb. 3:12-14, Gal. 4:1ff, 2Tim. 4:2-3, etc.), we can See Him more clearly—and consequently His Will for our lives and for His Church.

I’m not suggesting that you “join” any organization or even be a “regular attender” of a religious institution—just that you get to know as many people as you can. Find out who truly cares by getting involved in their evenings, their jobs, their families, their hopes and dreams and fears and priorities. THAT’S where Life is found. The Kingdom is not “here or there” but *within* folks who *truly* love Him. So, *only* as we get *inside* of others, we find Jesus. And in doing that, we shed Light on our own lives, and theirs, and the Way becomes more and more clear as to who and where and how we must live to best...“serve the Purposes of God in our generation.” If we’ll pull the weeds, and make the hard choices (obeying His living Word, which are Eternal Seeds sown), He’ll direct our steps, and those around us who are doing the same.

All of that is freeing because NOW we don’t have to figure out what the right kind of church is, or how to “start one.” We don’t have to figure out “how to do it” or anything like that. We just need to go after what we *do* know is God’s Will on a case by case, day by day, basis, and let HIM build His Church. If we’re *really* “seeking first His Kingdom” and willing to live anywhere or do anything for Him, regardless of personal cost, He’ll send the Gifts, or raise them up, or make it clear what we need to do or where we need to go. But He’ll only do this out of the fertile ground of those who He can afford to invest in—because they are all truly abandoned to Him. And those who don’t *really* want all that He is...are free to “attend the church of their choice”—without us trying to “hold something together”! This is very freeing!

A number of folks have come together to express Jesus, in an organic corporate way...but some people become major disappointments and heartaches:

“We’ve come out of the institutional church setting, along with several other families. Also, others have heard that we desire to let Jesus truly ‘run’ the times we gather together, and have begun to be with us on a ‘regular basis.’ Things looked pretty rosy during the ‘honeymoon’ time, as we first came together. But now, it seems reality has set in. What a difficult, heart-breaking mix.

“One family loves to be around during the ‘fun times’ when we’re doing various activities and going places together. But, truth be told, it doesn’t seem that they really want to give their lives away with any depth. They have their own, private, ‘us eight and no more’ lives, and seem to add us to spice up their activity schedules and to have some religious outlet that isn’t too institutional. Not only is it really sad, but it is confusing. How can we pretend to have relationship when they won’t let us into their lives, and don’t seem to value that, regardless of what God has said about it? It’s almost as if (this is scary to say) they think that their family is the church, and we are all just extra, to be visited at their discretion.

“Another family never wants to be all in the same place at the same time (‘have meetings’) because they are afraid that this will make us institutional, too. Their idea of the church is just folks doing spiritual stuff as they please, on their own schedule, as individuals. Any sense of identity, such as Paul referred to, ‘when the WHOLE Church is together,’ seems undesirable to them. They seem to feel like that is too close to what they ‘came out of’ if we are all in the same place at the same time. I understand the desire to avoid some sort of unBiblical systematized calendarized meeting schedule, but how do we get them to see that gatherings of the whole collection of folks that love Jesus, in the same place at the same time, was described by Paul as a glorious time?!

“Still another family thinks that they, and their children need ‘structure’ and regular ‘bible classes’ and the like. They are ready to go back and sit in rows and files on Sunday morning so that everything will be predictable for them. How can we show them that the Principle of ‘a little leaven leavens the whole batch’ makes that a pretty bad idea, since that ‘way’ of functioning has no basis in the bible, and by definition, welcomes leaven without even having a way to know it? Would it matter to them if they knew this? What makes people willing to settle for Ishmael, rather than pay the price for Isaac (as high as that may be)?

“Another family has children that are out of control, and a number of other questionable issues, but refuses to talk about these things. There are also worldly relationships and habits and priorities that feel like fingernails on the proverbial chalkboard to us. They call it ‘a matter of opinion’ and shut us down. They feel like because the phrase ‘everyone did what was right in their own eyes’ is in the Bible, it must be okay to do that, I guess. We know GOD has thoughts and standards and ways...and we should be using this ‘forum’ of Believers to FIND those ways, not ‘agree to disagree’ and never find Him in it all. How can we convince them of this?”

“Another family seems to have ‘opinions’ about people and things, but won’t ever SAY anything. At least to any of us. Maybe they do to each other, ‘on the way home,’ but they won’t let us in on whatever they’re thinking. That feels like hypocrisy, to hold viewpoints and opinions and judgments, and not be open about them and try to work them out. It certainly builds walls about as fast as anything I can think of. How do we get them to be humble and honest (and obedient to God, for that matter) and open up to those they feel like are not walking God’s Way? Is it because they are afraid we’d be defensive? Is it because they wouldn’t want to find out they were wrong, and need to change themselves (if it turned out this way)? Is it because they are simply fault-finding to justify not opening up their lives? Or is it that they have just been trained in the form of ‘hypocrisy’ their whole religious lives (expressing their opinions amongst themselves on the way to the cafeteria) and really just don’t know that this is disobedient to God, and destructive of true relationships in Christ? We don’t know. You’ll probably say, ‘Why don’t you just ASK them which one it is?!!’ Okay, you’re right. We’ll do that.

“There are some other stories, too. But you get the idea. We THOUGHT God had called us all together around a common Vision of Christ and His Body, and now we’re finding out that it is not going all that well with some of the folks. What should we do? ANY ideas?”

One thing you should be aware of is this: there is often this pain in the “genesis” or beginning of finding, and exploring, and being built into “organic Life.” Often, there are many layers, as with an onion, that need to be peeled back before you can get to the “heart” of it. Very seldom do things fall together as God would have it, right from the get-go. God allows this, in part, to test US. He leads us “into the wilderness in order to find out what is in our hearts.” Are we doing this for HIM...or for ourselves? Are we trying to BUILD something, or are we simply trying to love Him

and serve Him, and love others and serve others, with all our hearts? And then “let the chips fall where they may”?

Nearly always there will be some spouses or families or people who will only go “so far”—and you will not be able to change that. Some “spring up quickly with great joy, but have no root.” Others will let the “cares and worries of the world, the deceitfulness of materialism,” the guitar lessons, soccer practices, 8 hours of middle-class sleep, their bellies, their hobbies or their “focus on the family...” choke out the Life God intended for them. When folks make these choices (and many will, while denying that they are), all you can do is go on with what you know is right. Be both truthful and kind with them. And wait and see. But don’t hang back trying to endlessly persuade folks.

To elaborate on one point just made, when you come up against the painful barriers you mentioned above, be sure to kindly speak with them, if you possibly can. Tell them what you’ve Seen. “Without Vision, the people cast off restraint.” If they don’t really know that God is after something radically different than the “attending” thing, then they may not have sufficient strength to fight the battles they *will* face. Maybe it will be the battle of parental insult, or some other painful repercussion of obeying God by doing something other than the world’s religion. Show them the Holy High Calling of Jesus’ Life descended from Heaven, and describe as best you can what it looks like “on earth as it is in Heaven.” Everyone can read Acts 2:42-47, but many have been told that Jesus-Life was just “cultural” and not “relevant.” Everyone can read Jesus’ Teachings and many can quote them, but few have experienced a Holy Nation, a Royal Priesthood, a People “being many, are one Body.” “Contending as ONE MAN for the Faith,” “one heart” “one mind” “of one accord” is nothing like what most have experienced. “Joined and knit by every supporting ligament”—most would have to say they have NO idea what that “feels” like in practical daily life. They NEED you to show them what God has said about it all, in order to break them out of the hypnosis of what their past lives may have been.

Remember it is usually personal sins or compromises that blind us to Seeing Him. “Without holiness, no one will See the Lord.” “Who can ascend God’s Holy Hill? Those with clean hands and a pure heart.” “Some have wandered away from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. They want to be teachers, but they don’t know what they’re talking about, or what they so confidently affirm.” Knowing that God said SIN causes us to be blind to Truth and deaf to His Voice, we now know the importance of being vessels of God’s Word in daily life. In addition to

helping people see the Vision God has for His People, so that they would not “cast off restraint,” you may need to help them find the sins that have held them back, personally. Offer to them, perhaps, anything that you’ve seen that MAY be the “one thing you lack” sin causing the inability to See. (Is it family idolatry, health food idolatry, pride, fear, or worldly lifestyles???) Invite them to reconsider allowing these things in their lives, if they are there. If they love Jesus, they will “love the Light” as well, according to Jesus—so they’ll be glad you mentioned it, and will be glad to pursue it if it’s there. And, someday, because they love you and love Jesus, they may help you, too. ☺ Life is good. ☺

Even if we are able to speak with, and reason with folks (as Paul was “insane” enough to do with the Corinthians, as he put it), remember this: Jesus didn’t chase people down. And Jesus didn’t do what everyone else did, just to make them comfortable. (Remember Jesus’ intentional offense of the religious leaders? What was the big deal about washing His hands? Couldn’t He *at least* have done that so as to avoid being controversial and divisive?!) Do your best to be kind, but we can’t ever sink back into a lower way just to accommodate others. That’s not “loving”—it’s compromise. Mis-applying Romans 14 is not helpful for anyone. The spouse that won’t radically live for Jesus because of an unBelieving husband or wife, is NOT being loving, and is not doing them a favor by hanging back at their level. We’ve never been given permission by Jesus to disobey Him for ANY reason. When you really love others, you invite them to come along, and you do your best to show them kindness, and you give up whatever you CAN for them...but we are never permitted to compromise any Truth of God to make a human happy. We would never shove it in their face by mocking them or humiliating them (that’s what Romans 14 is about, not exalting “weaker faith” as an acceptable alternative to Faith and obedience)...but we still must go on.

If these guys you’re grieving over are really in love with Jesus, they’ll come around if 1) they *see* you living it, and 2) you’ve done your best to plant the Seeds of Truth, and 3) you’ve shown them, in kindness, what the “weeds” may be in their lives that are causing them to not See so well. “Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see.” Just remember, if sons of Abraham, we can “NEVER go back to the old country” for anyone—anytime, anywhere. Love them, but don’t go backwards (or hang around in limbo) for long. Stay in touch, don’t embarrass them, but pour yourself into those who DO want the Whole thing Jesus intends.

Without addressing each of the different “types” of families you mentioned, the WAY to deal with those, and the thousand other possibilities of how

the enemy introduces chaos and heartache to try to crush our hearts and energy, is pretty much captured by the thoughts above.

Two more key thoughts, and then I'll quit for now: Return good for evil, and PRAY without ceasing.

Opinions and Disagreements Amongst The Saints?

Thursday Morning, March 11, 1999

Question: “We have a great ‘fellowship’ and feel like there is progress towards being a Kingdom of priests instead of sitting in pews. But, it is quite disheartening that we butt heads and can’t get past ‘That’s just YOUR opinion!’ problems when we try to decide things. It doesn’t come up every day or anything, but it always hangs over us. Should we just EXPECT to have opinion head-butting that slows us or freezes us in whatever we’re discussing? I have a hard time believing that there would never be any disagreements! Everybody is different, so as long as no one gets too angry or pouts too much, it should just be expected, right? So how should we handle it when we get into these head-butting problems?”

Should there be divisions or lack of harmony, or opinion-battles? No way. You *could* accept them as normative. Or, you *could* hire someone to tell you what to believe and what to do. Or, you could ask God for HIS culture in your home, your church, and your area. The difference between man’s culture FOR God, and God’s Habitat, is difficult to explain, but let me try it this way:

Let’s say I was conversing with a man from Albania. In Albania, dipping bread in vinegar is everyday stuff, and part of the very habit of life for them (it’s not a custom in Albania, but I’m just illustrating). If an Albanian man said, “What DO you do when you get vinegar bread caught between your teeth? Isn’t that just the WORST?! What do *you* do when that happens?” I’d have to say that while I’m not above that happening (I don’t have superior teeth and gums and eating habits to all Albanians), it really does *not* happen

to me. He might be amazed, since his culture has certain expectations that vinegar bread is just plain a part of everyone's life—and so is getting it caught between their teeth. But it's not so amazing that I don't ever have that problem. It just plain old isn't likely to happen to me, and I never think about it or talk about it! Why? Because I'm better? No—because in our culture, we don't live in a way that makes that a possibility!

It's an established fact that a group of Believers, a church, can consist of deeply involved saints (NOT just the unBiblical “committed nucleus,” “invisible church” thing). The church can be the “mashed potatoes” of many very bright and accomplished people, from tradesmen to janitors to executives and inventors, as well as ex-“Leaders” in religious environments, as well as ex-anything-you-can-think-of in the ugliness of the pagan world. So, we have to start by saying that this isn't just “theory” that's impossible to live out. In such an environment where Jesus is really Leading, there is nothing that could be described as in-fighting, opinion-holding, or ongoing barriers. It is entirely possible, proven in the real world with real people, for a church to go even a decade and a half without any head butting.

I don't know how to describe it any better than the Albanian example. To talk about it much would grieve the Spirit, so I can't. God does good Work, and leaves NO place for men's boasting. Yet, I know for a *fact* that tensions, mistrusts, stress, broken or wounded loyalties, lack of respect, confiding in some—but not being comfortable with others, opinions knocking up against each other, pooling of ignorance...ALL of that stuff is unwelcome and *unnecessary*. I have proof of it. If Jesus wasn't like that, then we don't have to be either. “Christ IN you, the hope of Glory.” If *any* of the stuff in that run-on sentence a minute ago peeks out its head, it is resolved so quickly that it makes satan's gnarly head spin.

I think I understand your question very well. People all over the world, I know for a fact, understand what you're asking and why. I'm sure your situation is *mild* compared to many (though it is troublesome enough, I assume, to cause you to ask about it). What you described, and much worse, is ubiquitous. But, it's not Jesus' Way, and doesn't need to stay that way. It's *too draining* to live like that. Sure, things like Ananias and Sapphira will crop up. Simon the sorcerer, Diotrephes, Absalom, and Korah are always a possibility. But that's very different than what you're asking about, I assume. Even the Acts 15 thing, or the Galatians 2, or maybe the 1 Corinthians 5 thing could come up. But the 2 Corinthians 7:11 response is what we have always expected—and what you should always see, for many years, whenever anything comes up. Nothing is hanging,

nothing remains unresolved or in question long, and broken hearts or disappointments or question marks about people or things or subjects are quickly laid down and resolved with one another at Jesus' feet, together with whomever may be involved.

SO, meanwhile, back at the ranch in Albania, I can honestly say that "disagreements" or "disagreeable people" questions plain old don't make any sense in God's House, when it's functioning properly. That type of question is strange to the ear of folks in a church that is functioning Well. It is just as strange as the question "Where do you attend church?" *that* is only a totally weird and bizarre question to an eight-year-old, or eighty-year-old, who lives in God's Kingdom—rather than an unBiblical religious/church experience. No compute. That's the honest truth.

Sorry I couldn't explain it better. But again, all around the spherical neighborhood, most folks have to try to cope with what you're speaking of, year in and year out. Attrition is about the only solution in those cases, other than people searing their consciences with the old "agree to disagree" adage. Well, I just have to imagine (and don't have to imagine, really) that God has a better way. The "price" for a City set on a hill, where the lion lays down with the lamb, and Simon the Zealot can easily embrace Matthew the tax collector...is really high, I suppose. Dying to self is a corporate prerequisite. Humility. Mutual love and mutual dependence. If 100% are willing to pay that price of "denying their very selves" (Jesus called such a person a "disciple," a "christian") we've begun the Journey. And when genuine heaven-sent Gifts are available to "*katartidzo*" (mend, prepare, equip, perfect, join, knit, restore, frame, and again *mend*, as in "mending the nets" for strong, united usefulness!) the saints for Works of service...the good stuff gets better. Most situations we've seen are collected under the umbrella of: homes instead of buildings ("we B cool")...or this doctrine or pet idea instead of that one...or democracy instead of "clergy"...or some other thing I'm not thinking of right now because I'm sleepy. How many *entire Churches LIVE* around Jesus as Savior (SO needed) and Lord (SO mandatory)? Usually these Two Pillars of LIFE (Acts 2:36) are either assumed to be in each person's life (because they've claimed it to be so), or these two things are not (in any practical way) necessary to be a "part" of that "group" anyway. And the involvement and relationship in daily life commanded in Heb.3:12-14 is rationalized away, so we can never even *know* the inner men and women around us to resolve this dilemma!

Well, when we build on a foundation of sand (sand foundation defined: faith and obedience are intellectual, or optional, or relative, or just a wild

guess in those around us—Mat.7:21ff), the House starts to look a little warped and psychedelic with its lack of square corners. Eventually it collapses “when the storms come.” That’s a different picture, of course, than the House that the gates of Hell itself cannot thwart—Jesus’ House.

Well, you *did* ask. So, there you go.

PS Believe it or not (BELIEVE IT!), more often than not it is some sin that blinds us from GOD’S viewpoint on *anything*. In other words, almost always, if we can help each other get past pride, or fear, or selfishness, or fear of man, or the wrong kind of fear of God, or...(name the sin)—we will find that those *sins* had caused us to not See together what God’s thought was regarding whatever is being discussed. It is absolutely amazing how simple life can get when everyone *wants* sin to be purged from their lives (1Jn. 3:3, 6, 9). As we get past the stumbling stones and satan’s mirrors, the ability to have “unity of the Spirit,” *and* “unity of the Faith” is wonderful and refreshing.

“Agree to Disagree”? NOT!!! Part 1

Sunday Afternoon, September 26, 1999

*Question: I know I have heard you say on several occasions that it is **not** okay for us as Christians to “disagree,” and also that it is not okay for us to “agree to disagree.” But what about the example in Romans 14 where there are issues of conscience? One person’s conscience may not allow him to eat meat, but mine does. Don’t we just accept those differences because God wouldn’t want us to crush weaker brothers?*

A Missing Element

Some people have tried to hide behind that passage in Romans 14 at times. Some are sincere about it, and others are using it to suit their desire to go on doing what they want. Either way, there is one important thing that’s been missed as folks have read Romans 14. People miss the fact that in the one case, God’s favor rests on the brother with stronger faith, and in the other case, God is permissive of ignorance and weakness in the brother with weaker faith...***But He does NOT DESIRE IT for the weaker brother! It is not admirable!***

“But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Relative to the total number of human beings that will have ever lived, Jesus said *few* would find everlasting life. Nevertheless, God’s promise to Abraham was that his offspring would be as countless as the sand on the seashore. So, there are a lot of saved people! However, God said that some people build with wood, hay and stubble and their work will be **“burned up.”** Others build with gold, silver and precious stones and receive their

reward. *Which way do you want to build?* Those who build with wood, hay, and stubble have their work burned up and they escape “as one through the flames.” Now, they do *escape* and they are *saved*, but is that good enough for you? Is that all you want? Not me! Don’t you want to offer more to Jesus than that?

Do you want to spend your whole life building in man’s way with a bunch of Ishmaels all stuck to each other—all with a *fading* glory? Or do you want to build in such a way that Jesus views your work as gold, silver, and precious stones—with an *EVER-INCREASING GLORY*? Do you want *supernatural* or do you want well-intentioned natural? You *can* be saved as through the flames. You’ll be saved, and you may view that as “good enough.” But it’s not good enough for me. And if you ask Jesus, I think you’ll find it’s not what He wants either. That doesn’t mean He isn’t willing to bear with the flaws, the errors, the poor building habits, and the Ishmaels and allow people to be saved as escaping through the flames. Yes, He’ll do that. But is that really what we *want* to offer our King? Isn’t He worthy of more than just wood, hay and stubble?

We Are Our Brother’s Keeper

While Romans 14 does discuss a couple of issues of disagreement, there are ten trillion more that *aren’t* in the chapter. That chapter couldn’t be long enough to contain all the possible areas of disagreement! But the lesson in Romans 14 is *NOT* to “agree to disagree.” Once again, the thing that is made clear in Romans 14, but is often missed, is this: on the one hand, there is a brother *who sees and knows God well*, and on the other hand, there is a brother *who doesn’t see God or know God nearly as well*. His faith is weaker. Now, *without faith it’s impossible to please God*. So, if you’re someone with weaker faith, it’s not nearly as possible to please God as someone with stronger faith.

The question we have to ask ourselves is this: are we “agreeing to disagree” so that one of us can have our work burned up and “escape as one through the flames,” while the other of us goes on without him? Do you like the way that sounds? Not me. You have heard me say it before, but I’ll say it again: *“agreeing to disagree” is from hell!* And I *intentionally* say it that strongly because that particular way of thinking is like Cain’s when he was in the process of *describing to God* how he didn’t have to pay that much attention to Abel. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” “Am I responsible for my brother whose work will be burned up and who will barely escape through the flames?” Well, the truth is, we *are* responsible. “*See to it, brothers, that*

none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12).

“But each one should be careful how he builds,” is what it says in 1 Corinthians 3:10. We are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ and we build up from there. Everything we build isn’t necessarily pleasing to God. Some things glorify Him, and other things distract. Some things dilute His work, while other things bring *honor* to Him and *expand* His Work. Which way do you want to build?

Spiritual Slum, or City Set on a Hill?

What are our lives about? Are we about merely surviving, or are we about being overcomers? Are we about being a “city set on a hill that can’t be hidden,” or are we about being a bunch of people living in a spiritual slum... surviving from day to day, finding our sustenance in what we scrape out of the alleys and the trash cans? Yes, it’s possible that we can be saved through the flames with weak faith...*but that’s not my goal for you, and I hope that’s not your goal for me!!!*

Any commentary on Romans 14 that I’ve ever read—any discussion or sermon I’ve ever heard—no one ever mentions the fact that we ought to desperately want the other brother or sister to have strong faith. No one ever mentions desperately wanting others to see and know God...to be seated with God in heavenly realms and *experience* rivers of living water gushing from their inner man!

Do you know anyone with weak faith who has rivers of living water gushing from the inside? *That person doesn’t exist!* You can’t have rivers of living water gushing from the inner man and the power of an indestructible life if you are living on subsistence living! *If you’re barely surviving, you’re not bringing as much honor to Jesus as you could be!* Your work will be burned up and you will escape as one through the flames. If you’re barely surviving, lukewarm, compromising, and playing around with things you shouldn’t play around with, then *Jesus is not getting the reward of His sufferings out of YOU!*

For Example

Let’s use the example in Romans 14 where someone considers one day more sacred than another does. I can acknowledge this person as a brother or sister in Christ, and I can love him regardless of the difference in conscience. I can also acknowledge the fact that he can be saved, *but what*

I can't do is leave this brother or sister that way. God did **not** say, "Ignore a person with weak faith and let all their work be burned up. That's their problem. You're not your brother's keeper." That's not what God said.

Paul said, "I wrestle to present everyone complete and perfect in Christ." Do you think Paul overlooked the fact that some people considered one day more sacred than another did? No! In fact, out of Paul's very own mouth, with his very own pen, he said, "I fear I've wasted my time on you because some of you hold one day more sacred than another." *I FEAR I've wasted my time on you.* If a person has such weak faith that they think there's such a thing as a "holy day" rather than *Christ as their Sabbath*, then they are missing something very fundamental and precious in New Testament Christianity. They are missing the precious truth that *these shadows are fulfilled in Christ!*

"The Temple...? Where's the temple?" *"THERE IS NO TEMPLE...because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple"* (Rev. 21:22). WOW! That's very good stuff. And I feel sorry for anyone who misses that. I have to care about the fact that people are missing that. I don't want anyone to think that God lives in buildings built by mere men's hands. Stephen got stoned for telling people that God doesn't live in buildings made by men. Those were some of the last words out of Stephen's mouth. People didn't like that very much. They *wanted* all the externals. Stephen tried to tell them, "It's bigger than that, brothers. And you can have the *real* thing rather than just the signs that point to the real thing. The signs are necessary—you need to follow the signs. But, you can't eat the signs to the bread. You've got to eat the bread." Just like Jesus said, "You diligently study the Scriptures thinking that by them you have overflowing life. You don't have overflowing life from reading the Scriptures. You have to come to Me." You have to follow the signs to Him, otherwise you don't get the real thing.

However, the separating point is not a different understanding about whether or not there is a sacred day. On the one hand, the Scriptures teach clearly that there's no such thing as a "sacred day" in the New Covenant. "I fear I have wasted my time on you because you hold one day more sacred than another." Galatians 4 is clear. Nevertheless, that's not where everybody comes from. I admit that I was paralyzed the first time I tried to live holding no day more sacred than another. One Sunday morning I sat in a restaurant eating pancakes when I saw these people going by dressed in suits and ties. I felt like the biggest heel in the world. It was like, "Man, I'm some sort of heathen or something." I used to go through the restaurant on my way to "go to church" on the "holy day," and when I saw

people like me I thought, “Oh, those poor guys. They don’t know Jesus. What a terrible thing. They’re out playing golf on Sunday. What a bunch of heathen.” And all of a sudden the shoe is on the other foot, and I’m thinking, “My conscience is giving me a little trouble here.” But was my conscience being guided by the Scriptures or by my “family inheritance” of going to Catholic mass every Sunday morning?

Wrestling through all that stuff was very painful and hard. I didn’t want to violate my conscience, and I didn’t want anybody else to violate their conscience. So, why was it so hard for me to understand this and 10 thousand other subjects even though God *does* have a truth about that subject, and some *do* have enough faith to see it? Think about it. Could the reason it was hard to understand be because I was driven by the culture around me telling me to do something that the Scriptures do not teach?

Babies Crave Milk

Our goal, our objective, is to wrestle to present *everyone complete in Christ*. To bring many sons to *glory*, and not just to *salvation*. We want to bring them and wrestle with them until Christ is formed in them, even if it hurts so badly that it feels like we’re about to have a baby. Those were Paul’s words, written to Christians, “I’m in the pains of childbirth until Christ is fully formed in you.” That’s how important it was to him. He was willing to hurt that badly in order to take saved people and make them great—not just people saved through the flames, but *GREAT!* Bringing *many* sons to *Glory, Complete* in Christ, Christ *fully formed* in them.

The purpose of Romans 14 was to say, “You’re all coming from some place, guys. You all have your own baggage. You all have to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So, please make a little bit of room for the fact that just as you have to grow, so do others have to grow. Nobody learns everything all in one day.” I can love somebody who doesn’t agree with me. But the nature of Romans 14 does *NOT* mean we stop loving the light. If a person loves the light, if they “love the truth and so are saved” (according to the Scriptures), then they are like newborn babes...*they crave pure spiritual milk.*

Maybe a baby can’t do much calculus, but that doesn’t mean learning calculus is never going to be important for them. Will there be difficult things to work through? Of course. But we can’t embrace the placebo of “*Let’s just agree to disagree. Stay a baby your whole life if you want. Let people change your diapers forever. Go ahead and suck on that bottle forever. Never eat solid food!*” That’s not the intention of Romans 14—half of God’s

people staying babies. The intention is to recognize that *there is such a thing as a baby*. Some have weak faith and need to grow into strong faith. And that might take some nurturing, but nurturing is not the same as “agreeing to disagree.” Nurturing is wrestling to present people perfect, and loving them while they are still babies. Now, if they don’t love the light—if there is no response, and no signs of hunger and life—then according to the Scriptures, they are *not even saved*. But assuming we are speaking of the truly converted, then we consider them like newborn babies. They *love* and *crave* and *agape* the truth—and so are saved. We can assume that they will love the light if they are truly converted. But, I also have to say that some of these things *DO* take a little bit of time. ☺

Love Them Into Greatness

So, what do you do? You love them into greatness. And there’s no problem getting them to this place of greatness because they love the Truth and Light even if they don’t instantly understand everything. They will have conscience problems and misunderstandings at times. They will have various kinds of baggage. *BUT, that’s not what divides us*. According to Jesus, the thing that divides us is whether or not they love the light. This is the verdict, “some *love* the light, and some *hate* the light.” This is the message: “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” And “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, then (and only then) we have fellowship with one another.” We can only fellowship with those who love the light, and love the things of God, and will obey those things when they see them.

Some are babies and are growing and wrestling through different issues, and it’s going to hurt them for awhile. I need to love them during that hurting period rather than “draw the line.” If they love the Light, that’s good enough for me. If they love the Truth and so are saved, then they are bought by the same Blood I am. Who am I to say that we’re supposed to separate and go different ways because of our different understandings of “pre-trib” vs. “post-trib”? (We’ll not separate over that ever again. Never again!) But *if they don’t love the light*, then we’ve got a big problem. *If they love the light*, then we’ll grow in the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. In this case, not only will everything turn out just fine, but *we’ll be better people for the struggle*. We will hold each other’s hands through misunderstandings and discover the Truth together. That’s what Romans 14 is about.

But when someone doesn’t love the light (they don’t care, they don’t want to change, it’s not important to them, they won’t wrestle with you, they

won't fast about it, they won't pray with you about it), then there *IS* a problem. If someone isn't working towards that end because they don't care, then we have a problem because, "This is the verdict: *Light has come into the world, but some men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*" (John 3:19-20)

Some love the Truth, and while they may not understand everything... they want to understand. They want light, and they want correction. If truly converted, they *are going to grow* because they love Truth and they crave milk, like newborn babies. For others, the issue may be apathy. "I don't care. I'm taking my stance. You're the one with the weaker faith. Ha, ha, ha." That's not what it's about. If a person loves the Truth and loves the light, we have room to resolve 10,000 issues...and we'll have *fun* doing it! Resolving the issues will be genuinely enjoyable!

Only One Dividing Line

Where I live there are people from every conceivable background you could ever imagine. People that were never part of traditional "church," to people that were part of very legalistic denominations, to those that were part of hyper-spiritual movements, liberal, conservative, catholic, orthodox, and everything in-between. And you know what? In fifteen years, by God's grace, we have never had a division. We've never had any kind of split. We've never had any fights or slanderous little "cliques." That's never happened in fifteen years! Why? Because we're building around Jesus with this one issue at stake: *Do you love the light or not?* Does a person love the Truth and so is saved? Is someone like a newborn baby craving the spiritual milk of truth? If so, everything is going to work out great. With that foundation stone laid, we're all going to grow, and benefit, and be deepened by each other's perspectives.

Frankly, everybody is a little bit right. Nobody is totally wrong on much of anything. There's something we can learn from just about everything... but only if we love each other enough to hang in there and take the time to not be offended and insulted. And only if we don't accuse or divide, but love each other. If you love the truth—if you walk in the light and love the light—there will be genuine fellowship. *And Jesus is going to be honored!* We are going to be brought together into a unity of the faith to the full knowledge of the Son of God, to the full measure of the stature of Christ. No longer being infants so easily fooled by every wind that blows through. We're going to grow together because our only dividing line is whether we love the light or hate the light.

Now, some will say that the dividing line is simply, “Do you *say* you ‘love the Lord’ or not?” But, everybody *says* they “love the Lord.” I’m so tired of hearing, “Oh, he really *loves* the Lord. He’s really got a *good heart*.” Maybe he does, maybe he doesn’t. If someone loves the light, then they love the Lord. The Lord is the Light, right? He is the Truth. If they love the truth and are saved, then they love Jesus. If they are passionate about Him and are willing to change anything, then they love the Lord. Do they have that attitude that says, “I don’t see it. But if I ever did see it, get out of my way because I’m going to run faster than you in that same truth.” “I don’t see it, I don’t agree, I don’t understand it...but cut me loose if I ever did see it. And keep working with me. Bring two or three witnesses to me like Jesus said. I want to understand. I want to grow. And if I see it, I promise you—you have my solemn oath before Almighty God—I’ll change so fast it will make your head spin. Teach me, show me...*I LOVE THE TRUTH!*”? If everybody lives *that* way from the least to the greatest—they all know Him, they all love Him, they all love the light, they all love the truth—then there are no divisions that can ever separate us...*BECAUSE WE’LL GROW THROUGH IT ALL!*

This is what Romans 14 is about. Not “agreeing to disagree,” but loving each other while we passionately grow into the unity of the oneness of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. We’ll work together as we get there. Everybody starts someplace. Everybody’s wrong on most things. That’s okay. We can work through that as long as we are building on the right foundation.

“Agree to Disagree”? NOT!!! Part 2

Sunday Afternoon, September 26, 1999

Question: But what about in the case of Paul and Barnabas? They had such a sharp dispute over John Mark that they ended up going different directions. How does this fit in with “It’s not okay to agree to disagree”?

Paul and Barnabas

It’s intriguing because there is not a lot said about Paul and Barnabas in that relationship. There is nothing said about the relationship after that event where they had the “disagreement.” Do you remember how John Mark bailed out on a previous journey? He was carnal, worldly and fearful...*and he quit*. He was a quitter. But Paul was clear with how he felt about John Mark later when he spoke of him as being a beloved brother...a “fellow prisoner.” I think there was not any dispute over whether or not Paul loved Barnabas. I’m sure he was grateful for all Barnabas had done for him. Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles and brought him into a secure relationship with them. Though Paul was once a blasphemer, he was welcomed primarily because of Barnabas. Barnabas did a good work. He did us all a favor by playing an important role with Saul, later to be called Paul.

Although John Mark was a quitter, he went on to write one of the four gospels. I don’t think there is any evidence that Paul’s love for those two men was ever in dispute. The issue that was in dispute was...is a quitter fit to go on a job like this? Should a man be full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom to wait on tables? Most would say, “No, that’s not necessary.” God would say, “Yes, it is.” Think about it. How many of you in your natural minds would say, “Waiting on tables? Now, there’s an important task. I really think you need to be full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom in order to put that bowl of beans on the table.” “Yeah, that makes sense to me, too!” That might not make sense to you, but that *is* what God said. Of course, I am being *slightly* facetious. The key to understanding this is that the men were being chosen to be *over the matter*. There were *people* they

were responsible for *overseeing* while they were feeding the Hellenistic widows. The point is this: normally we would think that the person with restaurant experience gets to be in charge of feeding the masses. But, God says that the person who *knows Him best* is the one in charge of feeding the masses. That's a very different measuring rod, isn't it?

That was the nature of this dispute with Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. There's no evidence that Paul's respect or love for Mark, or respect or love for Barnabas was ever at stake. The only thing that was at stake was, "How do we go about doing God's work?" "Does the man need to be full of the Holy Ghost and full of wisdom to wait on tables?" Paul said, "Yes." Barnabas said, "No. He's my nephew and I love him." Paul said, "That's not good enough." They had a dispute, and they went separate ways.

Who Was Right?

So, who was right and who was wrong? The Scriptures don't really say. Except in almost a backwards way, they *do* kind of say. Because from that point the Holy Spirit put a spotlight on Paul and followed every move he made, everything he did, and everything he wrote. Where's Barnabas? Poof! No more Barnabas. Was he saved? Absolutely! Was he dearly loved by God? Absolutely! Did he forfeit part of his ability to serve God and part of his effectiveness with God? Maybe he did. Maybe he took a step back from what it was he *could have done*. Barnabas was very prominent in the Scriptures prior to that point, and from that moment forward...*he's gone*. Now that doesn't mean he wasn't saved, and that doesn't mean he stopped working. I'm sure he did some wonderful things. In *Fox's Book of Martyrs* there are things written that would let you know he continued to be a faithful soldier. No dispute there. My only point is...they didn't divide over some matter of conscience per se and there wasn't a rejection of one another. Paul spoke in warm terms of Barnabas. There's no question whether Paul dearly loved and was infinitely grateful to Barnabas. That wasn't the issue. But they did reach a dispute as to how to build. There's some evidence, at least based on the facts, that being full of the Holy Ghost and full of wisdom is *required* to wait on tables. Perhaps Paul was correct in that matter. Certainly, Paul went on to be incredibly effective, and the Holy Spirit spotlighted and followed him in the Book of Acts from that day forward.

So, we have good reason to think that Paul wasn't in sin when he made that choice about John Mark and ended up with Silas instead. I don't think that Barnabas and Paul decided to "agree to disagree." God certainly had

an opinion about that matter. We are not absolutely certain what that opinion was, but there is some evidence as to what His thoughts were. But, whatever God's opinion was, either *one* of the men was right or *neither* of them were right; but there's no chance at all that *both* of them were right. Okay?

They went their separate ways, doing the best they could, and sometimes those kinds of things came up. But the fact that Paul referred to Mark later as a dearly loved brother is evidence that there was still a connection there. There was no coldness, no isolation, and no judgment in the sense that Paul was separating from him. But this "agree to disagree" thing is normally lived out very differently. The way it usually expresses itself is, "I have a strong opinion about something. You have a strong opinion about something. And we both think we're right. There's *nothing* we can do about it, so let's just drop the matter." That's *really not God's way*, to just drop it and everybody go on and do their own thing. It's convenient for us, but there's *serious loss* whenever we take that particular course. It's an intriguing story with John Mark. It's an unfortunate story. But, our lives are filled with unfortunate things. It's just a matter of handling it the best we can.

What If??

You know what? What if Paul and Barnabas handled it wrong? Is that possible? Could they have *mishandled* it? "*The Lord's servant must not quarrel*" (2 Tim. 2:24). Well, it does sound like they had some sort of a quarrel. So, *perhaps*, there is some little bit of disobedience somewhere in the picture. And the fact that they had that quarrel in the Scriptures doesn't mean that it was right. Maybe that should have never happened. Maybe John Mark should have gone and they should have brought a couple other brothers to spend a little extra time with John Mark. Maybe there were other solutions that they just didn't come up with at the time. Maybe they didn't pray and fast enough. Maybe they didn't love each other quite enough. They were all fairly new in the faith, you know. Maybe they weren't as wise at that point in time as they would have been ten years later. Maybe they would have done it differently ten years later. Just because it's in the Scriptures doesn't mean they were perfect and that they didn't make any mistakes.

So, perhaps, they could have done something better at that point in time. But the main thing to see in that situation is that they *continued to love each other*. There is evidence of that. There is also evidence that Paul took

a stand—and he had a reason for taking that particular stand. He wasn't being unloving. There was a principle at stake, and he did the best he could to fulfill that. And, apparently, they stayed in touch later even though they didn't work together at that point in time. Maybe they could have, maybe they should have...but they didn't. However, the one point they *didn't violate* was that they didn't cease loving and caring for each other.

Summing It Up...Love God and Love Each Other

I do realize that you may have never thought of some of what I just said before. Perhaps you never really thought of it in that light or exactly that way. And I do realize you are going to have to chew on this and kind of work it into your life and consider it from different aspects. My intent is only to plant seeds so that *God* can give increase...and *oh, how He gives increase!* Where and why and what form that increase takes, is *His* business. The seed I want to plant right now is that *Romans 14 does not mean "agree to disagree."* *Somebody* has weaker faith—and *we need to care about that!* We don't ignore the fact that one of us has weaker faith, and we don't reject each other either.

I also want you to recognize that the reason Paul did what he did with Barnabas was probably very much related to an Acts 6 issue of waiting on tables. One must be full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom to wait on tables. "You that are spiritual, restore such a one." There were principles of truth in Paul's mind that led him to take the course that he did. Right or wrong, he did the best he could to follow the ways of God in that matter. If we love each other the way that Paul and Barnabas did and if we love God, then how it applies in various situations, difficulties and disagreements that we find ourselves in will play itself out the way God wants it to. We can trust Him to do that.

And that's kind of the thought I want to leave you with. I'm not trying to create some Acts of the Apostles theological trail that says, "When you have a disagreement with somebody, here's what you do..." The principle is just this: ***Love each other into greatness!!*** Don't give up, and don't accept weaker faith in someone else as just the "way it has to be." Don't reject them in the process, and don't give up on them in the process either. Keep working with each other and you will see glorious things! ***LOVE EACH OTHER, LOVE EACH OTHER, LOVE EACH OTHER INTO GREATNESS!***

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (Philippians 2:1-2).

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be shepherds and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

“I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3).

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, **correcting** and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

*“Proclaim the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with **great patience and careful instruction**” (2 Timothy 4:2).*

Anointing On All—Jesus is Family

Mzuzu, Africa 1996

“In order to speak the word of God you must be ordained.” Is this what most of you have always thought? I have good news from Jesus for you about this. It says in 1 John 2 (speaking to *all* true believers) that you have an anointing on you that is *real and not counterfeit*. The Spirit of God, Jesus, the Great Teacher, lives inside of you. Jesus is a wonderful and great Teacher and Counselor. Paul says that if you don't have the Spirit of Christ inside of you, you don't even belong to Him. So, if you are a Christian, then Jesus Christ—the most ordained man that has ever lived—lives inside of you. That means that if you are a Christian, you are ordained. Hallelujah!

Not a Position or a Title— Just a Job to be Done

There are times among God's People when certain jobs need to be done. There are jobs such as caring for children, distributing food, caring for financial matters, helping to care for widows and orphans, helping to care for people's homes and property, plumbing or electricity, helping to sew clothing or do gardening. There are many jobs in the Body of Christ.

In Acts 6 there was a job that needed to be done. This account in the scripture is not about “being ordained to be a priest.” The seven men described there were men that were full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. They were already doing a good job for Jesus. They already had a reputation of being humble servants of God. No one had ever laid hands on them, yet they were already speaking for Jesus. Then there was a job that had to be done in feeding the widows. So the laying on of hands described in Acts 6 has to do with doing a job, not speaking for Jesus.

Also, according to the Bible, these men were not truly “deacons,” as is the normal thought. What they were is actually even better than that. We read in 1 Timothy 3 that the deacons were to be married, but, as far as we know, these seven men were not married. The qualification needed in Acts 6 in

order to feed the others was to be full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom; it was not to be married or have children.

Later on in his life, Paul went to visit Philip, who was one of the seven. Do you remember that Philip had four daughters who prophesied? The Holy Spirit describes Philip as “one of the seven,” not “one of the deacons.” There were deacons in many churches by that time, but the Holy Spirit did not say, “Philip, one of the deacons.” The Holy Spirit said, “Philip, one of the seven.” This is an important point. There is a difference between a deacon and someone who is chosen for a task.

A deacon has ongoing tasks, but the seven who were chosen in Acts 6 were chosen for a *specific* task. We even see that the job changed later on as things changed in Jerusalem. We see that Philip goes to Samaria, and Stephen goes and proclaims in a synagogue where he is stoned and killed, but we see no further discussion of them feeding widows. Sometimes we will lay hands on men or women to do a specific job, and when that job is over or changes, then they are no longer in that position.

It is a different sort of situation, though, when a Church is mature enough to have deacons and elders. Those are ongoing jobs that involve many things and taking responsibility to help in many ways.

When you become a Christian, Jesus lays hands on you and you become a priest. You become a speaker and a lover of God’s word. As the Church grows and changes, there are jobs to do and perhaps the Church will choose from among themselves two men or four men that are full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. Maybe, if the job is very large, the Church will choose seven men full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom and will lay hands on them together and appoint them for the work. As long as that work exists, and they are faithful and obedient in that responsibility, then they will have that responsibility. If they are not faithful in that responsibility, it should be taken away from them. But if they are faithful, they will work that job until it is done. For deacons and elders, this is a longer job. But it is also true that if they are not faithful and obedient, then the church should together perhaps take away that responsibility.

The Gift of Apostle

The apostle Paul said that he was a slave chosen by God. It wasn’t because he was someone special, but it was because God wanted to demonstrate His mercy. This is true for all apostles. They are not chosen because they are special. They are chosen as a trophy of God’s mercy. Paul said the responsibility of the gift of apostle is to be very faithful every day as a

slave to tell others about the very great riches of Jesus. Paul said to the Corinthians that if he did not do this, a terrible curse would fall on him. So he became a slave to the Good News of Jesus, and he spent his life, no matter what it cost him, to tell others the Good News of Jesus.

There are many gifts in the Body of Christ and each one is special. Paul said that the gifts that everyone else had were very special, and that each person would function as a priest and tell others about Jesus. He said, though, that when others tell about Jesus they receive great rewards. But the apostles, Paul said, are cursed if they don't tell others about Jesus.

The gift or privilege of apostle is one that is very, very special; it is very, very great and rare. But it is also very costly, according to Paul. He said apostles are like janitors in the House of God. In Ephesians 3, Paul spoke of two things he would do in his responsibility as an apostle. He said one thing (v. 8) would be to tell others about the great riches of Jesus. In verse 9 Paul speaks of the second thing that he is called to do, and that is to make clear to everyone how to *live* in the great riches of Jesus. He said he is going to teach them how to live in the mystery of Jesus—how to work out the mystery of Jesus in their personal lives.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul called himself a wise master builder. He wasn't saying this because he was prideful but because God put it in his bones. God had given him great mercy and kindness and put inside of him the ability to see things that others could not. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul said that he had been a terrible man, but God had shown him mercy by not only forgiving him all of his many sins, but also by giving him a particular gift. Jesus gives many, many different kinds of gifts. All the things that Jesus was, all His different parts, He gave to His Body. In one sense all gifts are equal because they are all Jesus. But the gift that God gave to Paul was the gift of apostle. Paul said, "I did not even deserve to have my sins forgiven. But because He forgave my sins and gave me a gift, I will work very, very hard with this gift in order to say thank you to Jesus for forgiving my sins." That gift was to tell others about Jesus' great riches.

Because Paul had the particular gift of seeing what others could not, he needed to help all of God's people see how to walk together. That's what the gift of apostle does, and that's why this gift is very important in the churches around the world. If you put 100 dedicated Christians in one place, they could all love Jesus with their whole hearts and could all *want* to obey Jesus very much. But without a relationship with an apostle somehow from somewhere, it would be very difficult to know *how* to live together. Committed, loving Christians can hurt each other, but the gifts that Jesus gives helps them to work together better.

Putting the Parts Together

We could take all the parts of a car—a steering wheel, a bumper, a motor, a door—and pile them in a room. They could all be very wonderful parts, but you could not drive very far in that car if all the parts were not put together. In fact, you couldn't go anywhere in that car. The gift of apostle puts all the good parts together. In the churches, we need the gifts that can help put the car together. This is what Paul says in Ephesians 3. He tells people about Jesus' great love and helps put the church together so that it will be the house of God. All the wonderful gifts and all the committed Christians need the gift of apostle to help them put the House together.

In Ephesians 4, Paul said that God gave gifts to the church—apostle, prophet, and the other gifts so that we can all grow together. Those gifts don't *make* us Christians, but they do *teach us how to grow together*. They teach us to no longer be infants, help us grow into the full measure of the stature of Christ, and help us to be compacted together. Paul says that this gift is very important to the church in helping good people to build together properly.

Many of Paul's letters talk about very practical things. He does talk a lot about Jesus, but mostly he talks about how the Believers should live with each other. He gives them practical teaching about money, their marriages, children and widows, and about how to build in the Church with authority matters. He teaches them about their worship together, their meetings, and how to share with one another.

Teaching all the good parts (the way to become a car) was most of what Paul did with his gifts. In other words, he taught them how to build together so that they could go somewhere; we don't want to be a bunch of parts sitting in the middle of a room. We want to be a bus for Jesus to go somewhere. We want to build together and learn how to do our work together in love.

Some Practical Questions About Men's and Women's Roles

Paul said it was okay to have practical questions. In 1 Corinthians 1, we read about how some from the household of Chloe traveled hundreds of miles to ask Paul a question. They asked him questions about divisions they were having, questions about marriages, or about what to do when sin was in their midst. And because his gift was that of an apostle, he could see what to do. God's people needed Paul to be able to see and help.

Paul was not a “superstar”. He knew he had weakness in his heart, and had fallen into sin in the past. But because God loved Paul anyway, Paul wanted to say “thank you” by using his gift for God’s people.

“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman must learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to have authoritative teaching over a man. She must be silent. For Adam was formed first, and then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be kept safe through childbirth if they continue in faith, in love and holiness with propriety” (1 Timothy 2:9-15).

This is similar to 1 Corinthians 14, and Paul wrote both Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. So we want to understand what the Holy Spirit was thinking when he wrote these things. The Holy Spirit is a person and He has thoughts and feelings, just like with you and me. If you say something to me, you are probably thinking and feeling more than you are saying. So we want to understand what the Holy Spirit is feeling and thinking since the Holy Spirit is a Person, not just words.

The heart of the Holy Spirit is that He loves men and women just the same. In Galatians 3, He said that there is no male nor female; we are one in Christ. There is no Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free. If we have faith in Christ, we now wear Christ. We have the clothing of Jesus—not Jew, not Greek, not male, not female, not black, white nor yellow. Hallelujah?! But now we *all* are Jesus. What color is Jesus? *Who cares? He is wonderful!* And so, if we have faith in Jesus Christ, we all put on Jesus, and there is no more Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. This too the Holy Spirit has said in Galatians 3.

Precious Thoughts on Authority

There are many things that the Holy Spirit thinks concerning male and female. These things are precious and we must understand them together. As we consider all the teachings about man and woman, we see that the Father is the head of Christ. Christ is the head of man. Man is the head of woman. But, is not Christ the same as God the Father? Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” Yet the Father is over Christ, though they are one. Thomas said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God.” The Father and the Son are one.

Certainly Christ is head over the man. But if we have been clothed with Christ, we are one with Christ. So there is still authority between Christ

and the man, yet they are one in another way. There is authority between the man and the woman. The man is over the woman in the same way that Christ is over the man. Yet the man and the woman are one in Christ. So, in one sense, the man and the woman are very equal. And yet there is authority between the man and the woman.

These things are very precious and you must try to understand. The man can serve the woman with a whole heart. A man can love the woman and cherish her deeply. A man, in a way, can make himself a slave to the woman as Christ has come to serve the Church. But even though Jesus washed our feet as a slave would, He still has authority. And likewise, as a man cherishes and loves a woman, even becoming a slave to her in some ways, he still has authority over her, and she must respond to that.

Because Christ is so kind to us and loves us, we shouldn't forget His authority, should we? There is an order in God. There is authority in God. And when the Holy Spirit speaks these things to us in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, He is not saying that men are dictators, ruling over the women with an iron fist. Women are not slaves that have to hide in the corner in the darkness. We must celebrate the wonderful gifts God has given our women, and even submit to the gifts that He has put into their hearts. But women must still recognize the authority that God has placed in man. So all of these things are *matters of the heart*. All of Christianity is a matter of the heart, not a matter of rules and laws. Jesus did not give us a set of rules. He taught us how to have His heart. He teaches us to think like He thinks. Therefore our goal with 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 is to have the heart that He wants us to have about these matters. The Bible is not a rulebook, but a way to have a heart.

Now how does that look in a practical way? In a relationship between a man and a woman, the man will feed, care for, and cherish his wife. He will lay down his life for her in every way possible, even so far as to become a slave as Christ did for the Church. At the same time, the woman will listen very carefully for the voice of the man because that is her heart, just as is the Church's heart to hear Christ. The woman's heart is to hear the man's voice and respond to it. This is not a law, but this is the way Jesus wants us to live in our hearts. The more a man lives that way towards a woman, the more he can hear God. The more a woman lives that way towards a man, the more she can hear God. The Scriptures say, "*How can two walk together unless they be in agreement?*"

Authority Sets Us Free!

All of these matters are very, very important. When the whole church is together, if our hearts and our minds are right, then the man will be very respectful and loving towards all the women (who will not disappear like the furniture). The men will deeply love the gifts in the women and will not want them to bury their talents. The women will respect the men and, as they are in the gatherings of the saints, will understand the authority of the men and never come over the top of that authority. Paul said, "*I do not permit the women to teach with authority over the men.*" And yet they can *offer* their gifts.

A practical example: If one of the women has something burning in her heart to say, she must not bury her talent. She must not ignore the gift of God that is within her because the men need that gift. We need *all* of Jesus desperately. So if a woman has something burning in her heart that she wants to speak, she can respect the authority of the men by asking permission to say this thing. She should turn first, perhaps, to the authority over her personally. If there is a man in her life that has special authority over her, then she should, perhaps, turn first to him and ask him if it is okay. Perhaps then that man should ask the assembly if it is okay if the woman speaks. If the man does not think it is a good idea for her to speak, or if the assembly does not think it is a good idea for her to speak at that moment, then she should be happy to be silent. She should not resent that or be angry. She should not say, "Well, then, I will never share anything."

This is how the woman can be Jesus to everyone, with the man still having the authority. The man draws the gift out, but the woman does not push herself to the top. When you look at all the teachings of the word of God together, what you see is that God has a wonderful heart towards women. A woman is not like a chair or a table in the room. She is alive with Jesus and we need her very much. But she must also understand God's order and not be proud or arrogant. She must be humble in order to offer her gift. This is the order of the angels, the order of God the Father and Christ the Son, and the order of man and woman. We are all one, but there is an order in God that helps everything to work smoothly. We are equal, and a wife's gift may be even better than her husband's, but God made him a man and so there is order. Maybe he doesn't deserve to be in a place of authority. But God chooses things that we must honor, so we must all work together to draw out the gifts and also to love the order that God puts us in so that we can work together.

Where I live, we have some very, very gifted women. The Church there has been blessed by several women who are very, very strong in Jesus. They

will all tell you the same thing about functioning within God's Order—it does not press them down; it sets them free. There is great freedom in offering their gifts rather than just taking authority. It is a very precious thing to be in submission. The women will tell you that it frees their hearts and makes them sing inside to offer their gifts rather than to take. So, while we do not desire to push down any gifts at all, these gifts come as an *offering* from the women, and that is true in the home or in a gathering of the saints. This is a heart that is precious to Jesus—a heart He will bless.

Do you remember when Jesus spoke to the Centurion, the Roman guard? He said to that man that in him, He saw greater faith than was in all of Israel. The greatest faith Jesus had ever seen was in a man who said he knew how to be under authority and how to have authority. The Roman guard said that he would say to his servant “Go”, and he would go. He would say to another servant, “Come”, and he would come. He said he too knew how to respect authority and go and come under authority. Jesus said this was a man of the greatest faith He had seen because he knew how to respond to authority. It was something that set him free, not something that pushed him down.

When Christ is head of the man, the man is set free. Jesus said if we are not His slave, we are a slave of sin. When we choose to not let Jesus be our Master, sin becomes our master. But when the Son sets us free, we are free indeed. Do you feel these things in your own heart? When you obey Jesus, are you free? When you don't obey Jesus are you dirty inside?

The same is true with a man and a woman. When we respond to God's order, we are not slaves; we are free. But when we don't, we become slaves to the wrong thing. A woman that is not under authority with faith will feel dirty inside. She will be confused and frustrated. God gives order and authority in the family and in the Church—*not* so someone can be better than another person or tell them what to do and order them around. He gives order and authority so that we can all be set free in love and God's order.

Talking to Daddy as Family

We speak of a way to live, not a way to have meetings. The answers to many practical questions are easier than they seem at first. The more we become a family in truth, the more things begin to make sense. Most people are caught between being a family and being a religious organization. Some groups of people are totally just a religious organization. Others are somewhere between being a religious organization and a family. But, as God brings His Church more and more toward being Family, then more

and more things begin to make sense. When we view ourselves as a family, the answers to different questions begin to make sense. Because we love each other so much, we share every part of our lives with each other every day. Now it's no longer just about meetings. Rather, because our lives are so wrapped together everyday, men know how to treat women and women know how to treat men. If we know how to do it in our homes and in the streets, we will know how to do it in the meetings.

In all things, we must recognize God's order, but we must also not quench the Spirit. We must recognize order, but we must not bury our talents. So, if all the Saints are together and God puts a prayer in my heart, as a man I might ask if it would be okay for me to pray. If I'm a woman I would probably ask a man if it would be okay for me to pray, and he might ask the whole assembly, "Would it be okay if this woman prays?" If that man and the assembly think it's okay, then *she is under authority*. She is covered by authority if we ask her to do it. If she just decides to do it, then that could be out of order. But if we all want her to pray because she is our dear sister, then she is under authority and at that moment it's okay. These things are true.

We should understand something about prayer. The word "prayer" sounds very religious to our ears. As we become more like family, then the way we work together makes more sense in the meetings. As we all become closer friends of God, then prayer makes more sense. In false religion, people "say their prayers". In Jesus' Christianity, we have a friendship with our dear Father. So, what then is a "prayer meeting"? I'm not sure I know what a "prayer meeting" is anymore. I know what it is to have God's family together. I know what it is to have God's family talking to their Father together from time to time. But I'm not sure I know what a "prayer meeting" is in Christianity. Can you see the difference? One is religion, and the other is relationship.

We don't "say prayers," *we talk to Father*—just like a young child would talk to his daddy. Does a young child have a prayer meeting with his daddy, or does he just enjoy talking to his daddy? Does he need a meeting to talk to him, or can he just talk to his daddy because he loves him? Well, what if all of God's little children are in the same room and they want to talk to Daddy? That would not be a prayer meeting. That would be a family being a family with their Daddy. So now you can see perhaps how corporate prayer works. It doesn't *work*, per se! What we can do, though, is if a brother loves Daddy and wants to tell Him that, when he gets done, I say, "My turn, my turn, I want to talk to Daddy!" That is how we pray together. That is how we talk to God together, as God stirs in our hearts. A special sister might ask a man, "Would it be okay if I talked to Daddy

now?” And so she is still in order because the man has authority over her. But she still has the freedom to talk to Daddy if she has worked that out. This is how we can be with teaching, with prayer, with singing, and with everything because we are family together with our Daddy.

We want to continue to brush all of the traditions of men and religion out the door and just be simple children with each other. We don't want to be religious, holy men with titles and rituals. We want to be loving children with each other and with our Daddy every day. Meetings take care of themselves because we are family all the time. We talk to Daddy together all the time. We bring the teachings of Jesus to each other all the time. If we all happen to be in the same room, that's great. But that's not any different than outside the room 30 minutes later.

A Question About Women

Question: But the Bible says that when we pray, the men raise their hands, but the women do not. So the women can also raise their hands? Can that be right?

Good question. 1 Timothy 2: 8-9 says, *“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes...”*

He says, “I want men everywhere to lift holy hands in prayer... I also want women to dress modestly...” Does that mean that men should not dress modestly? Men must dress modestly also, even though he speaks to women here. And he does not say, “The women should not lift up hands in prayer.” He does not say, “Men must not dress modestly.” Men must dress modestly. Women must dress modestly. If a man lifts a hand, he should lift a holy hand. The key word is “holy.” He should lift a hand that is dedicated to God and wants to serve God. Unless a woman violates authority, if she has a hand that wants to serve God, it might be okay for her to lift it. God did not say that men should *not* dress modestly, even though he *does* address the women to dress modestly. God did not say that women should not be able to lift hands in prayer; so maybe it's okay, if they are *holy* hands, just as it's okay for men to dress modestly.

On “Women’s Role”

Sunday Afternoon, February 20, 2000

Question: So, what is the “woman’s role” supposed to be in the church, anyway? There is so much controversy! Some say all of Paul’s teaching about women and their role was only “cultural” and not “the Word of God.” I know this cannot be true. How much of the Bible would we need to throw away, in order to please everyone on every topic? However, I also have a very difficult time understanding what the women’s role should be. If she is a co-heir, what about her preaching and leading bible studies and worship leading? Should it happen or not happen, according to God?

The biggest problem is that we are asking, “Should our poodle dog wear a beret, or a baseball cap, or a cowboy hat when she goes to the dance?” The answer is, “None of the above. Poodles don’t go to dances.” We spend our time trying to interpret Scriptures for totally unscriptural environments!! The legalistic answers are wrong. The culturalistic interpretations are wrong. The liberal answers are *all* wrong! Poodles don’t go to dances, and Paul was *not* writing to people that had to decide if women should be allowed to “preach sermons” (there were none) during the “service” (there were none) or speak up during a “bible study” (there were none) or “lead worship” (wrong idea) in Paul’s day!

There is *no* mistaking (1Cor. 11, 14; 1Tim. 2; 1Pet. 3; etc.) God has a different role in mind for women than men. However, the *real* role of a woman can only be interpreted in the context of *biblical, daily Christianity*. We cannot understand God’s thought unless we live *as a family* “from the least to the greatest,” “confessing sins one to another,” and “bearing one another’s burdens to fulfill the law of Christ.” Any attempt to interpret a male/female role in the unBiblical context of “attendance,” “programs,” “Sunday house-church services,” “bible studies,” “monthly prayer breakfasts,” “hirelings,” “cell groups,” “Buildings Appropriated for Religious Functions,” and “worship teams”—will miss the mark *terribly*.

Let’s not try to “dot the i” when the “i” does not yet exist! In other words, let’s just build God’s way, without the gimmicks, or accommodating human flesh with the human schedules and programs. Let’s try it *without*

the hierarchies and “automatic teachers, preachers or leaders.” This “automatic speaker” or “official leader” makes a man nothing more than a mini “vicar” or “substitute” (from the Latin word, “vicarious”). Do we really need a substitute for Christ? Whether a “protestant” vicar, or a roman catholic one, it is the same disastrous offense to God’s Son. “Nicolaitanism” translated, is to “conquer the People.” Jesus is ALIVE and needs no one to fill in for Him! “When Revelation comes to the second, let the first one sit down!” “Everyone has a word of instruction, a song, etc.”

Jesus said, “Call no man leader, teacher, father, vicar—for you are *all brothers!*” Are there Gifts? OF COURSE! But, Oh, how different. “Automatic” anything or anybody? Nope. Only Jesus. Period.

Let’s try building *daily* as a *Family*, rather than as an organization. Also, do you realize what is as unfruitful and as far outside of Father’s Heart as institutional christianity? Here it is: A “loose-knit nothing” is equally wrong. Just nice people that hang around together some, is *not* God’s intent for “a City set on a hill that cannot be hidden.” The “loose-knit nothing” is not His thought either! We were, according to Father, “baptized by the Spirit” into something immensely greater than that! (1Cor. 12). If we will each lay down our lives in tangible ways every day as a Priesthood, “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament,” *then* and *only then* will we be in a position to KNOW what the “women’s role” can be, in keeping with both the Spirit and the Words of the Scripture.

Here is another way of saying the same thing: What is the basis on which God intends for us to fully understand Scripture? Personal prayer and Greek word studies? Oh, I love those, but...NO, that’s NOT the end of the deal!

“God’s household, the Church of the living God, *is the pillar and foundation of truth,*” saith the Lord.

Much of what is seemingly contradictory in the Scriptures, and the majority of those things that cause controversy and division, are the product of ignoring God’s Counsel on this point: “The Church is the pillar and foundation of Truth!” In the *midst* of daily lives, joined to one another and hidden *together* in Christ Jesus, baptized into one Body by one Spirit, daily “having need of one another,” “contending as one man for the Faith,” in *that* environment God shows Himself and brings “unity of the Faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God!” In that environment, where the Testimony of His Son is evident in “how all men will know you are My disciples,” He shows His Friends His Thoughts, as things come up. His House is not a laboratory, a library, a think tank, or an ivory tower. It is a Family of “a hundred homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, and children.” We

must be a daily Family, or we are not living in His Heart's desire, and are not the "Bethany" or the "Beth-El" where He desires to put His feet up and open His heart and current applicable thought to His Family in the most comfortable way.

"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!"

Well, the "woman's role" in the Church? Hey, let's start with being the Church, and then we can, in the context of Family, discover *together* what the women's role should be in the heart and mind of our Father.

Question: We were talking this morning about teachers. We believe Scripture when it says women are not to teach men. I have been influenced by women teachers, and I want to be obedient in all things, so is that wrong of me to put myself under their teachings? Can you give us insight about women teaching in the church? Thanks...

Hi...so much of the difficulty in comprehending and "obeying" Scripture is the *unbiblical* world we attempt to "apply" Biblical teachings within. If I said to you, "I want you to take your pineapple tree and fertilize it with koala droppings," and you lived in Canada, of all places, you would *want* to "obey"—but you *could not*. You could *call* a pine tree by the name "pineapple tree" and you could *call* dog droppings "koala droppings" and go on. But then, if I were to say, "Now, I want you to take the pineapples, and eat every bite of them," you would find yourselves eating pinecones and getting very sick. Why? Because we attempted to substitute truths and apply things, and rename things that are *not* what "the author meant by that word" and that *don't work* in your world. That is the dilemma of so many things that most folks face.

"All things in common"—what does that MEAN??!! One cannot know and one cannot "do" it in an unBiblical world of attendance and disconnectedness and leaven in the batch, where hypocrisy and lukewarmness can remain hidden or accepted. It would be a program or a "community" or a gimmick...and a disaster! The same is true for "woman's role" and "leadership" and "the Lord's supper" and so many other topics.

SO, what to do about "women authors" and "women in pulpits" and the like? Who knows?! A "good author" *is no evidence* whatsoever that

the man or woman even knows God, or lives a life *anything like Jesus*. I personally know and have spent considerable time with a number of the “big name” authors and leaders and music guys in Christendom (in their homes, at the YMCA with them, in their meetings and at their breakfast tables), and find the majority to be as worldly, ambitious, and hypocritical as anyone you can name. Jesus is *not* their “Passion”—even when they write wonderful books about that very topic! They are so often proud, egocentric to an extreme, power hungry, and ambitious. And worse. They will *not* submit to the Word of God, or anyone around them. And yet their books and “sermons” are marvelous (and quite lucrative for them—“peddling the Word of God” and music they claim God inspired, “for profit”). It is *pathetic and tragic*.

SO, how do you, in this unBiblical world, deal with “women authors”—or “men” for that matter—when you have *no idea* what their *lives* are really like, because the ivory tower, leaven-filled, hierarchical, traditions-of-men world they live in is *so far from God*? I don’t know! Just do your best, and when you find something that sounds legitimate, do *not* be fooled into automatically thinking they must know God well, or *live* anything like what they write about. Contact them, perhaps. Send them things to read. Get feedback on what is going on where they are, for “you know them by their *fruit*”—not their word-crafting.

Question: “I have a question for you... It has to do with what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:26-35. Could you explain for me what he was saying there, ESPECIALLY in regard to the women? We really want to do things God’s way, so what does Paul mean about women being ‘silent’? Should they never say a word in meetings? And what about every day life? I know we’re supposed to be a ‘family’ but I’ve never been able to figure it out. It can feel so unreal and mechanical. Are there answers? What is it like for you all there?”

☺ Yes, there are answers, for sure. And they are pretty well tested for Biblical authenticity and fruit in the 15 years we’ve been living the way mentioned, as Family. I feel a bit overwhelmed to try to describe it, though. If someone asked you about a typical week for your family, I think you could see the magnitude of the task of answering the question—if you were meaning to do the answer justice instead of superficiality! That’s kinda how I feel. I don’t see how I can answer thoroughly with time constraints right now. But, I would say that the answer is *relational, rather than legal*, of course—meaning that if we *are* functioning as *family* every

day, then the answers can be extracted from how you function with your own physical family.

Of course the parallels are not exact because of raw numbers in “the whole church” that Paul was writing to, and because of various levels of relationship, as well as unBelievers that were in the midst of the Family, on the occasion mentioned. All of these are factors, just as they would be in your home. If a third cousin were there, there would be some “Heisenberg” effect on the dynamics of your family and how you functioned and spoke to one another. If an outsider were there—someone you did not know at all—it would affect your family dynamics considerably. The bathrobe is not an option for wandering around the house now. The discussion at dinner would not likely be of sensitive matters, and so on. I just use this to illustrate the point that there is no way I can answer your question in a *general* way, because every situation is different.

But, the *points* Paul is making must not be violated:

- 1) Men’s roles are different than women’s. Women must not dominate or control the assembly, but be submissive to their husbands and the men in general.
- 2) There must be no more than two or three prophetic “thrusts” in one sitting. There may be considerable teaching and discussion and songs and prophetic insights on topic number one. Later in the time together, another totally different prophetic thrust may come along, and all that surrounds this. *But*, when a third entirely different thrust manifests itself, it must be questioned as to whether enough has been done already for the Time. “The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet.” If a fourth thrust were to come up, we *know* that it should be set aside for another time, no matter how good it may be. “Two, or at the most three.” God is not the God of disorder or chaos, and “over-feeding” is no longer good for the health.
- 3) Nor is a tongue worthwhile in the assembly if there is no interpreter—because that is a potential source of chaos, and God does not author confusion or noise or chaos.

In a general way (but as I said, don’t go too far with this, because every situation is totally different and “as many as are led of the Spirit are sons of God”)—if women desire to say something, they must (by the Principle of 1 Timothy 2, 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Corinthians 11—speaking of women prophesying) do it in submission—not as one with “authoritative teaching”

(the Greek of 1 Timothy 2). “Would it be okay if I asked a question?” “Would it be okay if I offered a thought on that subject?” *That* is the spirit of anything that would be said.

And, contextually, in listening for the Spirit’s Voice on these matters, it has been interesting to see that when very large numbers are together, including perhaps large numbers from other cities on occasions, the women have generally not felt liberty in the Spirit to say a word. And the very same women *may* be able, under Headship, to offer a Thought in a more local environment (a living room, or with 250 folks locally that they are intimately close with on a daily level), and be powerfully used by God without anyone feeling any lack of humility or submission.

SO, again, seen through the “family” eyes that most can relate to at home, it is not hard to see that the dynamics of the specific occasion have *much* to do with whether your wife or children should say or do something. And in a different situation, what they may do, acceptably, could be much different. And, if a woman were exercising indiscretion or lack of humility and acting in a way that is inappropriate for the situation, *because* every single person is daily involved in each others lives, someone could easily nudge her and whisper “Not here. Not now. There will be a better time to express yourself on this matter. This is inappropriate.” And she would be *glad* and *grateful* (though perhaps ever so slightly embarrassed at her temporary poor judgment). *It’s a family, not a “meeting” to attend, so everything changes radically!*

Question: I have a concern about women in meetings or just speaking in general. What does it look like when women are quiet in meetings? 1 Corinthians 14:34 says, “The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says.” Should women talk to men in a certain way all the time or does this only pertain to meetings? I am specifically asking about the women who speak to any man besides their husbands. I don’t fully understand this. I know that there is no male or female in His Church, just Christ. How does this apply to our daily lives? I will pray that God gives us wisdom on this.

Thanks, Brother in Christ,

Hi there, Beyond question Paul’s encouragement to the Corinthians (in two places) and to Timothy and to Titus—about who women are to be, as well as Peter’s Thoughts—all point to the fact that *women are clearly*

to be different than men in how they carry themselves. Many who deal with “Church” as something to “attend”—an institution and organization, rather than Family—will *never* get it right. They’ll either allow women to dominate in “meetings” and in “real life”...or they’ll make “separate rules” for “meetings” and then allow women to dominate in the rest of life...or they’ll bury women into some subservient role in “both” worlds. There are NO good answers when the Church is not functioning as Family in the Body of Christ. “Round peg in a square hole.” The “Scriptures” don’t make any sense in a non-Biblical paradigm. “Get the leaven out of the batch.” *It can’t be done*, in a non-Biblical paradigm. It can only be excused or justified or legally applied or totally ignored. TRUTH only can be understood in a Biblical model of daily Life in the Church. “The Church: the pillar and foundation of Truth”—that is the meaning of this verse. Anyway, a great and important topic. And women *fully released* to be who God called them to be, and yet *fully* in the role that God intended for them under the headship of men (not just their husbands)—AH!

What a Marvel to behold! Truly good stuff. Women who are subservient doormats *and* women who are domineering feminists—*Neither have any idea of how awesome it can be to do it God’s way!!*

Excerpts from a question.....

I listened to the tapes entitled “Silent Women in the Church” and I have a question in my context. I’m sorry, but I need to voice my emerging understanding on this issue in a (probably) long winded way. Don’t worry about writing back soon if it is not convenient. I trust my questions will become more focused as I see a clearer picture of Father’s ultimate intention.

...To sum all of that up, this woman is not power hungry for power’s sake, I think. She is like a mom who is fed up with her kids who won’t shape up to her expectations, and says it is actually God who is fed up. What can I do other than to pray and fast? It has been 15 months now. Maybe it’s not fair to ask you, but you seem to have gone through some stuff that may enable you to sense if the Lord is in this, and to what degree. I love these folks like my own family, and my kids are getting hurt, as too much time elapses with no resolution.

Is it true that the Lord has arranged for the man (husband only?) to lead the family and church, and even if he is wrong (or falls into sin?), the woman (wife?) is to obey?

Thanks and love,

NO, NO! You didn't understand me! Xoxoxox!!!!!!!!!!!! Not sure *where* you got that idea!!! Of *course* a woman must *never* buckle under and "obey" anything sinful! I've never been willing to accept that scenario as from God. "Judge for yourselves whether it is better to obey God, or man!" Any authority *must* reflect *Jesus' Authority* ("All Authority in Heaven, and on Earth, belongs to Me") in Spiritual matters, or they have usurped the place they were delegated to, and must *not* be obeyed.

The fact is, you will never be able to "envision" how to fit many Scriptures into such an *incredibly* unBiblical paradigm as what you have had to endure there. Many Scriptures *cannot* make sense or be put into practice in such a faulty, sinful environment. And it is sinful, if for no other reason (and there are, no doubt, other reasons) than that it *is unBiblical* in it's very essence and manner of "serving God."

A couple of e-mails follow on the subject of authority and man/woman roles with one another, which may clear it up a bit.

Hi, Some thoughts exchanged between the saints, years ago...captured in some rough notes at that time relating to "authority."

Understand "Authority"! Take a hypothetical situation to help interpret other "authority" situations. In the United States, a cabinet-level position known as "Secretary of Defense" or a military position known as "Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" have tremendous authority and decision-making status. However, they *report* to the Chief Executive Officer, the Commander-in-Chief—the President of the United States.

He has the ultimate authority. *They* would be totally irresponsible to *not* speak to the President very frankly about their viewpoints. They have the expertise that often he will not. Nevertheless, he makes the final decision and they *must* be supportive of that decision. If his decision is counter to their recommendation, and things fail (as they had predicted to him, earnestly)—they will *not* be traitors to his authority with an "I told you so" attitude, or allow anyone in the media or press know that *they* were right, and the President was wrong. That lack of loyalty and insubordination is **TOTALLY** evil. They will simply work with him to rebuild and find new solutions for the new problems. But He will continue to get their full support and loyalty. *That* is the "Authority" that Jesus commended the Centurion for, and saw him to be of *Great Faith*.

Now, here's another scenario. Let's say that the President asked the Secretary of Defense to do something illegal. Now that is an entirely

different story! There are laws that the President *must* submit to that are bigger than him. He has no “authority” to ask anyone to violate the law, simply because he has “authority.” He only holds that “position of authority” based on the law, and will *never* have the right to “order” someone or make a decision that *violates* the “delegated authority” that he has been granted. He is *not* an “owner” of authority, but has only been entrusted with authority to get a job done, within the confines of the law and greater authority that is over him.

In a similar way, authority in the home, and in Spiritual situations, is real and appropriate. *God Himself* grants authority to one in various situations in Church and Family and workplace and elsewhere. Responding to that “delegated authority” is a *Faith* issue, like it was for the Centurion who was so commended by the Master Himself. If we don’t respond to authority, we *cannot please God*. We *cannot* have “God” as an authority and savior if we will not respond to authority that He has placed in our lives, whether we always “like” or “agree” with what they decide (as in the Presidential example above)—or not.

However, in an unBiblical environment, with false, man-appointed authority (clergy), or over-bearing, lawless authorities in home or workplace...*anyone* who asks us to *disobey God* has over-stepped their authority and...“*Judge for yourselves whether it is better to obey God, or man.*” *Authority is real*, and God is disobeyed when we make ourselves the ultimate authorities because we will not submit to those God has placed in our lives—in family, or Church, or workplace, or civil environments. *God* is at the root of Authority delegated to men, and to miss that or ignore that is the height of arrogance and unBelief. But, at the point where one (in any of those environments) asks us to *disobey God*, they have forfeited their right to have “authority” in that area.

Spousal, Employer, or Governmental “Authority”

Monday Morning, October 14, 2002

In answer to a question about a husband (a man with a history of sin, not Christlikeness—yet like every American CALLS himself a “christian”) who is demanding that the believing wife “obey” his “headship.” He is demanding to control her, her relationships, her time, and her beliefs—a controlling slave-master, not a husband or a Christian—and by so doing, he is breaking federal law and the US Constitution (which protect religious liberties for every US citizen, male or female), in addition to God’s Law.

Question: “How should I deal with the fact that I OF COURSE want to honor my husband, and yet my first (‘seek FIRST the Kingdom’) priority is to my Life with Jesus and His Family?Love, Mary”

Dear Mary..... I’m so sorry. I very much appreciate your heart, and have literally shed tears this morning for this. I am so sorry. First, some general thoughts:

“Judge for yourselves whether it’s better to obey God, or man” (Acts 4:19).

When a mere human, whether 1) a boss at work, or 2) a police officer, or 3) a husband or wife or parent... when ANY mere human demands that we do things that violate our conscience, harm our relationship with Jesus or our possibilities with Him, or do something or anything that is sin (“missing the mark” is the Greek word for sin)—we have an obligation to “obey God, rather than man.” There is NO way around this Truth, though some compromisers will try to manipulate you and the Teachings and Life of Jesus to their own ends, *of course*.

In that environment of a Saint doing what God wants them to do, without “man pleasing” (and losing God by pleasing man, Gal.1:10), “if the unbeliever is willing to stay, let him stay” (1Cor. 7:12-13). God has not called us to compromise Spiritual matters from mere men. But, if the attractiveness of who He is making us causes them to want to stay with us *anyway*—great. We DO NOT compromise, but perhaps the pagan or religious unbeliever (those who pretend to be Christians, but their lives and minds and actions and tongues reveal them to be otherwise—1John 1 to 1John 3) will realize what they are losing, and allow the Believer to be who they need to be and relate how and to whom they need to relate, rather than constantly trying in vain to command them to disobey or water-down God.

“ALL authority in heaven and on earth belongs to ME,” said Jesus (Matthew 28:18).

All OTHER “authority” is ONLY related to 1) things that have no bearing on my Spiritual Life, or 2) things that are *consistent* with the Authority of Jesus—not violating my conscience.

Kindness, patience, servant-heart towards even the worst manipulator and control-freak and abuser? Please! A thousand times YES! Always. And “the extra mile!” But, compromise on matters relating to Jesus Christ and our growth in Him and His Kingdom—for another mere human who is attempting to control us, threaten us, or bully us with guilt or fear or manipulation or bribery? Never.

When legitimate “spiritual” and governmental “authorities” commanded two Apostles (who knew Jesus’ ways well) to alter their “lifestyle” in Jesus—even “optional” elements, one might reason—they responded to the commands (from legitimate authorities) this way:

“Judge for yourselves whether it’s better to obey God, or man.”

In the Spirit of their Master, “Seek FIRST the Kingdom.”

When all of the commands and decisions being imposed are compatible with our life in Jesus—excellent! Pay the price, even when you wouldn’t “agree”—that’s what authority is all about! BUT, when others are demanding you violate your conscience? A true Christian would never demand that you violate your conscience and try to control you in that manner anyway. They’ve already revealed themselves. And, if what they are living and modeling and inviting you into is *really* Jesus, their fruit and patience and love will show it over time.

But, if they are playing god and attempting to usurp Jesus in your life, then they have revealed the spirit that they are of. Any “authority”—whether a

boss, a government, or a husband or wife—ALL must be *only* reflective of “neutral” decisions or decisions in keeping with our conscience—call to follow Jesus with all of our hearts, uncontrolled by mere fallible and ego-centric human flesh.

“ALL authority” belongs to Jesus alone. Any other authority must be representative of Him, or they are violating Him and you. As the men who knew Jesus and His intentions well on this matter said, “Judge for yourselves whether it’s better to obey God, or man.”

Simple enough, really.

Mary, you have to know, on various levels, it’s not an uncommon story. But it is still very sad. Live your life for Jesus, and give in where you can, as it’s not related to your Spiritual Life or any children involved. Be a servant and be kind. But you only live *ONCE*. Do it right, even if men’s controlling power-freak stuff (using Scriptures, of course) turns into physically or verbally beating you, as it often does. At that point, if he will *not* allow you to live by your *own* conscience, and you are not going to live by his foul conscience, then God said, “Let him leave, you are not under bondage in such cases.” Your courage and servant heart and willingness to suffer rather than compromise your conscience or one ounce of your Spiritual Life—will either win him over, according to Paul—or further reveal his true colors.

Out of seven billion people on earth, “FEW will be those who find the Eternal Life”—and we will not *all* be so fortunate as to have guessed correctly during our youth and pagan days in marriage situations. We can’t control who our blood relatives or bosses at work or neighbors are, or whether they will be mini-gods, or slaves of Jesus. It’s out of our control. “MANY” will destroy themselves, and according to Jesus the statistics are that we will be surrounded by heartache and charlatans crying “Lord, Lord!” in addition to those who never have claimed Him. While the tares abound on the planet and we still must be “in the world”—we are NOT required to be “of it.”

“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. And I will be your God, and you My people” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

Love, serve, care, pray...but GOD never asked you to compromise anything of Him. Just to love others while they persecute you for loving Him and not playing by the world’s rules.

“Judge for yourselves whether it’s better to obey God, or man” (Acts 4:19).

Marriage Perspectives and Objectives ☺

Some thoughts exchanged between the saints, years ago...captured in some rough notes at that time...

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

“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

“Stop viewing one another after the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16).

“See to it, brothers, that no bitter root sprouts up between you. But encourage, deal in one another’s lives alongside daily” (Hebrews 12:15; Hebrews 3:13-15).

Because we are neither married nor given in marriage in heaven (Mat. 22:30), then the marriage institution (as it is called) is *not* above the Word of God. In other words, if a spouse sees something in his/her spouse’s life that is unlike Jesus, Jesus *didn’t* say,

“Take it to him and him alone and then bring two or three witnesses—unless it happens to be your wife, or your husband or your children or your parents.” He didn’t make that distinction. He said you take it to *anyone* who claims to be a Believer!

Who are my mothers and brothers and sisters? Who is my family anyway? Those who do the will of God. That’s the **ONLY** way a person who has been born a second time is allowed to see it. We must come to understand more of the eternal nature of the things of God than most understand. We’ve got to cross these barriers. “Take it to him and him alone, plus your best friends”—that IS Gossip! Or “take it to him and him alone, plus your wife”—that’s Gossip!

A marriage is not a legal place to sin. “Do what you want, inside of your own four walls.” That is *not* the way the Scriptures read. Also, if your brother or sister who is caught in a sin happens to be your spouse, it’s not, “Take it to them and them alone...but don’t bring two or three witnesses,

because they are your spouse, or best friend, or....” Wrong. Those things have to take place. Remember, we’re neither married nor given in marriage in heaven—there’s something much bigger at stake here!

The reason you are married is because God has given you a special opportunity to work the Life of Jesus into a captive audience. You mutually benefit from that relationship. You are together in that relationship so you can help each other become more like Jesus in the quickest possible way—in the most trying of all circumstances. ☺ (Did I say that?)

It is a Great Opportunity, to lay down your life for each other in a way that is almost inescapable! It is easy to escape responsibility in just about every other relationship, but marriage is a relationship where your responsibilities are inescapable, if you are honest at all. *If you are a pagan you can step out of that relationship*, but if you really love Jesus and love your spouse, that’s the perfect place to grow in the deepest possible way.

Marriage is not a place to *hide* from the Word of God. It is the best possible place to *apply* the Word of God!

If you are a husband with a wife that is walking in unbelief, or a wife with a husband that’s walking in unbelief, that certainly presents some serious difficulties and painful situations. And, the problem in the home and relationship may not be unbelief (as classically defined, at least). It may be bitterness, unforgiveness, rebellion, a hard heart, laziness, pride, self-centeredness, shortness of temper or other things that are just plain old *not like Jesus*. These are issues, because those problems are indications that they are very likely not in fellowship with Him—and you care too much to let things stay that way.

Take the opportunity, in your marriage, to build one another up and to use that depth of relationship to help spur one another on to love and good works. If they will *not* move towards Jesus, that is always going to be their choice. You are still very responsible to show them the way, and encourage them and pray them into Greatness in Christ. But in the end there are seven billion people on the planet at the moment, and you can’t make anyone, even if they live in your four walls, have “a good and honest heart” that wants to love Jesus and obey Him in every area of their lives. Not everyone “loves the Truth and so is saved.” Some, according to Jesus, do not “love the Light.” You can only do the best you can, and continue to serve God in every other area of your short lifetime as well. *You* must do what *you* have to do to serve Him well in every arena of life.

Again, as this relates to pseudo-Believers and unbelievers? God says, if he (or she) is content to live with you while you are serving Jesus

whole-heartedly, without compromise, being the best servant you can be in the home at the same time you are “about your Father’s Business,” then that is great. If they will not tolerate you living for Jesus on GOD’S terms—laying your life down for them and others, “admonishing one another daily,” “bearing one another’s burdens,” “confessing sins one to another,” “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament” within the daily Life of the Body of Christ Jesus...that is a very different matter. ***They cannot control your service of God.*** Not possible. “Judge for yourselves whether it is better to obey God or man.” “You are not a slave in such cases” to unBelievers’ whims.

Of course, you ***must not*** provoke unnecessarily, or manipulate to get something you want and use your “service of God” to do so. But on the other hand, when a spouse or parent or child will *not* cease “crucifying Jesus afresh” right before your eyes, the ultimate decision is no longer yours, if you are “not your own, you are bought for a price.” If they are willing to stay, as you live a Life for Jesus, deeply involved in His Kingdom, “contending as One man for the Faith” (while also being Godly and sacrificial in the home), let them. “Who knows? You may actually participate in saving their souls!” But you’ll never do that by compromising and giving in to their emotional and physical blackmail. They will only learn from any lukewarm compromises and slavery to mere men on your part...how little Jesus really means to you, and how pointless it would be for them to give their lives to such a powerless God. Don’t do that to them, thinking you are doing them and God a favor by lowering the standard of your life to accommodate someone else’s sin. Bad, bad choice. Don’t do it.

Now, back to relationships amongst Believers. Take the opportunity to use whatever resources you have available, to help them Grow in Christ—even if it involves bringing other people into the picture. If “to him and him alone” is ineffective (because they “won’t hear you” or because there is no change) then JESUS said there was a next step to take! Bring “two or three others” and even involve the entire church if necessary to snatch them from ways that crucify Jesus and harm their ability to have a true relationship with the Father. It is not in THEIR best interests, as well as being forbidden by God, to just turn away and ignore sin in your home or relationships. ***Again, marriage is not a place to hide from God’s Word. It’s a place to explore a close-proximity relationship to help each other be more like Jesus.***

In other words, don’t put up with (ignore, overlook, refuse to deal with) anything in your marriage or home or workplace or neighborhood (when Believers are involved) that is inappropriate and unlike what Jesus taught

and commanded. Just because they're your spouse or your children or your parents or, on the other hand, because you supposedly don't know them very well *doesn't give you that right*. "Cop-outs" are not the way to please Jesus and to "wrestle to present everyone complete, perfect, full and free in Christ."

And marriage is *not* to be pursued for self-interests. It must not be pursued on the basis of what you want for yourself, rather than what would best serve God. "MY house"—"MY family"—"MY time"—"MY day off"—"MY yard"—"MY job"—"MY dinner table"... These are very weak and destructive expressions of one that is not connected to the Head and the Body of Christ. People who live that way will not see the Kingdom in the lives around them, beyond the middle-class, cultural counterfeits. Don't settle for that! God has designed you for better!

And never, ever, EVER marry someone based on wishful thinking—hoping that someday "they'll be a man of God or woman of God." Only marry based on what is proven and bears fruit, not on what you *hope* it will be someday if they "grow into it." You must forever live with what you decide in these matters. Don't be naïve or self-deceived, or let your hormones rule you and ruin your life! The human body is just a decaying earth-suit that ends up shriveled and stretched and ripped in a short amount of time anyway. Be wise! Be governed by the Spirit, seeing "*no man after the flesh*," as Paul said. Nothing is judged or decided by "the seeing of the eye or the hearing of the ear" if we are walking with God.

Look at Jesus as the Standard—an irrevocable Standard, regardless of the kind of relationship you have. Whether it's mother, daughter, husband, wife or whatever, that kind of relationship must not nullify the teaching of Jesus. That's the place to apply the teaching of Jesus to the greatest possible extent. *Love and mercy and patience—but NOT disobedience to what God taught.*

A marriage is not meant to be a hiding place. It is meant to be a place to bring each other to the highest possible place in the shortest amount of time.

So, **DON'T SHRINK BACK** from that responsibility.

"We're neither married nor given in marriage in heaven, Jesus taught.

"Those that are married should live as those not consumed or controlled primarily by this relationship, as time is short and the days are evil," said the Holy Spirit of Christ Jesus, through the apostle Paul.

The purpose of marriage is to build the character and qualities of Christ in the shortest amount of time, in the closest possible proximity.

See it that way, instead of trying to get all of the things you “want,” okay??!! Love, devotion, kindness, patience, selfless partnership, and more...all are part of the Picture of Jesus and His Relationship!

Now, PLEASE...!!! Don't use this as a license to do the nagging you've always wanted to do, either. It's not like that. Again, patience, kindness, forbearance, generosity and love. But with clarity—there *is* a Standard. Help each other to walk it out, in love, without compromise. Marriage is *not* for your entertainment and your “rights” primarily. That self-life standard is sold to you by the world, and pagan ideology, but it is *not* God's Intent. From the Beginning it was not so. Find your “enjoyment,” your “joy and crown,” in “bringing many sons (and spouses and neighbors and co-workers) to *Glory*”—not just surviving and serving your own interests. *That's* where Life *really* is found!!! Go and find the meaning of this!

Thoughts About Relationships

Saturday Morning, February 26, 1994

The desire to have Understanding of how Jesus desires that we think and feel and act...on the topic of “best friends” is always important. Because of the magnitude of emotions relating to our basic instinctual desires for love and affection, and our disdain and fear of “loneliness” or rejection, this topic will always remain dangerously important...for us, for our children, in any legitimate expression of Christ Jesus in His Church. So, this (originally “internal” to the local assembly here) is forwarded on for those of you that desire God’s Highest and Best.

“Best Friends”—Close Relationships in His Kingdom

There have been times in many people’s lives (people in the world as well as within the Elect) when they have striven for, or found, a “best friend.” I mean that in the natural and obvious sense: this special friend is the main person in their life... the one that they look to in time of crisis, the one they are confiding in, the one that they are likely to be with at any given time, the one that they find the most pleasure in as a companion. Is this a bad thing or a good thing?

Parts of this are fantastic! Done correctly, it can be a spectacular gift from God! *Aspects* of that kind of relationship are precious and we can be grateful to God for “kindred spirits” and more. (In the major part of the church world where there is often much compromise and too little reality, special relationships are a miracle from God, many times. A close friend in that far-too-typical sort of environment is often a lifesaver and sanity check that is worth more than diamonds and rubies!) However, there are some very important things to watch for, if there is someone in your life that you would consider a “*best friend*,” or someone that is far more likely to be involved with you in your every-day life than any other single person.

Are You Ready?

If you are THE person anyone confides in, or THE person they feel “most comfortable with,” or anything of the sort, then some things do need to change right away. (Others around you are likely to be more unbiased in their assessment of this than you would be of yourself—as Paul said, “if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.”) Will you unselfishly move to higher ground spiritually? More often than not there are roots of self-love and insecurity that can cause us to cling to our “right” to having a “bestest buddy in the whole world.” A sister mentioned to me recently that, it seems to her, women (or even little girls) are prone to wanting and running after (or falling into) “best friend” relationships far more often than most males. WHY you have evolved into this type of relationship is an interesting question to ask yourself. Let’s examine some of the pitfalls, spiritually, of an unhealthy—the wrong kind of—“best friend” relationship.

For starters, most of us have been on the outside of one of these things at some time or another as well. Only a few privileged ones, clothed in all of the social graces and with personalities or talents that make them permanent insiders, have missed the experience of being an outsider. It’s painful. To willingly, as a disciple of Jesus, inflict pain or erect any unnecessary barriers between yourself and others, or your good friend and others—this saddens God’s Spirit. Our God “sets the lonely in families.” How sad to do the opposite by making anyone feel like a second-class citizen... on the “outside looking in.” Our close relationships, even within our own households, are to serve God’s People and give them a welcome home. “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him—as you have helped His People and continue to help them.”

No matter how convinced we may be otherwise, if you are THE person in another’s life (in the sense that you are the one they’ll talk to about this or that, seldom others, YOU are the one privy to their hopes and dreams and desires and dislikes or complaints)—you are causing them to stumble, and, in addition, you are excluding and harming others. God will not allow you to build this way forever. When the people in Genesis 11 thought they were of such oneness that they could do anything, God came and confused them and left them unable to communicate. And the building stopped entirely, with great pain. The time will come when God will, if He loves you, bring chaos, confusion, and pain into your relationship that has usurped Him and His People. And you’ll lose the precious thing that could have been. It’s far better to do it His Way!

Another sad aspect of the “best friend” scenario, “the” focal point and confidant, is that you are far, far less able to hear God’s Voice when it might be time to move on to other relationships or, perhaps, to be sent out with other saints to another city. If you are too “comfortable” because you have built a fortress for yourself in flesh and blood (or allowed them to do so with you), you will not be able to hear God. The relationship **MUST** stay on the altar at all times, if God is going to be with you.

Practically speaking, there is great poverty in the wrong kind of “best friend” relationship. Just as it tends to, unknowingly of course, isolate us from others, it also robs us of access to all of God’s Gifts. If my habit, due to an improperly built “best friend” relationship, is to “always” tell so-and-so first, or my knee jerk reaction is to run to so-and-so with news first, or to cry on so-and-so’s shoulder, or to ask so-and-so how to go about doing something in the Kingdom... this “tradition of man” nullifies our ability to hear God! (Mat.7) Instead of asking God who we should go to for “equipping for works of service,” we have a “tradition” of handling it in a particular way. This usurps God as God! It also cuts us off (and others) from drawing on the gifts that He has placed in His church, with resulting poor fruit. Can you see it? May it never be. Please do **NOT** get yourself so comfortably into a relationship that you cannot hear God, or don’t even think to ask Him what He desires in the decisions we make. How should I spend my time? If you have an “automatic” place to go or person to be with, you are lacking in your relationship with God and giving away your future. As well as robbing them of their future in Christ. The traditions of men still nullify the voice of God.

I know how easy it is at times to find comfort and security in the wrong places. Find it in Jesus? Ok?

Love.....

P.S. Great relationships are GREAT! Just be sure, please, that you are pointing each other forward and upward and outward, not towards each other as an end in itself. And launch each other into other relationships, rather than clinging! YOU don’t have all the gifts of the Body, nor do they. Don’t rob each other by being narrow for selfish or naïve reasons? **THRUST** one another outward, if you really love each other in Christ, rather than selfishly. OK? A recap of the problem of predictable relationships? They are exclusive, and others are unknowingly left out of the magic circle. God sets the lonely in families. Also, it becomes nearly impossible to hear God when it’s time to move on, if we have found *identity* in a relationship. In addition, we can’t hear God day to day, drawing on His choice of gifts, going

to those of *His* leading to share our lives, when the “traditions of men” have become ingrained and expectations are built into the pattern on both sides. And, lastly, but very importantly, the wrong kind of relationship harms our relationship with God as we find too much security somewhere other than in Him.

May God grant understanding and wisdom, and grace, to all that *live* to love and serve Him. Finally, let me repeat, so that no one reacts wrongly, Great relationships are GREAT! Great relationships are GREAT! Great relationships are GREAT! Great relationships are GREAT! Great relationships are GREAT!

Agabus...Help Us Out Here!

Sunday Afternoon, April 22, 1990

Question: When we see a brother or sister sin or if we think they are sinning, shouldn't we always just handle it as quickly and directly as possible? I know sometimes I can just deceive myself into thinking I should just pray about it when really I need to confront that brother or sister directly. I don't want to be lazy, or irresponsible, so I'm thinking I should make a bee-line for someone when I think there may be sin between them and God. Is that right?

Of course, there are definitely times when we need to approach someone quickly and directly. However, it's important to remember this, always: Sometimes when we feel the passion of God in our hearts and we seek an outlet for it (such as "laying our gift down at the altar" and sprinting to that person to try to solve the "problem" that we see), it may not be the Right thing to do, or the Right time to do it. The outlet that we find for that "passion" to resolve or help something isn't exactly the right application, necessarily. The passion is real, but somehow in the application we sometimes don't find the right way to go forward with that passion.

Just for the sake of illustration, consider something that happened amongst our brothers a few years ago, recorded for us in Acts 21. It seems very clear that our brother Agabus "went overboard," "jumped the gun," "over-reacted," and MISSED IT when he spoke to the apostle Paul about the future. Agabus prophetically and courageously announced that Paul would be bound when he went to Jerusalem. Agabus went through all the dramatics of the thing as prophets sometimes do, if you read the account. So far, so good. Nice work, Agabus. But then, the human interpretation took over—out of sentimentality, love of Paul, fear of losing Paul, or human logic. (Sins, such as these, will always block our ability to hear Father. This often tends to happen to our generation in physical family units, particularly with sentimentality towards those who will not cease crucifying our Lord and denying His Reign. Many cannot hear God because their emotions and clinginess and fears and familiarity are more tangible to them than the Voice of God, so they function out of human emotion and logic with even unbelievers.)

Agabus fell into this all-too-common trap, as good a man as he was, and as accurate as he often was in his perceptions of things! He, and all the people there (along with Luke, who was certainly a man of God) told Paul in no-uncertain-terms that he should absolutely not go to Jerusalem! BUZZZZ. Wrong. This is a “mere human” sentimental fearful logical (and WRONG) application! It was a LEGITIMATE prophetic insight of Paul’s future imprisonment if he did, in fact, go to Jerusalem. But they went about it wrongly with Paul. They mixed human thought into God’s Thought, and didn’t make the distinction. They would have carried out a right thing, in a wrong way.

In spite of the fact that Paul could sense the voice of God in the declaration that he would be “bound” by enemies if he went, he knew something was incomplete and misapplied about what was said to him. In spite of the fact that the trusted brothers were urgent and genuine in their appeal that he should not go, Paul STILL knew better than to interpret it all as if he shouldn’t go to Jerusalem. Paul could tell the difference between accommodation and revelation—man’s application of God’s current Thought, versus God’s true intent. The prophecy was right, the intensity and the passion were right, and even all the dramatics were likely from God. It was great! But there was something a little bit out of place with the application of this passion. Paul would, of course, not “blow them off” and ignore their feelings. And yet, something was “off” in part of what was said, and it needed to be worked out with them.

How did Paul sort it out? Paul had a vision earlier in his life, and he knew that he would appear before kings, and suffer much for Jesus. While Paul’s imprisonment didn’t make sense to those who were thinking with just their natural minds, Paul knew that some of these things were *supposed* to happen. Paul knew he still had a lot of work to do. So what if his transportation to where he was supposed to do that Work happened to be a prison ship rather than a cruise liner?! Agabus and the others didn’t see that. Paul made part of his trip to see the “Kings” he was going to tell about Jesus...hanging on a piece of wood in a violent stormy sea! There was a process involved in fulfilling what Paul needed to do in life that didn’t quite make “sense” to everyone. Their passion was absolutely right, but the application was a little bit askew. Agabus combined God’s desire with his *own* desires, and presented it all as if it were God. It wasn’t. The *application* of the Revelation was wrong, though the Revelation was RIGHT.

Now back to the question...1 John 5:16 says, “*If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.*” I’d just like to suggest something else for you to explore as you go

through all these things. As we pray, what we should be searching out is *how* God wants us to participate in His Love and Life in helping someone to Grow Spiritually, or maybe even through whom God wants to share His Life. It may not be His time or His way for YOU to do it, NOW!

OF COURSE, cowardice or carelessness must never be the hyper-spiritualized excuse for disobeying the Command from God to “Admonish/encourage/warn be-called-alongside to help one another daily so that none are hardened and deceived by sin.” Of course, passion needs to be directed towards resolving the thing that has caught a brother or sister in sin and broken Fellowship with their God. Of course, to do less and to “just let the Holy Spirit do it” would be to *disobey* the Holy Spirit who *wrote* Hebrews 3:12-14 and dozens of similar Scriptures. One absolute that you should keep in mind is: Don’t you dare brush it under the rug and forget about it. Don’t you dare just forget about it and say, “Oh, well, it’s probably not what I thought.” That approach is wicked and foolish and disobedient to God. We will at times kill our brothers and sisters if we do that.

There is Work that we must do together! “I will build my Church that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against!” “The pillar and foundation of Truth” is God’s People working together to serve His Purposes, “wrestling to present every man complete/perfect/mature in Christ”—“in the pains of childbirth until Christ is (fully) formed in them.” “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you!’” “Fulfilling the Law of Christ” requires our involvement! THIS is the Church that makes the gates of Hell crumble and causes them to “have no hold” on those together in Christ Jesus. That’s His Plan. “His Intent is NOW, through the Church, to make known His Infinite and Intricate Wisdom, even to Principalities and Powers.” Agabus’ prophecy was definitely faithfulness to express the passion that Jesus had put in his heart. That was good. But...

Urging Paul to take a different course of action, simply because the brothers didn’t *want* the prophecy to happen was very similar to what happened when Peter told Jesus that Jesus shouldn’t suffer and die. “Get behind me, satan” was God’s opinion of letting sentiment or fear or anything else cause us to do things our own way.

The application is...

In your intensity and in your passion to see something through and find the finish line of this race, and in your effort to present everyone perfect in Christ and not accept anything that is not Christ, realize this:

The application sometimes involves going to Jerusalem on a prison ship. When we see something in someone's life that we think may need to change, sometimes we may have to wrestle with it first before anything else happens. Sometimes we have to suffer through something as we watch and cry and weep and feel the agony and the pain of it as we search for Life for someone. Life in Christ together means we never IGNORE things that "crucify Jesus afresh" and thus cause broken fellowship between them and God. But we *allow for the fact that we're not always Right in what we see.*

Who would have thought that Peter would have been permitted to go into a Gentile's house (Cornelius)? It violated SCRIPTURE, and "everyone" knew it. But Peter saw a Vision of a sheet from Heaven, and was COMMANDED to "take, kill, and eat" things that were forbidden by Scripture. We don't always know all of the things that go on in the GodHead and Fellowship with Him, and we may just not be seeing even "obvious" things as we think we are. That doesn't mean we can't talk about it, as Peter did (Acts 10 and 11), but sometimes things aren't as "black and white" "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" as what we assume they are. So, start with the humility of knowing that God's Ways are sometimes "past finding out" and we don't know it all! So we allow for the fact that we may not have it all figured out, even if it seems obvious. That will cause us to tread more carefully and humbly, rather than barging into things with a sledgehammer of "what ought to be done." Love. And realize that the Fruit of Life is meant to help us discern if we are just missing it ourselves, or if we can help somehow. Fruit is a telling matter, according to the Master Teacher.

Allow for the fact that the timing, the application of what ought to be done about whatever the problem is, and who ought to be involved...are all subject to Father. We need to let Him remain the Father, and us the children, eh?! Be available, be qualified ("you who are SPIRITUAL," God said), and care deeply. Don't be negligent, or careless, or disobedient by ignoring things that seem unlike Jesus. But, draw on His Wisdom in *how* to go forward. Jumping on things with both feet from a flying leap of ten meters is not always the way Jesus did things, is it? "Who's face is on this coin?" "You who have honestly not sinned yourselves, you go ahead and be the first to heave a stone at this woman." "Go tell that fox..." "It's not my time, woman." "Bread to the dogs? Are you kidding?" "Moses said to you...but I say to you..." "Cut off your hand." "Forgive as you desire to be forgiven." "Am I your arbiter?" "You snakes." "When I return, will I find faith on this planet?" "Satan desires to have you, but when you're converted, strengthen your brothers." "What business is it of yours if I allow him to remain alive until I return?" "Go find out the meaning of this." Father is

VERY Creative and diverse in how he Helps us, isn't He??!! You be *part* of Him and *part* of that! By all means, "Admonish one another daily so that none are hardened and deceived by sin"—but participate with HIM in His Ways, rather than running roughshod over people. Make sense?

We've talked about finding God's Way and hearing God's Voice in a situation this way:

It is similar to running alongside of a wall, trying to find a window to go through in order to get to the other side of that wall. If you want to get past the wall, you don't sit casually in a folding chair in front of the wall, waiting for a window to just appear in front of you! That is laziness and sin. But, at the same time, you don't lower your head and run full force into the wall in hopes that your head butt into the wall will create a hole—so you can do this great thing for God. Instead, you run up and down the wall searching for the Window into God's Mind and Ways—HIS Solution, HIS guidance, with all of your heart and strength. That is, if you love and if you care. You realize you have got to get to the other side, but that it has to be *God's Window*. And you might get up to that window just in time to see somebody else go through that window and do what you've seen needs to be done. And you find perfect satisfaction in that because—all you want is to see God's will *done*! It doesn't have anything to do with you. It only has to do with God's will. And if somebody beats you through that window one hundred times out of a hundred, then Glory to God! You didn't need to be anybody special, be recognized or "used" or do anything for yourself anyway. It's just about them, and about God's Love and Life. You'll be passionate about seeing things all the way through, and to have a total satisfaction that God's will is done. You're going to see things through all the way to the point where purity and freshness and truth prevail and there's nothing in the shadows. You're not going to be satisfied with anything less than that, and you're going to run up and down that wall with all your heart, desperate to find that Window that only God Himself can open in order to impart life, rather than legalism. You care deeply and love deeply, and all of that is devoid of SELF and human opinion and judgment and sentiment and ambition, or any other sin. You only care about them, and the Glory of God. Now, *THAT* Father can work with. ☺

So, if you see a brother or a sister in a sin, and that "sin doesn't lead to death," you should pray and God will bring life. He may bring it through you. He may bring it through someone else. But be passionate about it, and don't let it slip through your fingers. Care! There have been so many times that I've had this burning in my bosom and I've wanted to see something through. I'm not making excuses for myself and I am refusing to brush it

under the rug. I'm not going to be lazy about it. I'm not going to feel guilty in a way that makes me neglect the word of God and the ways of God. I'm going to see it through. Yet, sometimes it has taken weeks and even months until finally something will break and somebody will say, "Man, why is this thing like it is in my life?" And I'll say, "HmMMMM! I'm glad you asked. Let's talk about that! ☺ Do you remember two months ago when...." And that's the way God brings Life, rather than the burden of law. It is in His own time and it's fresh and alive. *He* brings Life. You should pray, and *God* will give Life.

So, the Answer is in seeking God and asking Jesus Himself to choose His vessel and His timing, saying, "God, please don't let it be anything less than your best." As a whole church, as well as every single individual from the least to the greatest, we've got to have that heart and that passion. Let's look together towards ways of Life, but also ways of completeness. Wrestle to present every man "saved"? Is that what God said? No! Wrestle to present every man perfect, complete, and full! Nothing less than full and complete is acceptable. Let there be no wandering eyes, no half-dead brains, and no lukewarm hearts! NONE! "See to it, brothers, that NONE of you has a sinful or doubting heart!" Let there be no brothers and sisters without knowledge or without convictions. Let there be no brothers and sisters without peace. Let there be no brothers and sisters that aren't washed and cleansed and free from guilt. Let there be no brothers and sisters that exude laziness or apathy or bitterness or lack of forgiveness or any such thing. Absolutely nothing short of the full measure of the stature of Christ is acceptable. There has to be passion in every heart from the least to the greatest to present every man perfect in Christ all along the way. That's what God said the local Commonness of daily Life in Christ ("church") is all about, and all relationships in Christ!

Again, see to it, brothers, that none of you have a fearful or a sinful or an unbelieving heart. "*See to it that none of you...*" That's the commission. As we look toward the Master Teacher as the Messiah, the Owner of the bond servants, the Head of the church, and as the Father of the family, we see He has called us to love Him with all our hearts and to wrestle to present every man perfect, rather than nit-picking His children. If you see a brother or sister that is disappointing to the Father (unbeknownst to them, usually), then pray, and God will give Life. He may bring Life through you, or he may bring it through some other means, but whatever you do, don't let go of the commission until you've seen it through!

The things that taint us and keep us from being able to follow the Father's lead, and the things that interfere with our ability to be disciplined by the

hands of Jesus and to do the work of Jesus, have to do with the hidden secrets of the heart. Don't ever let anything stop you from following Jesus' lead on that. Fear of men, being a respecter of persons, our own personal guilt, or a thousand other things can block our ability to walk with God and obey Him. Forget all that stuff! "Oh well, I probably don't have as much discernment as so-and-so does, and so I'm probably missing it entirely, so I'll just brush it under the rug." No way! Pray! Don't brush it under the rug. Sure, you could be wrong, and probably are. 😊 As we said about Peter and the sheet, sometimes we have NO way of knowing something, and things won't be like we expect. That's okay. But pray anyway. Watch and see. Find a satisfaction in your heart that it's resolved, or that you can learn something that will bring you closer to Jesus as you find out WHY you were mistaken. But brushing things under the rug is NOT the solution! That will only disorient you, rob you (and perhaps others), and embitter you or divide you from the Treasures God intended for you in *Real* relationships. Not a good idea.

Now, if you have been wrestling to present one another perfect, you may sometimes find a discomfort in your heart. You see somebody and there's something wrong. Something is out of joint. There's something that's not free and full and alive, and you care about that. You cry over that when nobody's looking. No one would even necessarily know that you care that much. Perhaps it is unwise or gossipy to talk about it. Maybe you don't even see this particular person that much. But when you care, and you're watching and you're praying, and all of a sudden as you're prepared "in season and out of season"...wonderful things can happen in participating "as if God were making His appeal through you."

"Wow, look at this sin that I just recognized in my life." And you say, "Yeah! All right! I'm glad you were open to God's Spirit to see that, because that has put a division between you and me. Our fellowship wasn't complete. Our joy wasn't there. There were shadows. There was darkness. But, Hallelujah (translated, "Fantastic," "Wonderful," "Awesome," "Spectacular!!" "God is GOOD!")! You have found that shadow and now things can change." God said: It's only as we walk in the light together, as He is Light, that our joy with one another and Him is made complete and there is fellowship that we have with one another. Maybe it was circumstances that allowed this brother or sister to SEE. Maybe somebody brought it to their attention. Maybe it was in their own prayer closet. Or maybe it's because you brought it up. I don't know what it was, but when something comes into the Light that had previously caused a broken fellowship, it is an opportunity for Life and healing and change!

Do you know what it feels like to feel uncomfortable with somebody? You just can't quite look them in the eye. Maybe you don't even know why there is the discomfort. But, deep down you know there is something there that's not pure and holy and complete. It's just not whole. Is it in you? Is there envy or unforgiveness or some other unresolved sin? Is it foolish judgments of their personality or appearance or ways? OR, is it in them? Is there something that is legitimately unlike Jesus there that needs to be resolved? One way or another, *something* is disjointed in the Spirit! That much you know. You find yourself *tempted* to be distant, or to avoid a person, or you are thinking bad thoughts of them when you see them or hear them (or, *GOD FORBID*, saying negative things about them to a spouse or to others). You would want to smile, of course, and be at Peace with them, if you yourself truly love Jesus. You would want to talk about Jesus things with them, but it just would feel hypocritical to do so, as things are at the moment. You want to share Scripture and Life with them, but it's four steps back from where you want it to be and you can't get through it. Well, then, keep in mind all of these things we've just considered.

We have a Destiny together! We want to live in a way, together, that breaks satan's jaw. We want to build in a way together that is not marked with legalism or foolish ambition or vain conceit or human wisdom. For Jesus' sake, we want to build in such a way as to allow "our joy to be complete" together. Then we will be able to walk in true fellowship, having all things in common, together celebrating life to the FULL! "God's Intent is NOW, through the Church," to exhibit the Life and Freedom and Power and Light and Love and Righteousness of the Son of God. His desire is that we be, truly, "a habitation of God, by the Spirit" with "ever increasing Glory"—"a City set on a Hill that cannot be hidden"! And, God's House "is built with Wisdom."

Brain Temptations

Friday Night, December 1, 2000

an intercepted conversation between disciples of Jesus...

Just to illustrate the evil or good power of the mind...I had kind of a hard conversation, for an hour or two, recently with someone close to me. *Realistically* she hasn't done anything *terribly* wrong since then—I just expected something more back from her than I got. Because I was vulnerable with her, at certain times since then she has *seemed* “arrogant” towards me, or “defiant” or “rude” and especially “ungrateful.” Is she all of that? I *feel* it, and my *mind* says “treat her cold” “turn away from her” “make her come to you if she really wants a relationship.” “Why should I come to her, after all I've done for her?” Etc. etc. The “brain”/“temptation” is an amazingly powerful thing...but we *must* not give in. WOW! Do I feel the need and the “right” to react. Even saying and knowing all of that, I *strongly* still want to do it.

But...it must not be!

I am the loser if I do, because “God is Love” and *I* will find Him nowhere if I won't go there. See what I mean?

Giving up? Nah.

Thursday Night, March 25, 1999

My husband and I have been taking a break out of town for a few days. I believe that we have come to the place where we realize that maybe our vision is different than the others. We are just going to sit it out for now. We cannot make this happen. It is a work of God in the hearts of the individual. If we all have a different building in mind, it will not work. I don't know where we go from here. God knows our need for the body (as well as our children). He knows our desire to be a viable part of it as well, and the rest is up to Him. We have tried to be honest and open, to build real relationships and I believe that is too much for most people. We are sooooo used to our excuses and individuality. I have found that Bob is a bitter man and says he desires a people that are honest, but when you are—watch out! Our first impression was so wrong. How can you walk with a man if you have no idea who he is? Or where his heart really is for all that matters. I admire what the Lord has done in your city, but it will remain a dream for most.

Hi. Before you get too far down that road in your thinking...read slowly, prayerfully, carefully, in fellowship with the Spirit, and understand THIS:

Dreams are meant to come true, when they're Jesus' Dreams.

Abraham lived in a way that was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. It was by faith that Sarah together with Abraham was able to have a child, even though they were too old and Sarah was barren. Abraham believed that God would keep His promise. And so a whole nation came from this one man, Abraham, who was too old to have any children—a nation with so many people that, like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them. All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously, people who talk like that are looking forward to a country that they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better

place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a heavenly city for them (Hebrews 11:10-16).

“So that’s why faith is the key! God’s promise is given to us as a free gift. And we are certain to receive it, whether or not we follow Jewish customs, if we have faith like Abraham’s. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. That is what the Scriptures mean when God told Abraham, ‘I have made you the father of many nations.’ This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who brings into existence what didn’t exist before. When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Abraham believed Him. God had also said, ‘Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars,’ even though such a promise seemed utterly impossible! And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children. Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything He promised. And because of Abraham’s faith, God declared him righteous” (Romans 4:16-22).

“Don’t ever forget those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail. When all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew you had better things waiting for you in eternity. Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord, no matter what happens. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so you will continue to do God’s will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. For in just a little while, ‘the Coming One will come and not delay. And a righteous person will live by faith. But I will have no pleasure in anyone who turns away’ But we are not like those who turn their backs on God and seal their fate. We have faith that assures our deliverance” (Hebrews 10:32-39).

“Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire

tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world” (1 Peter 1:3-7).

Maybe you think that I didn't go through what you're encountering? ☺

You get my drift. If you're doing this for HIM, rather than for yourself, you'll never, never, never give up or lose heart, or let the enemy steal the reality of the dream. And you'll do what YOU need to do.

Think about it.

Relationship Owees in a Non-Lampstand Environment

Thursday Morning, July 6, 2000

Frequently we receive letters from those who are attempting to build REAL relationships with Believers, rather than the back-patting, shallow religious (or “fun”) centered counterfeits of the thing Jesus is after in His People. In this process of Life (Heb. 3:12-14, Gal. 6:2, etc.) that Father desires in the Church that Jesus is building, there seems to be an issue that comes up frequently:

“What do you do with the folks that want to live life for themselves in their own prideful, independent way...and just USE you for ‘fellowship’ or ‘studies’ or ‘meetings’ whenever it suits them? How do you address the things that come up in their lives that give you great cause for concern, in their potentially foolish, disconnected lives—when it does not appear that they care to hear about it?”

Bite your tongue and ignore it? No. No way. That would be quite evil, though some would recommend this as they attempt to hide their own sin.

Gossip to others about it? No! (And “just to my spouse” is ALSO gossip!)

Barge in and blast the living daylights out of them? Of course not. (See the article “Apostle Paul’s Guide to Helping Carnal Christians Mature.”)

What follows (a letter excerpt) is just an appetizer, but it is an answer to PART of the question:

“What do I do with a person who seems to be making continually bad choices in her worldly and independent lifestyle? She doesn’t seem to ‘get it’—nor does she seem to want to talk about it. I’m the ‘bad guy’ for bringing

anything up, and 'burdening' her. I KNOW Jesus would not approve of the way she lives amongst the pagan man's world. But, I don't want to 'mother' her, do I?"

Sometimes, particularly if a person doesn't "get it" or *care* to "get it"—all you can do is *declare* to them the error and foolishness of what they've done. I would *not* have just "bitten my tongue." But, if I were you, I may not have felt like I could discuss it either. SO, the alternative is: DECLARE IT!

In other words, "Jane, I know you don't get it and you MAY not want to hear this. But that was FOOLISH building, and you cannot build that way and the 'house' stand when the storms come. It was unwise and inappropriate. If you think I'm out of my mind, feel free to ask those that we know and trust to know Jesus deeply. I'm not intending on discussing or debating with you about it, but just want to tell you straight up that that sort of 'I can handle it,' and I'll 'do-it-my-way' way of building was either dumb, or out-and-out arrogance and independence. You can figure out which it was, but I just need to say it."

"Mothering" is wrong. Here's why. IF they are hungry, you only have to mention it, and they will desire to go deeper themselves. Sometimes you will need to explain more thoroughly, or get help to explain. But with a good-hearted person, you will never have to follow them around and badger and mother them. They will care, be grateful, and ask you for more examples as they come up. They will *desire* more insight and more protection and help from those who can see what they obviously cannot for now. IF they are NOT hungry, you are casting pearls to swine, and it will only come back upon you later as an accusation of "controlling them" or "legalism" or some such thing. So, to those that are perpetually wayward, you cannot "MOTHER." You obviously try to help, and if they do not seem hungry, then you may only "DECLARE." Obviously, the dynamics of every relationship are different, and the maturity of the one offering the thoughts will vary greatly, as well as the personality or supposed stature of the one who seems to need some help. Therefore, every conversation of this type will differ greatly. Sometimes with more warmth and humor. Other times more to the point. Sometimes filled with, "I can understand where you're coming from—I battle with this, too." Other times, "C'mon! You know better than this!" But, here is some of the essence of it, regardless of the envelope that it may be delivered in:

“This seems to be a pattern with you, this _____. It is not Jesus’ way, and you will not please Him nor prosper spiritually on this path. If you do it, you do it at your own risk, because I don’t sense that you want to hear about it or want to change. So, if you choose to build a wall between us by continuing on this course, the consequences are your choice. I wish you’d reconsider, but because you don’t seem to want to hear about it, or change, then I will NOT follow you around and bring it up again and again. However, I also cannot embrace your path, and you have obviously created distance between us. ‘Fellowship’ ONLY comes from ‘walking together in the Light where He is’ according to the apostle John. It appears that you want to live independently and what appears to me to be foolishly, rather than on the Rock. And you don’t appear to ‘love the Light’ when we try to work these things out. It seems a nuisance or bother or intrusion to you, rather than ‘loving the Light.’ THAT rips my heart out. I CANNOT ignore this seeming breach of Father’s Ways, and ignore the grief of the Holy Spirit and the dangers that lie ahead for you as you build this way. But I will not chase after you and beg you, either. ‘Know the Lord, know the Lord’ is the other Covenant. I’m just begging you to reconsider, and declaring to you the danger of your path. Let me know if you DESIRE to talk more about these things. Until then...”

Question About Religious People's Hearts

Wednesday Afternoon, January 20, 1999

Question: "My husband and I both have an observation that we're wondering about. The last e-mail about small beginnings, and the fact that others around the world seem to care is really neat, and it really is excellent and encouraging. But something you've implied has left us wondering. You've basically implied that most folks in the institution would follow Jesus wholeheartedly if they knew there was a better way. Most hearts are good, it's the environment that's bad. Maybe that's not what you meant, and we're misunderstanding. But, a lot of good, open, loving disciples of Jesus, hungering for His Word and desperately wanting Him to be pleased with His Church: this is clearly not what we've found in our city. From our relatives, to the neighbors we moved near to for Kingdom reasons, all the way down to the homeschool group, we have found that MOST of these folks are building their own kingdoms and God quite frankly needs to accommodate them, from their point of view. When we've tried to show a better way, we've been met with the most vicious and hateful accusations possible. Honestly, it's left us, or at least me, disillusioned.

For my own sanity, I cannot embrace the idea that most folks are goodhearted and just need a better environment. I know we've made mistakes, but looking back at every situation, which we have done many times, the bottom line was none of these people, so far, love the light. And they have one, if not many, idols clear to be seen that they love more than God. The more honest ones, instead of putting up a make-believe Scriptural argument to defend worldliness and lukewarmness and leaven, will admit it. They just are not willing to position themselves to change. Is our city unusual? Is this a cursed place and we need to get out of here? If your implication is true that most believers would change if they knew any better, then our town is clearly an exception. The anger, hate, accusation and evil we've seen from professing believers has been unbelievable, consistent and even predictable.

Your encouragement to pass out books, teachings, and get to know people—we've done all of that. OF COURSE that's the right thing to do. But we have gotten creamed royal in the process. The best response our attempt to labor for Jesus has borne is that many people hate our guts. Maybe that's okay, and certainly we need to grow Spiritually, too. No doubt we can "do things better." But that doesn't seem to be the ROOT problem, as much as most people really don't seem to CARE! I know I'm being a bit emotional here. SORRY! Any thoughts?"

Here's my thought, as requested. "ALL MEN, EVERYWHERE!!!" Coming to repentance is *always* the heart and mind of God. He didn't say, "A few men and women, here and there." He said, and is still saying, "ALL MEN, EVERYWHERE!" I think you must know that I'm fully aware of what the religious landscape is mostly made up of at the moment. That isn't going to keep me from having the largest possible heart, and the largest possible vision, every day that I can. Jesus almost seemed *surprised* when he wept, "I would have *gathered* you! *WHY* wouldn't you come??" (Mat. 23:37). Now, we all know that He was not surprised, but it was His *heart* to try, and to have hope. If, in the end, they "would not," it wouldn't be because He was skeptical all along anyway.

Even the Jews (one would surmise from Paul's letter to the Romans) are *unthinkably* and *illogically* going to have some turnaround as we get near the End. Some will be grafted back in by conversion to Jesus, and in great enough numbers to warrant Paul's prophecy. Why not a few religionists, too, while we're at it? Sure, many are in *bad* shape. Just like the Jews. Sure, those in denominations (huge numbers of "house churches," too) are hopelessly lost in worldliness or detours and obsessions away from Jesus—in many, many of the cases that anyone could find, experientially speaking. But why not elevate to God's Way of thinking? He still calls ALL MEN, EVERYWHERE, in spite of what they've done to Him in the past. Always hoping, always trusting. Never making their *current* situation look better than it is (it is terrible, no mistaking it), but still hopeful that they'll escape the trap of the devil. If they prove they "will NOT have this Man Jesus to be the KING over them"—so be it. But we can't enter in skeptically or sarcastically. Let *them* decide, rather than assuming. Offer your cheek to be kissed, and if it's Judas, he'll hang himself. You won't have to hang him. We just want to help as many as will come. Can you See it?

Living LOVE

Monday Night, January 12, 1998

The Shadow

Have you ever experienced that goofy sensation of holding somebody's hand and getting a tingle up your spine and a lump in your throat? Some of us have, and it's a hard-to-explain-falling-in-love phenomenon. 😊 As the years roll by, we come to learn that even though it's a lot of fun, it isn't anything to build a relationship on. But it is true that even that faint version of love can actually change your personality.

In the movie *Shadowlands*, C.S. Lewis unexpectedly falls in love with a woman named Joy. As the movie goes on, she teaches him *how to love*, and *that's* when he becomes a *real* person, in a sense. The man had knowledge before and he could understand and fathom great mysteries...but he didn't know *love*. It's like in 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul speaks of being able to prophesy and know the future. What a great gift that would be, right? It'd be great to know the future, and to have a prophetic insight. To have faith that does miraculous things as phenomenal as throwing mountains into the sea and making the sun stand still. Those are great gifts, aren't they?

But as Paul said, all those things are meaningless unless you are primarily a Holy "lover"—one who is first and foremost filled with deep love as the very wind in your sails. Do you want to be a "great man" or a "great woman" in God's sight? Well...God is love. So how can we be endowed with power from on High if we are not primarily lovers? A "great man" or "great woman" is NOT primarily one who performs miracles, or understands or teaches all the great mysteries, or is willing to give their body to be burned. According to God, a great man or woman is one who primarily loves very, very much.

When you fall in love, your personality changes—you do goofy stuff! You go dancing through the meadow barefoot and all the other things you read about in the poems. There's a certain something inside of you that has the courage to say things you wouldn't have said. You yell up to someone on the balcony in the middle of the night, "Come marry me!" You're willing to take a chance and do crazy stuff even though you might get a shotgun poked in your face. You sing a special song you've written

to someone, when you can't even sing or write songs! I'm just reminding you of some things that you know poetically or that you've felt or seen in your own experience somewhere. I'm talking about "falling in love" in the trivial sense, but it's so you can understand the Truth of it on the important level.

I think we're all aware that even just the *shadow* of love in the human form changes our personality. When we really love, there's something about us that changes. We're more sensitive, more kind, more forgiving. We're more patient, and we're not easily irritated. We're not grumpy or pushy, and we don't demand that someone "go get us something" all the time. Instead, we want to find a way to get it for them. What do you "do" when you really have love—when you're primarily a lover? Well...you do stuff! Don't tell me you love me if you're telling me to leave and "be warm and well fed." That's not love. True love wants to find ways to manifest itself. True love is always groping and grasping for a way to manifest itself. Love isn't going to happen in a vacuum. There's desire and courage and creativity.

Love More...And Be Changed

Many or maybe even ALL the problems that any of us would ever have would be taken care of *if we Loved more!* As Jesus said, all the law and the commandments are summed up in these two things: Love God and love everybody else. Besides that, you don't need any other commands. Why is that? Because if you fall in love with God and with everyone else, you'll not be a self-centered person anymore. You'll not be so concerned about prophesying the future or casting mountains into the sea. If you're primarily a lover, you'll want to LOVE PEOPLE. You will find ways to give and ways to be creative. Your personality, your patience level, your pain-tolerance level, and many things will *drastically* change. *Your personality will change.* Like if you're basically a fearful person, there may come a time when Real Love begins to bloom and blossom and manifest itself—and then maybe you just won't be so fearful anymore. You won't be so self-centered and inward, thinking about yourself all the time. "Phooey on all that!" You'll just bust out of that when Real Love comes in.

So many different things have caused us to fall short over time, like being totally intellectual or getting caught in our thoughts all the time. You're not going to do that if *your passion is for loving people around you.* If *that's* your primary purpose in life—to love people—you won't be caught in this intellectual cycle and three-ring circus in your mind that you've been a slave to. The mind games in your head and so many other things just won't

be important anymore, *when you love*. That doesn't mean everything else is without meaning or value. But on the other hand, if the primary force in your life is to be a lover—one who's desperate to find ways to express the love of Jesus—then most of the other stuff goes by the wayside. Name your sin: whether legalism, selfishness, vices, or whatever. If you've really opened yourself up to the Father's Love for people (brothers and sisters, people in your neighborhood, your city, country, or planet), you'll be HIGHLY motivated to put aside foolish sin in your life.

If you can feel a true love in your heart for those who God has redeemed by the Blood of His Son, then you know there's a part you can play in their lives. And you can play a part by sanctifying yourself for them. As Jesus said, "For them I sanctify myself." By putting aside your vices—the way you think, the stuff you permit into your eyes and ears and thoughts—you can actually contribute to someone's life on the other side of the world. You put sins aside because you LOVE them and you want the best for them. They are more important to you than your own selfish things. If you really love, you're going to have an impact on other people's lives. You'll even have an impact on people you've never met because of that principle of sanctifying ourselves for others.

Jesus said that all the law and the prophets, and everything that ever was and ever will be can all be summed up in *loving*. There's something very real and extraordinary and mostly untested about that. As we're abandoned to love, the other stuff tends to take care of itself. We know how to act and we know how to "be." A person who's so dull and lifeless will definitely change when they're in love. A spark of life will be there! Something will be regenerated in them, and something in their eyes will connect. They're going to care, and the dullness, lifelessness and lethargy will fall by the wayside. Their personality changes when they fall in love with God and His people. Name your error, name your sin, name your character problem. Nothing will fail to be totally smashed to smithereens if we just Loved more. We wouldn't be so fearful. We wouldn't be so caught up in legalism. We wouldn't be caught up in weird hyperspiritualism. None of that stuff would entangle us because it's all PHONEY. It's not real. It doesn't compare in any way to what love is. It doesn't connect; it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't change lives. It has no power and there's no life in it. *Only love can generate the personality of Jesus that accomplishes the work of Jesus on the basis and the ground of Jesus*. Only love can do that. You can go out and give your body to be burned—all these good deeds that the Scriptures say you can do. But it's powerless, it's lifeless, it's meaningless, it's boring, it's yucky! It's religious and it means *nothing* if the foundation isn't love. All that other stuff is just gunk.

True Love, not Gushy or Compromising

If you were introduced to a total stranger, the primary thing they ought to notice isn't how much you "know." They ought to primarily notice that *you love*. But it's not a love that is mushy, worldly or compromising, of course. That's an abomination. Lukewarmness makes Jesus sick (Rev. 3) and **MUST** make us sick, as well, if we're truly "connected to the Head." False love that covers carnal sympathy or our own insecurities, or our own worldliness makes Jesus sick and makes us an "enemy of God." Jesus was clear with the "rich young ruler" and could not accept him as he was—not because the ruler wasn't perfect, but because he still wanted control of part of his life. But still, Jesus saw something in the young man that He could "look at him and love him." And so, to be a lover as Jesus was, we may have to say to a compromiser, "Sorry, but we can't walk with you"...just as Jesus did with the rich young ruler. So what if we can throw mountains into the sea and know everything about all the deep mysteries? So what if we're so sacrificial for other countries that we'd sell our cars or give up food to care for them? It doesn't mean anything and it's just a clanging gong if the foundation isn't Love. Love *will* seep through in all those other ways—in sacrifice, in a prophetic insight, and in faith to see things change. But let's not get the cart before the horse.

In your times with God in the morning or whenever, there are many things you may talk to Him about. But first and foremost, *ask Him to make you a lover*. Ask Him that you'd be filled totally in your heart with His love, that you might see things as He sees them and respond to them as He would. It might be that this love results in something like "turning over tables." Or it might express itself with, "Go and sin no more; neither do I condemn you." Love will take a lot of different forms. But it is *not* just gushiness. The point is that we're going to break free from all bondages and set captives free when we are primarily lovers in our hearts in the clearest, Christ-centered sort of way.

Make Me a Lover!

"If I could speak in tongues of men and even of angels but have not love—that reasoning, intentional, spiritual devotion and passion, such as inspired by God's love for and in us—I'm only a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers, a gift of interpreting divine will and purpose and understand all the secret truths and all the mysteries and possess all knowledge, or if I am sufficient in faith so that I can remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing...a useless nobody. Even if I dole out all that I

have to the poor in providing food, if I surrender my body to be burned but have not love—God’s love in me—I gain nothing.”

“Love endures long and is patient and kind. Love is never envious, never boils over with jealousy. It’s not boastful or vainglorious nor does it display itself haughtily. It is not conceited, arrogant and inflated with pride. It’s not rude, unmannerly. It does not act unbecomingly. God’s love in us does not insist on its own rights or its own way for it is not self-seeking. It’s not touchy or fretful or resentful. It takes no account of the evil done to it. It pays no attention to suffering wrong. It does not rejoice in injustice and unrighteousness but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever-ready to believe the best of every person. Its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances and it endures everything without weakening. Love never fails and never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end.”

“When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, I loved like a child. Now that I have become a man, I’m done with childish ways and have put them aside.”

Now I will grow up and learn to give away my life...to truly love God and others more than myself. I will no longer be a mere child—I will walk like a true man.

It’s a CHOICE that we make, the Holy Spirit says, to stop being babies, to stop being children. We try to entertain ourselves with our own childish trinkets, and our own childish ways of thinking and acting. Sometimes we find ourselves bored in an evening or frustrated in some situation at home...fill in the blank with whatever it is. But if you’re basking with love, LOVE will find a way through that. It will find a way to overcome and to conquer. You can add to that list in 1 Corinthians 13: ***Love is never bored.*** Why is love never bored? Because a religious person gets bored when they don’t have anything to DO, but a lover simply LOVES! A lover is going to find a way and doesn’t need to be entertained, doesn’t need to be busy, doesn’t need to have religious stuff lined up in front of them. A lover doesn’t need an ego boost of something to accomplish.

A lover finds fullness and satisfaction in loving, and that loving can take a lot of different forms. It might be “in a closet,” basking and wallowing in tears and prayer for someone—for their difficult financial, relational or work-related circumstance. There’s a satisfaction and a fullness in loving, because **that’s where GOD is found.** God is love...*that’s* where you find love. Our frustrations and our vices, sins, and problems are all a testimony of a lack of love. It doesn’t matter how many mountains are

cast into the sea...we will be unfulfilled, if not bored and frustrated, and 1,000 other little problems will begin to creep up. Bad habits are formed, relationships turn cliquey and self-serving, and all these problems flow from a lack of love. Without seeing the whole landscape of God's Beauty and Glory and all the parts that make the whole...without loving all of that with all your heart, we get caught in all these little traps. That's why love is the fulfillment of all the prophets and all the commands you could ever think of. All those commands and prophecies by themselves mean nothing. To fulfill every one of them to the "nth" degree would mean nothing if love wasn't the glue that held them all together. Love is what gives form and substance, making the picture complete and bringing color and music to it all. Without love, it's just religion. It's a form of godliness and it's meaningless, boring and frustrating.

New Every Morning

Is exciting new "knowledge" what keeps your spiritual engine running? Do you get new jollies with a new type or shadow or Greek word? I'm telling you that after awhile you will run out of excitement about ideas. You can only know and have capacity for so much before you get bored with "yet another new thing" (like the Athenians) or it's a repeat of something you already knew. I'm not saying that reading something doesn't move me or help me or change me. That happens every day, but I know it's not brand new. I know it's not a concept I was unfamiliar with, or something I hadn't read or thought about or felt someplace along the line. The idea isn't that new. I can't rely on external concepts or thoughts to thrill me forever. The fact is, the thing that makes life new every morning and every day is LOVE—it's not information! It's not deeds. All those things run out of steam after a while. They're exciting initially...a new thought, Wow! This is great! Something else to chew on and we can talk and get excited and banter about it after dinner. Big deal. After a while it gets boring. So then you find a few mountains to cast into the sea, and see some people raised from the dead...then what? You encounter some other kind of miracle or evangelize the nation of whatever land, and after a while you realize that even *that* doesn't mean anything on a surface level.

And yet, as you come to love one person someplace...*that* lasts forever. And it gets deeper and deeper. You become more and more acquainted with the love of the Body of Christ and the Vision and His heart for His bride. And as you pour your heart and your life and your mind into that, it grows and matures and flowers and blossoms. Like a plant, new life springs up continually with a new blossom and a new bud that's always

changing. It's always better and more mature. The roots are deeper and the life is greener and the flowers are more fragrant, and it grows. Love does that. Nothing else does that. Everything else vanishes. Tongues cease and prophecies pass away and fade. Everything else vanishes and diminishes, but love grows and grows. That IS pure religion! That IS what it's about. The other stuff is great. But only as it's a blossom out of the vine of God's love, out of the plant of God's planting and His vineyard.

This is a vision for you to uphold and to plead with God for! It's the True Love of God. It isn't something that can be attained, but it's certainly something you can beg God for. You can beg God to open your heart and put that sparkle in your eyes of a genuine love. Beg Him for that, instead of living with the competing thoughts that drive you out of your mind (whether the boredom or the extreme thoughts that need to get more extreme in order to keep us entertained). Love makes all that stuff obsolete and unnecessary. As you grow in His Love, you'll grow in patience and kindness. Your thoughts and doctrines will make sense, and they'll hang themselves in the proper place in your heart and mind. Your "doctrine" will begin to form very patiently and carefully in your heart, rather than be acquired through mental gymnastics and comparisons. "The Life" still becomes "the Light of men"! God forms His life and His mind and His thinking in us through the medium of love. It takes some time and it can't be done in a vacuum. We've got to live it out with others every day. But it's very real. He's real. Yet, we will never really know how real He is, or be real ourselves—men and women in His fullness—until we daily LIVE a true love in the midst of His Church and the world He died for. That's His full intent. Just as it was so for Jesus, so it is for us.

Are You Royalty?

1800's

"If you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself; you are doing well'" (James 2:8 NAS).

Do you feel yourself alone and empty-hearted? Then you have necessity indeed for fortitude and brave endurance! But, above all and before all, you must get out of your solitude.

You cannot command for yourself the love you would gladly receive; it is not in your power to do that. But that noble love which is not asking but giving—that you can always have.

Wherever your life touches another life, there you have an opportunity. To be with men and women in the ordinary forms of social interaction becomes a sacred and miraculous event when one carries into it the true spirit. To give close, sympathetic, observant, caring attention to every human being we touch; to try to get some sense of how he or she feels, what he is, what he needs; to make in some degree his interest our own, that disposition and habit would deliver any one of us from isolation or emptiness. It is Jesus, and solely where He is found: self-emptied and sacrificial care, attention, and love.

-G.S.P.M.