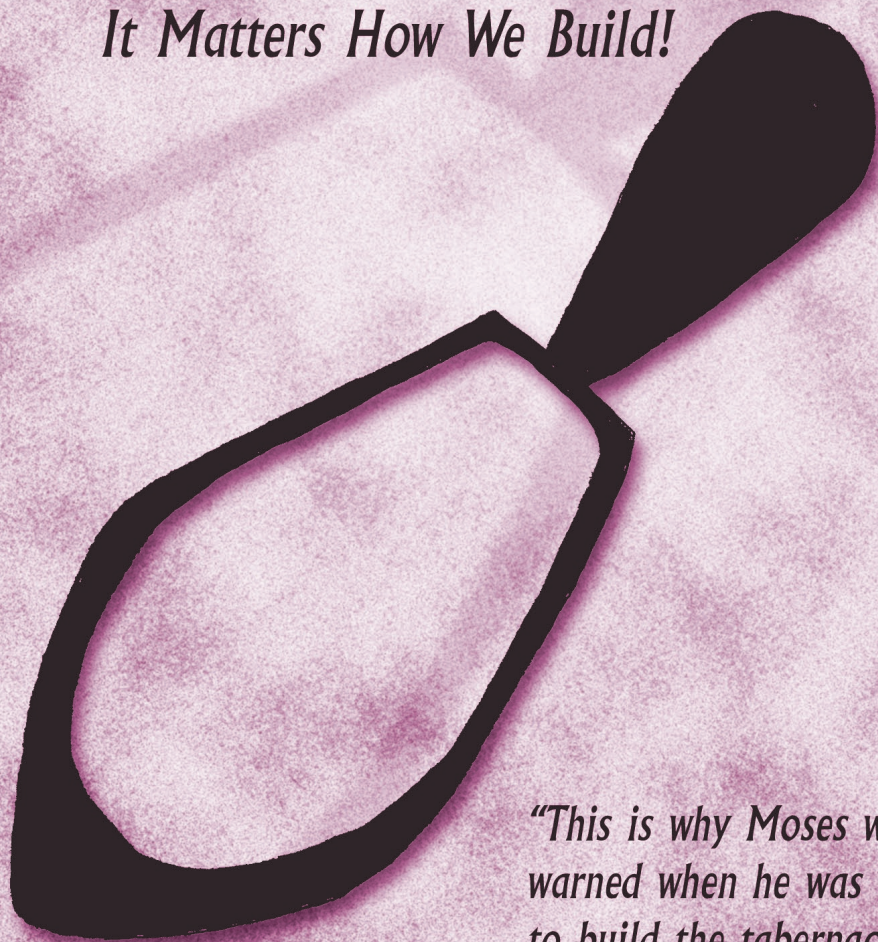


# The Trowel

*It Matters How We Build!*



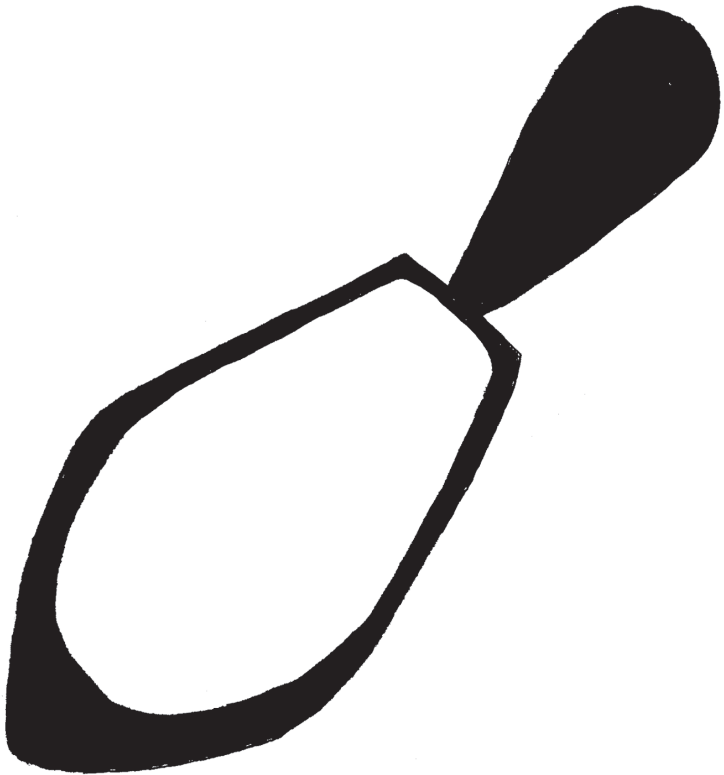
*“This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’”*

Hebrews 8:5



# |The Trowel

*It Matters How We Build!*



As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at  
P.O. Box 68309, Indianapolis, IN 46268 USA.

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# The Trowel

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*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

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# It is True, in 1923, and Now. GOD Said So.

1923

“**T**he tremendous power of mass-suggestion, which we call the world, can only be confronted, and its victims cured if they are received into a body which is filled with a vivid, vigorous, and conscious community life of the Spirit.”

“Individuals are powerless to cope with a power so subtle and all-pervasive as this world’s mass-suggestion is. If we are to save and rescue sinners and ourselves, there must grow up in our Church a Spirit of Love and Brotherhood, a Christian community-life, transcending class and national distinctions, as pungent, as powerful, as impossible to escape as the Spirit of the world.”

“No religious system, Apostolic Succession, no Ecclesiastical program, no rigidity of orthodox doctrine, can in and of themselves give us this power to overcome the world systems’ allure; it comes, and can only come, from a clearer vision of the Christ, a more complete surrender to His call, to the bearing of His Cross, and participation in His Plan of daily mutual openness and dependency in the Body of Christ.”



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# Buildings? Traditions? Why or Why Not?

July 29, 1998

*Below is a question from a letter sent by a good brother in another city. His observations are correct, but there is a deeper thought that he hadn't perhaps taken into account, which you'll discover as you read on. Hopefully this will be helpful for all of us in sorting out these sensitive matters...*

*"I know that it's not buildings or traditions, per se, that are the cause of the unnecessary heartache I see across the religious landscape...rather, it's a persistence in unbelief and disobedience by God's people. Yet, I do find great difficulty building relationships with other believers for whom Christianity primarily means 'attending services.' This has been especially hard for me to work through, as I tend to be a closed person. How do I work for change in the environment I'm in? Again, the externals themselves aren't the issue... are they??"*

The answer to your question is "no and yes." The *building* (with its system of clergy, ritual, programs and the like) is *obviously* not the *REAL* issue. Much of it is actually, unbeknownst to many involved, disobedient to the teachings of Paul and Jesus, if done as 99.9% do these things. Still, those "things" are simply an obstacle to Christ-Life. Perhaps they are a symptom of needing security from something external rather than from Jesus Himself. Definitely, at least, they are an unnecessary stumbling block to true Life. But, as you said, the externals are not the real root enemy, per se, of Jesus' Corporate Life.

However, the unbelief and disobedience, in their many ugly forms that you mentioned, persist (seems like forever) in 7 out of 10 potentially good people *because the ENVIRONMENT is unBiblical*. Those good people don't get the *strength* and *encouragement* and *light* and *equipping* they could get in a Biblical environment (daily devoted Life, instead of "attending" something).

Let me give you an example from everyday life. If you were trying to make a good decision and you had been indulging in alcohol or were “drugged” unknowingly, your decision-making would be crucially, if not fatally, impaired by this outside force. Not that you would be a different, or worse, or more foolish person—but simply an outside force would have impaired your thinking to some extent, large or small. You would NOT function to your full potential in a moment of crisis or complexity. Similarly, if you were trying to drive an automobile while wearing someone else’s thick prescription eyeglasses, you would very likely, sooner or later, wreck your car and perhaps harm yourself and/or others. You are a good driver, but your “situation” has an unnecessary and “unfair” effect on your ability to get the job done. Do you see what I mean? The best intent to do the “right” thing, by the best of people, can be hindered by an inappropriate situation we live in. Externals CAN hinder functionality.

*“A little leaven leavens the whole batch. Remove the leaven from the batch...”* (1Corinthians 5:6-7) is an example of this.

*“Bad company corrupts good character”* (1Corinthians 15:33).

*“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up among you to cause trouble and defile many”* (Hebrews 12:15).

If these Scriptures are true, there can be no escaping the fact that our *ENVIRONMENT* affects even innocent people that truly mean well. Any environment that builds around meetings and programs and titles and forms, rather than a “neither here nor there” Kingdom that Jesus spoke of, is very likely to disobey the above Scriptures from God. And, according to God Himself, the “*whole batch*” will suffer for it—just as Achan caused all of spiritual Israel to be beaten down at Ai by the one man’s “leaven.” Any form or system that builds and is defined around “membership” and “attendance” or “tithing” or “knowledge” or “listening to words from a ‘pulpit’ regularly, or any such thing—rather than around deep, known relationship on a daily basis with God and brothers and sisters—will easily and unavoidably welcome “leaven.” And, according to God, such a system will harm *everyone* in so doing. This “external” has had seriously detrimental spiritual effects on good people. Those seeking God and Life will seldom find all that they need or might have had in Him. Those who are religious, but unconverted—those who Jesus said would fill the “broad road” while calling out His Name on Sunday (Mat. 7)—will not have the opportunity to have all of the Light that they might have had in true relationship with others—to open the opportunity they deserve that they might truly find Him. *“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’, so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness*

of sin” (*Heb. 3:13*). “ALL” will be “leavened” and diminished, simply because of what we have built. And, truthfully, this system of building, attendance, sermons, ceremony, programs and the like... cannot be found anywhere in the Bible (that we all call His Word) anyway. It has allowed, by definition, “leaven” to co-exist in the batch. And it *must* co-exist anywhere where one can “belong” because they “attend regularly”—even though often they are not known in the inner man and daily life by another person in the entire assembly.

You need to know this: building externally different doesn’t *solve* anything. We see and hear of many “informal” or “house church” situations, meeting in some different environment externally only. Many have “chucked” the formal to no benefit, and are still living in spiritual poverty, legalism, or foolish shallowness. Their “group” is fraught with weakness, or “little man dominance,” or “health food” and home school worship. Is it really that great a deal to exchange pews and ritual for this? I think not.

While being “informal” or at “home” or “spontaneous” rather than the other stuff is *not* a solution in itself, we really do *need* to build *God’s* way rather than through convenience, habit, or culture. Many of the heartaches of the wilderness are needlessly created or needlessly prolonged because of our ways of leaning on or shallowly living in the “traditions of men” that “nullify the Word of God.” So many problems, so little time... and we’ve mostly done it to ourselves by building Ishmaels, instead of looking to God for Isaac. Even your admitted “closed-ness” is a hindrance to your walk with God and to holiness, and it could be different by now. Of course you are responsible, alone. And yes, unbelief and disobedience—lack of relationship with Jesus—are the first level of “source” of those shortcomings. But *if* you could get help (there are many Biblical passages that insist that we *can* help one another be closer to Jesus) on a daily basis, you would *very likely* have overcome this by now, if you *really* wanted to. And, knowing you, I know you do. Surely most others do, too. Anyway, just food for thought, brother...



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# “The Christian Sabbath...”??

*Wednesday, November 29, 2000*

No.

Many people worldwide have seen clearly and decisively that they have been fed a diet of “empty traditions handed down” about this subject, and have just taken the religious system’s word for “Sunday services.” They have come to realize in many, many cities and countries (many letters we receive daily have made this obvious!) that much “teaching” about “attending” on “the christian sabbath” (and related topics) is shallow thinking. It is often taught erroneously, and readily accepted, to accommodate a lifestyle of convenience and sentimental pigeonholing of Spirit-Life in the Body of Christ. The Record shows something very different: normal people, newly bought by the Blood of Jesus, coming *out* of ritual and form and attendance, and now giving their lives to God and His Kingdom and His People 24 hours a day, every day, as a natural result of the Spirit’s Life within, begun at Pentecost. They were far from “meeting-centered” and would be aghast at the Life of Jesus (in His Body) being expressed in such a way when the Master Himself never did such a thing while here in body or spirit. Many now recognize and celebrate that the Bible does not support or teach or exemplify a “theology” (or “ecclesiology”) of moving the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Interestingly, the word “Shabbath” *means* Saturday, as the Roman day is called, and *cannot* mean “Sunday”—by the very translation of the word itself. There is NO basis or convincing reasoning in the Holy Spirit’s Record in the twenty-five years He recorded in the Book of Acts, or in the Teachings of Jesus or the Apostles for the *concept* of “a Christian Holy Day” and a “Christian Sabbath” on Sunday to hold “services” to be attended. Not on Saturday *OR* Sunday, as a Christian ordinance, as so commonly practiced and usually taught by those with something to gain from such a thing financially or personally.

Paul said, “I fear I’ve wasted my time on you because you regard special days!” God also said in the New Testament that some people “with weaker

faith” would “count one day as special.” Out of sixty years and thousands of words in the New Testament, those that would desire to build an entire christian system on a “Sabbath”—shift from Saturday to Sunday have no realistic basis in the Scriptures for creating such a thing.

Could we live through such a radical departure from the crutches of “the traditions of men” as ceasing from this man-made mandate of a Sunday “service”? *OH, YES!* We can do far more than survive!!!!!! In fact, we’ll never learn to “*RUN*” as long as we’re content to stay “safe” in the “wheelchairs” of “traditions” that do not find their true basis in *JESUS’ LIFE* and *WORDS!* We don’t need to be afraid of that honest Truth. *I know many of us were told we would be hit by a lightning bolt for not “attending” an organization’s meeting (whether in a cathedral or in a living room) on a “holy day”!* An honest reading of the New Testament would find no such concept as a “christian sabbath” as the centerpiece of Christianity—as is surely and obviously the case in institutional and culturally-convenient Christendom of today. And fifteen years of something and someOne far surpassing men’s ways have convinced us that it’s not only “safe” out here...but also *GLORIOUS!*

## And YES!

However! No matter *how* easy it is to see through *that* matter in an honest and unbiased reading of the Teachings and the Record the Holy Spirit has given us—*don’t forget* that “the Law” and “the Temple” and “the Sabbath” are “*the shadow of the reality that is found in Christ*”!!!!!!!!!!!! Stay with me—this couldn’t be any more important for those that understand the above as obvious. While a “holy day” is not God’s Way in this Covenant, *there is a shadow lesson*, as always, *that is essential to walk in!* Certainly JESUS is that Rest (Heb. 4-10; Col. 2:16-17; Rev. 21:23; etc.!) But...

All of the many Commands from God in the First Covenant regarding the Sabbath *have meaning!*

In other words, it is very safe to say that *God deeply desires that we bury ourselves in Him, and not in our work and our duties and distractions and noises!* Surely we have learned that much from all of the multitudinous Thoughts of God regarding the “shadow” of the First Covenant and its “Sabbath” or “Saturday.” We must each, in order to honor the Intent of God regarding “Shabbath,” fulfilled and magnified and made Visible in His Son, take *time* and *focus* from all other things and noises and demands...and *devote* it wholeheartedly to Him. The “Most Holy Place” is a very quiet and peaceful place!

We don't sacrifice animals any longer—but rather we are “living sacrifices” celebrating and participating in the Cross of Jesus, “the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world,” in our practical living situations at home, on the job, and in our weekends and evenings. The “New Agreement” *fulfills*, but doesn't “erase,” the Old. The Temple worship is not in Jerusalem any longer. “The day has come,” as Jesus put it to the “woman at the well.” The “Temple” is now daily, worshipful Life amongst God's People as a “Habitation” of God, individually and as a local expression of “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament” in the Church, being “called alongside daily so that none are hardened and deceived by sin.”

The “types and shadows” are *alive* and *better*, not ritually continued or eliminated.

- It is true for animal sacrifice—which was a vital part of the “Old Agreement” as a “visual aid” for “those of us upon whom the apex of the ages has fallen.” There is *now* a true and better “fulfillment” of this Command to God's People in the “Old Agreement”!
- It is true for Temple worship in Jerusalem. There is NOW a true and better fulfillment, and no longer just a “shadow,” as the Scriptures call them.
- And the *same* is true for the “Shabbath”! It has *not* “gone away” because we are more Spiritual now than to accept it as a day for rituals and sacraments (whether protestant or catholic) during “mass” (whether protestant or catholic). *The Sabbath is for REAL!* There is simply a *higher* fulfillment, not a *lack* of fulfillment!! And, as with the other “shadows” God gave us “as schoolmasters to lead us to Christ,” we want to embrace and walk in the “reality” (Gr: “soma”)! So what does that mean practically? *Take the time to separate yourself in the blood and spirit of Jesus*, apart from the sensory overload, the world and your flesh and your “responsibilities” and your television and computer and sports may want to feed you! There is a Sabbath Rest for the People of God, in Christ. Let's GO there, in the most enriching possible way, for His sake!

The Sabbath, as it was on Saturday in the Old Covenant is “obsolete” according to the Hebrews writer, and according to Paul by the Spirit. It must not be external “form” expressed religiously on Saturday—or culturally and traditionally “shifted” to Sunday, without true Biblical basis. *But the Sabbath is still part of God's heart* in the REAL sense, and we need to explore and honor the REAL meaning of it! We must not let this simply slip away in an “invisible” realm of nothing (disobedience and loss), or shove it into a “traditional” realm of shallow understanding and life by having some “special day,” as Paul called it. Remember how *serious*

God was about setting our time and ourselves aside for Him in the Old Covenant, and “keeping set apart (holy) the Sabbath”? Now what was that “visual aid” for?? Isn’t that enough reason to believe that He believes it is essential for us to come to Him on that basis, without distractions or other duties pressing us into their molds and into their servitude? Let’s take all of this to the highest possible level—not to the ritual Old Covenant visual aid and “form,” *nor* to neglect or hyper-spiritualizations. The “Father *seeks*” those that will form the priorities and take the steps necessary in their practical lives to *Live* the Shabbath, with the *essential* times of separation clearly implied from the “visual aid” of the Old. Have you set aside time for Him today? (And I surely am not referring to some pre-programmed gimmicky calendar-ized and “Daytimer-ized” block of time—but rather being enveloped by, and led by the Spirit of Christ into knowing how and when to respond to His Direction and the *cravings* “like newborn babes” that He instills in us if we’re listening!) In a Church that is built *His Way* (Acts 2:42-47, for example), “teamwork” and taking turns with children and other chores for each other is *easy* to do, if we’re inclined. In an unbiblical church environment of “every man doing what’s right in his own eyes” for six days out of every week, it’s tougher—granted. But you! Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking! Jehovah loves to Jireh. ☺ He loves to give Good Gifts to those who ask Him. But you’ve got to put the same priority on the Quiet Place of the Most Holy—the Sabbath of Life set apart for being with Him, with nothing else distracting or grabbing after you, that He obviously does. He’s illustrated His heart for this clearly in “THE SABBATH” that He called Israel to, and continues to invite us to share with Him in the non-shadow and most *full* way!

Surely this is all obvious, but I’ve been told that it can’t hurt to remind!!

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# The Intermingled, Fused, Together Christ-Life... Today

*Sunday, March 12, 2000*

*Question: Can you give me Scripture references for why you feel it is inappropriate for believers to meet in both a more formal worship “service” as well as informally (in order to further relationships)? Scripture tells me that the first century believers continued to go to Temple, (not just the courtyards, but the more formal, “corporate” meeting times) even as they also began meeting together in homes. I’m not trying to be argumentative, but rather to understand. Why not just stay in the system and work from within?*

**H**ello Jeff, ☺ Good to hear from you—however, it might take *weeks* for me to answer your questions! “How do you eat an elephant?” Answer: “One bite at a time.” So, I’ll give ‘er a go. ☺

Okay, just for fun. ☺ Let’s flip this around and look at it from the other side. (Since we have strayed *so far* from God’s Intent and the Ways of Jesus and the Apostles, perhaps we shouldn’t start with TODAY as a reference point to be DIS-proved, but rather start with Apostolic Life and try to support all the stuff we’ve done to it instead!) So, here’s the game: ☺ Can you give me Scripture references to justify the practice of a man with a title, putting a weekly ceremony on the calendar, and giving a prepared speech to a group of people who have “attended”? You know it wouldn’t be difficult to add 4,000 man-made additions, subtractions, distortions, and dilutions to that list. But, let’s just stay with these for now. Can you give me Scripture references to justify the practice of a man with a title, putting a weekly ceremony on the calendar, and giving a prepared speech to a group of people who have “attended,” and passing the bucket for his “salary” and other stuff? The truth is, there is *no* justification for this departure from the Scripture and practice of the Believers that were Born under Jesus’ Leadership through the apostles. “When you come together brothers, *everyone* has a word of instruction, a song...” There is NO other Biblical Pattern for Believers being together, except as a Priesthood. No

ceremonies, no pre-arranged choreographed stuff, no assigned leaders. Jesus Himself forbid the titles and positions and traditions. Did Paul ever “preach” to a congregation (and surely no one considers himself today a better man than Paul)? No such event ever took place, that the Holy Spirit recorded. When Paul was in Troas, the Bible says he “*dialogued*” with the Saints until dawn. He did not “preach” and there are *no* examples in the Scriptures of anything like what happens today with the ceremony and speech, on a holy day, in a holy building (or holy living room for the “service”). Where are the Scriptures for what is happening today? There are none. “When revelation comes to the second, let the first one *sit down*” saith the Lord. That is Scripture that makes virtually every religious organization on the planet immediately disobedient to God. It is *not* the way men function. “Hey! I’m the one with the Bible knowledge and charisma! I’m the man of God around here, and *I will be the leader and speech-maker!*” And the people loved it so. Even if God has another Command. “Let the first one SIT DOWN.” That, and “remove the leaven from the batch” are two *totally* unacceptable Scriptures to those who love and defend and are comfortable with the leavened batch and unBiblical lifestyles and assemblies.

Now, why did the new Christians continue to meet in the temple courts? If you check the drawings in the back of many Bibles, this was a city park, an open-air area—not a building. But, it wouldn’t matter if it were a building, because you must realize that the Jews that were converted to Jesus did not immediately think of themselves as “no longer Jewish.” To *them*, all that had changed was that they now realized that the Messiah, long-awaited, had *Come!* This is the largest celebration OF Judaism, not a reason to think they were no longer Jewish! He has Come! Now, every Jew should know this!! It’s what all of their history had pointed towards, and He has Come! It never occurred to them that they should stop being involved in Jewish things!

As time passed, now their minds were opened to the fact that this Deal was for *Gentiles* too. (It was perhaps a full 5 years after Pentecost when Cornelius was brought into the Family, and then much longer until “the uttermost parts of the earth” finally kicked in—maybe another 3-4 years for the push towards Antioch.) Then they had to work through how much Judaism was *really* just a “visual aid” (Col.2:16-17; Heb.5, 7, 9, 10; Rom.4)—and how much was for them, still (Acts 15). So, it should come as no surprise at all that they would *temporarily* continue with “the hour of prayer” (Acts 4) and the like. And, since they were to go first to the House of Israel, “first Jews, then Greeks,” it makes sense that they would also use synagogues for “fishing holes” later on. They did *not* continue to be under Jewish Law

in any way, or else Christ died for nothing, according to Paul. Nor were they “under” Jewish “form” of the synagogue service on the Sabbath, with a Rabbi (by the way, NONE of this is in the Scripture, but was born out of man-made concessions, while in Babylonian punishment by God).

The first “christian religious facility” (built for christians to have meetings in) that archaeologists have ever located, was in approximately 275 A.D. For well over 200 years after Jesus, it was clear to the Believers that they were not to build “worship temples” in the towns and cities. All of the other world religions had always built “church buildings” and were still doing so. But for *many* years, even when other things were slipping away from Jesus’ Truths, they still *knew* that what Jesus had “started” was not about that.

Emperor Constantine, circa 312AD, merged his form of state-approved “christianity” with the other religions of his Roman Empire. He did this, to please his people and his flesh, by taking pagan holidays that worshipped false gods (“fertility”/Easter, Saturnalia/Xmas, etc.) and pagan religious practices with their temple “services” and high priest sermon-givers...and wed them together. WE are the recipients of these pagan practices, with christian fish-stickers on them to lend credibility. But you won’t find any of that in the Bible.

SO, small wonder that the Jews absorbed world religion practices in Babylon that were not in their Bibles. (Old Covenant Temple worship—yes! Synagogues with Rabbis—no!) And Constantine legitimized this practice of the world religions into “christianity.” And the Roman Catholics led the way in fossilizing this, while the Protestants took 90% of Roman Catholicism and embraced it as well. “Priests”/“Clergymen” (totally unBiblical to an extreme) are NOW allowed to get married? This is “protestant reformation”?

I’d say we should go a little deeper and find out what JESUS had in mind!!!  
“From the Beginning, it was not so!”

I am sure that you weren’t being in any way argumentative, my brother. I could sense your heart in the honest inquiry. I wish I had more time to give you even more, but, alas...

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*While I do see the difficulty of trying to walk in and “share the light” in and among a congregation that is not presently engaged in this (Biblical Christianity), I’m not sure I see how the answer is to walk away. How will*

*anyone ever learn there is a problem if we don't sound the alarm? I guess I'm wondering if we don't bear some responsibility, similar to the prophets of old. They did not walk away from Israel when she was in open rebellion, but instead stayed to call her to repentance, even at risk to themselves. I feel that there are many well-intentioned Christians who work diligently within the "system" who want nothing more than to serve the Lord. To walk away seems somehow selfish — "I found truth; see ya later—you're on your own!" Please let me know your thoughts on this.*

Another good question. Just to make a point that has substance, rather than just expressing it as a "concept," I want to tell you a bit about the Church here. I hope this is okay. We have somewhere between a zillion and a zillion and half folks (give or take) talk to us about moving to this city every year or two. We have never, in fifteen years, encouraged anyone to move here to be part of the Church. There are a number of stories of folks that had even quit jobs and given notice on their apartments, or had their houses for sale—that we *talked out* of moving here. Sometimes they eventually came, a year or two later. Sometimes many years later. Usually not at all, ever. WHY do we not "recruit" as is the common practice in the "church world"? *BECAUSE OF THE VERY POINT YOU'RE MAKING*: If folks have not exhausted themselves in their given worlds or relationships and religious organizations—trying desperately to love on and get deeply involved with those that are *already* in their lives—they have "put their hand to the plow" and looked elsewhere. This is robbery to those that are all around them, as well as cheating themselves of Growth by sacrifice, and the love of others.

However, being faithful *FOR REAL* is seldom the way folks function, unfortunately. If you or anyone *really* is faithful (rather than token "radical" remarks during a bible class, and a couple of new programs)...if you are *really* willing to get involved in "admonish one another daily so that none are hardened and deceived by sin"...if you are *really* willing to "confess your sins one to another" and "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ"...you will either see wondrous revival there, or you will be thrown out on your ear for shaking and exposing the lukewarm elements of whatever is out there. It is NOT an option, if you love Jesus, to allow "leaven in the batch." No excuses, no rationalizations, no procrastination. "If you love Me, you will obey Me." If you think you can "blend in" and be "one of the boyz" but just be a bit on the weird and radical and committed side, you are in serious trouble. "A little leaven leavens the *whole* batch." God didn't give you a choice. Nor does your "assembly" have a choice. The question is *not* whether to get the leaven out of the batch. It is *mandatory*,

or quit calling it a “christian church.” “WHY do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and don’t do what I say?” “I will take the Kingdom away from you and give it to those who will bear its Fruit.” It is *not an option* to leave leaven (compromise, worldliness, lukewarmness, greed, etc., etc.) in the batch. The question is HOW to remove it? Legalism? NO WAY! Passivity or disconnected ignorance of it? NO WAY. That didn’t cut it with God when God judged all of Israel for Achan’s hidden sin, and it doesn’t cut it now either. The Answer is: If the “church” is built around meetings and times and places, rather than by 100% (from the least to the greatest) “walking in the Light” in deep relationship with one another, “admonishing one another daily”—then it is *impossible* to obey the Command to remove the leaven. And then *everyone* is leavened and even the good things are greatly tarnished, according to God.

SO, “bailing out” is not the answer. At least not until you have bloodied your knees in prayer, and risked your life getting into others’ homes and lives. Liken it to a man who discovers a toxic gas leak in his apartment or flat, and gets up in the middle of the night and moves his family to another location. Meanwhile, he fails to try to help the other 7 families that live in that apartment building, and the other 500 families that live in that complex! What a terribly selfish thing to do! “Bailing out” *robs* God’s People of their God-given Right to make their own choices about Truth! And, how do you know that *everyone* won’t receive Truth and a wonderful thing happen amidst those families? You cannot know—until you TRY! Give out books and booklets at the back door after “the benediction,” get into people’s homes multiple nights a week and pray with them and talk with them and plead with them! Honor their relationships and responsibilities with the “assigned leaders” by avoiding “undermining” or “gossiping”—but recognize that those people *belong to God and must have their own chance to decide and act on what the Scriptures Teach that Christianity is.* ☺

Prolonging involvement in a place where “leaven” (love of the world, false conversions, greed, pope-ery, and other evil) is taking place without Light and Repentance, is also *not an option*. We *may not* stay indefinitely in an environment that does not “love the Light” and protects the traditions of men and the compromise. Even if there are some good people there, and all of your children’s friends. You *may not* stay indefinitely in a place where there are entire pockets of “members” that have no Light-walking relationship with others, so that there is *no way* to help them or even be aware of hidden leaven. We are still responsible for it, as Ai and 1 Corinthians 5 make totally clear, but we have built so poorly and unBiblically that we don’t even know where the problems that we are responsible for lie.

So, yes. Risk your life trying to find others who *truly* love Jesus (“If you *really* love Me, you will obey Me”—not just “worship” good and say deep things), and live a *Biblical* life with them. And, take responsibility, as you must, for “see to it brothers that *none* of you has an unbelieving heart” and the other issues of leaven in the batch. If there is revival, Hallelujah! If the leaven and the bad, unBiblical building practices that allow the leaven to be hidden or undealt-with continue...then leave—or be leavened to the guaranteed detriment of your family’s life and spiritual Life. And, even if you *had* to leave (because of the continued hidden and un-dealt with leaven and refusal of those there to be obedient to the One they call Lord) you would *still* need to do what Paul did: visit some “fishing holes” along with other trusted brothers and sisters to try to find those who truly *do* want to go to the Highest Places with Jesus and His Bride. Devote yourself to those people you can find who *do* want to see “the Bride prepared” regardless of personal cost—those that “love the Light.”

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*My next question is this—I understand the importance of not allowing unbelievers to “infiltrate” the ranks, but I’m unclear on how an unbeliever is exposed to truth. I see how my employment can be a “mission field,” of course, but if I’m spending my days working and my free time with family and the rest of the Church, when do I have time and opportunity to cultivate relationships in order to win others to Christ? Am I missing something? When you gather in homes, are unbelievers welcome? Or are the gatherings strictly limited to “Family” only? And if they are not limited, then doesn’t that constitute “leaven” in the batch?*

That’s another great question. If the “church” is a meeting to attend, then being involved with unbelievers would best be served by “bringing them to a meeting.” Maybe they’d “hear” something. That’s how the reasoning goes. First of all, an unbelieving visitor would not be “leaven” because they would not consider themselves to be “members” of the Body of Christ—or Christians. “Leaven” is, according to the Scriptures, a term for those that “call themselves brothers” and continue to live in sin, without repentance. Those that “love the Light” (Jn. 3) and “love the Truth” (2Thes. 2) are *not* leaven, since such a person *desires* to change and *wants* darkness exposed. Weakness is not leaven. Even sin is not leaven. A refusal to love exposure, and a refusal to change, are what constitute leaven. So, a weak brother or sister that is caught in a sin, but *wants* to turn from it for Jesus, and *wants* help, and *desires* that “his deeds be exposed” (rather

than being defensive about it) as Jesus Himself taught...that one is not leaven. They will get help to change, no matter how large their problems are. If they honestly love the Light, God's Resources will be there for them and they will "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Also, someone that doesn't claim to know Jesus and does not "call himself a brother"...is not leaven. An "unbeliever" is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 when "the whole church" is together. But such a person doesn't consider himself *part* of the church. He is an unbeliever.

Part one of your question: *Of course*, an unbeliever could easily be present when the whole Church is together. But again, I have to say that it is virtually impossible at times to "figure stuff out" in our "church" world. Why? Because we are often, in today's world, trying to "apply" or "find" Scriptures—to plug into an entirely UNScriptural church world. Even the *worst* of the Churches in the New Testament (probably the Corinthians) had SO much relationship that the man that they didn't eat with almost *died* from the withdrawal of daily mutual life (1Cor. 5, 2Cor. 2, 2Cor. 7). That means that arguably the WORST of the Churches back then—were FAR superior to most of the "best" today!

By the way, the "parable of the wheat and tares" is about the Church not isolating itself away from the world. "IN the world, but not OF it." It is NOT a license to disobey God by allowing tares to consider themselves part of the church. 1 Corinthians 5 is totally clear. "Remove the leaven. You must not eat with them, or socialize with them. Expel them from your midst."—Jesus Christ, Lord. Jesus said, "the field is the *WORLD*" in this parable that is so frequently abused—NOT "the field (where the wheat and tares grow together) is the church." The wheat and the tares must *not* "grow up together" in the *CHURCH*, but rather in the world. How else could we be "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth" and "a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden"?! "THIS is how all men will know you are My disciples—by the love that they see you *having for one another.*"

Essentially, because the Church is *supposed* to be "contending as one man for the Faith," "joined and knit together by every supporting ligament," "we being many, are ONE" "baptized by one Spirit into one Body," with "a hundred mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, and possessions"—we are to relate to unbelievers via His *family*, not as individuals inviting someone to some event. "THIS is HOW all men will know!" It's not about events, but about them seeing us love on each other—which *cannot* be done in a meeting! Unbelievers must be invited into our lives and the things we do with one another on a daily basis. Jesus said that unbelievers seeing our lives and our love for one another is HOW they will know that Jesus is for real.

Think about this, as it relates to your question. We are not, then, competing for time to “share Christ” with unBelievers—with all of the other busy stuff with family and work and other things. We are weaving *all* of that together into One! “THIS IS HOW”: Evangelistic meetings? Nope. Invitations to “services” or events, or having programs about it? Nope. That’s not the “HOW” Jesus said was His Way. Our mutual love of one another, daily from house to house, as we rise up, sit down, and walk along the way, our shared trips to the marketplace and the errands and the activities and families, all joined into a harmonious whole! “A hundred fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, possessions, persecutions”—all rolled up into One Life. If it’s Father’s Best, then it is not about an individual that has a separate work life, recreational life, family life—and then tries to add into that a “church life” and an “evangelism life” and a “feed the poor life.” Unless it is all melted together into One, as Jesus Designed and Ordained and Commanded and Empowered...our lives will be far more impotent than God ever intended. We’ll only be kidding ourselves, really, and trying to prop ourselves up with what we *can* do and what we *like*, while closing our eyes to SO much more that God intended. Everyone quadruples their capacity when we build “according to the Pattern.”

It is *essential* that we build the way the great Architect laid out the Blueprint! On the simplest level, if we do not “admonish” “be called alongside” “warn” “encourage one another daily”...GOD said we WILL be hardened and deceived. We will be wrong in many areas (“deceived”) and our conscience will not warn us of the danger (“hardened”). If the “church” is built around assemblies and sing-alongs and programs, rather than around interwoven daily lives as Priests, 100%, “from the least to the greatest”—we *will* have massive and unnecessary weakness, “cracks,” leaven, and lukewarmness. We cannot build according to man’s blueprint—and have God’s House. Will there be some saved and sincere folks in the man-made “churches?” Of course. But even those really special folks will never reach their Potential in an unBiblical environment. As has been said before, “You can’t grow an orange-tree in Alaska, no matter how good your artificial programs are. That is not the habitat for orange tree life. And you cannot grow a Believer well in a man-made environment. It is not the habitat for Spirit Life.” It *matters* how we build. Immensely. The perfect example is the Samuel kingdom versus the Saul kingdom—and how GOD felt about the move from organic to organizational. It matters. WOW, does it matter! Look it up—it’s *very* serious to make these “small administrative changes” that men continue to make out of fear or convenience or control or greed or aping the world system models of “leadership” and “efficiency” and “marketing.”

When we're building His Way, we don't have three or four competing "lives" (work, family, church, spare time), but only one interwoven Life with Jesus and one another. That makes a lot of sense for a *doulos* (Greek for slave or servant), doesn't it? ☺ And in that One life, the people who we meet at work or elsewhere are invited on to the edge of our lives, "as we rise up, as we sit down, and as we walk along the way." Dinners with several families, ice cream places, basketball games with two hundred of us; fireworks, barbeques, piano recitals, golf, lunches with a gang of brothers during the business day, library visits, park hikes, bicycle rides, and a thousand other Opportunities. All of these are "windows" into their souls—and divine appointments for Seed planting. If the Church happens to be getting together some evening after a seeking unbeliever is at someone's home for dinner with a few folks...well, sometimes it would be the Spirit's Directive to bring him along to the place chosen for the evening. Or maybe, another couple dozen of folks might inadvertently, gradually, drop in after dinner. And if they did, someone or several *likely* would have something they would want to encourage everyone with, and the unbeliever would "have his heart laid bare" by the Way that the Spirit does His business (1Cor. 14:24-26).

It is wonderful that you are looking into these things, with the openness that was evident in your letter. Father *never* fails to Reward "every act prompted by our Faith."



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# The Apostle Paul's Guide to Helping Carnal Christians Mature

## Healthy, Devoted Relationships Part 2

*April 1986*

**N**o one would argue the “hopelessness” of it. Trying to bring a group like those folks from Corinth to maturity in Christ? Not possible. That immoral city just down the road from Athens is world-renowned for its drunken depravity. And the “church” there? Well...there have been many magnificent successes (1Cor.6:9-11), but there is still so much *junk* lurking in the background. What to do? How would Paul respond to the news from Chloe that things weren't well in the Church in Corinth?

How would *you* respond to a brother or sister who has been a Christian for maybe a couple of years—and still has a problem with vices and self-indulgence? What about brothers who are bickering with their brothers and sisters, and, believe it or not, taking them to court? What are we to think of those who are still so callous to sexual immorality that they decide to ignore it rather than oppose it? How would you respond to a brother or sister like that? Write them off? Blow them away? Back off and “not waste your time”?

Paul, no doubt, had to come to grips with some of these same possibilities.

It is worth paying very close attention to the fact that whatever it was Paul did... worked! Within six to nine months after he addressed the problem, he could write to the Corinthians and say, “At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter;” “you were all obedient;” “I have boasted about you, and you have not embarrassed me” and “I am glad that I can have complete confidence in you” (2Cor.7:11-16). That is pretty phenomenal success!

Let's consider this idea of successfully making disciples of Jesus men and women who are still living weak, and even ungodly lives. Yet, while you

read and pray through these thoughts from the life of the apostle Paul, bear in mind that the secret of Paul's success was not in "what he did" as much as in "who he was." Thus, you will find that many of the changes may need to be wrought in your *own* life if you are to be a suitable vessel for God to work through to bring about a miracle in someone else's life.

There is no formula, only God's ability to create out of nothing, to bring life from death. Many times God will let the one that you are praying for and helping to "teach to obey" Christ's commands, your "Lazarus," stay in the stench of death for a long time—just to clearly demonstrate man's inability to raise anyone from the grave. God delights to glorify His name by rolling back the stone in front of our stained-glass mausoleums and in accomplishing the impossible in our lives. There is no magic formula, only the I AM. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to make your heart a means of transportation for the Eternal God in mercy and power.

So, what is the Apostle Paul's heart in dealing with still-worldly brothers and sisters?

## Get Out The Big Guns, Right? Nuke 'em!

It is definitely true that Paul dealt severely with "...anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater (job, possession, recreation or family worshiper) or a slanderer ("doing God a favor" by constant criticism and complaining), a drunkard or a swindler" (1Cor.5:11). He had such courage and conviction of God's Truth that he could state very boldly "...for your meetings do more harm than good." (1Cor.11:17) And "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ" (1Cor.3:1). He had the courage to take a stand and speak out against disobedience and perpetual babyhood. Your usefulness to God will be determined by whether or not you too are willing to pay the price of stepping forward and not idly letting men and women defame the name of the Lord of Glory, carelessly ignoring His Holiness and presuming upon His grace. Like Paul, our brother, "a man like us," we must dare to get involved.

Now before we jump headlong into "Holy Spiriting" ("exhorting," "warning," "admonishing") one another daily so that none are hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb.3:13, 12:15), we must carefully examine the heart that Paul had for his family in Corinth. That, as it turns out, is by far the most important factor in growing others up into the Head.

Remember, "you who are spiritual should restore one caught in a sin gently" (Gal.6:1). "Spiritual" does not mean that you are smart enough to lead a

Bible study, or that men made you a deacon, or that you brought twelve people to Christ last year, or that you preach at seminars (or on the street) “real good.” It means that you have progressed far along the untrampled path of being “conformed to the family likeness of the Son” (Rom.8:29; 1Cor.2:16). You are very much like Jesus in personality, thought life, patience, prayer life, servanthood to the least of your brothers and sisters, and attitude towards material things. “This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (1Jn. 2:5-6).

The Holy Spirit says: “You who are spiritual (filled with the Spirit of Jesus) should restore such a one.” The point is not that you must be perfect in order to help someone mature in Jesus. It is just that it is essential to first examine your own heart, “get the log out of your own eye” and make certain that you have a heart that God can use to perform miracles through.

## The Heart of One Who Helps Make Disciples

Here is the heart of Jesus in a human named Paul—a heart that God could use to do the impossible:

*1) “So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you” (2 Corinthians 2:1-4).*

*“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye and went on to Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).*

*“For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your affection, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while” (2 Corinthians 7:5-8).*

Notice this about a man who God can use to transform not merely external actions, but hearts—yes, it was necessary to confront them, but

he *hated* it! It did not make his day and give him an ego trip. Yes, he did rebuke them soundly. And to read only those parts of his letter, we might likely judge him harsh and unloving. But the fact is, that to catch your children playing in the freeway without taking them to the woodshed is proof that you don't love them (Heb.12:5-11). Nevertheless, a loving parent (or under-shepherd in Jesus, or fellow-christian) will hate every minute of the issue of discipline. They would never dream of bragging about how they did such a marvelous job challenging this rebellious one. It will likely remain their secret. That's love (1Cor.13:4-7).

Paul was virtually devastated by this encounter with the Corinthians, even though they seemed well deserving of harsh rebuke. Though they must do it to stay in Fellowship with God and the saints (1Jn. 1:3-7), a man or woman of God will hate the idea of laying a charge down on the doorstep of a fellow pilgrim—regardless of how much they may seem to need it. Paul said that the writing of the letter was extremely “agonizing” to him. It caused him “great distress” and he literally wept “many tears” as he tried to pen this letter of rebuke and instruction.

Paul, if you recall, was given an “open door” to preach the gospel in Troas (2Cor.2:12). Yet, he was so distraught by his fear that the family in Corinth would reject his word from the Lord, his “oracle of God,” in his letter (1Pet. 4:11), that he finally turned his back on the “open door” to go find Titus to see how his rebuke had been received. He had “no peace of mind,” “no rest,” “conflicts on the outside, fears within,” and even regretted having issued the rebuke. All of this pain was not diminished until, at long last, Titus reported to Paul that they still loved him and had “ardent concern” for him. Best of all, the great sorrow that his rebuke brought to the Christians in Corinth led them to a wonderful repentance and “innocence at every point” within six to nine months after he had written them concerning their worldliness.

Here's the point: Of course, we have no right to be passive while others are jeopardizing their relationships with God and selling their Destiny in Him. Yet, if we can casually demolish someone, even concerning the most obvious sins, without weeping and anguishing, we're not fit to say a word to them. Test your heart carefully. If you don't have at least a *desire* to have compassion, then you do not have God's permission to speak, whether you are “right” or not. *“If I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not unconditional love, I am nothing” (1Cor.13:2). Amen?!*

2) *“I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth” (2 Corinthians 1:23).*

*“So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you” (2 Corinthians 2:1).*

Paul, and every man or woman that God will work through, knows when to be wise and not press. Paul knew that there was much to do in this wicked city and in this worldly, immoral group of Christians. (NOTE: Luke 14:33; Luke 9:57-62; Matthew 10:32-39; Acts 3:22-23 are not contradicted by 1 Corinthians 3:1. The Corinthians’ response to truth is the key. See 2 Corinthians 7:8-16. This is a true disciple’s response to convicting truth—not argument, three more years of Greek word studies, and a yawn. Please read these verses carefully and you will discover that it is absolutely impossible that one who calls himself/herself a Christian could remain unchanged when challenged with the Word of God.) He also knew when to bite his tongue. There came a point where Paul knew that he must not “exasperate his children.” He elected to not return and make “another painful visit” to the Church there, even though, at that time, he still had no report that they had repented of the sinful areas that they were engrossed in.

The moral of the story is that there may well be things that we can say, observations that we can make about another brother or sister—true things, accurate things—and, yet, it might actually be sinful to say one word to them about it. Paul knew, as Jesus did, as we must learn, that when we are one with the Father through Jesus, we will not speak one word on our own. Ever. (Jn. 14:10-11, 24; 8:28-29; 17:21; Gal.2:20; Eph.6:19-20; Col.1:9; 1Pet. 4:11) All things that are true are not necessarily right or good to be addressed at that moment in time. Resign yourself to God that you are willing to do whatever He wants: to lovingly address the situation now, or bit by bit over six months, or that you are willing to never confront it at all and simply pray continually that God will use some means to help them leave that sin. You are not God’s policeman. Our God is like any good Father—He’ll not have others randomly disciplining His children (Ps. 50:21, Oba.1:12). There is a time to rebuke—possibly in front of all of the brothers (Gal. 2:11-14; 1Tim. 5:20; Acts 5:1-11). There is also a time to quietly wash the feet of even a known thief like Judas, as Jesus did, letting him continue as treasurer until the last minute. While remaining true to God’s Word and your commitment to representing God’s everlasting government, please be kind and tolerant and generous (Rom. 2:4; 2Tim. 2:25-26; 1Thes.5:14; Lk. 6:37-38). Learn, as Paul, to bite your tongue at times.

3) *“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm” (2 Corinthians 1:24).*

*“Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity” (1 Corinthians 16:12).*

Watch this mighty miracle-working Apostle who had seen Christ and, then, several years later, had been transported to a part of heaven itself (Acts 9; 22; 26; 1Cor. 15:8; 2Cor. 12:2). Even the Apostle Paul himself refused to put words in anyone’s mouth, make people conform, or do things just the way he wanted. Certainly God’s principles were never compromised (Gal. 2:14; Tit. 3:10; 1Cor. 5:9-13), yet, the mechanics and “how to’s” were not dictated. This is illustrated above by Apollos’ refusal of Paul’s strong directions (1Cor. 16:12).

Also consider the strong warning and pleadings of an acknowledged prophet of God named Agabus, along with a doctor (who penned a Gospel) named Luke—that were refused by Paul (Acts 21:10-15).

The principle is, of course, that we are not to dictate man-made rules about any spiritual area (“dating,” shorts, Bible study quotas, etc.)—no matter how logical they might be. Jesus, Himself, would not be an “arbiter” of externals (Lk. 12:14). As Paul said: Rules “lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence,” they bring “death,” and they have no ability to change a person’s heart, but only to modify their actions to conform to an accepted norm (Col. 2:23; 2Cor. 3:6).

Because God is the judge of the intentions of the heart, even if the actions are fine (Mat. 5:27-28), it is senseless to focus on behavior modification. Paul cried out with anguish to the Christians in Galatia: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Gal. 3:3).

Paul reminded the Corinthians very clearly that he had not and would not “lord it over” their faith, but rather, he had offered himself as a tool for them to enjoy and utilize in their pursuit of a deeper faith in Christ and more full walk in Him (2Cor. 1:24). Certainly “authority” is not an unbiblical idea by any stretch of the imagination (Heb. 13:17,7; 1Cor. 16:15-16; 2Cor. 13:10; 1Thes. 5:12-13), but the objective of anyone investing in the lives of others spiritually is to be a tool for them to find their own faith, not a hammer to make them after one’s own kind, as the Pharisees did (Mat. 23:15). By all means, give all a crystal-clear example that is worth emulating (1Thes. 1:6; 2:10,14; 1Cor. 11:1; Php. 3:17, 4:9; 1Tim. 4:11-16), but remember the words of Jesus, “You are not to allow yourself to be called teacher, father (“discipler”?, etc.) for you have ONE TEACHER—AND YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS” (Mat. 23:5-12).

4) *“I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you” (2 Corinthians 2:3-4).*

*“Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged, in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds” (2 Corinthians 7:2-4).*

*“I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well....I am glad I can have complete confidence in you” (2 Corinthians 7:14, 16).*

Can you imagine having “complete confidence,” “great pride,” “great encouragement” and “refreshment” in a man who gets drunk during the Lord’s supper and wallows in selfishness, boasting and materialism? How would you feel about a person like that? What about a congregation that seems to be characterized by a wonderful spirituality like that? Would you write them off? Would you “shake the dust off your feet”?

Or, would you be so totally confident in them as to turn around and brag about them to others even before you had heard whether or not they had given those things up? (2Cor. 7:14-16). If you have the heart of Paul, who often had the heart of Christ, you will not criticize and complain about others’ shortcomings—but will actually *brag* about your family to others and be wholly confident in their future. God does good work! How are you doing? Will others see this quality in you? I have “complete confidence” that they will!

5) *“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).*

*“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Corinthians 1:8).*

Here was a guy, named Paul, who had a lawyer’s education and background, knew the scriptures backwards and forwards, had received personal instruction from the Resurrected Jesus, participated in numerous miracles, and brought thousands of men and women to Christ (Phil.3:5,

Acts 26:24; 23:6, Gal.1:14; Rom.15:18-19; Acts 20:35). All of that, and yet he quickly conceded that he was personally unable to accomplish anything in anyone's life.

Only God can create and cleanse and empower. Paul counted on God to turn his words of stone into the bread of life for his brothers and sisters. Paul knew that only Christ Himself could really reveal the Father and that only the same God who had made him strong could make them strong (Mat. 11:25, 27; Php. 3:15, 2Tim. 2:7; Col. 1:9-11; Eph. 1:17-19; 3:16-19; Acts 20:30-32; 1 Jn. 5:20). He entrusted his brothers and sisters entirely to the One who could "keep them strong to the end" and "complete that which He had begun in them" (Heb. 12:2, 11; 13:20; 1Thes. 5:23-24; 2Thes. 3:3; Jn. 3:21). Paul's job was to faithfully plant seeds and water and certainly do all that he could do to lay down his life for them (1Thes. 2:8), yet, he humbly recognized that his theology, argument, persuasion or rhetoric could do nothing to transform or mature a soul (Jn. 1:1-12; Rom. 12:3). All he could do was bring the seed of truth in the vessel of a broken and pure life (2Cor. 4:6-7; 2 Tim. 2:20-21) and pray that the Lord of the Harvest would give increase in open hearts.

As for you and I? How could it be any different? Let us be faithful, faith-filled, courageous, relentless, and pure as the precious lamb—and prayerfully lay our burdens for others at the feet of the "Great Shepherd of the sheep." He will "equip them with everything good for doing His will and work in them what is pleasing to Him" (Heb. 13:20-21).

6) *"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2).*

*"We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world" (1 Corinthians 4:10-13).*

*"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2: 15-16)*

There is no question that this courageous involvement in others' lives, spiritually, is very expensive. There is no question whatsoever that the price of being useful to our God before He returns may leave us brutally treated,

cursed, slandered or even hungry and thirsty (Lk. 6:24-26). There is no question that if we are “fools for Christ” rather than staunch or “preppy” or a franchise of religious machinery...that we will pay a high price.

Is it acceptable in practical terms in your life that you willingly “make yourself nothing,” “the scum of the earth”? If you dare to get involved in the impartation and serving others into the life and truths of God, you will certainly be a sweet aroma to those with good hearts. It is also true, if you’re really involved in God’s Business of changing lives and drawing them near to Him, that you will be the stench of death to those with unrepentant hearts. And that will cost you, as it did the Son of Man. As the mighty apostle, himself, exclaimed, “*Who is equal to such a task?!*” He did not, and we do not, take it lightly.

It is an awesome thing to be involved in warfare with the “*powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-12).

Now honestly, when you read the title of this chapter, you had in mind that you would find a formula that would make possible this impossible task of maturing carnal Christians to Christ. Right? My prayer is that you will fully recognize that the “secret” lies in one thing alone: That your heart is hidden in Christ and that you are willing to die even for “the least of these”—“while they are yet sinners.” Your heart is as Jesus’: to purchase men for God, even with your own life, if necessary. There is the secret. Make that your full focus. Crave the God of the Word, the “Alive and active” Word of God, and the People of God, and you will have no more problem than Paul did in maturing carnal Christians. Prepare your heart.

As you forge ahead in laying down your life for your Lord and your brothers and sisters, risk the impossible and unpopular and let it be said of you in heaven, as it was of another mere man: (Acts 13:36)...

*“THIS ONE SERVED THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN HIS OWN GENERATION.”*



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# Love, the Only Place God is Found

*Sunday Night, April 26, 1998*

*“If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth, but I didn’t love others, it would be like making meaningless noise, like a loud gong or clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy and I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn’t love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor, and even sacrifice my body to the flames, I could boast about it, but if I didn’t love others, I would be of no value whatsoever” (1 Corinthians 13).*

**T**he beginning of this thing we call a “chapter” in Paul’s letter is really clear about one fact: loving others is not an additional thing that we do alongside the other important works, such as conquering the world for Christ, throwing mountains into the sea, healing the sick, and all these other things. It’s not an additional thing. It is the root issue and substance of existence. All of that “Christian” stuff is total rubbish, totally worthless, of no value whatsoever...if it is not rooted in the basis of intimate love for others because of the blood of Jesus. Not an “additional thing to work on,” but the very basis of our existence, our decisions, and our actions. This is the *only* way the Father can be pleased, and without it we’ll never have the slightest idea of how to “walk as Jesus walked,” doing “*nothing* that we do not see the Father doing.”

This is as fundamental as the difference between eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and eating from the Tree of *LIFE!* What IS a “good work for Jesus”? Do you *really* know? You cannot *possibly* know, apart from what we are discussing here. Your *mind* is not the basis of knowing. Like Peter, we’ll say right to God’s face, “Surely NOT, Lord!” if we are living by our mind’s perception of what is “right,” and what we have read somewhere must surely please God. We *must* eat from the Tree of Life, not the tree where we think we’ve studied enough to “know.” This is a place of perpetual dependency (a very unpopular idea to the proud religious man). This is a place of abandoned love. This is the only place

God may be found. That is, the TRUE God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Father of the Master, Jesus Christ. God doesn't teach love, or command it, alone. God *is* Love, and He can ONLY be found there. Not the externals. This is what Paul is saying in the passage we just read about Love. Learn to *love deeply, from the heart! Please?*

Now, in practical terms (about measuring ourselves by "externals"), someone says, "The Bible says, 'Greater works than these shall you do,' right? So, if I can't experience important and miraculous things, then I have the right to be frustrated, disappointed, and go through mid-life crises." No way. The demons just might not submit in His Name in this particular instance because of a foggy, arrogant understanding of what the Scriptures mean. Wrong tree. Riddle me this: How many miracles did Jeremiah do? How about Isaiah? Are these men so deficient with God that the "externals" might be limited to twenty-three years with no one listening, and getting thrown into a well to die? John the Baptist did no miracles. Were these men failures? Did they not know God?

Other men did "external" miracles, right? Elijah did a whole truckload of them. Elisha did a bunch. Jesus certainly did a bunch. Paul and Peter and John did their share. But it's not a "given" that if you can't do miracles or if you never see one in your entire lifetime that you are a failure. I'm all for miracles, and have been the humbled recipient of miracles of His grace in several areas (the forgiveness of sin, for starters). Yet, if we think we can demand of God our understanding and timing of any externals, such as "greater works than these shall you do," then we're no better than "a wicked and adulterous generation."

It's a very shallow and foolish understanding to demand externals in order to validate your relationship with God, and we are headed for shipwreck or deception (or self-deception) in one form or another. That's much like a self-centered relationship with another human where our "measurement" of love is, "What have you done for me lately?". Pretty pathetic, eh?

Emotionally, if you live this way with God or man (trusting and needing externals rather than the "invisible" foundations of LOVE and the Tree of LIFE), you are going to come unglued at some point. You have an idol in your life. If you don't find your identity in deep love for Jesus and deep love for others, you will find your identity in externals. Someone says, "Now you have to add love, of course. But surely we have the right to expect a), b), c) and d)...because after all the scriptures say this and that..." The Scriptures also say that you don't have to see it in your lifetime. Four hundred years of silence from God. Four hundred years of no miracles, no healings that we are aware of, no prophets, no leaders that we are aware

of, and then the Messiah shows up. Four hundred years of bondage in Egypt—twice as long as “the United States of America” has even existed! Massive problems, from lashes on your back regularly, to heatstroke and family members dying of disease, to mistreatment and cursings by superiors that are Egyptian pagan false-god worshippers who hate you and despise you and mistreat you and abuse you. “Where is God? Isn’t a mid-life crisis appropriate here? I’ve read my Bible. I’ve read His Promises. Where is God in all this? I need a Plan B. God is letting us down here. ‘It isn’t working.’”

Someone might say, “Don’t I have the right to expect that He will be my Redeemer, my Deliverer?” Four hundred years is a long time, and I guarantee you no one lived to see the beginning and the end of that four hundred years. There wasn’t one single person alive who saw the beginning of captivity who also saw the end of captivity. No one was four hundred years old when Moses showed up. Point being, a lot of people died in what would have been total poverty, a total contradiction of their interpretation of the Scriptures, in total frustration and agony over this God that “let them down and didn’t do things the way He said He would.” They could have died in misery or they could have died in peace. If they died in peace it was because their priority was not in what they accomplished, or based on what they thought the promises were to be for them. A lot of people died, as we read earlier, “without having seen the promises fulfilled.” *Yet, they could die in peace, and they can die in satisfaction of the heart and soul if they experienced and distributed the love of God. That’s what it is about.*

Give your body to be burned. Big deal! Cast a mountain into the sea. So what? That’s what the Scriptures say. That is, if you don’t have agape love as a basis for your existence, loving people from the heart just as Jesus did with “the rich young ruler,” looking at them with eyes of redemptive love, even in the “tough love” that Jesus demonstrated with him. Remember how Jesus responded with Lazarus? Is that how you respond? Not crying for yourself, your “loneliness,” the “injustices” you suffer, but tears welling up in your eyes because you love others so deeply. If that is not what you are about in your own home, in your neighborhood, in the local Church (the Body of Jesus Himself!) and the world at large—if that’s not what you are about, you are headed for shipwreck. You will eventually come unraveled and unglued. You will have a mid-life, and a three-quarter life and a four-fifths life crisis. You are going to have all kinds of crises, and you deserve them because God has not yet taught you because you are not listening to what life is really about.

God IS love. God doesn't *do* love. He doesn't *give* love. He doesn't *command* love. *He is love*. And you don't have God if you don't have love. If that's not what you are about, you are going to have this war in your mind constantly—a frustrating, agonizing battle—and God is going to make sure you have it! If He loves you, He'll see that you live with it and that your existence is marked with misery and unrest if you don't get the idea straight that God is not primarily “command giver” or “rule maker” or “creator of all stuff” or “author of all true religion.” God is Love. He doesn't just command it. He doesn't just encourage it. He doesn't just generate it because of the good things He is. He IS Love, and that is what it is about. Everything else, no matter how noble is meaningless! And we have no right, in answer to the question directly, to any expectations whatsoever apart from LOVE as the root basis of what life is about. Everything else—all knowledge, all good works, all prophetic insight or “commitment” and everything else—comes along only as God authors it in His own place and time. *Nothing* else is a “given”!

Nothing? Really?! Well, let's just say that fallen, religious man has gotten himself into a *lot* of trouble by eating from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” We tend to say, “This is a good thing to do and that is a bad thing to do. I read that in the Bible!” Actually, believe it or not, it is arrogant to think in the narrow, finite terms we commonly think in! Surely you realize that our perceptions of “Truth” are biased by your time and space and definition, limited experience, limited intellect, as well as by the grotesqueness and blinding nature of our sin?! That's where Ishmael came from. Think about it. Abraham clearly had good intentions for God, responding “obediently” to His Word...but a sincerely *wrong* interpretation of that Word. God spoke to Abraham later and said, “Your son, your *only* son, Isaac.” Ishmael was not considered a “son” as Isaac was. Clearly God did not honor Abraham's “honest mistake.”

As for us? That “eating from the wrong tree,” “making ourselves to be gods, knowing good and evil” is where a lot of the fallacies and the corruptions of the denominational world and all of biblical history have found their origin. People are regularly *sure* they know exactly what God meant when He said thus and such, and “so I'm just going to go out and do it.” Thus was born the scourge of Ishmael, always “persecuting the child born of the Spirit.” And, as Paul said, “It is the same now.”

An example or two? God gave His People a Promised Land, and the “ten spies” messed up and had a “bad report.” When they learned they had blown it and were now sentenced to wandering in waterless places, they said (not because they loved God, but because they didn't like the

consequences of their sin and unbelief), “Okay, I was wrong. I’ll go do it. If it was a good “promise” before, and even a command, then surely I should go on up to the Promised Land!” No. It doesn’t work that way. It’s on GOD’S timing or not at all. “Promises” are not like that. God defines them, not our “claiming” them. You’re a dead man if you “go take the Land” without God’s Timing. And that’s what happened.

Another “New Testament” example? God commanded Peter to, “Take, kill and eat.” Peter, out of his perception of Truth, “accidentally” in defiance of the Living God, said, “Surely not, Lord! Don’t you know the Scriptures, God? The Scriptures say right here, ‘ \_\_\_\_.’ You *know* I’ll never disobey You and eat unclean animals. It’s right here in black and white! No, no, no, I can’t do this thing.” That lack of flexibility, that lack of “Spiritual depth perception” put Peter in a dangerous place. His attempt to obey God from his brain and his experience’s perception of “Truth” almost caused him to rebel face-to-face against God Himself! Wow. His communion was with his brain about God rather than communion with God Himself. The Scriptures are to be a road map *towards* God instead of a substitute for a living God (Jn. 5). God will not bless our external attempts to “please Him.” He will not grant His peace and prosperity of soul and heart and mind when we are looking at external stuff and having external “expectations” that will either satisfy or dissatisfy us. We’ll find ourselves in competition with ourselves, with others, or with some perceived “standard.” We’ll be arrogant and prideful if our human flesh is “successful,” and discouraged if we are “not.” There is no end to it all. God Himself—not perceived “good Christian objectives”—must be our *only* goal. The rest takes care of itself. He will confirm only what He is: LOVE. All else will find unrest and Ishmael’s fruit, in time: “Fading Glory.”

Father desires a Family that is in harmony with His feeling about things. Like any father or mother, it’s not of any great satisfaction to Him that His children would simply “do what they are supposed to do” apart from communion with His heart and intent. Our connection to *Him* and to what His heart longs for is what brings Him joy and satisfaction. People who do the right thing are a dime a dozen. (Well, maybe not, but you get the point.) People who feel what God feels are the rarest of gems. That’s what He is after. He is not asking for a bunch of robots to try to figure out mathematically what He wants and then go do it in order to prove that they love Him or to prove they are good disciples. “If you love Me, well, you’ll keep My commandments because you will be able to hear Me. You will be able to experience Me. You will be able to feel what I feel.” And when something happens, you will be able to respond to it. Not with a, “Surely not Lord, after all, I know better.” But rather, like Mary, when

visited by the stranger Gabriel, “Whatever you want, Lord! I don’t get it, I don’t understand it, but that’s Your will. Let it be so.” That is the one fit to be the mother of the Messiah, the person who birthed the Son of God. The creator of the universe lived in her womb and in her home. Why did God favor her in this way, of all women? Her heart and life was, “At your word. Let it be so. I don’t have to understand it in order to fully embrace it and love it.”

That’s the kind of heart He is looking for. Someone who can feel what He feels. Not just think you know what He knows, not just think you are doing what He wants you to do (because you are probably wrong—“Surely not, Lord.”) You think you know, but the point is you *don’t* always know. You think you do, and surely you are not just intentionally going against what you think is God’s will, but surely if you are after God rather than just things about God, you are going to be much more open to, “Really, Lord?” as opposed to, “Surely not, Lord.” This radically different response can only happen when we are rooted in a love affair with the Person that is speaking. We cannot be rooted in our arrogant little brains—brains that one could extract from your body, put on a scale and the needle would barely move. In the whole universe of Creation, our personal, decisive, adamant conclusions from the wrong tree should not weigh very much, even to ourselves! That’s not what life is about—your understanding about this or that. That has gotten a lot of people in trouble over the years. The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The issue of Life is not about “doing christian things,” but having an intimate, personal experience of God and His love, and also dispensing that love to those around you. *To see what He sees, to feel what He feels and to respond willingly to His heart, case by case, day by day, that’s what Christianity is really about.* You see, with that kind of attitude you can live your whole life in His Peace having never necessarily done any great and mighty “thing,” but you have experienced the Godhead!

“My Father and I will come and make Our home in you!” That experience brings a deep sense of belonging and a deep sense of worth, and a deep stability that is unshakable. “My Father and I will come and make Our home in you.” What else do you need but that? If that is true, you will also execute. You will also *do* what He calls you to do. You will also respond to Him case by case and situation by situation. Of course you will. Just like Jesus did. But the basis of the whole thing is the Father and the Son have come to make Their home in you. And you experience that Indwelling. It’s not just a theology. You didn’t read that someplace. You are experiencing that, and if you are experiencing that, then it will guide your whole existence. It will guide how you feel, how you think, how you respond to

things. You are not going to jump to arrogant conclusions based on your finite experiences of what you think is true. And when you fail, you are not going to unravel and you are not going to fall apart because you didn't have some assumption that it had to be some certain way anyway. You are looking for love, for the peace that flows out of the Father's heart and mind at this moment in time. "The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." You are looking for a sense of fellowship and the satisfaction and the love that comes from the Father and the Son living in you and affirming Themselves to you.

If you ask anything knowing, feeling, and experiencing the Father, it will be done. There is a process of fellowship and this love communion that is at the root of the Christian existence in its purest form. Not many people have ever lived that way, unfortunately. Therefore, mid-life crises or instability mark more than 99% of the existence of so-called Christians, and even true Christians because they are not living out of the Life of God, out of the Love of God, out of the supply of the Father, out of communion with the Godhead, out of desperate love one for another.

They don't yet know truly what it is to feel the Father's love and experience the love of God in others. Their experience of "church" or the "Body of Christ" is still primarily academic. Lord haste the Day when the Faith shall be sight! When the clouds over our eyes are rolled back like a scroll. When the Bride has truly "made herself ready" by being the Church Jesus died to birth—an equal yoke ready for His Return. This is the Purpose of all that we're speaking of: a gift "from Him and through Him and to Him!" Living in love rather than externals alone. Or even less than that. "Thank you Father, for being patient with us on the Journey towards You, but not so patient that we lose our way!" ☺



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# Are You Exclusive?

*Monday Night, December 1, 1997*

*(Transcript of part of a time when a large number of Believers were together. Probably in some far away land, in the 1740s?) ☺*

## Jesus Draws the “Line”

There have been times over the years when someone would say, “Oh, you’re just exclusive,” or “You think you’re the only ones.” I’d like to make a few comments regarding that flippant accusation; an accusation that probably all of us have heard from someone at some point in time.

It is pretty well-known that most religious bodies in the world only “fellowship” with people of the same brand. It’s virtually unheard of that there would be fellowship between brands. A Baptist would never have a Presbyterian minister come into their congregation and let him have the pulpit. Usually an Assembly of God person would never have a Baptist come to teach their congregation. It just doesn’t happen very often. If you go to your average Baptist camp meeting, you will not find anyone but Baptists there. That’s just the way it is. I’ve been around the block a few times, around the world a few times, and that’s just flat the way it is.

Most flavors stick together and that’s the end of it and there is no interrelationship. Assembly of God members don’t get letters from and visit places that are Nazarene and vice versa. It just doesn’t happen. Most of the religious world is very exclusive, very narrow and cut themselves off from every other brand virtually universally.

Contrast that with what it ought to be in every religious body, here or anywhere else. That is, we draw a very hard line based on whether or not someone wants to obey God. A very hard line. Jesus said the road is very narrow; few will be those who find it, and the ones that are on the narrow road are those that “*do the will of My Father.*” Not the people that believe the right thing or grew up in the right organization, but those that “*do the will of My Father.*” Those are the ones with whom He has fellowship.

On the other hand, many will say to Him on that day, “Lord, Lord, we went to church constantly, we did a lot of good deeds, we memorized

the scriptures,” and He will say, “Depart from Me. I never knew you. You didn’t do the will of My Father.” God draws a very hard line separating those who choose to obey Him and those who don’t. And that’s the only line there ought to be.

If we get letters from all over the world and all over the country, they ought to be with that thought in mind. They ought to be not from one particular brand, but ought to be from every kind of person regardless of their flavor or upbringing or their particular spiritual heritage. If we’re drawing the line where Jesus draws the line, we ought to get letters from everyone that loves Jesus. From people that want to obey Him without regard whatsoever for their brand name. If they want to obey Him and they want to grow, then we must extend fellowship, because we don’t choose our brothers and sisters. God does. Just like your children didn’t get to choose who their siblings are. They were birthed into the process and they didn’t get a vote. It was something that God did. And the same is true for our spiritual birth. It has nothing to do with the heritage; it has to do with whether or not we want to obey God from the heart and whether we want to walk in the light.

## Loving the Light

So, “exclusivity” must be there where Jesus draws the line. The lukewarm, for example, He vomits out of His mouth. Is He going to vomit His own Body out of His mouth? No. So, the people who we embrace ought to be those who are not lukewarm, just as one example. If we are part of His Body, if we have the mind of Christ, we are not going to be able to embrace that which makes Jesus sick. God has drawn a line. Lukewarmness is unacceptable and we *will* be exclusive on *that* issue. Lukewarmness has to make us sick or we are not connected to God.

The line is drawn there, but it’s drawn by God. Exclusivity? “The road is narrow and few will be those who find it.” Exclusive? Amen, if the line is drawn around the Lordship of Jesus Christ. However, if it’s drawn around what you happen to believe about the end times or wrangling about words or this or that, if the lines are drawn around a label that someone grew up with, then that kind of exclusivity is very wrong. We extend the grace of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to those that love Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, regardless of their past, regardless of their spiritual maturity at that moment in time. Those are not issues.

If they love the light and want to grow to be like Jesus—they just want to know Him and they want to live their lives for Him—then fellowship will be

there. If that's not what they want, then, as Paul said, "A curse be on everyone that doesn't love the Lord." I would say that Paul was pretty exclusive, and so was John and so was Peter. Read the second book of Peter. Serious stuff. Very serious, narrow-minded stuff. But it all centers around those that want to love Jesus and want to walk in the light versus those that don't.

So we must be exclusive based on the Lordship of Jesus, regardless of heritage, regardless of current belief system and any other baggage. We'll work the rest of that stuff out together as we grow into the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. But that's only possible if at the name of Jesus every knee bows. *That* is not optional.

## Four Ways to Build God's Way

And if we don't build that way, innocent people will die. Innocent people are destroyed or are at least immature their entire lives because of building improperly. The beef that we have is not with a person that loves Jesus with all their heart. The beef that we have is that a person who could love Jesus with all their heart is never given a chance to, because their environment is filled with leaven and the leaven leavens the whole batch. By God's decree, by God's ordained word, a little leaven "leavens the whole batch." And if we build in a way that has men's hands all over it, we end up with a lot of people who don't make it that could have. Unless we are building in the four ways that I am about to mention, unless we are building these ways as volunteers from the heart, it is nothing more than an institution and innocent people will die.

*Firstly*, we have to voluntarily bare our hearts. That's a choice that we make. We have to voluntarily bring our lives into the light, that our deeds are exposed. We have to find a way to do that, to soften our hearts and humble ourselves and not put on some kind of external show.

*Secondly*, we need to be willing to receive the light from others. If someone brings light into our life, we need to be willing to really seriously think about it. When I hear something being read, or listen to a tape, or whatever, I have to keep bringing myself back into focus and keep applying it to my own life. The tendency is to glaze it over in our mind's eye and stop *hearing* it, and watch the continuous stream of children in and out of the bathroom, or pay attention to the babies, or get distracted thinking about other people or things, or what happened to us today, or the headache that we have. The fact is, we have to discipline our hearts to pay attention to what is being said, whether it is something being read from 1741, or something being said to us face to face, we have to discipline

our hearts and minds to pay attention to it and to apply it to our own lives. That's what Jesus called loving the light. That's what the apostle John called walking in the light.

When things are brought to us (in whatever form they are brought to us), we have to find a way to push it down into our hearts and say, "If there is just 1% of this that applies to me, I want to get everything I can out of it. I don't want to miss it." That's loving the light. "I want to embrace this thing. Yes, I know how weak I am. Yes, I know how many times I have failed. Yes, I know how dull and senseless and foolish I am. But God help me to grab this seed and bury it in my heart that some day, some how, by your infinite mercy and power this can bear a harvest in my heart—thirty, sixty and a hundred fold." First the seed and then the head and the full grain in the head and the multiplication of that. That's the second thing. Being willing to receive the light from other sources, and to cherish and treasure it with all of our heart.

*Thirdly*, we must be willing, as a kingdom of priests, to do that for others—be willing to be responsible and care about other people's relationships with God.

Again, I'm speaking of a building process. I want to contrast that with the way men typically build, which is to have something to attend to hear a speech and to go home. To feel good because we "worshipped real hard" and we listened closely to a sermon and then we went home to our own lives...but we are not a priesthood! Not "joined and held together by every supporting ligament." Not "admonishing one another daily so that none are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

God builds a certain way for a reason—we need each other. These aren't meant to be neat-popular Scriptures to memorize. "You are baptized by one spirit..." "...into one body," so that no one can say to the others, "I don't need you." I DO need you as a person that has been baptized by one Spirit into the one Body. I need you to speak into my life. I need to hear the word of God, the treasure in your earthen vessel.

"How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?" That came from a very intelligent person—one of the officers of a very prosperous nation. "How can I understand?" It wasn't about intelligence. It was about, "How can one hear unless someone is sent to him?" It is about a supernatural transaction that comes from the voice of God through others. And we need to be willing to offer ourselves into that process. We need to not be afraid to do it. We need to not think that we are not qualified to do it. We need to not be disconnected or uncaring or unloving, so we choose not to do it. But rather, we need to offer ourselves into the process.

That's the way to build, as opposed to an institutional setting with all the cogs and gears all shiny and bright and seeming so spiritual as they do this and that over land and sea, but none of what I am talking about happens on a daily basis. That is man's way to build. God's way to build is through relationship, not institution and program and hierarchy. Through relationship. Through a kingdom of priests that He always wanted to have from the beginning of time.

The way we build has to reflect first of all the humility to open our hearts to others, voluntarily. Secondly, we must have the humility to receive the light and even love the light and to cherish every little bit of light that we can get from whatever source, even if we don't get it all. Even if 99% of it doesn't make sense, or we don't feel anything, or whatever...still, we cherish it. Don't resent it, don't throw it back in someone's face, don't turn the tables and try to make someone feel bad for risking. But receive and cherish. Honestly. Not with a false face of, "Thank you sooo much for bringing this to my attention. I will pray about it. Bless you for coming." We must open our hearts honestly and try to find a way for God to bring a tear to our eye. Beg Him to bring truth all the way to the core of our being. It takes conscious effort. It won't happen by accident.

So, thirdly, we volunteer ourselves to the process. We receive light graciously and with hunger and humility. We are willing to offer light to others in humility on a daily basis as a kingdom of priests.

*Fourthly*, as priests of God, we bring the word of God to each other on a regular basis in its many forms. We offer each other the word of God, not just as a personal challenge about some specific thing, but we also carry around within us the Word of God, the treasure of life, and we offer opportunities. It is vital that we do this for each other.

We need this. Maybe something that is read or a tape that you hear isn't something that was originally directed specifically to you by name. Maybe it happens to be a precious gift of God speaking through a man in 1741 that has the seed of Life in it and could bring those with soft hearts great benefit. So we offer those things to each other when we don't have anything specific to say. We still hold up the light that lights men's paths for them on a regular basis. Whether it is a cassette tape, or a writing, or opening up 2 Timothy and reading it together. Whatever we do, we do it for each other on a regular basis.

We bring it to work. We bring it wherever we go. Always ready, in season and out of season to bring the word of God into each other's lives. Maybe it is something specific. Maybe it is something general. But God will get

something out of it if we have those other qualities. Right? If I have that quality of being willing to bring something out in humility, that has never been dealt with or noticed by anyone else (or at least no one ever said anything), if I have that kind of humility to love the light, and if I have the humility to receive light from someone else, then when someone brings something that's of the word of God in a more general sense, I will be treasuring that. And I will want it to find a place in my heart to divide between soul and spirit, bone and marrow. So you have done me good. Even if it's the fiftieth time I've heard it this year.

The word of God is like food. It's not, "I've heard that before," "I've read that before," "I already know that." That's not the way it is when you are really in love with Jesus. "Like a newborn baby craving pure spiritual milk of the word." How many babies say, "Oh, I've already had that milk, I don't need that. I'm bored." It doesn't take very long before they start crying again because they want the food. They need the food. They live on it. Not by bread from earth, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We are craving that, and we don't mind hearing 2 Timothy or Deuteronomy 8 for the thirty-eight thousandth time, because God feeds us through it. We are watchful. We are praying. Every sentence is different than it was the last time.

This is a building process. This is how we must build together. It is through relationship and through the living Word of God, through treasure in earthen vessels.

## Everybody Deserves a Chance

Does it matter if you are a Baptist or a Methodist or Assembly of God? Doesn't matter to me. Does it matter if you love the Word of God and you want to obey Him with all your heart? Yeah, that matters a lot to God and to me. Does it matter that an institution would create an environment where God's people are not daily interacting with each other; where it's just not important if they do that? A few in the committed nucleus do that, but as a general rule, the vast majority feels no need to do that. They have not been *taught* to do that. There is no example of that in their personal and practical lives. The leadership isn't doing it, and the vast majority of people they know aren't doing it because something very much like a treadmill was built where people are running in circles every Sunday morning from nine to eleven, and never go anywhere, but feel like they got exercise, and think that's good enough. Does that matter? You bet it matters. I have a problem with THAT. I don't have a problem with the people, but I have a

problem with the fact that people have been robbed because they are not living in an environment that God has ordained for His people to grow in, where there are relationships every day, where they don't have to die and fall away. It doesn't have to be that way.

The pillar and foundation of truth is not just an individual thing. It's the Church of the living God. "I will build my Church that the gates of hell will not prevail against." All these things are essential from a personal level. When we cease to live this way, we cease to have the life of God flowing through the Body of Christ and the gift of Christ on a daily basis, and are no longer living and walking in the light. The Lampstand will be removed. There are no tricks to this. There is no slight of hand; there is no rabbit out of a hat. There is no exclusivity in the sense that one group is better than another group. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with God's wisdom and how to build properly. And that's a volunteer process that each of us have to participate in. And if we choose not to participate in God's way to build, we are writing our own epitaph. Because this is God's way to help weak people, to His Glory, to depend on one another and to learn how to love Him, and to keep us safe from the holocaust of satan's hatred.

Exclusive? Yeah, in a way. But it's not about club or name or brand. And it's not about anyone being better than anyone else. It's because we are all so needy that we must build God's way. Everybody deserves a chance to live in that. They deserve a chance. Not that everyone will choose to live that way. Not that everyone will love the light, given the opportunity to love the light. But they will die if they don't love the light. If they resent the light, they will die regardless of the environment. But everybody at least deserves a chance to love the light. And that is only possible if there is enough light around them to know whether they love it or not, a chance to choose to soften their heart if they hear His voice today. "Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart." Most people don't get to hear His voice today. All they hear is the Wall Street Journal, and Good Morning America. That's all they hear. They don't have a chance to soften their heart today if they hear His voice, because men are building with their hands all over it and calling it "church," out of greed, out of ambition, out of ignorance and a hundred other reasons, I suppose.

## He Will Build His Church

All I am saying is this: Let's be devoted to building personally in those four ways, the way God said to build. And let's encourage everybody, whatever

their heritage is, wherever they live, to build with those four things every day of their life. And God will be glorified, and God will get His Bride, and God will use the Gifts in the Body of Christ, and intertwine them into a cord that cannot easily be broken. Divine synergy. That's God's heart for His people and for His Church.

Call it exclusive if you want. But I don't think it is, except for the exclusivity that the only qualified people are those who want to love Him and want to obey Him and want to walk in the light. In that sense, it has to be exclusive because He made it that way. In as far as a person wants to know Him and to love Him and wants to walk in the light, then together we need to help each other around the world to do that. And in all of our weakness, all of our frailty, our lack of giftedness, our lack of talent and intellect, our lack even of commitment, our lack even of holiness, our lack in every conceivable area that would bring us any credit at all, and yet somehow, together, by the grace of God and the love of Jesus and love of one another—a true devoted love of one another—we are all going to make it and make Him very proud of us in spite of our weaknesses.

How we build matters, and how we offer ourselves to the process matters a lot. Let's make sure we help each other and fulfill and walk in all four of those things that make a church truly a Church, and help other people, wherever they may be, to do the same. And if they love the light, God will take good care of them. And He will build and He will bring lives into their environment that bring Him glory. He wants to build it far worse than we could ever imagine. "I will build my Church." And if we will be faithful in those four ways at home and abroad, God will do some marvelous things.

## It Matters!

I want you to hold two things in your mind:

First of all, what "exclusivity" is and why it must be *properly* defined. It is not defined by separation based on heritage or any other externals, but God does have a thought about it. And, I want you to understand what we need to fight for in terms of exclusivity. That is, Jesus' Lordship and how we are supposed to build in our lives and others' lives.

How we build has always mattered. That's why God went to such great lengths to define in exact detail how the lampstand was to be beaten out of one piece of gold, and how many stems in the almond leaves, the ark and the angels on the lid, and the gold and the kind of wood...extreme detail down to the kind of materials, the exact colors that are supposed to be in

the tabernacle. Immense detail. God cares how we build His Lampstand, the Church. Uzzah found out the high price of trying to do “God’s things” in man’s way, because the end product of what He wants to accomplish in us is very much connected to how we build.

Here is one verse that establishes the whole point 10,000 times over—“A little leaven leavens the whole batch.” How we build matters drastically. There ain’t no way, Sunday morning from 9 to 11, you have any clue what leaven is, what weakness is, or what rebellion is. You haven’t any clue. There is no way to get at it. You can preach your little head off, and you will never know what the difference between leaven and rebellion and weakness are. You will never know. How can you get leaven out of the batch in such a situation? When you build improperly, there is no way to obey God in even that one simple matter. A little leaven will leaven the whole batch, by God’s decree.

So, being exclusive has to be around the Lordship of Jesus and loving of the light *only*, regardless of background. And, how we build matters immensely to God, and how we build in those four things matters. A relationship that isn’t centered around fellowship for my own personal needs; a relationship that is centered around being mutual priests and bearers of the treasure of God—that is how we must view ourselves. That’s what a relationship is for. Not for entertainment, not so we won’t be lonely anymore, but it’s so we can help each other know God better in those four ways. And if we will build that way, that is how dumb, foolish, weak people like us will actually, somehow bring a little bit of glory to God and avoid the trap of the devil. Let’s work together on this and offer ourselves into that process, both here and to the four corners of the earth for Jesus’ sake.



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# HIS Mark

*Friday Evening, December 20, 1991*

*Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand." And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the Glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."*

*As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple. Then he said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!" So they went out and began killing throughout the city.*

*While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" He answered me, "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.' So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done." Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded." (Ezekiel 9:1-11)*

**"G**o throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."

Have you ever noticed that this is not about people that are *doing* detestable things? This is about people that *don't grieve* and *lament* over detestable things. The people who refused to do detestable things were also destroyed by God. It was the people who grieved and lamented over the detestable things that were saved. If they didn't *grieve* and *lament*

over the detestable things, they were not saved because they didn't love what God loves. If they don't love what God loves and they don't hate what God hates, then they're in the same category as the people that do the detestable things. There's no distinction made here between those that *do* the detestable and those that *blend in* with the detestable even if they don't *do* the detestable things themselves. They were all killed—men, women, children, elders, men at the sanctuary... Everyone who can blend in with it and doesn't stand against it, all of those will be wiped out according to the Word of God.

Lot was a man it says that in his day and his time was tormented in his righteous spirit by the lawless acts around him. If we're not **tormented** by it, we're in the same category according to God as those that **do** it. If we don't have any spine, any backbone, enough to say, "**Enough! Don't sing about Jesus and don't wear His name unless you're going to live for Him!**" If we won't stand up for it, if we won't grieve and lament over those things that are detestable in His sight, then we're in the same category as those that are doing the detestable things in God's sight. That's what it says. That is what God said about it. If we don't have any backbone, if we can just kind of smear our molasses over the top of it and say, "I'm ok, you're ok..." "Well, he says he's a christian..." "Well, they're a nice person, they seem sincere..." "Well, let's not be holier than thou..." If that's the way we are going to handle our lives, then we are in the same category as rapists and murderers and arsonists and liars and thieves and all those other things.

## Stand Valiantly

If we won't stand valiantly against the detestable deeds around us, the contradictions and hypocrisies, if we won't stand valiantly and visibly against those things, then we might as well be doing them because we're going to fall in the same category in God's sight. Isn't that what God said? (Yes) And is that the only place where God said that? (No, not hardly.) It's pretty clear in the scriptures and we need to be willing to stand up for what God said and not blend in with it thinking that "Well, I'll just do it right even if everyone else does it wrong, and that will make it ok." That's not what God said! Jesus was willing to die for it and those that are followers of Jesus are willing to die for it.

Don't call yourself a follower of Jesus if you're not willing to follow Jesus. I'm not talking about being arrogant and blowing over the top of people, but I'm saying there are things that are real and true that are not to be compromised. In our hearts and in our spirits we know when

we've prostituted truth for our own well-being or for our own reputation or carnal sympathies or because of hidden sin in our own heart. We've compromised and we don't have any courage left to deal with anything else. We know when we've sold truth. The Bible says, "Buy the truth and sell it not." Jesus IS the Word. Jesus IS the Truth. Don't think you can white-wash over, or overlook Truth (in the name of "love," of course!), and still have JESUS. No way! He is inseparable from His Word, and from Truth! That's why He could say, "If you REALLY love Me, you will obey Me." When we love Him, we "LOVE the Truth" and we "Love the Light" and "like newborn babies, we CRAVE the pure Spiritual milk of the Word." If HE lives inside of us, we could never be content with lukewarmness within, or in others that wear His Name! (1John3)

## Wisdom

This does require God's wisdom. If it doesn't have God's wisdom all over it, it will thrash people rather than set them free. The purpose of the Word of God is to set men free from their sin. You need to understand that. It's not a matter of beating them with it, it's a matter of saying, "*You may not realize this, but you are in bondage. You need to know the truth so the truth can set you free and if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed. You're in bondage. If you really knew your own heart, you would know you're in bondage and as you pursue things on this level—the hypocrisy, the contradictions—you become a slave. And so, you can get mad at me if you want, but I only want you to be free because I care about you.*" That's different than beating them with it. The courage is still there, calling a spade a spade is still there, but you're doing it for their best interest, not to get even or for revenge or to puff yourself up. You're doing it because you want them to be free. Even though they may not look like it in all their arrogance and all their casualness, they are slaves. God said they were, it's a fact. No matter how comfortable or secure they look, they are slaves and they are in bondage and they will suffer immensely in this life and the life to come. And so, it's for their sake in order to buy them back from the deceptions of the enemy that you dare to risk your reputation or your job or whatever. People can sense a difference between whether you're doing it for them or whether you're doing it to satisfy some self-righteousness. They know the difference. They can smell it. Help them! **And when the Son sets them free they will be truly free in practice and reality!!!**

Now, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."



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# Bulldozers and YOU!

*Thursday Morning, August 22, 2002*

**I**t matters to God that we truly live out the Life of His Son together, rather than just teach about it and sing about it!

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

And, in lieu of a Lampstand where we live, our job is to be Faithful with our "Bulldozer Assignment"—clearing the Ground, Preparing the Way. We are "voices crying in the wilderness" when we are in this position. We will find ourselves aggressively working to clear the stumps and the rocks, and sow the Seeds of His Glorious Life, on earth as it is in Heaven. We will *make the time* in the evenings and on the weekends to visit places and people—shaking, beseeching, imploring, rattling cages, shaking boats, praying valiantly, loving emphatically. And then, as *we* are prepared in this way, and *perhaps* the place where we live is prepared for Him, He Sends to "every town and village where He is about to go." HE "determines the exact times and places where men should live." If we are "seeking first the *Kingdom*" (rather than our li'l ol' jobs, our preferences about climate, nation, housing, biological relatives and the like), we will be able to HEAR Him better and know where those "exact times and places" may be.

*Hearing* Him is directly related to being *abandoned* to His Voice, in utter and radical obedience (Rom. 12:1-2; Jn. 7,8,15).

And, what does it mean to “seek first the Kingdom”? The Kingdom, as you know, consists of a King...and some dumb. ☺ The Kingdom is about *people*, not just the King. “Seek first the *Kingdom*”—not just the King. “Seek first” the Expression and Life and Benefit and Subjects of the King. If His People are *listening* to the Shepherd’s Voice, He’ll direct our steps into His ultimate plan for publicly humiliating and defeating the enemy. That’s WHY we’re still on this planet. “God’s Intent, NOW through the CHURCH, is to make known His many-faceted and powerful Wisdom, even to the principalities and powers” and to impart His Life as He “builds His Church that the gates of Hell cannot withstand.”

## Priorities!

PRIORITIES! “Seek FIRST the Kingdom!” Few would *tolerate* Acts 2:42-47 in their lives because *honestly*, they don’t *want* the Christ-Life. They prefer God to be on *their* schedule. That’s “love of the world” and “lukewarmness” and “idolatry” on some level, whether intentional or not. If we allow the world and its demands and our desires to dominate our schedules, and then try to *add* Him to all of that nonsense, we’re making a huge mistake and we’ll never “SEE Him Who is invisible,” or “SEE the Kingdom” in our lives. We may “escape as one through the flames,” but we’ll never truly “taste the power of the Coming Age”—as is our Inheritance. Unfortunately, most will die in that state. They allow guitar lessons, little league baseball, errands, housework, making money, spending money, isolating and focusing on their genetic family, home-schooling, and a thousand other things to consume the majority of their time and energy.

Those who *say* they have continual wondrous ecstatic experiences with Jesus, but live in this state of mixed priorities and worldliness (except on Sunday) are generally hallucinating. Living *truly* in “the power of an indestructible Life” comes from “losing your life”—“dying to the world and the world to you”—and “the seed falling to the ground and dying.” The *only* place where the enemy is shamed and destroyed is “the cross.” “It is the same now.” He is our “all in all” and one will “live and move and have our being in Him,” or it is not the Testimony of Heavenly Life which Jesus lived for and died for. We may *not* be addicted to going to “bury my father,” or “saying goodbye to my father and mother.” Those radical things *JESUS* said were mandatory in order to be the real thing—*ARE MANDATORY!* ☺ Jumping up and down on Sunday in a meeting,

or knowing a lot of Bible will not substitute for Reality. “Jesus we know and Paul we know about—but who are YOU!!??” said the unimpressed demons that ripped to shreds the religious men with the right words. In the unseen realm, it matters what our *real* daily priorities are, and how we really live, and where our passions and time REALLY are.

The Kingdom is entered with much tribulation, I guess, eh? Worth it? OH, yes. “A HUNDRED mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, possessions, tribulations, and Zoë Life that always was and always will be!” 😊



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# The Kingdom Suffers Violence

~1950's

*“The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and every man entereth violently into it” (Luke).*

“Here is the spirit of citizenship in that Kingdom—‘by force.’ Why? This is not merely an appeal to be in earnest—though it certainly includes that, seeing what a tremendous thing this Kingdom is, and what an immense loss will be suffered if we do not take it seriously. But you see, the Lord Jesus is speaking as in the midst of things which are constantly opposing. There is a whole organized system expressing tremendous prejudice. There is everything, from devil and men, to obstruct. To enter in requires violence. If you can be hindered, you will be hindered. If you are going to be easy going, you will give antagonistic forces all the ground they want to put you out.

“That is why I pointed out that it is not going to be a once-for-all entering into that Kingdom, but a continuous entering. The Kingdom is so much bigger than conversion. Of course, if you are going to be saved at all—I mean saved initially—you will have to mean business for that. You will have to make it a desperate matter, because there will be everything to stop you. But the Kingdom means a very great deal more than merely getting into it, far more than being converted. There is a great deal more in the purpose of God for our lives than we have ever imagined, and if we are going to enter into that, violence has to characterize us. We must desperately mean business, and come to the place where we say: ‘Lord, I am set upon all that You mean in Christ. I am set upon that....I am going right on with You for all Your purpose. I am going to do violence to everything that would get in the way.’ It calls for violence and we have to do a lot of violence to get all that God wills for us.

“How easily many lives are side-tracked, simply because they are not desperate enough! They are caught in things which limit—things which may be good and some of God in them, but nonetheless are limiting things.... The only way for us to come into all that the Lord means—not

only into what we have seen but into all that He has purposed—is to be like that? Well, if we are passive, there is everything to be lost. If we mean business, there is everything to be gained. The Lord make us men and women like that, lest we be numbered among those of whom it is said that they ‘have ears to hear, and hear not’ (Ezek.)”

*T.A. Sparks*

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# What to do About “My Convictions”

## Healthy, Devoted Relationships Part 3

*Thursday Night, February 16, 1995*

### The Dilemma

I want to be “led by the Spirit.” (What could be more important than a sweet relationship and partnership with Jesus?!) I know that it is the “Church” (not my individual “walk”) that “the gates of hell cannot withstand.” It is the “Church” (not my personal finite understanding of things) that is “the pillar and foundation of Truth.” Every matter should be “established by the testimony of two or three.” Also, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” There is “wisdom in a multitude of counselors,” and “Admonish one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” And, and, and....

So then, HOW can I have my own relationship with God, “discern the Body,” and draw on the Life that God has placed in the context of the local Church all at the same time?! Doesn’t one make the other unnecessary or contradictory?

Can I have a conviction and still function in oneness and trust of others? What if I have a really strong conviction about a certain thing, and then I ask a few others about it? What if they definitely have a history of walking with God in relationship with Him, but their convictions are totally different from mine? My conviction about this particular thing is very strong, and some trusted laborers in Christ feel entirely differently about it all.

Should my default mode be that, when there are two or three others who see something differently, I should trust their convictions over my own? Is it better to take a chance on being wrong together than to go fully on what I think and end up being wrong by myself?

## Disputable Matters

There's a whole category of things that Romans 14 refers to as **disputable matters**. It's important that we work that into the equation also. Some things just aren't all that important, such as whether or not we buy a red car or a blue car. In most cases, it's probably not a life or death situation. Of course, you might have had a dream the night before and arrived at a conclusion, based on that dream, that it really *was* a life or death matter. Then, you might have a true, honest-to-goodness conviction that something that would normally be of little importance is worth paying attention to. What if two or three witnesses come along and say, "We really feel like this is a dangerous decision, because of \_\_\_\_\_." The important issues in "discerning the Body" is not whether or not we come to an impasse, but whether or not we can agree that we are going to work and go forward together and help each other, whatever the future might bring.

Do we feel certain that the issue is not a disputable matter, but that we have a conviction that we believe is from God? We need to use that terminology very carefully. The things I choose to express as "convictions" should not easily be about small, trivial issues. And, the things I defend "against all comers" ought to be things that can be supported in the Word of God and the Character of God—things that have Eternal significance, not simply the traditions and pleasures of men—masked in the lingo of "my conviction." Learn to yield to others. The greatest compliment Jesus paid to anyone was to a man that had learned to yield to others (Mat. 8:9-10) and therefore was trustworthy. I want to save the things I consider "convictions" or "the leading of the Spirit" for REAL things, not matters of preference or flesh. I might have opinions about some things. But I ought to save the things I label as convictions for matters that are truly of consequence to Heaven. A conviction is something I've got to stand on. And I'd better be prepared to pay the consequences for standing on it. All of this is too often a charismatic game, based on one's imagination, or a "power" thing where one can exert themselves over others, or a pride thing ("I have my OWN relationship with God!"—"I only listen to the Holy Spirit!"), or some other childish counterfeit.

## Not All Convictions Are Created Equal

There are, it should be obvious, different levels of "conviction," also. For example, an older brother visiting from another country makes a statement in a living room full of people that his grandmother told him the moon is made out of cheese, and since she would never lie to him, it is

most certainly made of cheese. I have a “conviction” that the moon is not made out of cheese. However, I also have a conviction that Jesus offered His Blood that we not belittle one another, and that we make every effort towards Unity in His Spirit and Righteousness. As you might guess, this conviction is a HIGHER conviction than the one about the composition of our moon’s surface. Therefore, I SAVE my conviction about the moon’s composition for some other occasion when it would not embarrass this brother. It is simply not important, though it is a “conviction.” There might well be a subject relating to this brother’s church or family or personal relationship with God that would require important conversation, and we do not need to discuss anything as trivial as the moon and “use up” our convictions on the unimportant. I’m sure you remember the fable of “The Boy Who Cried ‘Wolf’”

While being careful to not be overbearing with “my convictions,” I MUST not, on the other hand, be lazy in pursuing God. When issues are “at stake” I must cultivate a relationship with Him that is not simply (and tragically) second-hand. I really do need to learn to hear God and befriend Him (Jn. 15:14-15; Rom. 8:13-14; Jn. 17:3). To simply take everything that others are convicted about at face value without pursuing God Himself is a shallow way to live and very unfulfilling. On the other hand, to put oneself above the Life of Jesus in His Church by “doing my own thing” is to persecute and reject Jesus. What a dilemma! Not. It really is a simple and beautiful thing to do it all God’s Way. Let’s look a little deeper.

## Paul Had To!

An example: Paul had a conviction he should go to Jerusalem. We may find ourselves in a similar situation to the one Paul was in when Luke and Agabus (the prophet) and some of the other folks said, “Paul, do not go to Jerusalem. Don’t do it.” Here is the Spirit of Oneness that the Father is looking for at such a delicate time: Paul said, in essence, “I’m sorry, I have to do this. I must go to Jerusalem. I wish I could do it your way. You know me. I’m not being arrogant or hardheaded or disrespectful. I dearly love you brothers. I just believe with all of my heart that I MUST go to Jerusalem. Would you be supportive of me? I NEED you to stand by me.”

Paul needed to walk out of that room either having stuck to his conviction or having fully given his heart over to those brothers who said, “Don’t go. Don’t go.” There could be nothing in the back of his mind like “We’ll see. I think I’m right. I’ll show them. I told them so. I really resent them making me do it this way, but I guess I had better go along with it.” To walk

out of the room with that attitude would be sin against God. Paul would have heard for the second time from the resurrected Jesus, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”

On the other hand, if the others had walked out of the room thinking, “Paul is just pig-headed and hyper-spiritual. He’s an elitist. The rules don’t apply to him. He just thinks he’s better than everybody else. We told him he shouldn’t go, and off he goes. Five against one, and he does it anyway.” If anybody had walked out of the room with that attitude, they too would have sinned against the Living God by not discerning the Body.

By the time they walked out of that room, either Paul would go out totally supportive of the other brothers and do it their way, or they would go out totally supportive of Paul and do it his way. Or, perhaps, they would not do anything until they knew together what the Father wanted them to do. Regardless, there would be a mutual commitment that whatever happened next, they were going to be together and work it out together. That’s God’s attitude about it. And that’s exactly what they did.

The Spirit of Christ speaking through a brother or sister in a situation such as Paul’s (with a differing of convictions) would sound like, in essence, “Brothers, I hear what you’re saying. I understand where you’re coming from. I appreciate it, and I respect you deeply. I don’t ever in my life recall having to go directly against what you brothers collectively have thought needed to happen. But, in this case, I must go and I am begging you to support me in this. If I’m wrong, help me to pick up the pieces later if there is anything left to pick up. But I have to do this and I need your support.” In Paul’s situation, they supported him and wished him well. Nobody stormed out of that room, and nobody went out of that room slandering Paul as being pig-headed or hyper-spiritual or an elitist or anything unkind or divisive. To them, discerning the Body meant a commitment that they would work together.

Now if it were a disputable matter, shame on Paul if his preference or his opinion allowed him to overrule all those brothers! Shame on him. But, if you trace it back about 20 years, he had a vision in the temple after his conversion that he would stand before the Gentiles and their kings. He had 20+ years of knowing there would be a time when he would have to stand in front of kings. And now they are saying, “Paul, if you go to Jerusalem, you’re going to be bound. You’re going to have to stand in front of kings.” And he says, “I know. I have to. I was told that I’d have to talk to the Gentiles and to their kings. This is just the next step in my life. I hate it too. But I have to. It’s a conviction.” It wasn’t a disputable matter. He had real evidence that he was to move in that direction.

There will be things that are disputable matters, and I want to yield as many of those as I can to others who have convictions. I want to make sure, though, that it's their convictions I'm yielding to, not just their preferences or opinions. I don't want opinions and preferences imposed on me in hyper-spiritual lingo. But if there's a conviction about the matter, I really want to be supportive of it. If I possibly can be, I will be. And if I have a conviction to the contrary, I'm not just going to blow them off. I'm going to beg them to work with me on it. "Support me in this, and we'll walk it out together. I need your support. I need you to help me through this. This is a conviction I have to follow. Please?"

## Abraham Had To!

There's a scene in the movie *Abraham* in which Abraham was teaching Isaac how to shoot a bow and arrow. His friend came up to him and said, "Come on Abraham, let's go back. A family wants you to perform a circumcision." But Abraham said, "I have disappointed God before, I will not do it again. I must train Isaac and not be distracted in anyway, even by good things. This one thing I do." Behind the scenes, Abraham said, "I bet you have talked to Sarah, haven't you?" She was, in fact, not supportive and was speaking to others secretly about her opinions. Sounds much like Miriam and Aaron's conversation about their view of some of Moses' decisions in Numbers 12, doesn't it? Look it up. God was not amused. Slandering what one does not understand is a serious sin listed in Jude. Sarah, in her case, was essentially slandering her head. Again, it is certain that God was not amused.

Now I realize that scene in the *Abraham* movie was fictitious; it probably never really happened. But the point is that Abraham had a conviction and they were not being supportive of it. In fact, they were talking about him behind his back. "Yeah, I have been talking to Sarah and she questions this too." That sort of dissension behind the scenes is very destructive. Abraham had a clear conviction. He would not let God down again. He had disappointed Him before, and he wasn't going to do it again. They should have supported him in that conviction instead of questioning why he wasn't doing circumcisions like he was "supposed to." He was attempting to follow God's Light for his life, and they were thinking he should be doing something else. They didn't (in the movie) even sit and talk with him about his "strange" behavior! That's an example of what *not* to do in a situation where we "have a conviction" that a brother is moving in the wrong direction. He may be, but let's talk! The "double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." It is likely that if he is motivated by sin or

foolishness, it will come out in the course of up-close living. (*This brings up another point. We MUST be living out the command of Hebrews 3:12-14, DAILY, with all of our local brothers and sisters in order to work out much of what the Father would be calling us to. Please put yourself in that situation, for Jesus sake, or you'll likely never know what your Destiny might have been! We'll need to discuss this a bit more, later on, for sure.*)

As a rule, in disputable matters, we need to help everybody to sort out the situation that has come up as clearly as possible (based on Godly teachings and principles) and then just do the best we can with it. But some issues are really not disputable matters. They are matters of deep conscience and conviction, based on real things. In such cases, it really isn't proper to ask or demand that people violate their consciences and convictions. We need, instead, to support them and help them to walk it out (and then help them to pick up the pieces later if they were wrong). We need to do everything we can to help them see it as clearly as possible, and then we need to be as supportive as we can, like we would if Paul decided to go to Jerusalem.

## “You Who Are Spiritual”

Here's the tricky part, though: What if you get together with people whose minds are not conformed to the Word of God, who are not building on the principle of putting His Word “into practice” (Mat. 7)? Unregenerate and immature folks can have all sorts of opinions about all sorts of things. There will always be, in a typical “church” situation, loose cannons on the deck ready to blow somebody's head off! “I have a conviction and God told me this and that,” says one whose whole life is a shambles. It's not believable. “I don't have a huge reason to believe God told you anything. I have little evidence, based on the quality of your life and character in your home and workplace and your speech and decisions, to believe that you are able to hear God accurately about things like this.” Quality of life comes into play. “A tree is known by its fruit,” and “wisdom is proved right by her children.” “Your babies, I'm sorry to say, are much deformed. I've seen your character and heard your tongue. I know a bit about your days. I know of your attitude when you come home from your workplace. I know of your lack of hunger for the Word, and your pride. I don't trust your wisdom very much at this point, though I am willing to listen. And I even know that God can work something through it. But your fruit, as you must admit, is not very good, and your walk with God is seriously questionable.” Sometimes that will come into play in a conversation with someone who has a “conviction” about something. He may really need to question his own wisdom as he takes an honest look at his own fruit.

But it's different when you're dealing with people of integrity who really desire to walk out the Word of God in their lives. The practice of their lives is built on the Rock, and they are putting His Word into practice. They are stable and sound, and their fruit is solid. Their lives are trustworthy as they are "in the midst" "daily from house to house." They live testable, Light-walking sort of lives *amongst* the Saints (as opposed to "alongside of" the saints, "about" the saints, or "in front of" the saints based on "reputation" or the plastic fruit of public performance). Then, when they have a conviction about something and my conviction differs, we can, and must, come out of that room supportive of whatever decision we've made about it together. That is a demonstration of our commitment to discerning the Body, to working together and staying together through whatever consequences this thing might bring. To store judgments or opinions, or to engage in any sort of slander in our hearts or bitterness toward someone else, would be *very destructive*. We can't permit these things in our hearts. It is just an absolute shame for Jesus, and a tragic loss of Testimony, for anything less than Oneness to be the conquering Fruit of obedience and humility.

## The Son—With Us in the Fiery Furnace

Back to some practical problems. Suppose you have a knot in your stomach about something, yet there's no clarity about it. You can't really explain why you feel this way. And if someone were to ask you, you'd have to say, "I don't know." You just have a knot in your stomach. Does that come from conviction or is it better described as an opinion? It might even run contrary to what you want to do. Your flesh wants to do one thing, but you *need* to do the opposite. You just don't know why.

Well, I'd probably say something like this: "Brothers, if you can, I really need you to support me in this. I hear what you are saying and it sounds right, but I've got this knot in my stomach and I really feel like I need to go this way. Can you support me in it? Will you work with me on it?" That way, you're not just blowing them off. Your attitude isn't, "Well, you're trying to violate my conscience and I don't like it. I have a knot in my stomach because I think I ought to do this and you're trying to tell me to do that instead, and I resent it."

You can, of course, have that kind of haughty or impatient attitude about it. Or you can turn to them in submission and "discern the Body." "I hear what you're saying, and I appreciate it completely. You're probably even right. But I have this knot in my stomach that says I've got to do this.

Will you support me in it? I need your help. I can't conscientiously do it that way. I can't even tell you why. But would you be willing to do a little experiment with me and help me through this? Then you can laugh at me and tell me 'you told me so' later. You'll get your enjoyment out of it, and I'll learn my lesson the hard way. But would you stick with me on it?"

That way, you're still submissive and discerning the Body, as opposed to being embittered by them trying to make you do one thing when you wanted to do something else. Nor are you acting like a dead rat, dragged around by the tail saying, "Okay, okay, I have a conviction about this, but they all say otherwise, so I'll just roll over and play dead." No, you really do need to talk about it further and work it through to a deeper level until there's a mutual relational submission on it. Don't hide from that "dealing" that your heart is very likely in need of, even beyond the issue itself!

Of course, if it's just a preference or an opinion, bag it. Listen, there's "wisdom in the multitude of counselors." Listen up. If it's just your feeling, preference, or opinion, bag it. Go with those that are over you in the Lord or those that are around you in the Lord. But if it really is a conviction, then a submissive way to handle it is to ask them to work with you on it. Tell them what you're feeling, even if you don't know why, and ask them to work through it with you. And unless they know for a fact it is a life-or-death issue spiritually, they, more than likely, will work with you on it. They will find some way to do so. Maybe Agabus will go with Paul to Jerusalem or something like that. "I feel much better about that. I still don't think you should go, but if Agabus is with you, I can live with it much more easily."

In other words, there might be another answer we haven't considered, which God has for us, if we will persevere *together*. After all, He did *promise* to be with us in a special way when we're together, and unified (Mat. 18). As long as we are committed to each other enough not to blow it off or roll over and play dead, Jesus can work with us, as He did in that other "fiery furnace" with our three brothers, Shadrach and friends. There might be another possibility that would manifest the incredible riches of God's Wisdom, if we'd simply submit ourselves to His Ways in order to hear Him.

## Finding the Words

Now you may be wondering whether, over time, you'll eventually grow out of not being able to explain the feelings of conviction that you have. Is that sort of connectedness with the Father, where you know what He is

trying to tell you, something that you grow into? Must I go on bumbling and stumbling around like a fool until I get there?

Well, I'd have to say that I know those that are a hundred times better now than six or eight years ago at understanding those spiritual "gut feelings," and comprehending the Scriptures that bring explanation to the issues at stake. They are more able to put words, rather than just feelings, on the Father's voice. That does come with time. But it isn't necessarily true that you'll *always* know why. Why did Abraham leave his parents' homeland and go out into the wilderness? He never did find out why he was going. And it wasn't just because he wasn't spiritual enough. There was no way he could have been spiritual enough back in Ur to know what was going to happen. The Father just flat wasn't telling him. He just said, "Go, I'm not telling you where. I'm not telling you why. Just go." He just had his spiritual "gut feeling" to go on.

In most cases, though, God does have clear thoughts in His mind. Jesus said, "I tell you my plans because you're my friends" (Jn. 15). The closer our friendship with Jesus is, the more likely He is to let us in on His plans—not just what He's doing, but why He's doing it. As our friendship grows, we really will know most of the time what that knot in our stomach is about and why we have it. Most of the time, but not always.

As we work through these things together and make mistakes and fall on our faces, that's okay. More than anything else, God is after our hearts. He's out to make us more into the image of Jesus.

## Uncommon Living

These are extremely important matters. Frankly, most people that care have had enough experience in the church world to know that most people do whatever they please—and seldom does anyone so much as raise an eyebrow or ask a question. They do exactly what they want, when they want, how they want. And no one dares to ask them about it. Just the ability to talk about convictions involving our personal lives and decisions, our property, and our children is rare. To be able to talk about these root issues of life is just a very uncommon blessing that few have. Thank God forever for this Blessing, if you have it. There certainly is more "Light" (Jn. 3, 1Jn. 1) and challenge when the people around you everyday care about your Life in Christ (2Tim. 3:16-17), but the alternative is hideously empty and dangerous (Heb. 3:12-14).

However, uncommon blessings introduce uncommon factors. For instance, the very questions we've been discussing really only apply to a few people

on earth. Most people don't have convictions about anything. When they do, very seldom is there ever anybody close enough in relationship to them that would have convictions to the contrary. Most people, I say with great grief in my heart for them and for Jesus, aren't building on the Word of God in the first place. So, very seldom are there really any convictions at stake, just opinions and preferences.

## Some Conditions for Hearing Together

You know, there are several components needed just to make this an important discussion in the first place. You have to be building your life on the Word of God rather than on your feelings and desires—*that's rare*. You have to be building with other people on a daily basis—*that's rare*. You have to be building in such a way that your life is an open book to everybody around you, and you invite input into your life—*that's rare*. You must want, with all of your heart, for Jesus to be exalted in your life and in His Church, regardless of personal cost. All of these things must be in place before this matter of working out convictions with others will make any sense at all.

## Whose Voice Am I Hearing?

Now, is it possible that a “conviction” that you think you have “heard from God” could simply have originated in your flesh? Yes, definitely. Sorting that out is part of the process of growing into the Image of Jesus! Suppose you have a conviction, and I ask you to consider whether it might just be your flesh. You say, “Well, I'm open to that possibility, but I don't think that's it.” Well, maybe I have a sneaking suspicion (because I've been around the block a few more times than you have) that it just might be your flesh, and you are kind of missing the point. As long as we're committed to one another, and I'm not willing to violate your conviction (or at least what you think is your conviction), and I'm also not willing to violate our relationship, we're gonna come through it together. We'll go down the road a little bit farther and you will see that the fruit of this thing you were committed to doing is bad. This thing that you thought was conviction was really just your flesh. You thought it was the Spirit, but it was really your soul. Something “iffy” will come out of it, and then I'll say, “Well, okay, here's what you can learn from that...” In time, you will begin to better discern the voice of God.

Remember how Jesus said to Peter, “Who do **you** say that I am?” and Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus said, “Simon

Peter, my Father in Heaven revealed that to you. Men didn't reveal it to you—my Father did.” Then, remember this insane episode? A few minutes later, Peter was taking Jesus aside and rebuking him for talking about his death. Jesus said, “Get behind me, satan!” In a matter of moments, Peter went from clearly hearing the Father to hearing the devil and *thinking* he was still hearing the Father! He really didn't know who was who.

That's the position where we often find ourselves, especially early in our walk with God. Here's a guy who heard the Father. Jesus never said that to anyone before that we are aware of. “You heard the Father speak to you, Peter. Good job.” It wasn't an audible voice, but clearly he heard the Father in his spirit to be able to say what he did. He wasn't guessing. Jesus said that Peter had actually heard the Father! But a few minutes later the exact same guy listened to the devil and quoted him. Jesus had to tell him, “Get behind me, satan!” So it's possible for our “reception” to go a little haywire, so that the channels kind of bleed over the top of each other. It's like watching two things happen at once and you can't pick out which one is which.

## The University of “Constant Use”

The Scriptures say that we “exercise ourselves unto godliness.” At the end of Hebrews 5 we read, “Solid food is for the mature who, by constant use, have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” It comes by constant use. In other words, sometimes, if it is not too dangerous, I need to let you run that course, even if it is your flesh, so that you, too, can learn “by constant use.” Perhaps I need to let you run that course, and just stick with you to help and protect as you go. I can be committed to going to “Jerusalem” with you, even though I'm sure you're wrong. Then I'll be there to help you sort it out later when something bad happens, so that you can learn from it. “All right, now I begin to see what a bad decision that was. I was sure at the time it was right, but here's what's happened since then. Now I see.”

## If We Don't Hang Together, We'll Hang Separately

So, through constant use, you get a little better at discerning what's God's voice and what's not His voice. You have to exercise. It's by *constant use*. We will likely not grow to know His voice well as long as I'm sure that your conviction is wrong (and my conviction is right), and I don't stick with

you while you run your course. Likewise, if I abandon you saying, “All right, then, just have it your way!” I won’t be there to help you learn from it. You’ll either suffer the consequences or be deceived into thinking there are no consequences. But you won’t learn what you need to learn.

Sure, it can be “flesh,” totally wrong, absolute nonsense when you thought it was a “Spirit-led conviction.” Even so, we somehow need to figure out what to do when we aren’t really certain, and when we are “certain” but are wrong. If you’re sure it’s a conviction, refined by the Word of God, and not just a preference or an opinion, I need to honor that. This is where Paul was coming from when he spoke with unbelievable ease of Apollos defying Paul’s conviction in 1 Corinthians 16:12. Think about it. Paul was sure that Apollos needed to go to Corinth. Apollos was certain that he should be doing something else. What was Paul’s response to Apollos’ difference of conviction? Though Paul still held his ground as to his conviction, he was very willing to be supportive of his brother as they worked it out for Jesus’ sake. That’s the kind of teamwork that allows us to learn together by constant use how to hear God’s voice. If my conviction proves to be right and yours were to blow up in your face, I could say, “I told you so.” But I won’t. Instead, I’ll help you see what you could have learned from it. I’ll explain why I felt the way I did, and maybe you can see why you didn’t grab onto it in the first place. It’s a teamwork thing. It’s not about me, having my personal walk with God and hearing His voice, while you do your own thing and I do mine. *Together* we learn to hear God. *Together*. There’s got to be a commitment to being together if we want to clearly hear God.

*“...I will build my CHURCH that the gates of hell cannot prevail against.”*

*“...the CHURCH, which is the pillar and foundation of Truth...”*

*“...where two or three are gathered in My Name, there will I be.”*

*“...together, with all the saints...”*

*“...Christ in you (plural), the hope of Glory.”*

## Classroom and Laboratory

Are there actually times when it’s right to let somebody pursue a course that looks like a mistake? Sure. Maybe you’ve been down that road before and you know what’s up ahead, but you don’t say anything. You just watch and pray, and you make sure you’re by their side when they fall. Of course, there could be some things a brother or sister would choose to do that are just hideously dangerous, and they don’t see it. In that case, you might have to throw your body in front of their path and beg them to reconsider.

But with other things, when the consequences aren't really that great, you can afford to let them learn the hard way. Just make sure you're close by to help them sort it out later.

But, it's really not just one way of learning Christ, or another. God, in His Wisdom, uses a combination of things to teach and refine us. When you learn chemistry, for example, a lot of learning comes through academic teaching. But then there are the laboratories, where you can get your hands on the chemicals and start messing with the Bunsen burners and pipettes. You start to see and experience what the things you are learning about really look like. It all becomes more practical, and the visual and hands-on experience adds a new dimension to the whole thing. Chemistry moves from a two-dimensional proposition to a three-dimensional one when you go into the laboratory.

Does that mean we don't ever need teaching or "reproof, rebuke, or correction?" Well, to return to our chemistry analogy, I doubt you could really understand much of what chemistry is really about if all you did were laboratories. We don't need to be afraid to teach someone what Jesus said about a particular issue, but know that there will be "laboratories." It's not even like we need to set up for the labs. We all will get our time to work in the lab of Life, for sure. The more "teaching" we can get to prepare us for life, the less likely we are to get burned by the "Bunsen burner." There's no great merit in letting everybody learn everything the hard way. They will learn enough things the hard way without me having to create new opportunities by not saying anything when I could.

## Trust, Built on Relationship

Now that brings us back to the situation with Luke and Agabus. They had a conviction that Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem. Even so, they wouldn't let their conviction take priority over their respect for Paul's convictions. Where did this respect come from? Was it how "powerful" his "sermons" were? Was it his good looks, his charm, his musical talent, his forcefulness? No way!!! Their ability to walk with him, through this thing they did not understand or agree with, grew out of knowing him and watching (not just hearing about) his relationship with God. He had lived among them as a father, a mother, and a brother "night and day with tears." This was not the equivalent of today's superstars or clergymen. This was a true man of God "in the midst as one who serves." They knew him!

*"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by*

*God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed” (1 Thessalonians 2:3-10).*

What if Luke or Agabus had stepped in and said, “No way, I don’t care how strong you feel about this. I’m telling you, if you do it, you’re wrong!”? I guess it would have been pretty obvious that they trusted their own conviction more than they trusted Paul as a brother, even with his life and relationship with God.

What you *really* know about a person’s life and walk with God has to play a serious role in weighing whatever convictions you might have about the other person and their decisions, or their convictions about you and your decisions. You can certainly share your convictions with anyone that claims Jesus, but where there is relationship, there is trust. If you love them and you know their walk, you can trust that they’re in good hands, even when things fall apart. Please don’t allow any pride or immaturity to dull you that you would allow your love for a fellow-heir to come second to your own personal convictions.

Of course, referring to the men and women that attempted unsuccessfully to talk Paul into avoiding Jerusalem, those folks had an advantage over most people today. These guys had spent a lot of years with Paul, directly and indirectly. (If I am walking intimately with a tested and true disciple, and he or she is in a fire-proven relationship with a disciple that I don’t know personally, I know everything that I need to know to trust that disciple that I don’t know personally!) Again, in most religious environments today, people don’t know people. They may *think* they know someone because they’ve listened to his speeches, bought his cassette tapes, read his books, or even hung out with him on Sunday morning. Here’s what the Scriptures command you to do if you want to obey God and truly *know* someone: “Admonish one another daily so that none are hardened and deceived by sin, as long as it’s called Today.” Since that is almost entirely absent in the religious world today, there’s really no way to “know” as we

ought, and consequently, much of the rest of the Scripture is difficult to apply correctly also! If I asked you to “go three blocks to the east and turn right, go two houses down the street and park in the driveway” but you started in a different city than I thought you did, my directions wouldn’t mean much, would they? That is how difficult it is to live out “Biblical” Christianity in a church world that has priorities and connectedness so unlike what the folks in Acts 2:42-47 had. We need to get back to the basics of why we live! And we need to expect that our churches would reflect that Relationship with Jesus and one another in every nook and cranny, or we die trying!

*“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. 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. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” (Colossians 1:24-2:4).*

*“My dear children, I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19)*

Again, those brothers *knew* Paul’s life. This guy was involved in their lives. He was in their homes. He was part of their families. Read Romans 16: “This woman was a mother to me.” There are so many people you never even hear about in the book of Acts. “This person worked hard by my side and co-labored with me.” “This person risked his life for me.” And Romans was written only about halfway through Paul’s life. He crossed paths with a lot of other people even after that, I would guess.

Here’s the point. Paul was right in the thick of life, “in the midst as one who served.” When they said they knew his life, they *knew* his life! That’s an advantage most people who are attempting, even honestly, to understand how to respond to one another’s “convictions” don’t have today. Try to function the way they did, and people today would say, “Ah,

man, they're just too gullible, too willing to trust somebody." Well, okay. If you don't have any real relationships with anyone, I guess I could see your point. It *would* be gullible for you to give into everything that came along from a pulpit or some other source, since you don't have a real, intimate relationship with them and those around them on a daily basis. There is no "admonishing one another daily," "encouraging one another daily," or "being called alongside one another daily" as God has said. But when you do have relationships, *your whole world changes*, and then some of the rest of this can make sense!

## God Wins!

Regardless of how much these guys trusted Paul, *they also trusted God*. They saw that Paul's heart was such that God was going to work with it. It was going to be okay, even if this were a total mistake, resulting from Paul's blind side. Maybe Paul had some secret ambition to be a martyr and he just couldn't see it. But they knew his heart was sincere and, for that reason, they could trust God. It wasn't like they had to trust Paul to be perfect. (He's had a pretty good track record on hundreds of other things, so he's probably right about this one.) It went beyond that.

They went the extra step and said, "You know, even if he is wrong (and this is the first mistake I've seen him make in 25 years), I trust that his heart is sincere and I trust God." It's not that they trusted Paul perfectly and "blindly." It's that they trusted God, and they knew Paul's heart pretty well. So, what if this turned out to be a totally bone-headed mistake? They would all learn from it. They would work together and learn from it. Trusting God was an even bigger issue than trusting Paul, although they did that too.

Now, if you don't trust somebody's heart because his track record is poor, this gets to be a lot more complicated. If you've seen him violate Jesus, if you've seen him betray God and man again and again, then how are you supposed to believe him this time? How can you really trust him when his record is one of sin and selfishness, pride and ambition? It's a bit more difficult. "God works everything together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes." They knew Paul loved God and that his life was about His purposes. Thus, even if this were a mistake, God would work it together for the good. As long as those two things were in place, they didn't even have to trust Paul. But when you don't have much evidence that a person loves God or is called according to *His* purposes, there may not necessarily be much reason to think God is going to work this together for the good.

## Expect Supernatural Conflict

“Some have gone out from among us, proving they never were one of us,” John said. There will always be “thorns in the flesh” and those that despise the Light (1Jn. 1, Jn. 3). Who are the targets of the Light-haters? Their targets are all those who question the religious world’s status quo and love of the world system, as well as questioning individual lukewarmness or profiteering upon Jesus’ Name. The Light-haters will eat, without qualms, at your love feasts, and then firmly thrust a short dagger in your back when given a chance. Since they did not truly give their life to Jesus or to others (very related ideas 1John 4:20), they built dangerously upon the sand. They could not relate to the ability to love and trust the way Agabus and Luke did with Paul. They didn’t *co-labor*, as brothers amongst brothers. They never lifted a finger (except to advance their own independent cause, their so-called “ministry”), spiritually speaking. Consequently, there wasn’t the ability to relate to that kind of trust. The lack of “discerning the Body” has brought the kind of judgment into their life that Paul warned would take place. Shimei doesn’t always receive Justice immediately. God allows some challenging and hateful things to persist, even allowing Jannes and Jambres the temporary ability to do “miracles” against God’s true Cause in order to refine our characters! But, in the end, He will prepare a table for His Faithful, in the presence of their enemies. Stay with Jesus and His Ways, regardless of the consequences of men and hell’s demons, and He will vindicate in His time.

## Finding God at the Impasse

Let’s go back to the previous discussion of good brothers looking for a solution from the Heart of God to a difficulty. What do you suppose would have happened if Agabus and the others hadn’t been supportive of Paul’s decision? Would Paul have gone to Jerusalem, based on his convictions, regardless of what they said? Well, I bet Paul would have at least taken a couple of days to fast with them before anything else happened. I bet he would have at least stopped the process in order to go deeper with it all and find out what God was saying through the impasse.

No matter what, you never *really* reach an impasse when you are working with true disciples of the Carpenter. There are always ways to get to the truth of the matter and solve difficult differences of “conviction.” God has given us lots of tools to work it out. Even if Agabus and the bunch had said, “We just can’t let you do it,” there would have been a solution.

Sometimes God will do some pretty tricky things to conform us to His purposes. Maybe it's just a matter of timing. "If I spend two days fasting with these brothers. I'll miss the boat, and it will be another month before I can go." Well, maybe God wanted Paul to wait another month because He had other things for him to do before he went to Jerusalem. So the impasse was God's way to make the timing work out properly. There can definitely be other factors at work. I can have "convictions" that are not based on all of the facts, and God allows my conviction to be formed with "mirrors." "I KNOW the sun is larger when it sets, than it is during the day. I can see it with my own eyes! How can you ask me to believe otherwise?!" Sometimes, by God's Decree, things are not as they so obviously appear, by God's Decree. Let's proceed cautiously, even when we KNOW something is so. God is sometimes working other things out and confuses our view of things a bit in order to accomplish His Purposes and Timing. Make room for that. This is a strong motivation to "Keep the unity of the Spirit, and the bond of Peace" as we work through differing convictions.

If we're willing to "wait on the Lord," there's always a solution. It's not just a big battle where the stronger conviction wins. I feel certain that God's wisdom would have opened up some other door that they hadn't considered. "Okay, Paul, we're all going with you." There has to be an answer in God's heart that can satisfy the souls of men who love Him and are connected to the Head. There has to be some constant in God's heart and mind for all of those who are connected to the same Head. It's like the story of Cinderella, where the prince went from house to house trying to find the only foot in the whole kingdom that the glass slipper would fit. That's often what happens in the Spirit, when you're trying to find God's will. Paul wants to go to Jerusalem, but that doesn't "fit" with these other brothers. They want him to stay put, but that doesn't "fit" either. So in this process of praying and fasting, considering the Scriptures and talking it over, Agabus and Silas and Luke and Philip all say, "We're going with you," and the "glass slipper" slips on. Now Paul can go, and they can be totally satisfied in their hearts.

From experience I can say I'd have a hard time believing that God would tease sincere men desiring to be led by the Spirit of the Son. It won't be very often that we can't find some way that the "slipper" fits on where everyone feels satisfied that God's will is being done and they're not fighting God. But it's not always what either party originally thought. It's another answer entirely that brings us to a place of peace in the Spirit. We have to fight for it, because neither of us came into the room having considered it yet. But your opposition to my way and my opposition to yours forced us to look for something else, and then we found God's heart, together.

## “Movement” Centered, or Driven by Love?

One of the many things that God is doing in us, if we allow Him to use our misplaced “convictions,” is confusing and embarrassing us, and humbling us into a correct view of Him, of His Church, and of ourselves. If our “energy” for spiritual things is centered upon ideas or a movement or personal ambition or any such carnal thing, God will use very creative means to find a way to change our hearts. He will graciously permit all that originates in man to fall apart. If what we have set our hearts and minds on is truly centered in our Love for Him and our Love for others, with no regard for ourselves, it will grow from “glory to glory.” Keep an eye on God’s marvelous Ways of purging us of self-life through the means of differing “convictions” among brothers and sisters. Let the quality of your response to others and to God be reflective of the knowledge that God may be using this conviction that you think you have to teach you and equip you in a “back door” sort of way!

## What About “Authority”?

There certainly must, we would all agree, be some discussion in all of this about how to deal with “authority” in Jesus’ Church. Some would wish that there were no such thing! The Korah spirit, as prophesied by Jude, is alive and well in today’s church world.

*“These men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals, these are the very things that destroy them. Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion” (Jude 1:10-11).*

They say (as Paul said that those that do not “discern the Body” and walk in immaturity would), “I am of Christ! I don’t need anybody but Jesus!” “We ALL have the Spirit!” says Korah of yesterday and today. “Why do you think anyone needs to listen to you?!” This is a very bad idea. It cannot go well for one with this attitude, as it violates the heart and soul of Messiah.

Others, it seems, are paralyzed with fear and the veiled spiritual threats of ambitious men, “Touch not God’s anointed!” They find it difficult to find Jesus, Himself, amidst the whine and drone of men’s sermonizing and scheming in today’s church world. SURELY there is Hope! And there is, thank our God. There is a perspective that frees us all to find Jesus IN His Body, as He intended, rather than to have to choose *between* Jesus and a group of mere men.

Some of this understanding of God and His Ways can be found in a book entitled *Spiritual Authority* by W. Nee. Though I have no first-hand experience with this book, I know many trusted followers of the Master who have read it and recommend it heartily for insight into these things. See if you can locate it, if you would like to consider this topic more in depth.

The following letter also will, I believe, draw you deeper in an understanding of the Life of Jesus to be found in this idea of “authority.” It was written by a man to a young group of Believers that were together trying to find Jesus in a corporate setting. They were “up against the wall” and were, in essence, deciding a great deal about their future together as they tried to answer the question together, “What is authority?!” I pass on this personal letter from a man to his friends as encouragement to you in your Journey also.

January 14, 1995

To my dearest friends, brothers and sisters of the heart, through whom the supply of Jesus so often comes to me—

I hope these thoughts will somehow bless you. That’s my prayer, and the full intent of my heart. You have been such a blessing to me that I couldn’t put it into words. God knows how much you’ve given me, and whenever I despair of returning even half as much to you, I remember that the Father, who is in secret, will Himself reward you a good measure, pressed down and running over, poured into your laps, and that makes me happy again!

Lately several of us have been wrestling with the question of spiritual authority and submission, and the related question of private opinions versus group convictions. In other words, when should I as an individual give up privately held opinions and abide by a conviction someone else holds as important? How am I to work out Paul’s admonition to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”? When does a question fall under the Romans 14 “disputable matters” category of things we should just keep between God and ourselves?

I’ll admit in advance what you already know—I don’t have all the answers, or even all the questions. But I would like to share a perspective that I hope can help us search out God’s truth and wisdom with a greater freedom and peace. If we can do that together, I’m sure I can count on you to help me, for one, understand how to work out the practical implications.

It's probably no accident that we are encountering these questions now. They are body life issues. Until now, we've mostly been concerned about our own personal connections with the Head. We'll still need to pay attention to that question forever. But if a baby has been born here, an infant Body of Christ, we suddenly have to consider the issue of discerning and responding to group directions from the Head.

That's the kind of body Jesus wants, discerning and responsive. Our human bodies detect signals from the brain and respond almost instantly. Often the brain wants to accomplish a task that only involves the coordinated effort of a few parts. But sometimes I need my entire body to respond as a unit. If I play a song on the piano, it takes almost every part of my body to do it. Do y'all believe that Jesus has performed a miracle and has birthed an ekklesia here?

I don't want to make anybody paranoid (especially me!), but it's an important question. If Jesus isn't building His Church among us, we don't have any business trying to act like one. It would only lead to unrealistic expectations and make-believe and frustrations and mistreating one another. But if Jesus Himself is calling us to function as a body, then we've got to deal with some issues as they come up.

One of those issues is how we anticipate that God would take us in some direction as a group. The fact is that He often gives discernment initially to a few people at a given moment, yet He expects the group as a whole to respond. Of course the subset of people He would use might change from moment to moment, but the point is that He often works by providing direction to a few. Under the Old Covenant, Israel was a nation, not just a conglomeration of individuals. When they acted "each man as he saw fit," as in the book of Judges, chaos resulted. When the people responded to God's prophets, there was revival and spiritual health. Under the New Covenant, we as individuals hold a much more glorious privilege of knowing God personally and hearing His Spirit within. Yet in the records of Jesus' "holy apostles and prophets," whom we know to be reliable men and women, we can read that God still often gave group direction through a few people at a time. In Antioch, the Spirit set aside Paul and Barnabas for a specific task. That was a decision that affected everyone. These two guys were valued leaders and teachers, and the whole Church sent them on their way. Yet the Spirit gave the initial direction to a small group of five guys who were worshipping and fasting. Then on a later trip, the Spirit showed Paul in a dream to go to Macedonia, and the entire group traveling with him concluded that God was calling them to go. That's just the way God works.

That last paragraph scares me as much as it does you, I promise you. It really shouldn't frighten us, but let's face it, we've all seen examples of ungodly leaders running roughshod over their flock, and justifying it under the guise of "obey your leaders and submit to their authority" or "touch not the Lord's anointed." And we've heard stories (some of them ecclesiastical legends, no doubt, but some of them probably true) of even worse abuses. The whole idea of God providing direction to my family and me through somebody else can be terrifying in that light.

Yet a healthy body has to function by each member receiving supply from the others. Either that or we'll have to dispense with Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 and several other passages! The alternative to life together is for each of us to try personally to be our own individual body of Christ, and to say to the hand or eye, "I don't need you." But we shouldn't expect Jesus to honor a proud, independent spirit! At best, I'm going to have a gift or two or three, for the benefit of the whole, and if I'm unwilling to receive others' supply for the gifts I lack, I (and those relying on me, like my children) will be impoverished.

I think we've made a lot of progress in trusting one another and being willing to take some risks with each other. In years past, I've probably been at or near the bottom of the barrel when it came to the matter of trusting and receiving. But that's changing. Only yesterday one of you offered an unsolicited opinion about a personal matter, a character issue involving one of my children! And I loved you for it—even more after the phone call than before. I'm certainly not the only one who has grown in this area of receiving supply. It looks like we all have.

Our current "unsettledness" about these issues simply means that Jesus is calling us to embrace His heart for us on a deeper level than before. And that must mean that the Creator and Sustainer, the Ruler and Judge of the Universe has noticed us and for no other reason than His love, He's decided to call us to another degree of glory! That's nothing to be afraid of. Jesus really can have local bodies that on the one hand respond instantaneously to His slightest prompting, while on the other hand sniff out false teachings and spirits that would lead them away from His will. We really can reach a point in our maturity where we can *"test everything; hold onto the good; avoid every kind of evil."* Sensing what has already been bound or loosed in heaven and doing the same on earth is not just a pipe dream.

If the question of corporate discernment and response is a body-life issue, then whatever promotes healthy body life should lead to our being able to give and receive Christ's supply in a way that honors Him. Here's a passage that describes a healthy corporate life:

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:15-17).*

That’s the kind of body life I desperately want! Peace reigning... thankfulness of heart prevailing... the living, active, powerful word overflowing... needs met through teaching and admonition... worship springing up naturally... deeds being done in the stature and authority of the Name.

Part of that body life has to include our *“letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.”* It has to mean that we speak the word of Jesus into each other’s lives, making practical application along with it. Much of that will be one or a few members speaking into the lives of another one or few. But sometimes it will involve a few speaking into the lives of all.

That’s part of normal body life. But most of us have seen some undeniable failures in that very area of functioning. I think the preceding verses of Colossians 3 point out the reasons why. Before a group of believers can ever live out verses 13-15, they have to pass through verses 1-12! Here’s the first chunk of that:

*“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*

Here is a picture of the basic life of a disciple. He or she has died and been resurrected with Christ and has received a new self that is “being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” There is now a progressive “putting to death” and “ridding oneself” of sin.

Unless the individual believers in a group have undergone that basic regeneration of heart and accepted those basic discipleship decisions, there is no way that group can function as a body. They aren't a body. At best they are a mixture, an unholy fellowship of light and darkness, full of leaven that leavens the whole loaf.

The whole question of Jesus taking that group in some desired direction as a group is problematic. Many of the members, maybe even among the leaders, are not even in His hands and under His control! Only those who have laid their lives on the altar of living sacrifice to Jesus, rejecting the patterns of this world, can test and approve God's will, right (Romans 12)? So normally, any kind of corporate functioning is a mess. If the leadership is passive, they meet in closed-door sessions and try to determine an agenda. They spring the news on the congregation, motivating and manipulating through promises or threats, hype or scolding, battling all the while the disorder caused by selfish ambition. If the leadership is active, "type A," and goal-oriented, they try to reign in the congregation through tight control and legalism. Honestly, guys, some of us have been in that kind of group, experienced that kind of leadership, and witnessed the spiritual devastation that resulted. Isn't that at least part of the reason the whole issue of spiritual authority and submission gives us the willies?

But we don't have to function that way, do we? If each of us as individuals actually dies to our old life, receives the new, and progressively learns to walk "hidden with Christ in God," doesn't that open up a whole new realm of possibility for a corporate functioning that doesn't have to rely on manipulation on the one hand or iron-fisted control on the other?

Then there's the next verse of Colossians 3:

*"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."*

Here, among a crucified and resurrected people, it is possible for Christ to be everything, and for individual differences to melt into insignificance. This matter of unity, of being "joined and knit together," of being living stones built together and rising up to become a holy temple in the Lord, this, too, is a sovereign issue. If you only have a group of consecrated individuals, healthy functioning by coordinated effort of the whole is still impossible. That's true in the matter of discernment and response to Christ's supply. There are exceptions, but normally we are somewhat limited in our relationships with other professing believers with whom we don't sense that oneness. We might feel a freedom and a responsibility to offer insights about each

other's children, but ordinarily we wouldn't feel the same freedom with someone we bump into at a shopping mall.

It has taken me a while to understand that principle probably because I wasn't really joined and knit with anybody for a long time! Back three or four years ago, I wanted so badly to call those of us who were together then a "church." I wanted us to act like one, too, and I got mad or depressed if we didn't. Mike told me one time, "Stop trying to draw a circle around a certain group of people and calling the people inside a church, then demanding they act a certain way. Lift up Jesus, allow Him to draw all men to Himself, and let Him worry about the circles." It was wonderful advice, but hard for me to take.

During that time some of you will remember a young family, relations of another couple living here then, who moved to town for a month or so to "be a part of us." We were quickly over our heads trying to deal with the sin in that household. There was a stronghold of imaginations and slander in particular. Eventually one of the spouses left the mate and ran home to Mom and Dad. I wanted so badly to bring some sort of group accountability to bear, a Matthew 18 sort of thing, on the problem. But again, Mike suggested, "This person is not accountable to you as a 'group.' You're just not a Church, a 'Lampstand,' at this point in your corporate Life together, frankly. She's accountable before Jesus for her sin, and part of that will be making things right with people she's offended, but she isn't answerable to you as a group." He was right.

Groups of believers, even if they are individuals trying to live for Jesus, can still function in some unhealthy ways if they try to get ahead of God and presume on some relationships that just aren't there. But if there are some people here in this city amongst us who are joined and knit together in the spiritual realm now, then a healthy corporate functioning should be possible. We may have to function on a pretty young level if we're a corporate newborn, and we may need a lot of help, but a baby is still a wonderfully functioning organism, isn't it?

But there's more:

*"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."*

Even in a group of consecrated individuals who have been joined into "one loaf," there is still a prerequisite for healthy body-life: love. Without

love, there won't be any "binding together in perfect unity." Attempts to function corporately, whether in the matter of corporate discernment or in other issues of life, will still wind up a disaster.

A few days ago I asked God why I hadn't been much of a blessing to the group as a whole whenever I had developed a conviction about what "we" should or shouldn't be doing. His answer, I think, was that for a long time I just wasn't free to love. Even if I discerned something, I tried to work it out of a critical or prideful heart, and it just didn't help anyone.

But that's not how I see your hearts operating! I see an increasing measure of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. Certainly those words have taken on a new life for me because of the treatment and acceptance I've received in your merciful hands! I hope you've seen my heart melt some, too.

I can't help but believe that if our lives are hidden with Christ in God, if He's tied us together in the spiritual realms, and if we love one another, we can work out this matter of receiving and responding to corporate direction in a healthy way!

This letter's already longer than I intended (surprise!), but there's one other question I wanted to raise on the topic of spiritual authority and submission.

Part of being able to grow into the Head and reach maturity together, as a body, has to do with the process of equipping. Ephesians 4 says,

*"It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds and teachers, to equip/prepare/mend God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."*

The working of each part is necessary. There is a priesthood of believers. There is no clergy-laity system. But it is still true that not all members have the same function. There is not a priesthood of equippers! At any given moment, God's heart for some will be to bring out the best in the rest, so that the whole can be what it needs to be. That's why the four (or five) gifts mentioned here, "equipping" gifts, are among Christ's gifts to His body.

The question of spiritual authority comes into play here. The gift of apostle or prophet or evangelist or shepherd/teacher implies that this person has a foundational role, or word from God, or proclamation of the Message, or group feeding, that the whole group needs to receive and accept. "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority" is still in the scriptures. So is the admonition to "respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you; hold them in the highest regard

in love for their work.” The servant of Jesus will bend over backwards to keep from demanding to be treated this way, but the body will not benefit from his or her service unless they can receive it with such a heart.

The existence of equippers in the body does not take away the member’s need and responsibility to “*test everything, hold onto the good, and avoid every kind of evil,*” for there are false apostles who must be tested and rejected (Rev. 2:2). There are false prophets (Matt. 7:15-23; 24:10) who want to deceive us. There are false evangelists teaching false gospels (Gal 1:6-9) who should be an anathema to us. There are false shepherds who are really ravenous wolves wanting to destroy the flock and draw disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30). And there are false teachers (1Tim. 5:3-7; 2Tim. 4:3-4; 2John 9; Rev 2:14-26) who must not be tolerated.

So we must discern but we cannot do that out of a critical, cynical, suspicious, or prideful heart! Otherwise, we will reject the true equippers with the false and miss out on Christ’s gift. We can try to function without equipping, but we have God’s word on it that we will never reach maturity in the faith without it.

Our discernment cannot be based on mere appearances. We must walk by faith, not by sight! Paul was not that impressive of a person from a worldly point of view. Those “super-apostles” he spoke of were much slicker. Some with carnal minds rejected Paul and accepted the impostors, and one direct result was that carnality leavened the Church in Corinth!

We must discern with the Spirit. God’s direction to us that comes through the body may not always make more logical sense to us than the alternatives, until we later can look over our shoulders and understand why. We’ve got to learn to discern the Christ life in an individual and in what he or she is saying. We’ve got to learn to smell the aroma of Christ. All authority in heaven and on earth is in Christ and nowhere else!

I’ll stick my neck out and make one practical application before I quit. How are you going to regard an “authority” in your life? We need to think about it. Do you want him to be a resource? A friend? An ecclesiastical 911 emergency service? Someone at arm’s length, who can give us some neat stuff, but whom we aren’t really accountable to? Or do you welcome equippers whom you regard as having spiritual authority? (If you receive a prophet, you receive a prophet’s reward. If you receive him only as a friend, you receive only the reward of a friend. If you receive him as an information dispenser, you receive only information, not imparted Life.) Let’s each pray that one through, OK?

That's enough for now! Hey, being a Christian can be complicated sometimes, but isn't it wonderful anyway? "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are!"

*In that wonderful love,  
Dan (a brother from Ohio)*

## Join Us in Prayer About All of This?

*Father, human beings are pretty shallow as a rule, and I think we would fit into that category. We were created even lower than the angels, yet You desire to impart Your life, Your heart, Your Spirit and Your wisdom to us. You do this so that we can reign with You and even judge the angels that we were created a little lower than. We know there's a process You are bringing us through. These things are very, very important for us. We need to learn how to walk with each other and go onto the next level together. We don't want there to be any confusion at all about whether or not we can have our own relationship with You and discern the Body at the same time. Those two things will work together in Your heart and mind. There's no question that they can work together, rather than in opposition to each other. Help us to comprehend how all these things work together so we can also help others to walk in them.*

*Father, don't let us be shallow. You promised to take us to the place where we're worthy to sit on thrones with You and rule over the nations. We don't feel especially qualified right now, but we trust You, as the Master Teacher, to impart to us, to teach us, and to gift us in such a way that we actually can walk with You in those things in the celestial realms. This is all part of that. Show us how we can function in a relationship with You and with one another that's not competitive, but rather one that works together toward Your glory, and toward the whole of what You want to do in us for the sake of Your Son and His kingdom.*

*Yours in Him,  
Mike  
March 10, 1995*

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# Jesus' Greatest Miracle: A Changed Life!

1999

*This is a transcript from an evening in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It is therefore available in Portuguese, if that would be helpful to anyone. May He fill you and protect you in every way...*

**T**he Bible talks about Jesus as being Messiah or Savior. You normally think of “Savior” as one who forgives our sins and takes us to Heaven. But Jesus as Savior is far more than that! He wants to not only save our souls and take us to Heaven, but also *deliver us* from slavery on this earth.

I was thinking about different miracles that Jesus did when He was here physically. (He **STILL** wants to do miracles for us—He’s the same today and forever.) The first miracle I thought of was raising Lazarus from the dead. I thought, “This is a wonderful miracle. Is this Jesus’ greatest miracle?” If you take a body that is stone-cold dead and all life is gone and then it comes back to life—that’s a great miracle! Maybe that’s the greatest miracle, to raise a person from the dead. But maybe there is still a greater miracle that Jesus does. I thought about the people who were blind and Jesus gave them the ability to see again. One man was born blind, could never see, and then he began to see. Jesus still wants to do wonderful miracles such as this. Think about having total darkness and then beginning to see color and texture, and the people you love. Is this the greatest miracle that Jesus does, to give sight to blind people? Jesus also gave hearing to people who could not hear. Their worlds were totally silent. They could not hear the people they loved. They couldn’t hear the birds, they couldn’t hear music, they couldn’t hear a baby laughing. And Jesus gave them hearing. Is this a great miracle? Our Jesus still wants to do things such as this. We must never stop believing in a Jesus who gives eyesight and hearing, and raises the dead. Other people Jesus healed were people that had skin diseases like leprosy. They had much pain and agony. They had to stay away from all the

people they loved so that they would not catch their disease. Jesus would touch those who had the skin disease and their skin would become brand new, like the skin of a little baby. This is our Jesus who does wonderful miracles!! But are these the greatest miracles that Jesus did?

I want you to think about other miracles that Jesus does. He is our Savior and our Deliverer. He can take away our sin. He can take away our blindness or our deafness. He can take away our skin disease and our pain. But also as a Savior and as a Deliverer, He does another kind of miracle that is greater than all of these. Think about this with me. If a man was dead and Jesus raised him from the dead, how would that man feel if after he woke up from being dead he remembered that all of his family hated him and all of his neighbors gossiped about him and called him names? That man might just prefer to still be dead! Suppose a man had been deaf his whole life and he was healed by a miracle from Jesus and now he hears everything, yet he discovers that everyone in his family is yelling and angry and calls each other names and gossips. It would break his heart. He would almost rather not hear these things. What if he was blind from the day he was born and Jesus healed him? Now he opens his eyes and he can see the sunrise and the birds in the trees... but his family and his neighbors have terrible pictures and pornography and they do terrible things around him. He would almost wish he could see no more.

So what I am saying is this: The greatest miracle of Jesus is not raising someone from the dead, because if a man comes to life and his world is a bad world, he doesn't need to live. The greatest miracle of Jesus is not to see or to hear, because if we see and hear hatred and evil and sin, we don't want to see. We don't want to hear. *The greatest miracle of Jesus is that He wants to change our lives.* He wants to take hatred and make peace and love. He wants to take anger and selfishness and make gentleness and self-sacrifice. The greatest miracles of Jesus are when He changes our lives from the inside... because we don't need to see if there is only evil. We don't need to hear if there is only hatred and anger and gossip. The greatest gift and the greatest miracle of Jesus IS that He wants to save us to be like Him in personality.

*“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except you, drunkenness and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again as I have before that anyone living this sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God. They cannot inherit the kingdom of God. “But when the*

*Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love and joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness (ever true), gentleness, self-control. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited or irritate one another or be jealous of one another” (Galatians 5).*

*“The grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed by God to turn away from godless living and turn away from sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, with right conduct, with devotion to God while we look forward to the wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ will be revealed. He gave His life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us and make us His very own people, totally committed to doing what is right” (Titus 2).*

*“We too once were foolish and disobedient. We were misled by others and became slaves to many wicked desires and evil pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy. We hated others, and they hated us. But then God our Savior showed us His kindness and love. He delivered us, not because of good things that we did, but He delivered us from sin because of His mercy. He washed away our sins and He also gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out His Spirit upon us, not because we were good, but because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did. He declared us ‘not guilty’ because of His great kindness. And now we know that we will inherit eternal life” (Titus 3).*

Many, many things that God says to us in the scriptures tell us again and again about the wonderful miracle of changed lives. But you probably notice when you look at yourself in the mirror or when you really get to know other people who follow Jesus that this greatest miracle of all, a changed life, takes some time and hard work. If you look at yourself in the mirror, you probably know there are many things that are still not like Jesus.

***Jesus wants to do a miracle in your life.*** He wants to replace your anger with love and peace. He wants to replace your selfishness and your pride with His love. He wants to take away your bad moods and make you a gentle and kind person. He wants to crush your gossip and lust and bring flowers to your heart instead. He wants the greatest miracle of all for each of us—that we could become like Him in personality. But there is an important part that we play in this.

# The Importance of the Church in the Miracle of Change

There is a great and wonderful picture in the scriptures of the importance of the Church, of other believers. Jesus said, “I will build My Church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against.” He wants to build our lives together so that the miracles can happen in each of our lives. He made us so we would need each other very much for these miracles to happen. No one finds this greatest miracle by himself. He wants to change us as we help each other to become like Him. So it’s important that EVERY DAY you have deep relationships with each other.

He has called us to be priests and to do the work of God. So we must use the eyes that He’s given us to see things that are not like Him in ourselves and in others—and then we must choose to help! He gave us the miracle of being able to hear so we can listen when others speak to us about our lives. If we are willing to listen, if we are willing to be soft and open, and if everyone is willing to do their part to have courage to talk to each other about things in their lives—then Jesus will do this wonderful miracle in each of our lives. It is a better miracle than raising someone from the dead or giving sight to the blind. He can take our stubborn, selfish hearts and make us like Him. But we must use our ears to hear and be soft when people talk to us. We must have the courage to speak to others so we can work together to do this miracle.

I should say too that the definition of a Christian, a follower of Jesus, is someone who has become a slave to Jesus. Jesus said, “Unless you take up your cross and deny your very life, you can’t be My disciple.” In Acts 3, the Scriptures say that everyone who won’t listen to Jesus will be completely cut off from amongst the people. It’s very important that we understand that we are not our own; we are bought for a price. A true Christian is one who has given his rights to the King. True Christians trust the King to provide and care for them and to lead them. They don’t have to be big and tough and smart. They can be soft and let Jesus decide for them. “Whatever God wants is what is best.” We don’t need to be afraid anymore.

*“No one can serve two masters. You will hate one and love the other.”* You can’t serve yourself and your own desires and also serve Jesus. Jesus tells us that we hate Him if we choose to serve our own desires. But if we serve His desires and not our own, then we show that we love Him more than we love ourselves. Jesus goes on to say that we don’t have to be afraid anymore:

*“So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life. Don’t worry if you will have enough food or drink or clothing. Doesn’t life consist of more than food or*

*clothing? Just look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns. Because your Heavenly Father feeds them. You are far more valuable to the Father than the birds are. Can all of your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not. And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. If God cares so wonderfully for flowers, and these flowers are here today and gone tomorrow, won't our Father surely care for us even more than that? You have so little faith. So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. Why be like the pagans? The pagans are so deeply concerned with these things. Your Heavenly Father already knows all of your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day."*

Jesus began by saying you cannot serve two masters. And then He goes on to say that to run after protecting or helping yourself is what the pagans do. It shows that you do not trust your Father. Our Father says that if you totally trust Him and make all of your decisions for Him and seek first His Kingdom, if your primary concern is the Kingdom of God and not yourself, the Father Himself will make sure all of your needs are met. Very few people have ever trusted Jesus' words. Very few people have put these words into practice. We want to encourage you to trust the Father because He cares so much for us. We don't have to be afraid anymore. We don't have to be selfish in order to protect ourselves. We don't have to be angry. We can trust our Father. He is a very good Father. And if we will seek His Kingdom first and primarily...if we seek His Business, He will take care of "our business." But if we seek "our business" and try to add Him to that, if we try to add God on the side of our own lives...we will make Him very unhappy, we will break His Heart and we will never see His miracles. We want to encourage you to trust God for miracles, to seek His Kingdom primarily and first, and to be involved in each other's lives—in order to be able to see your character changed to be like Jesus. And we will see many wonderful miracles in the days ahead.

## Jesus' Promises for Those Who Will Live This Way

Even though it sounds difficult and certainly it is very different from the way most are used to living, Jesus made a promise: In Matthew 7, Jesus talked about building a house. He said storms will come to beat against the house, but for those who have built the house wisely, the house will stand in spite of the storms. He said what makes the house **strong**, so that

it can stand up to the storms, is that we would help each other put into practice His Word. There are many people who do not know His Word; they don't know the principles of Jesus and His teachings. There are others that know all of His teachings, but don't put them into practice. In both of those cases, the storms will trash the house (Mat. 7:13-27; 2Thes. 1:5-8; Lk. 12:47-49). But the promise from Jesus is true for us if we will help each other put into practice His Word. When the storms come, and they will come, the house will stand against the storm. We must help each other put into practice His Word. If I am being prideful or selfish, I may not see it myself. But when YOU see it in me and choose to help me, you are not *hurting* me, you are *helping* me overcome the storm. So I am not afraid for someone to come to me and say, "I think you have this problem or that problem." Why not? Because I know the storms are going to come and I want to put His word into practice, and I need others to help me put it into practice! These are not bad things. They are very good things. The storms will come and this will help us overcome the storm.

Another promise Jesus made was that if we will give away our lives to others, if we give away everything for Jesus and have no more rights for ourselves, then He will give us a hundred mothers, brothers, sisters. He will give us a hundred homes and lands and possessions. If we totally give away our life, He will bless us a hundred times in this life and in the life to come give us eternal life. If I had one dollar and it was the only dollar I had and I needed it to feed my family, it would be very hard to give it away. But if Jesus promised me that if I give Him one dollar that He would give me one hundred dollars, then it is easier to give away the one. When we are selfish and fearful and prideful, when we have sin in our life and we don't want to hear anyone talk to us about it, when we see sin in others' lives and we don't want to talk to them (maybe we are afraid to talk to them because we think they will be angry or won't like us)—if we make the wrong choices with these things, we lose all of the great and precious promises of Jesus. That's like holding on to "the one" even though He promised us that if we give it away He will give us one hundred. It's a very good investment to live this way for Jesus. Because the storms WILL come into our lives. And if we try to do it alone, with the sins in our lives, the storms will trash our house. But if we do it together, helping each other to obey God, willing to see, and also willing to hear...then the house will stand and Jesus will do miracles. It is hard to give away the one, but it is wonderful to receive one hundred in return.

## Caring Versus Controlling

Now this is NOT some “control thing” at all. Jesus said anger and hatred are just like murder, right? So if one of your brothers decided, “I think I’ll go kill two or three people”—would you think it is a “control thing” to say, “No, no. Please don’t do that!”?? That’s not control. That’s Jesus-life. If a brother or sister has unforgiveness or pride in their heart, it is exactly the same. We say, “Please do not have unforgiveness or pride in your heart.” “Please don’t kill; please don’t have hatred and anger.” It’s the same. Neither one is control. It’s Jesus-life.

Let me give you an example of someone that I know who lives in California—many miles away from where we live.... He is the editor of a “Christian” magazine. This magazine is sent to many places. He has told me several times exactly “how many” people and exactly “how many” countries his magazine goes to. He told me this when I first met him, he told me again a few weeks later, and he told me again a few weeks after that. Now, what does that sound like to spiritual ears? If I love him and I want his house to stand when the storms come, I’m going to listen for things that can hurt God’s heart and harm his walk with God. Do you remember when David took a census in the Old Testament? He wanted to count all the people that he was in charge of. Do you remember how God was angry about that? God brought judgment on David and on many of David’s people because of David’s pride. David had pride, and he wanted to know how many people he was in charge of. This friend of mine in California wanted to keep track of how many countries and how many people received his magazine. Many of the things that he writes in this magazine are very important and good, and I want him to be able to serve God very well. But the Bible says God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. The Bible also says a trap of the devil is pride. So, if I love him, I’m going to talk to him and try to help him put into practice the Word of God about pride. It IS possible to know about “how many” are “added to their number that day,” or how many fish are in the net. God did record such things, on occasion. It is not impossible if the motive is Right—ONLY to encourage God’s People—never for our own glory or to draw attention to mere men, rather than to Jesus.

I’m not controlling him by saying, “Please, please, please don’t have pride.” I’m saying, “Please. There are many good things God wants for your life. Don’t let the devil ruin them. Forget how many countries. Forget how many people. Don’t take a census. Just serve God with all your heart.” There is no control there. It is pleading from the heart for his sake and Jesus’ sake. We can plead about killing or murder; we can also plead about

pride or selfishness. I said to him, “Perhaps there is no pride in these words, but please be careful.” I’m not judging him, because I don’t know if there is pride or not, but I do know it is very dangerous territory, and he should be very careful with these things. All David wanted to do was want to take a census. Maybe to you that doesn’t sound so bad. But God was very unhappy about that. What if some trustworthy lovers of Yahweh had gone to David (alone and then together if he wouldn’t listen) when he first thought about that idea and said, “David, please don’t. Make sure there is no pride in your heart.” What if a good friend had gone to David and said, “If there is pride here, please don’t think about this.” If a good friend would have helped him put into practice the Word of God, 70,000 lives would have been saved. That’s how many were killed. 70,000. That’s a very large number. But if a friend had tried to help him turn away from pride just by asking him, pleading with him—70,000 lives could have been saved. I hope you can see the difference between pleading and loving and caring versus controlling. In both cases, you talk about what you see, but the heart is different.

## Working it Out, TOGETHER... in the Midst of Immaturity

Let’s say that someone does come to you and tries to help you see something in your life. Perhaps that person is immature. Perhaps the issue gets clouded. When someone is immature, there can be mixture sometimes. So, what do we do?

There are two or three things I want to say about it. First of all, Jesus honors the fact that we are doing this together. So, even if there is immaturity, He said that “if two or three come together to discuss a problem, there I will be.” He didn’t say everyone had to be perfectly mature or have perfect knowledge. He said He would come if we do it HIS WAY. If we do it HIS WAY, He said He would be in our midst. In Matthew 18, He said that “if you come together to solve a problem I will come too,” and He doesn’t talk about how mature the people are, or that they should have a title of elder or pastor or any such thing. I do understand perfectly the dilemma...it does create problems when there is immaturity or mixture. But it is important that we honor something “bigger” than ourselves. It takes faith to see something bigger than ourselves.

There have been people who I’ve brought to Jesus and helped to find Jesus who were very immature. I’ve had those people come to me and talk to me about things in my life. Sometimes they are totally right.

Sometimes they are totally wrong. Sometimes there is mixture (some good mixed with some bad)—that can be frequently true. But it's very important, even if I brought them to Jesus, that I honor something bigger than myself and that I humbly listen to them. Jesus said that if someone comes to me and has a grievance, if we can't work it out—then we bring in two or three others. That's what the Bible says. And if we still can't work it out, we tell it to the whole Church. The beautiful part about that is, even if there is immaturity, good things can still happen from it. If they come to me and say something that I don't think is true—according to the words of Jesus, I ask them to bring two or three others to talk to me, too—because something really good will happen if we do that. Jesus promised that He will come if we do that. And then... either I will see what I was blind to before, or they will see their immaturity if they discover that they were wrong.

BUT either way, I must never make them feel bad for coming to me. I must not discourage them from being a priest. I must be grateful that they had the courage to try. And perhaps I will learn from their effort. Or perhaps they will learn from their immaturity. But either way, if everyone is humble, then God will receive glory. If I want someone to not be immature anymore, I must not discourage them from doing the work of God. That's how they become mature—they try to do God's work, even if they make mistakes. So, sometimes it is hard when there is mixture. But God even works that together for the good, and it's okay.

If someone comes to me and says, "I really think you should do this instead of that"—I might think they are totally wrong, but I must not make them feel bad for trying. What I should do instead is bring others in to help talk about it, too. There are examples in the Bible of this. When Paul was far away from Corinth, they had problems (disagreements) in Corinth. Some were taking each other to court, others didn't believe in the resurrection. There were crazy things going on there and they were not getting the problems solved. So they asked for help from the outside. On another occasion, Paul was with some Judaizers (some people who believed in circumcision) and they couldn't solve the problem. Paul thought that circumcision wasn't essential. Other people thought that they must become Jews first and then Christians. They couldn't solve the problem. Both thought that they were right. So what did they do? In Acts 15 it says they all went to Jerusalem and talked about it with other people. They could have gotten angry and separated from each other. But instead they brought in more help. So when we have this mixture or immaturity, we bring in more help—even if we have to bring it in from the outside: from another part of the city, from another part of the country, from another country. We just bring in more

and more help, rather than separating from each other. This is the biblical pattern for overcoming mixture and for finding and hearing God.

At the end of Acts 15, after they brought in much more help to help clear this up, James said, “It seems good to us and to the Holy Spirit and here is the solution...” So there was a battle with different opinions. There was immaturity. Jesus said if we have problems, bring in more help. So we have been doing this where we live for nearly fifteen years now, and it’s getting better and better without all these problems. We even have many people that used to be “pastors” or leaders who thought they knew everything. But as we all learn to be humble, we can work together to build the House. And even all the smart guys become humble, like little children, and help each other—because we know we need help, and we want other people to look into our lives.

This Truth applies even as it relates to a husband and wife. There may be disagreements about this thing or that, but if the matters have to do with spiritual things, if it’s about Truth—then this all applies. Here is an example: If your husband does not like broccoli and doesn’t want you to fix broccoli and you really, really like broccoli...that’s okay. Don’t fix it. But if you go to someone else’s home and they have broccoli there, and he comes home with you and he is complaining about it and upset and angry about it...THAT is a spiritual issue. A personal preference is okay, but when sin comes in, that is not okay.

## Stretching Beyond Those We Know Well

How about when you don’t know someone very well? How does all of this apply then? What if you don’t have very much relationship with a person, yet you see a way to help that person? Part of this is simply faith. Because we understand that Jesus has bought His whole family with His blood, and if Jesus lives inside of people, then to talk to someone we don’t know very well is still very safe. It may be more difficult in some ways, but it is still very right to open up. There are times when you may be with people you don’t know very well and you see something that looks like it may not be like Jesus. Though you may not have seen it correctly, it’s still important—in most cases—that you try to talk about it.

God can give us prophetic eyesight to see things even if we don’t know a person well—even someone from a different city, a different state, or a different country. Because that is true, it is also true that people we don’t know very well can see prophetically into our lives and help us. And so, because we believe in Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus, we “open up” even

though we may not know each other very well. And it is very important that we learn to do so and that we learn to trust Jesus to help us through that. If we wait until we know someone deeply before we open up, we will never know anyone deeply!!

“I feel anger inside when they talk to me...”

What happens when someone comes to you, trying to help you, and inside of yourself you find many different feelings going on? Sometimes those feelings are not good. Paul said that we are not unaware of satan's devices. In other words, satan has tricks that he plays that are predictable. As we grow to be more like Jesus, we become very wise to satan's tricks. We learn how to battle with satan as we become more wise and more mature. When we find ourselves getting upset, we should stop and say, “Why am I so upset?” An unwise or immature person just says, “I'm angry. That's not fair. You don't understand.” But as we become more like Jesus, we say, “Whoa! My heart is going BOOM, BOOM, BOOM...and I have a lump in my throat. I am angry, and that is not a fruit of the Spirit. If it is not a fruit of the Spirit, what is it a fruit of? It must be a fruit of sin. So I better stop and find out why I am upset before I go forward.”

And as we become more wise and more mature, we can think and talk about it in peace and say, “You were right on these three points. I'm not sure I agree completely on this next point, but we can talk and pray more about it. Maybe we can bring in some others to help us talk about it.” That would be a wise and mature way to respond to things that upset us. Instead of being frustrated and angry and having barriers, instead of clenching our fists and being upset and striking back and saying, “Well, what about you?!” Instead of that we can say, “Let's talk about it, let's pray about it. Maybe you are right.” That is Jesus' way, and it brings much fruit. But it's not our habit, is it? We need to make better habits.

## Helping Each Other Over Time

As it relates to all relationships, even husbands and wives, there are very real, difficult things that happen. The beautiful thing about the Body of Christ in a lot of these things that we have been talking about is that as you begin to open up your lives with sisters and brothers, those sisters and brothers will help. The brothers, over time, will talk together with the husband and say to him, “You need to be more considerate, more observant.” The brothers will help show him ways to do that. The sisters will say to the wife, “You need to be more patient, you need to be more kind and loving.” That's what a helpmeet or rib is for, is to help, not to be

upset. So the sisters will help, and the brothers will help, and altogether in twelve or eighteen months, everyone will be totally different.

## Quality of Life Brings Confidence

There is something else that can help very much in embracing all of this and can make it easier for you to hear things from people that you might not know very well. It's not because you know someone very, very well that you are able to hear them. Rather, you can "hear" someone because you know the *quality of life* that they are a part of. Likewise, if they know the quality of life that you are a part of, it will give them the same freedom to receive what you say, even though they don't know you well. That's a very powerful truth—if the Church is really the Church! If I were to live here and there were 500 of us, maybe I wouldn't know you personally very well, but you would still be able to warmly receive the things I say without being offended (and vice versa), *if the quality of life—the Foundation—is proper throughout the whole Church*. The time when it becomes a problem is when the church is not really a Church, and people in the "church" just live any way they want to live. People are scattered. This is VERY unBiblical, but 98% of all places called "church" in every country live this way. God said if things are scattered in this way that "Your meetings do more harm than good!" In such a scattered, unBiblical environment (even if the singing and "preaching" seem "Biblical") much of God's will cannot be accomplished in lives.

For example, imagine an environment where you don't really know anyone too well and someone comes up to you and says, "You need to change, you need to change." You would likely say (or think, or gossip), "I don't know you. I don't know if your life is any good. I don't know if you love me, I don't know if you love anyone. What you are saying may be true, but I don't really appreciate it very much." That's what happens when the church is all scattered and it's not really a Church, as the Bible defines a Church. Of course there will likely be many Christians there, but that does not make it a Church, according to Jesus.

Now think of an environment where there are 500 people who are totally devoted to Jesus—and you know they are—and all 500 people are laying down their lives for each other every day. A daily *quality of Life* is there, and "from the least to the greatest, they ALL know Him." "See to it brothers that NONE of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart." "Admonish, encourage, warn, be called along-side one another DAILY, so that NONE are hardened and deceived by sin." "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of

Christ.” “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed!” If THIS is the quality of Life, THEN even if you don’t know them very well and they say something... it’s okay. You still want to hear it. So the quality of life, the Foundation, makes all the difference in how easy it is to hear. It’s not just whether or not they know me very well. It’s that I trust that they know Jesus very well.

When the Church is really the Church, if something is not working out, you can bring in other people that you trust. There IS a way to work it out. It doesn’t just end up in the air some place. If the person coming to you is immature, or you don’t know them very well, and you don’t quite understand what they are saying; well, you know that they are committed to other people that you *do* trust and know...so, you are able to bring those other people in. You can always bring in other mature people to help clarify. If you know they are committed to people, they are committed to God, and their life is accountable to others—then it is easy to bring in other trustworthy people so you can get it all resolved. However, if everyone is just doing whatever they want and no one is really laying down their life for anyone...then it is just a bunch of words floating around and you don’t really know what to make of it all. You wouldn’t even know who to bring in to talk about it! Who would you bring in? They don’t know anyone. You don’t know anyone. It’s all just a big guessing game. Then it’s all suspicion and hypothetical stuff and you end up just being a rag-doll tossed around all over the place. But, if you know someone who is committed to daily life and you are too...and you hear something that’s immature (or you think it is), it is so easy to bring in other people that you know are solid people to help clear it all up. Then everyone goes home “new and improved.”

In an average religious assembly—hundreds of thousands of religious assemblies all over the world—most people can be part of that for twenty years and never really change very much. That’s a very sad situation. The reason it is that way is because they are building wrong. Someone is giving a speech or sermon to them on Sunday morning. Maybe they have a bible class over here or over there, and another religious meeting with miniature clergy in a home on Friday nights, once a month, except during summer family vacation and sports season. But they don’t have intertwined “joined and knit together” lives as a Priesthood of Believers. So most people don’t change, even after twenty years! That is very sad. But if we use God’s blueprint—the teachings of Jesus—then we can all change to be like Him. If we are humble and we work together as priests, the greatest miracle of all can happen—we can change.

## The Stench of Death, the Aroma of Life

The Way of Life, the Jesus Life, is so different. The world and the religious system see it as so, so different. Remember when Hitler took over the religious system in Germany? Dietrich Bonhoeffer had the courage to say, “That’s not Jesus.” He stepped outside of the religious system and as a result, he died in a prison. There are many stories throughout history of those that wouldn’t cooperate with the larger system. Many of our “heroes” whose books are widely read would have been totally rejected if they lived today like they lived in their days. “We build monuments to the Prophets out of the rocks that we stoned them with.”

While these Godly men and women refused to cooperate, they also didn’t call other people names or judge them (although there IS a right way to “judge” those that call themselves Christians—[1Cor. 5:12]) or insult them—rather they wanted to love them. Jesus said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not.” Jesus wouldn’t be part of the system, but He tried His best to try to love them and care for them, and *change* them. He did NOT accept them where they were. He simply had Hope that they would change. Eventually many did not change, so He took the Kingdom away from them, and gave to their betters. Nevertheless, this isn’t a matter of being insulting of others, but it is living Jesus’ way and trying to help everyone live Jesus’ way, too.

We live in a city where there are 1,500 denominational assemblies. We have visited many hundreds of these. We have given things to read to 1,200 or more of them. We have visited Believers of every background in almost every state, and every continent. I mention this so that you can know that no one I know wants to cut themselves off from others, unless they do not desire to love and obey Jesus, and “love the Light.” We try to meet people and love them and care for them and help them know Jesus, with the people that they know and care about. But as Jesus prophesied, not everyone wants to know Jesus. “*Many* will say to Me on that day....” Some people just want to go and listen to a speech, have prayers and then go back to their “own life.” But there are many, many good people out there who do love Jesus and do want to know Him. So we try to go to the synagogues and religious meetings and try to meet those people. Some will call you names, and some will love you very, very much. Paul said that the Good News of Jesus is the stench of death to some, and the aroma of life to others. So we just do the best we can.

When Martin Luther stepped outside of the “expected” norm of religious life, not very many people admired him for it. Some did, but most hated him for it. They said to him, “You must recant.” And he said, “I can’t. This

is what the Scriptures say. I have to do what God wants.” We are in the same situation today. God has shown things that His Scriptures say, and we must put them into practice. Regardless of what is popular, we cannot “recant” unless what is being brought to us is seen to be of God, and not simply human tradition and accommodation of the flesh of man.

As you know, the work that Martin Luther did has affected many millions of people. Today, there are people in many, many countries who are beginning to understand these things that we are talking about tonight, and it is growing very quickly. It may *seem* like you are alone, but you are not alone at all!

### *Together We'll Walk it Out*

I know the price that He paid was so very high  
To let me be made one with you, my brother.  
The price of Jesus' offering was His very life  
He was thinking of you, He was thinking of me,  
Thinking of us.

I know the price that He paid was so very high  
To let me be made one with you, my sister.  
The price of Jesus' offering was His very life  
He was thinking of you, He was thinking of me,  
Thinking of us.

He healed us by His blood and gave us new Life,  
So that for each other we could fight.  
We now work side by side,  
To build His House with our lives.  
And to break down all the barriers by His love.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,  
We declare right now,  
That we will pay whatever the price  
To be one heart in the Lord.

And though the darkness may fight against us  
And try to tear us apart,  
With our eyes fixed on Jesus  
Together, we'll walk it out.

When we look down at our physical children, so often we want to just make the hard things go away. I know that is how Jesus feels about us too. He would like to make all the hard things just go away for us. But then we wouldn't grow. These hard things are better than not growing into His Love and His Likeness.

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# For What Purpose Will YOU Die?

*Thursday LATE Night, December 27, 2002*

## Inevitable Call of the Grave

Except for that fortunate generation that will “be caught up with Him in the air,” each man and woman and child WILL die a physical death. Maybe it will “hurt real bad,” or perhaps it will be silent and swift. Perhaps you will outlive your children, or they may instead bury you. Regardless of method or timing, physical and total departure regardless of what is left undone—is rapidly approaching for all of us. It’s true, and what is true is best known and understood and accounted for in the decisions of our daily lives.

If you are amongst those who live “in denial” and will not willingly face the evil in the world, the pain in the world, disappointment, chaos, unhappiness...and death...it’s time to Grow up. It is only in driving forward “resolutely towards Jerusalem” and His Destiny in us that we can be Useful to the Cause and Purpose and Person of Jesus Christ.

*“If we will willingly share in His suffering, we may then share in His Glory” (Romans 8:17).*

*“No man is greater than his Master. If they hated Me, they will hate you also” (John 15:20).*

*“Woe to you, if all men speak well of you” (Luke 6:26).*

## We FACE the Truth

And so, we do not hide from pain and difficulty and unfairness, but embrace these visitors as one possible mark of Intimacy with Him and Promise from Him. “Denial” and avoidance are an empty game of the cowardly and fearful—not the Path of disciples of Jesus. The Enemy’s deceit and accusations towards Jesus’ men and women, the threats and power plays of the Enemy’s pawns and puppets are to be expected IF we

are about the Father's GENUINE business. Certainly, the marks of placebo cultural religious exercises and hobby are the daily pursuit of "acceptable" pleasure and comfort, and pursuit of our own personal business as a way of life. These who do not Know Him will order their lives by the cliché, "God, family, and religious hobby." They will, and do, treat God's Work and Together-Life in His "daily" Body (Acts 2:42-47; 1Cor. 12; Heb. 3:12-14) as no more than a social outing, on their own schedule. They will act as if His Truths are simply stimulation for the mind—a New York Times crossword puzzle of words and ideas and numbers. These are without awe of the Words of God, and therefore there is no felt compulsory obedience or responsibility for others. Christianity, His Church and Purposes are a game we play—a "plug-in" into the program of our personal lives, added to enhance our experience in some social and philosophical way. However, when our life's only focus and goal is pleasing and serving and representing HIM, as was true of the First of our Tribe, Jesus Christ, then and only then will we find death imminent day by day, as all Faithful are promised to experience.

Many think that by refusing to risk, refusing to challenge that which is not, refusing to think or care, refusing to turn full face towards the Truth with open hands... many believe they can thusly evade the death cost of "life that is truly Life." Some honestly believe, through squinted eyes as they read Holy Writ, that they might acquire the Pearl of Great Price for a rationalized tittle of a tittle of a tittle of life. They consider themselves complete and sufficient, if only they can point to the fact that they are being weekly sprinkled with evangelical "holy water" of "attending" a religious garage sale, flea market, or a circus or theater performance. And, OF COURSE, we know that this is not what Jesus demonstrated "Christianity" would be. *"Anyone who claims to be In Him, must walk as Jesus walked"* (1Jn. 2:6). Not simply "believe what Jesus taught."

And so, death is inevitable for ALL who love Him and actually live FOR Him. Threats, rejection, hatred, accusation, and pressures towards death are Biblically inescapable for those who represent Him properly in daily life.

We know, as the sands slide quietly through the narrow throat of the hourglass, those rushing sands whisper the same message regarding the brevity of life to all—whether disciple of Jesus, or not. The passing of time will lead all rapidly towards physical death. There is no reasonable denial. There is no hiding—that will not cost us more than we have saved by this denial. "While all die, not all really live." We choose. By definition, this is not an "extra" choice if we are truly a Disciple of Jesus (Lk. 9:57-62), a Christian (Acts 11:26). If truly Twice Born, each of us has chosen a life

that is costly, enlightened, and sacrificial—if saved, we are “doulos” and slaves “bought for a price”—“the precious Blood of Jesus.” A Saved human, saved by Jesus’ costly Death and Way, has chosen a Life fraught with risk, by definition, according to Jesus Himself. “Daily taking up our cross,” we sacrifice what all “mere men” (1Cor. 2-3) count precious. Others, devoid of His Spirit, or shaming and grieving His Spirit, will instead take the road most traveled: choices and affections and relationships filled with the lukewarmness of world-loving self-life, preoccupation with trinkets and mirrors, and shallow rationalizations—stumbling as they play and pretend in the grey twilight, only a step from oblivion.

We mustn’t live in denial of that which is inevitable: “*It is appointed to man once to die, and then to face the Judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27).

Okay. We’ve got that said. Awake! We must all stand wide awake to what is and what must be and what shall be! Death is near to all. It is friend, not foe, when we are His, of course. This, then, explains a true Disciple’s willingness to face death for Him and in Him. Still, aren’t many (with or without Jesus) willing to step out of denial and face death? Are not the sonnets of the centuries filled with such stories of those who will face death without denial? With awareness of such lofty issues as life, and such inevitable matters as death, isn’t it true that some will cry with clarion call, “I am willing to die! I face death with eyes ablaze, chin juttied, and fist raised to the sky!”

Let’s consider that for a moment, together. What kind of man or woman would face death and not turn away? Perhaps there are four kinds of mortals who are not in denial, nor cowards in the face of death. Who are these four kinds of men and women and youth?

## What Kind of Man or Woman Will WILLINGLY Face Death?

### Man #1

The careless man. He will willingly die. This man, drunk on pleasure or lust, frivolity or irresponsibility shouts, “Eat, drink, and be merry—for tomorrow we all die! Of course we will die, but we fear not! OUR God is a God of L-uhhhh-vvvvve, and nothing will happen to us. We all attend a yellow submarine—the Temple, the Temple, the Temple, Peace, Peace.” This man or woman has persuaded himself that all must be well, and that consequences and truths do not exist if they do not wish them to exist. They will die with eyes open wide, unwilling to acknowledge the reality

of the Message and Commands and Opportunities in Jesus Christ. “They have a form of godliness, but deny the Power.”

A second kind of man or woman is also willing to face death and die.

## Man #2

The man of hatred. This man, empowered by rage, drunk on ambition or movement, guided by hatred of what (or who) he believes he is against, is willing to “die in battle.” In the depths of his heart, he simply despises himself—and his heroism is often no more than the despairing of his own empty life and hypocrisy. This macho man is quite willing to “die in battle.” Envy, anger, hatred, and other such animals crawl mercilessly under his or her skin, and throb for release from their bondage. For such a slave, it will be death, or Jesus Christ—one or the other. And which shall it be, “the frying pan into the fire” of seeking release for pain in sin? Or will it be abandoning ourselves into the Grace and Truth and Life of Jesus Christ? The answer lays in how any human answers this question: “Will you have THIS Man Jesus Christ over you, to be your King?” To those tormented by their inner egos and demons, a “courageous” death has an appeal. They think to themselves, often without even knowing it, “I can appear to have gained meaning and status by risking my life.” Hatred, in many, has already stolen the spark of life—leaving nothing to truly risk. This second man or woman will “risk their life” for their cause, or even randomly in foolish choices.

Now, this third man or woman will also step out of denial and personal comfort, and risk their lives. This third common sentiment and instinct of a man has fueled the ovens of war for millennia...

## Man #3

Many can be willing to raise the sword and die—if they knew they would die if they did not. These would risk death to defend themselves from another death that might have been imposed upon them from elsewhere. This is not courage, but defense of self, an animal protection mechanism. We find in this “carnal heroism” category those who are willing to die in defense of geographical dirt, or pagan political ideology. Men will readily die, pumped to the gourd with blind obedience by “basic training” brainwashing, and by the pummel of marching songs, guilt, fear, pride, and emotional ploys. Men will be programmed by others, or self-inspired to die for water rights, land rights, for someone else’s oil, for an illusion of wealth or power or “paradise,” or for any number of “civilian affairs”

unrelated to the Spirit and Truth. Nations rise and fall by the success or failure of its leaders to sing the song well to inspire chest-thumping by its young men, when the young ones have not even truly been informed as to the reality of the hidden motives and mission. For those who are not in Christ Jesus and will not love Him or obey Him, this is a way to bring “meaning” to their lives. Thousands and millions will perish forever from the earth, trained to jump at the cadence of someone else’s drum, and think it heroic to do so. Simon says, “Shoot, on my command.” Simon says, “Raise your hands.” Simon says, “Give your money.” Simon says, “Shake the hand of your neighbor.” Simon says, “Repeat after me.” I comment not on the validity of such a choice, or lack of validity, for those who are not Spirit-filled Disciples of Jesus. Perhaps this is all fine for them. Such men, willing to die in this way, do exist.

## Man #4

Ahhh...and then this. The Life and Death of Jesus of Nazareth, worn in heart and soul by some few Wayfarers:

*Man with his burning soul  
Has but an hour of breath  
To build a ship of Truth  
In which his soul may  
Sail on the sea of death  
For death takes its toll  
Of beauty, courage, youth  
Of all but Truth.*

Some very VERY few are those who would die willingly for love of the Man Jesus, and a cause of His Truths (which He personifies as “the Word” and “the Truth” and “the Way”). These Special Ones, His Elect, would consider betrayal of His love and Truth to BE death, and far more vulgar than mere physical death. In living for Him regardless of cost there is no real risk. With no earthly reward in sight, with no applause sought, these men and women in the Spirit and Together-Life of the Son of God will die FOR Him and IN Him. If prophecy in the Bible regarding your lifetime is True, those in love with Him and obedient to Him will risk dying a criminal death, by simple unyielding Faithfulness to His Word and Ways. Clandestine hand-holding between the Romans (the secular government) and the Religionists (the accepted cultural expression of religion) will plot for the Body what it conspired against its Head, Jesus of Nazareth. A Faithful man or woman will always find themselves, as Jesus

promised, rejected by most. “Woe to you if you are not hated by those with something to lose, and accused by those who choose to not bow their knee to the King in daily life.”

True Christians, Jesus said and demonstrated, will be indicted by a conjured (and remarkably “believable”) testimony from those who seek revenge as an outlet for their own plagued consciences. Fear and jealous rage will make your existence unacceptable to those with something to lose—if you REALLY love Him and obey Him in your workplace and family and neighborhood. The accusers’ true ulterior motives for wanting you harmed or silenced are covered with the smoke screen of the noble cause, in God’s service. Often their motives are, in reality, protecting their own empires or wages. Sometimes it is their pride alone that justifies, to them, the killing of anything or anyone which lovingly would pull the shroud and expose their fouled consciences. Of course, this aspect is seldom seen by the rest of the religious hierarchy, or by the religious masses. If we sing loudly enough, wave our arms, and crank the percussion, all the hard stuff “goes away.” A polygraph test would reveal they truly believe you ARE worthy to be burned at the stake, literally or figuratively through libel and slander and creative “punishments” and collusion. These, with something to hide or protect, are honestly convinced they would be “doing God a favor” by extinguishing you—or attempting to cripple you through this slander and gossip. Jesus prophesied over and over again in His physical lifetime here that this hatred and these attacks would surely take place against those who truly live for Him.

*“Do not weep for Me, but for yourselves and for your children. For if men do these things when the Tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:31).*

If the “Tree” the Firstborn has planted—the Life of Heaven come to earth—is so despised when it is so young, said Jesus... how much more will the world hate a Church in maturity and seasoned Christ-Life? As “the Bride makes herself ready” for the Return of the Groom, the dragon’s hatred and attacks are every bit as deceitful and violent, according to Jesus, as they were towards Him.

Nevertheless, those ablaze with His Life and Love, buried in the daily Life of the “pillar and foundation” of Ekklesia and Koinonia, with Reason to “live and move and have their being”...will press on. These will forfeit or water down NO Truth to accommodate “the lowest common denominator” of worldly christendom—since all Truth is inseparably part and Life of Jesus and His Father (John 1). Those in love with Jesus more than in love with themselves and this “wicked and adulterous generation”...will “stand firm

*in the Spirit, contending as One Man for the Faith of the Message without being frightened in any way by those who oppose them. This is a Sign that the accusers will be destroyed, but that you will be Saved—and that by God” (Php.1:27-28).*

In the footsteps of their Master and Friend, Jesus, those “in Christ” will willingly forfeit their pleasures, reputations, securities and relationships, as He did, for Truth and Love of the Father. His Volunteer Tribe, “of the Faith of Abraham” and born by His Transfiguring Spirit, have left all for Jesus. A true Christian will risk even physical life itself—for a Man they have not yet met face-to-face, and for His Truths which they will not argue for self-justification. Hallelujah.

*“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives, even to the cost of death” (Revelation 12:10-11).*

Yes, and Amen. THAT is Jesus. THAT is Christ-ianity. That is the Life of the local Church, in Christ, “Daily” and Together “from the least to the greatest.”





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# By Your Grace!!!!!!!!!!!!.....

*Saturday Night, July 3, 1999*

*My Dear friend Jesus, The love of my life—and my King!*

*I PROMISE! I promise never to...*

*Let You down. And if I do, I WILL make it right. I promise never to become defensive, no matter what means You use to help me See You and be more like You.*

*I promise never to give up on our love and my devotion to You, no matter what I'm feeling or experiencing in this present age.*

*I promise never to make plans without checking with You.*

*I promise never to leave a ring in the bathtub, or leave others' sidewalks unshoveled in the winter.*

*I promise never to be consumed with trivial work or news or sports-related things, and be distant from You.*

*I promise never to give away affections or admiration to those that don't have You living inside of them in a clear and powerful way.*

*I promise never to think longingly of past sin, or even consider future sin and separation from You, even for a second.*

*I promise to never lose my sense of humor, and un-religious relationship with You, and those hidden in You.*

*I promise never to take all of the things You do for me for granted.*

*I promise never to resent not having what I think You SHOULD do for me now, or in the future, but only to be grateful for what You've already done for me. I never deserved even that, but You loved me, and gave.*

*I promise never to be disagreeable with those that You bought with Your blood. You've said that this would be the same as being disagreeable with You...and that would be ridiculous.*

*I promise that our relationship will never be in jeopardy.*

*I promise I'll never try to keep secrets from You, as if that were actually possible anyway!*

*I promise never to doubt Your word.*

*I promise to talk to You before anything else happens, every day. You're first. Always.*

*I promise to never spend money without consulting You first.*

*I promise never to hold back a single penny, or a home, or a car, or a hobby. It's all Yours. I promise!*

*I promise never to take advantage of Your love or forgiveness, or good nature.*

*I promise to always stand up for You and those You love...in a crowd, or in private, when You are drug down by others.*

*I promise never to approach You with ulterior motives. All is for You. I won't use You to get what I want for myself. I won't trade You. I'm Yours.*

*I promise I won't keep you waiting. 'On earth as it is in Heaven.' Michael and Gabriel and the others DON'T keep You waiting!*

*I promise to never second-guess You.*

*I promise to never be jealous of Your gifts or relationship with others.*

*I promise to never give You reasons to wonder about me.*

*I PROMISE, JESUS!! I love You!!*