



CHANGE FOR GROWTH

A Rocky Road To Restoration

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Roger E. Dickson

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Roger E. Dickson

rdickson@mweb.co.za

www.africainternational.org

www.blog.africainternational.org

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Cover Picture

Stafford, Kansas U.S.A. The author lived on a farm eight miles from this home town (village) in central America. Present population: About 2,000. The buildings on the right were built between 1900 and 1925. On these once dirt streets were the horse-drawn wagons of great grandfather Dickson. Times have changed to a new and better way.

Preface

The apostle Peter wrote in the middle 60s “to the sojourners of the Dispersion” (1 Pt 1:1). These were the same Jewish Christians to which James also directed his Holy Scriptures of encouragement (Js 1:1). It was a time when Jewish Christians stood up and counted themselves to be disciples of Jesus in the face of those fellow Jews who refused to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. This persecution from unbelieving Jews came in view of the consummation of national Israel when the unbelieving Jews were calling on all Jews to be patriotic to Israel. Those Jews who stood with Jesus, therefore, were facing harsh persecution from their fellow Jews. Therefore, Peter wrote,

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you (1 Pt 4:12).

Both Peter and James wrote to encourage the faithful Jewish Christians in their stand against an apostate Israel that formerly crucified their Savior thirty years before their writing. In a similar religious environment, those who would stand for the truth of the gospel today must not think it a strange thing that those who are in the bondage of traditional religiosity would persecute those who stand for the truth.

We would write these words to leaders who undergo the same opposition of Satan that Jesus and the early Christians endured. Peter’s readers could not understand why their fellow Jews would persecute them for believing and obeying the truth of the gospel of the Jewish Messiah. Some who stand up today for the truth of the gospel also find it strange that they must undergo similar persecution,

persecution that often comes from those who believe in Jesus, but reject obedience to the truth of the gospel. So we write these words to encourage those who are discovering the crafty work of Satan through those who are in the bondage of their religious traditions, or are simply consumed with their desire to be first and influential among the disciples.

The material for this book comes from the textbook on persecution, the New Testament. Every leader must know the tricks of the devil, which tricks were used against Jesus and the early disciples. For years we have witnessed Satan using the same schemes to bring down those who would stand up for their conclusions that they have reaped from vigorous Bible study. In the face of every discouragement that Satan could muster in the first century, we must understand that Satan sought to discourage Jesus from His destiny. He sought to bring down the apostles who continued the rebellion against Jewish religiosity. We should not think for a moment that he has ceased in his vile efforts to discourage the growth of Christianity throughout the world today. To think that he laid down his weapons of discouragement would be to succumb to his efforts because of our desires to be accepted. If a Christian is suffering no negative responses from anyone concerning what he believes, then he should check his beliefs with what the Bible says. **If everything we believe is accepted by everyone, then we can be certain that everything we believe is not true.**

Parts of this book will seem negative, which they are because we are bringing to remembrance the devices of Satan that are negative against the truth of the gospel. In a religious world of literature where every book has been written to make us feel good, we

have often overlooked the fact that not everything is good. Satan is not good. His schemes are evil. We live in a generation, however, where there are many who have accepted everything as good, and everyone who “believes in Jesus” is right with God. Too many have accepted a doctrine of universalism, that is, everyone is right with God as long as they cry out, “Lord, Lord.”

We would differ with those who believe that there will be a universal deliverance from condemnation of everyone who simply “believes on Jesus.” The New Testament nowhere teaches this. So in this generation of universalists, there is a paradigm of truth in which we would take our stand. And if there is concrete truth that we must believe and obey, then we should not think it strange that those of the paradigm of universalism should bring all of Satan’s devices against us. Satan did such to Jesus in the first century, and we would assume that he will do the same today to the disciples of Jesus.

We continue to call for a restoration to the old paths of God’s directions. However, we live in a generation of history where the concept of restoring the times of refreshing is foreign to the thinking of most religious people. Because the Bible has become obscure in the faith of most religious people today, even those who call themselves after Christ Jesus know little about the Bible. The religious world seems to feel content to carry on with religiosity while forsaking a knowledge of Jesus that is revealed in the Scriptures. Even many of those who were formerly born out of a restoration to the authority of the word of God have often forgotten the principle that we must always be sensitive to restoring the Bible as the center of reference to our faith. In our acceptance of everything

and everyone, we forget that the true disciples of Jesus are those who love and keep His commandments.

We would not think it strange, therefore, when a diligent Bible student stands up to proclaim the word of God to a movement that has circled around and become that from which the early fathers fled, that he would not be faced with the same opposition that Jesus and the apostles faced in the first century.

Satan is still working today to discourage those who seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus through their study of the Bible. In the religious world in general, we find few Bible students today who labor in study daily in order to keep themselves close to God. When there are those who would stand up and repeat the words of God to Israel through Hosea, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge of My commandments,” then we would not think it strange that Satan would unleash the totality of his weapons of warfare against these “rebels.” The purpose for which we write is to alert faithful Bible students who have been the recipients of Satan’s attacks. These faithful students of the Bible must understand that Satan’s attack against them is not strange, for he used the same tactics against Jesus and the early church. It is encouraging to understand, however, that when we study how Satan worked in the past, then we can expect him to work the same way today. So Peter encourages the faithful with the following words:

But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Pt 4:13).

CHANGE FOR GROWTH

Those whose faith is not supported by the unchanging authority of the word of God will move endlessly from one organizational religious identity to another. Even when we accept the word of God as the divine written authority of our faith it is difficult to keep our faith focused on the unchanging behavior of true discipleship. A move from the original standard of faith can often happen even before the passing of the first generation of those who restored the word of God as the foundation of their faith. This was why Paul marvelled when he wrote to the first converts of Galatia. *“I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel”* (Gl 1:6). This may be understandable since these first followers of Galatia had no written standard to keep them on track.

The letter of Galatians was written by the Holy Spirit to turn them back on course to the one true gospel they had received from Paul. But even with this standard, it is always the desire of men to fabricate their own faith, and then carve a god in a stone or piece of wood who would condone their wayward religiosity. The fact is that we have been created by God to be religious beings, and thus, we will create some religion in the absence of God’s word. Unfortunately, the descendants of the founding fathers of any faith often drift away from the desires of their fathers. The conclusion to this axiomatic truth is that there must always be concrete truth that determines the final authority in all matters of our faith. And it is this truth that must be restored as the foundation of our faith if we wake up one day through the enlightenment of our personal studies of our Bibles and discover that we have moved away from the word of God.

When living in the chaos of religious diversity, there are those sincere Bible students who will rise up among us with a cry to restore the old paths of the faith from which so many have drifted. We call these restorationists rebels. They are leading a rebellion against wayward religiosity. Because they are rebels against the apostate establishment, their efforts to restore the original comes with a great deal of pain. Because of the emotional pain that is inherent in any effort of restoration, there are few brave souls who have the spiritual stamina and knowledge of the Original Directive, to take a stand for the

divine order. The number of people who would join the choir of restoration, and sing the melody of change, is always few. There are always few restorationist rebels in the religious world because we find our security in our traditions and reassurance by conforming to the norms of the religious establishment. For most people, therefore, changing from the norms of the establishment is simply too unsettling. It is too painful to admit that what we presently believe and do may possibly be flawed in reference to the word of God.

While living in the comfort of our religious traditions, or customs, change is often considered to be disrespectful to the ways of our fathers. So when a studious anomaly does speak out, or does something different in order to restore the divine order, he or she is often labeled a rebel, a “change agent.” The “rebel” thus suffers the burden of being subjected to all sorts of games the devil plays in order to bring him back into conformity with the crowd. As a rebel to Judaism, Jesus ended up on a cross because He sought to restore the faith of the people of God by steering people away from the Jews’ religion. Those who would rebel against apostasy today will often end up the same.

We were constructed beautifully by our Creator to be an emotional being who seems to be naturally resistant to change from the status quo. But maybe we are understanding our emotional and traditional state of religious behavior from the wrong perspective. Could it be that God created us with the ability to live intellectually and emotionally in an environment wherein change would guard us from stagnation in error and a life-style that is contrary to His traditions? After all, do not the words “repentance” and “restoration” mean change? If there is no repentance, then there can never be a transformed life. If there is no restoration, then there can never be a return to God’s ways if and when we go astray. Without repentance and restoration we are doomed to end up as religious misfits who have all gone our own ways. It is for this reason that if we are not on a continual course of restoration, then certainly we are destined to create a religiosity after our own traditions, and not the original traditions that come from the mandates of the word of God. Once our traditions are moved into the category of law, we are doomed to establish a religious heritage that is based on tradition and not the word of God.

INTRODUCTION

We lived our youth through the 1950s and 1960s in the American farming culture. We grew up on a farm in the state of Kansas that is in the central part of America. In growing up as a farm boy, we had the privilege of being farmers, and American farmers knew how to change to do things better in order to be more productive. And because we had no TV, no cellphones, computers, etc., the creativity of our minds was developed. We could imagine how to change things for the better.

We were the children of a post-pioneering father. When we were very young, we could not understand why our father, who lived in the initial “tractor age” of America in his youth, never wanted to own a horse on the farm on which we children grew up. We did not understand until one day he explained why he had such negative feelings toward these magnificent creatures that were always necessary in building great empires.

On our farm was a horse-drawn, one-bottom plow that was dumped in a rubbish heap in the pasture north of our farm house. There was also in the rubbish heap a horse-drawn and dilapidated, spoked-wheeled wagon. Beside these there were other half-buried instruments of farming as a horse-drawn hay rake and a few other farming items of yesteryear. As youth, we always assumed that these belonged to our great grandfather who had homesteaded the land that we were farming at the time. But they were not. They belonged, as our father explained,

to our grandfather and were used by both our grandfather and father in his youth to farm the land that we were farming in the “tractor age.”

Our father went on to explain that as a child he had toiled long hours every day to work the ground behind a horse-drawn plow. While we in our youth rode almost comfortably on a D John Deere tractor, our grandfather and father in his youth had grown up walking behind a horse-drawn plow and hauling grain into town in a horse-drawn wagon. Our father’s labors as a youth were arduous in order to survive as a third generation immigrant from Ireland who was struggling to carve out a life in the New World.

We remember our father telling us the story about coming home from the small town of Stafford one day in a horse-drawn wagon. He was about five years old at the time. The wagon slipped off the side of the path. He recalled, “I fell out of the wagon and rolled and rolled down the hill.” He remembered, “It seemed like I would never stop rolling.”

And now you know why our father cared little for horses. They reminded him of strenuous work and days of toil as a very young farm boy growing up looking through the dust all day at the hind quarters of a horse as he tilled the soil. To him, the introduction to tractors meant deliverance from the toil of the past. It meant seeing farther down the field than the hind quarters of a horse.

Now consider this. One of us three brothers who grew up on that same farm

that was cut out of virgin Kansas prairie grass is still farming the same land with his son. It is now being farmed with the most advanced machinery that can be made by the John Deere Corporation—we have always believed that there was no other machinery than John Deere. But as our brother rides in an air-conditioned tractor cab, listening to stereo music, which cab is equipped with a two-way radio, plus a cell phone in his pocket, the days of the horse-drawn plow are long gone. As he sets his GPS to plant a row of corn (maize) a half-mile long that one can look straight down from one end to the other, he farms in comfort. He is thankful that things have changed for the better on the American farm. Our father in his youth could never have imagined that such inventions would till the soil over which he had struggled behind a horse-drawn implement while stumbling over clods of dirt. Change was good.

It was the ability to change that made all this possible. When we went through our high school years in Stafford and Preston, Kansas, we were required to study agriculture every year. The American farmer wanted to always change from the past to new ways of farming for the future. In fact, all farm boys were part of a nationwide organization that was called the FFA (Future Farmers of America). We could not wait for our second year of high school when we could purchase and wear our FFA jackets. Our focus was on the future, not on preserving the horse-drawn plows of the past. To be successful farmers, we were trained to always discover how

farming could be better. And when something new and better was developed in farming, we were trained to change to the new and better. Every Kansas farm boy of America grew up in a culture of change. We were taught to do things differently and better for the sake of our children in the future.

This culture of change was a part of the American way of life and our faith. Back in those days when we “went to church,” it was not about going to some Sunday morning concert for which we bought no entry tickets. It was about assembling with other avid Bible students who were obsessed with learning more from God. Our thirsty minds swarmed around the Bible in order to learn something by which we might grow our faith and change our lives for the better. If an incoming preacher did not preach the Bible, he was gone before he unpacked his moving boxes.

Some early Kansas churches had what they called “Bible Readings.” The practice was taken from Moses’ command to the nation of Israel that during the Feast of Tabernacles every year, the nation was to come together and read the Sinai law before the people (Dt 31:9-13).

During the off season when there was no farming, the members of those small Kansas farm churches would come together in their horse-drawn wagons for the purpose of staying several days in fellowship to read the Bible to everyone present. Different people would take turns reading the Bible throughout the meeting. Everyone, some who could not read or write, listened as the word of God

was read aloud. Those pioneers had an unquenchable thirst for the word of God because they knew that it would lead them to a changed life that was better. They had moved out of the bondage of denominational doctrines and organized religion. Their quest in restoration was focused on finding their way out of the traditions of their misguided religious forefathers. They wanted to plow through the word of God on their own with the right to think freely.

While many other nations of the world at the time were trapped in the quagmire of their own traditions that kept their economies in stagnation, and thus remained economically dysfunctional, the American socio/economic culture relished in the Christian faith that led them to develop into the most economically powerful country of the world.

We have heard the statement, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” We grew up with the cultural identity, “If it ain’t broke, we can make it work better.” The view that we must have toward our faith is that we must never relinquish ourselves to a state of thinking that our faith is unbroken and that our forefathers had it all figured out. They did not know it all. We must always assume that we have strayed from God in some area of thinking or behavior, or have been led astray by the world of worldliness, or the deceptions of misguided religiosity. We must always be as the father who had enough sense and faith to at least get his afflicted son to Jesus. He cried out to Jesus, “*Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!*” (Mk 9:24).

Our faith always needs fixed. If we convince ourselves that we have come to the climax of faith, that we have arrived and need no changing, then we are doomed to suffer from our own religious bondage and fall in the stagnation of unbelief. We must always assume that our faith needs “fixin’.” If we do not, then we will terminate our thirst for that which builds faith, that is, the word of God: “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Rm 10:17). Those who believe that their “unbelief” does not need “fixin’,” are those who have stopped their ears from hearing the word of Christ. They have become dull of hearing (Hb 5:11).

The early pioneers of America believed that their Bibles would keep them plowing a straight furrow that led them straight to heaven. So instead of coming together in assembly to entertain themselves with their self-imposed religiosity, they came together to be “entertained” by the teaching of the word of God. This is so different from the generation that we witness today among those of the cheerleading preachers of concert assemblies. It is so different from those who have strayed to the institutionalization of accepted methodologies or religious ceremonies that they have created after their own desires. Bible study is a forgotten behavior of many modern churches, and because it is forgotten, millions of adherents to traditional religions throughout the world today have consigned themselves to validate their faith by either the heritage of their fathers, or by an emotional experience with

others in a hypnotic assembly of religionists.

Most countries today who are considered to be the “developing world” (Third World) seem to be stuck in the past. They have a difficult time changing for the better. When we travel through Africa, it seems that some are stuck in a time warp from which they cannot escape. In fact, many have said that when traveling throughout different parts of Africa it is like going back centuries in time. The comment has been made more than once concerning some parts of Africa, “These folks have lived this way for two thousand years.”

Change is not conducive to African culture. It is almost unnatural. In fact, if any nation would assert that “we are a developing nation,” then that nation is actually confessing that those of its society have a very difficult time with change. These countries need to keep in mind that Europe, America, and many Asian countries of the world, were once “developing,” “Third World” countries in their past a century ago. But because they were not afraid of change, they moved on. They are now “developed countries” giving aid to those underdeveloped countries who often fight against change, and thus resign themselves to the bondage of their own socio/economic dysfunction.

Our culture often determines how we view the functionality of our faith. If we live in a culture that is resistant to change, then we will often view with caution any changes that we would make in our religious behavior if we learn more truth from our Bibles. Change frightens

those who are traditional in their culture. For this reason, it is very difficult to change from misguided and established religious beliefs and ceremonies in order to follow the directions of the word of God.

If we are stuck in misdirected religiosity, and do not change when we discover more Bible information, then we will spiritually die, if indeed we are not already dead. Change can prevent death. The farming community of America changed out of necessity for survival. It was fine when our grandfather walked behind a horse in order to plow and plant the land. His father’s family could survive with a horse. But that land which our great-grandfather homesteaded in the middle of the nineteenth century will not support humans today without all the changes in farming techniques that have been made throughout the years. Farmers had to change to bigger and better equipment in order to live off the land. The farms had to become larger in order to support just one family.

When we grew up in central Kansas, as children we would rummage through old deserted farm houses of farmers of yesteryear who had long moved away. There were old deserted farm houses throughout central Kansas. The farmers who lived in those houses were all gone and their farms were consumed by other farms. In order to survive, change was necessary, both in the lives of those who moved on and those who stayed.

After over a century and a half of farming the land, fertilizers and circle

(pivot) irrigation are now absolutely necessary in order to produce any crops from the soil. In other words, if the modern mechanism of circle irrigation did not exist, the land on which central Kansas farmers now farm would have to be vacated, for it would not produce enough crops to pay for the fuel to power the equipment to plant and harvest. Without irrigation, the state of Kansas would subsequently be depopulated and the land

would go back to nature. Change, therefore, was necessary for survival.

When change must occur, and we fight against it, then we will die. Those who are resistant to change must take another look at what is necessary to make their faith grow again. Church leaders who are resistant to change will often lead the members of the church to lose their first love (Rv 2:4).

Chapter 1

Change In The Winds

When the apostles spoke through Peter a short time after the “Holy Gust” of wind had blown through Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, they proclaimed in the following statement that the winds of change were about to storm through Israel. In order not to be blown away with the changes that were coming, there was only one recourse that everyone must do in order to be pleasing to God:

*Therefore, repent and be converted [change your thinking and living] so that your sins may be blotted out, **in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord** (At 3:19).*

This was a proclamation of change, a change in thinking and behavior. The train of God’s messianic movement among the Jews was passing through Israel. Regardless of whether the Jews

boarded the train, it would continue to move on from them to the Gentiles throughout the entire world (See At 18:6). If the Jews who first heard the message did not repent from their legal religiosity that was created after the traditions of their fathers, and accept Jesus as the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the Messiah, then they would miss the train.

Those in Jerusalem who had the first opportunity to board the train of change through repentance and conversion to Jesus, but refused to board, would be the first to be trampled from existence in fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy that national Israel was coming to a close (See Mt 24). It was a matter of change or doom.

If we read again the proclamation of the apostles’ condition for the coming of the “times of refreshing,” it is evident that there were two conditions that were

necessary to make the coming change. The Jews had to repent and convert from their old ways. When there was repentance and conversion, then there would be change. Without this change, there would be no “times of refreshing.” Unfortunately, most of the Jews would continue in the deadness of their own legal religiosity, dead in their traditions, and thus, doomed to destruction in the consummation of national Israel. The apostles’ statement was a distinct call for a change from the old to the new, from the old covenant to the new covenant, from the law of Moses to the grace and truth of Jesus (Jr 31:31-34; Jn 1:17; Hb 8:7-13). It was a change in order to escape the doom of national Israel in A.D. 70, but ultimately a change in life to escape the doom of eternal hell when Jesus came at the end of time.

The apostles were the “change agents” for Jesus to turn a people from their own traditional religion to the new ways of God. In the historical setting in which they called for repentance and conversion, those Jews in Judea who did not heed the call would suffer the consequences of their rebellion against God. In the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, over one million Jews died in the consummation of national Israel.

Some have wondered why so many Jews rejected those winds of Messianic change in the first century, and thus discouraged the coming of the “times of refreshing.” The answer is in the nature of the traditional culture of the Jews and the legal religion that they had fabricated after their own traditions. **The more tra-**

ditional a culture is, the more difficult it is for those of the culture to initiate and encourage restorational change.

Traditional cultures will often accept changes that conform to the established culture. However, it is very difficult for traditional cultures to generate and encourage restoration. Restoration involves repentance, and repentance means change. In the case of the Jews of the first century, it meant a drastic change from their traditional religion to the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus (Ti 2:11). It is very difficult to change from one’s assurance that is based on obedience to the traditional requirements of one’s self-imposed religiosity to the grace of God. Specifically, the legal religionist has difficulty making this change. In legalistic religions the adherents find security in the self-imposed traditions of their own religion. But in grace one must trust in the mercy of God.

For the Jews who lived with a theocratic world view, Jesus meant not only a change from legal religiosity, but a change in their isolationist behavior in reference to the Gentiles. It was thus very difficult for the Jews to change in their culture, as it is in all cultures that are theocratic and traditional in function. For the Jews to turn to Jesus, they were turning from the security of their cultural heritage. In the new culture of Christ (Christianity), there would be no Jew or Gentile (Gl 3:26-29). There would be no national Israel to which one could be patriotic, for national Israel was coming to a close in A.D. 70 (See Mt 24). The Jewish world in the eternal plan of God was

giving way in the first century to a new community of faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

The early Americans fought for and won their independence from English rule in the middle 1700s. The New World (America) that the revolutionaries built was a world that was built by immigrants, immigrants who had left the old world for the new. They left their cultures of Europe in order to make a new life for themselves in the New World. These were immigrants who were looking for a new life, a life of freedom. They came to America in the thousands during the 1800s in order to think freely and to determine their own future.

Immigrants came with their dreams, and with the baggage of their old cultures and languages. However, when they set foot on the new land of hope and opportunity, they adopted the English language—a nation cannot be united unless it has a common language. With the amalgamation of so many cultures in the New World, they developed a new way of life. Their blending of many foreign cultures formed the American culture of diversity. The people become united in their diversity. The serendipity of the amalgamation of cultures to form a new way of life meant that people learned how to change. The development of the American culture resulted in a subliminal cultural trait that makes it easy to change. Change for a better way of life became a cultural value of the New World.

Those who settled the New World were willing to change for a better life.

In severing themselves from the Old World, they were determined to build a nation that was based on the freedom of the individual to think and live. This ability to change for the better spilled over into their spiritual life. As devout Bible students, many would approach their study of the Bible with opened minds, not with the bondage of their past religious traditions.

Nevertheless, there were those who brought with them the religious traditions of the Old World. All the traditional religions of the Old World found a place in the freedom of the New World. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, and specifically at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the spirit of independence and freedom gave birth to what is referred to as the American Restoration Movement. The traditional religions of the Old World could not keep in bondage these free thinkers who studied anew the Holy Scriptures.

The Restoration Movement found its birth in America because, in their spirit of independence and love for the word of God, dedicated people began to think freely, and thus cast off the bondage of traditional religiosity. Because of their culture of independence and freedom, it was easy for them to rid themselves of those traditional catechisms of men that kept them in bondage for centuries in the Old World.

Do not make the mistake of believing that it was easy to make the change. It was certainly a fearful thing to flee from the comfort of traditional religiosity. However, the early restorationists'

comfort came from the authority of the word of God alone as the foundation upon which they built their faith. They concluded that if the Scriptures were able to furnish one unto every good work, then certainly the Scriptures were all that was needed to present one pleasing before God (2 Tm 3:16,17). It was the authority of the Scriptures, therefore, that moved them on from the authority of the religious traditions of their fathers. As a result, a massive Restoration Movement in faith stormed across America in the 1800s.

The message of restoration, as Peter proclaimed in Jerusalem two thousand

years ago, has now gone into all the world. There are millions of disciples throughout the world today who are the product of that nineteenth century American Restoration Movement. They are not products of restoration movements that were generated within their own traditional cultures. They were initially products of mission efforts of the American Restoration Movement that sent evangelists throughout the world. We know of few independent restoration movements in cultures of the world that generated a worldwide impact that was generated by the nineteenth century Restoration Movement of America.

Chapter 2

Traditionalized Restoration

Restoration movements have occurred among various cultures of the world. However, these movements have generally remained local. Because of the strict traditional nature of the culture in which they were born, they have often gone astray, and thus, faded back into the legal religiosity that is common with other local religions.

We have never found in the world today a worldwide restoration movement that was generated within any highly traditional culture simply because the more impact tradition establishes a culture, the less determination there is within society to allow the Bible to be the final authority in matters of faith. For this reason, the American Restoration Movement was unique.

Cultures that hinder freedom and in-

dependence, and thus are very traditional, make it difficult for the citizens to think freely in reference to all aspects of life. Traditional cultures, as the Jewish culture at the time Peter made the announcement of the “times of refreshing,” are highly resistant to change. The Jewish religious leadership (the establishment) had brought the thinking of the people into the bondage of the religious traditions of Judaism. The people were thus in the bondage of the religious leaders, whose duty it was to perpetuate the traditions of the fathers.

When the evangelists of the American Restoration went into all the world, we must note that many throughout the world “bought into” the restoration idea. However, the movement grew only because those who bought into the restora-

tion ideal were converts from the traditional religions of the world. Converts were picked off one by one from the camp of the enemy through one baptism at a time. Missionary reports were considered exciting when we read of “baptism reports.” It was not that the idea of restoration was spontaneous within the traditional cultures when freethinkers studied themselves out of religious error. In almost all nations to which the restorationists went it took the restoration evangelists to spark the concept of restoration. Thus the movement of restoration was generally generated from outside traditional cultures, not from within.

And herein was the Achilles’ heel of the movement within those traditional cultures that were not known for generating freethinking from within their religious communities. The imported ideology of restoration was often “traditionalized” by the local traditionalists. The local legal system of religiosity easily legalized the teaching that was introduced by the missionaries. The locals legalized the “outline of doctrine” that was imported and handed to each new convert. The outline had already been generated by the senders, and thus, it was assumed that if the new converts would remain faithful to the outline, then they would remain faithful to Jesus. What often happened was that Christians were identified by the foreign appendages of cultural traits that arrived in the “mission field” through the foreign evangelist. New converts were clones of the outlined thinking and behavior that was imported by the expatriate evangelist.

Because the local folks were not taught to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, but to perpetuate the legal outline of identity of the church, the church where the outline was imported often circled around and became as denominational as the traditional denominations from which the American restorationists fled. National churches that previously bought into the message of the pioneering evangelists buried themselves in traditional religiosity from which they now find it difficult to think freely for themselves in applying the message of the word of God in their own culture.

This did not happen when Jesus came into the world. He and His teaching were radical, so radical in comparison to the teaching of the Jewish religious leaders that it was not possible for them to syncretize the Jews’ religion with the message of the gospel of grace. Some Jewish Christians tried to make the harmony, but they ended up with “another gospel” that the Holy Spirit immediately condemned as a denial of the grace of God (See Gl 1:6-9).

In order to set the people free from Judaism, God had to work great miracles to confirm the fact that there was a change from His relationship with Israel to His new relationship with those with whom He had established a new covenant (See Mk 16:20). The dead were raised, the blind were made to see, and the crippled arose and walked (Hb 2:3,4). God knew that it would be difficult for the Jews to accept the radical change from the law of Moses to the gospel of grace that was revealed through His Son (Ti 2:11).

God knew that it would be difficult for the Jews to change when the “fullness of time” came. Through prophecy, therefore, He laid the ground work for changes the Jews had to make when the Messiah came. In Isaiah 28:11,12, He prophesied that His people would eventually be identified by their speaking in unlearned languages that they had not studied. We understand the prophecy in this manner because this is Paul’s inspired interpretation of the prophecy in his quotation of Isaiah 28:11,12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21. Isaiah stated in the prophecy that God would speak to His people with other languages. This speaking would be the signal of His people. Jesus said that the new covenant people of God would speak with new languages (Mk 16:17). **When the early disciples spoke in languages by the Holy Spirit, it was God’s signal to the unbelieving Jews that God had changed from His covenant relationship with national Israel to His new covenant relationship with the new spiritual Israel of God, the church** (1 Co 14:22).

The new Israel had been set free from the past in order to embrace the new in Jesus Christ. God will use no confirming miracles today to signal those who are His people. He does not need confirming miracles for such a purpose because He has given His written record of miracles that is able to furnish the people of God unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16,17). No longer do the people of God need to speak with languages they have not studied. God’s confirmation through languages (tongues) was accomplished in

the first century. The confirmation was recorded. Since the first century, therefore, we read in the New Testament of those whom God confirmed to be His people. If one needs a confirming miracle of the word of God among men, then he can open his Bible and read (See Jn 20:30,31). Today we read our New Testaments in order to define those in the first century who were God’s new Israel. We no longer need “tongues” of confirmation for this purpose. God expects us to read our Bibles. Nevertheless, we have found that those religionists who are obsessed with speaking in uncontrollable gibberish, while calling such tongues, have little desire to study their Bibles in order to confirm their faith.

When people are set free, they begin to study anew the word of God. And when freed people study their Bibles, unhindered by their fear of being ostracized by those of traditional religiosity, they start enjoying the times of refreshing that come from the Lord. We can understand why Jesus, immediately before His ascension, rehearsed with His disciples the prophecies of Himself and opened their minds to all prophecy (Lk 24:44,45). The apostles needed reassurance that all the prophecies had indeed been fulfilled in the One who was standing before them. They were still in the bondage of the thinking of the Jewish religious leaders. But in a few days on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would set their minds truly free.

If there is within a culture a lack of free independent thinking, then the religionists of the culture are doomed to live

in the bondage of those whose job it is to regiment all adherents of their prospective faiths into conformity to the traditions of the fathers. When religious leaders find themselves making judgments that are based on the traditions of the fathers, then there will be no times of refreshing from the Lord. It is only when men's minds are set free to study the word of God anew will there be repentance and conversion to the word of God. This understanding is at the heart of what Jesus said: *"Therefore, if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed"* (Jn 8:36).

We have traveled and visited numerous religious groups throughout the world who have orchestrated a diversity of assembly ceremonies by which they seek to validate their faith. We have discovered an axiomatic truth in reference to groups who do not have a high regard for the word of God. This truth is in the fact that **if there is no open and public Bible study among those of a particular group, the group is on its way to somewhere other than the times of refreshing from the Lord.**

Those religious groups that have no Bible study among themselves are usually "Lord, Lord" groups who cry out to God, but His word plays a small part in

their religiosity. They thus seek to bind themselves together by their religious ceremonies, or other inventions that are pleasing to all the adherents. The foundation of their fellowship is not according to the desires of the One who seeks to be worshiped in spirit and truth (See Jn 4:24).

It is believed by some of these groups that if enough energy can be expressed in an assembly, then truth can be sacrificed. They thus sacrifice truth for emotional energy. The result is that their coming together in assembly is for the purpose of entertaining themselves—or exhausting themselves—into the bondage of themselves. In their narcissistic religiosity, therefore, self-mesmerizing assemblies have been substituted for worshipful hearts that should be pouring out spiritual sacrifices according to the will of God. These folks need to be set free from themselves. And the only way they can be set free is through the medium of what Jesus said, *"And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (Jn 8:32).

There is no possible way to know the truth if we do not open our Bibles. Any group of religious people who would assert that they are following the Lord, must be avid students of the word of the Lord.

Chapter 3

Conforming To The Norm

That which encourages change is education. The farming techniques of America changed throughout the years because of education. It is very difficult

for an uneducated people to make changes, for in their lack of knowledge they seek to find stability in the traditions of their fathers. For this reason, it is dif-

difficult for an uneducated people to be delivered from the bondage of their traditions. We forget that our fathers did the best they could with what they knew. But the farming fathers of America knew that their children could do better. And in order for them to do better, every effort was made to educate their children.

Our great grandfather who settled middle America in Kansas had only a few years of school. Our grandfather had a few more years in school. Our father graduated from high school. And the one writing these words graduated at the doctorate level. Every generation exceeded the schooling of the previous generation, and thus, the economic standard of living followed behind the greater education of each generation.

Our fathers' desire to learn spilled over into their spiritual life. Because the generation of Americans out of which we were born were vibrant students, we became vibrant students of the Bible. Our obsession with Bible study made it necessary to change from traditional teachings that were based on a lack of knowledge of the Bible and were handed down from the fathers of the Old World. When we learned something new in the Bible, we accepted it as the will of God. If changes needed to be made in our thinking, we changed. If changes needed to be made in our lives, then we sought to sacrifice tradition for Scripture. Knowledge of the Scriptures inspired a transition from a foundation based on tradition to a foundation that was based on truth. Such was in the mind of Peter when he wrote to his fellow Jews: "*But*

grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 3:18). In other words, make the transition from tradition to truth.

Religious groups today who purport to be "following Jesus," but do not have open Bible study, have doomed themselves to carry on with either the traditions of the fathers, or continually invent for themselves a religiosity that is subject to the changing times of society.

After the tremendous migration of people from Europe to America during the 1700s and 1800s, America became a culture of diversity. People considered themselves to be Americans, not Irish, or Germans, or Russians, or any of the nations from which they came. Though immigrants from all over the world came together to the New World, there was the natural development of what became known as the American way of life. This was particularly true as industrialization began to transform American ways into a cultural identity that was unique. It was unique in that difference was accepted as the norm.

Patriotism congealed the American diversity into being one nation under God. When American soldiers went overseas to settle the wars of others, and then returned home, they went as Americans and returned as Americans with an expanded world view. America had a story to tell the world that was based on education, and thus, Americans assumed that everyone could follow the same socio/economic road to development if they would educate their people. They too would be proud of being their own

educated and developed nation. Ignorant citizens are rarely patriotic to the nation of which they are a citizen.

But with the conclusion of sorting out the Nazi Germany threat of WW II, American soldiers returned home from being “soldiers on foreign soil”—those for whom we prayed every Sunday when we were children. The soldiers returned home with some different thinking that the war had formed. There were some social rebels among this group who had discovered “overseas” some new ways, ways that were different than the American way. Other people did think differently than Americans. There were different cultures that were parallel with, but not contrary to, the American way of life.

A new word made its way into international relations between nations. “Peaceful coexistence” meant that nations could maintain their “differences” in a world of social and political differences. It was a social behavior that was embedded in the American way of life since its early beginnings. The many immigrants of the many nations of the world who had practiced “peaceful coexistence” gave birth to a unique cultural trait that the international family of nations needed. This “unity in social diversity” has now gone international. After WW I, world organizations as the League of Nations, and then the United Nations were born out of this desire to be united in our diversity.

The rise of individuals who opposed conformity to all social order was beginning to arise in America in the 1950s. Americans were about to discover some-

thing almost unique about their own way of life. Americans were about to discover their “peaceful coexistence” culture that made them great as one nation under God. Freedom to think and behave was about to give birth to a new generation of nonconformist Americans who would change America forever. The traditional farming culture of America that brought the nation into the modern world was about to give way to a changing culture that was led by the cities of America.

With his close friend, Neal Cassidy, Jack Kerouac traveled across America during the late 1940s after WW II. For him, he made a marvelous discovery. He discovered and experienced numerous differences in the American way of life and how Americans learned to live as one nation within the definitions of their unique circumstances. It was a beautiful discovery, one that truly revealed that there was accepted diversity within the whole of American society. The outside world was wrong to stereotype America, or as the world today, judging America according to what they see on TV and the international news media. What Kerouac experienced was the rise of a new nonconformist individualism that would not find its expression until the nonconformist revolution that had roots in the 1950s and became a major movement of America in the 1960s.

Kerouac was at first frustrated with what he had experienced on his adventure across America. He was frustrated with the efforts of the norm to work against change into something different. He earnestly wanted to put into words

his “quest for self-knowledge and experience.” His travel experiences had revealed that any healthy society must relinquish itself to continual change.

The only way Kerouac believed that he could reveal his discoveries to the general public was to become a “writing monk” until all his thoughts were put on paper. He had a typewriter (remember those), but he was too impatient to be held up in writing by continually changing individual sheets of paper in his typewriter. He felt that he had to write uninterrupted until he dropped. So he found a roll of paper that was used in a teletype machine, inserted it in his typewriter, and then started throwing words on paper through his fingers day after day. After three weeks of constant writing as a literary hermit in the confinement of his quarters, he came out with a document that would later be published as a book that was entitled, *On The Road*.

Kerouac’s writings laid unpublished and dormant for years. Then finally in 1955 the book was first published. The book immediately hit the best-seller list and has remained on the published book list ever since. *On The Road* touched a nerve in the “antiestablishment” movement of the 1960s. People were wanting to think freely for themselves, and live contrary to the accepted traditional way of life. Young people of the 1960s were looking for a changed way of life, something that was new, and above all, different. Kerouac discovered that **cultural vibrance is discovered only in diversity, but a diversity that allowed individual freedom**. When there is diver-

sity within a culture, then there must also be forbearance among those who are of the culture. The citizens of forbearing cultures blend in their diversity. And when individuals are allowed the freedom to blend, then there is freedom to change and freedom to think. If a culture does not allow change in order to blend, then the citizens of the culture are doomed to stagnation in their own traditions. They remain in the subtle fear of education because they are afraid to think freely and change.

How would this “blending culture” affect the religiosity of the world, since all of us live a long way from America? Simple. After WW II America sent representatives of its culture into all the world through the efforts of missionaries. In order to usher change into cultures, European, and then American missionaries, established schools for education around the world. Languages of local tribal groups were transcribed into writing. Grammar books of the local languages were published and taught in the schools. The Bible was translated into thousands of languages.

The first missionaries brought with them the word of God, but often, they also brought with them a legal system of obedience to how the word of God was to be understood and implemented in the lives of the yet “unlearned.” A legal system of faith was easy for the new converts to understand and obey.

In reference to Bible schools that often promoted a legal interpretation of the Scriptures, and a legal application of biblical principles in the lives of differ-

ent cultures, Bible schools often became “cloning institutions” to perpetuate the religious traditions of the religion of the sending churches. Bible schools sought to teach a legal outline of what constituted “the truth.” Application of truth was often cloned after the religious behavior of the sending churches from the “Old World”. For example, we once visited an assembly of some disciples in the country of Zambia. All the men and boys obediently sat on one side of the meeting hall. All the women and girls did the same on the other side. Families were thus split in assembly by dividing males and females. This arrangement looked somewhat unnatural to us, that is, odd in reference to our Western culture. So we asked one of the leaders why the people were so seated. The answer was, “The missionaries taught us this way.”

When Bible schools become factories of legal religiosity to turn out theological clones whose thought processes are unchallenged to think independently, and thus dysfunctional in reference to common-sense interpretation of the Scriptures, then traditional theology is passed from one generation to another in order to maintain the continuity of the religious establishment. When schools fail to train students to think, then the school has failed its definition of being a school of “higher education.”

What many of the first missionaries failed to understand was that the cultures into which they went were cultures where social order was maintained by keeping the traditions of the fathers. It was easy for the adherents to the new

faith of these cultures, therefore, to legalize their faith into a simple catechism of belief and behavior that was written in an outline on paper. Preachers were cloned in many mission schools in order to perpetuate the catechisms of each particular faith. These defining catechisms were subsequently transferred from one generation to another. For this reason, it was necessary that each denominational faith have its own preacher training schools in order to perpetuate the unique catechism that was accepted by each particular faith.

Regardless of any resistance to change by traditionalists, change will always occur. We recall one missionary who came to South Africa long before the American church realized that there was a difference between the word of God and the American cultural manner by which this word was to be implemented in the life of a disciple. When we grew up in America, any effort to “celebrate” Christmas was taboo because some had associated the holiday with the birth of Christ. It was supposedly a Catholic doctrine, and thus, everyone abhorred the possibility of manifesting any theology that remotely resembled Catholic theology. Our missionary friend grew up in this religious culture of “fear theology.”

When our particular missionary friend came to South Africa, he preached the “sin of Christmas.” Since the origin of his theology was strictly legal as the church in which he grew up in the 1950s in America, he established a legal system of faith where he went as a mission-

ary. He thus brought a systematic theology to Africa that not only contained the word of God, but also added legal appendages that he had attached to the word of God. The whole of his theology became a catechism of faith for the new believers. Maintaining the catechism determined one's faithfulness to the "church."

Our missionary friend brought an anti-Christmas catechism with him to the new land. Nothing is said in the Scriptures concerning Christmas, and thus, such matters are within the realm of freedom. Unfortunately, those who are legalistic in their understanding of the word of God find it easy to attach their legal appendages to the word of God. They thus seek to fill in the gaps where the Scriptures are silent. **Silence of the Scriptures to the legalist means restriction, not freedom.**

When the anti-Christmas missionary came to Africa out of the cloned religious culture of his church, he could only preach that which was a clone of that from which he came. So he preached an anti-Christmas theology. When he left South Africa, he left this theology with a very traditional culture that sought to honor the fathers by strict obedience to the traditions of the fathers. For years it was "men on the one side of the auditorium and the women on the other."

There is an interesting conclusion to this story. The time came for the American missionary to return to his home culture from which he came. When he returned to his home, he returned to a post antiestablishment culture of the

1960s where society had changed and fellow Americans were encouraged to think freely and change. The antiestablishment culture of America had changed forever the cultural function of maintaining the traditions of the fathers. No longer were people expected to clone others with their fathers' traditions, whether in ordinary behavior of life, or in ceremonial religiosity. In reference to the church, no fundamental doctrine had changed. What had changed was the manner by which fundamental doctrine could be manifested in the life of the individual disciple. There was freedom to think and behave in those areas where the Scriptures were silent. Silence of the Scriptures, therefore, meant freedom of thought, not restriction, the very understanding that the Scriptures teach in Colossians 2:16: "*Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect to a festival, or of any new moon, or of sabbaths.*"

So when the missionary reentered his native changed culture, he too learned to think and behave individually and freely. In reference to his faith, no longer did he feel compelled to mold his thinking and behavior around the traditions of the fathers. The subsequent result was that he, and those he taught at home, enjoyed the freedom we all have in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. We had to laugh when in the 1990s our missionary friend sent us a Christmas card with a glorious Christmas tree on the front. He changed, but many of the traditionalists he taught in South Africa were still living with the legacy of his legalistic binding where

God had allowed freedom. Though it is changing in South Africa, there are still the remnants of those who condemn trees, that is “Christmas trees.”

So we in Africa live with what was brought to Africa out of a ceremonial legalism that was a cultural identity of the American church until the middle 1960s when there was an antiestablishment that promoted freethinking individualism. What we have discovered is that those of the American and European faiths have long restored the times of refreshing among themselves, while those in the “mission fields” to which they were first sent as missionaries have hardened themselves in a legalistic religiosity after their own traditional world views. The missionaries who returned to their homeland changed by moving on to freedom. Unfortunately, they left a legal legacy that has been refined into a hardened legal traditionalism.

The good news is that Africa has enrolled in the local university. As young Africans are introduced to free thinking

through education, they too are transitioning into an enlightenment of objective study of the Bible. Their interpretations and applications are turning from the “legal catechismal boxes” that were handed to them from a culture that eventually changed from legalistic cloning to freedom to interpret the word of God. We would request that all those in previous missionary-sending nations, who at home transitioned from legal religiosity to freedom in Christ, would in some way let those of their legacy throughout the world know that it is OK to change. We are of a faith that demands growth, **and inherent in growth is change**. We must never allow traditional religiosity to distort our view of the Scriptures, nor determine the application of Divine principles in our lives. It would be good for those who were left with a legacy of legal religiosity to read what Paul wrote to those of the same theology: “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*” (Gl 5:4).

Chapter 4

Opposition Of The Establishment

Part I

We have this unique breed of cat in our house. It is a Red Point Siamese. Now this is a very intelligent cat. His intelligence shows up in many things that he does. For example, this cat will choose a nice comfortable location where he will lay his head down and sleep for a definite period of time. He is particular.

He will sleep in this location for only seven to eight days. After eight days at the most, it is time to change to another location. He thus selects a new and clean bed where he will again sleep for only seven to eight days. He is not afraid to change locations.

As we said, this is an intelligent cat,

and thus, he is willing to make changes in order to keep his snow white hair clean. Now consider dogs. Dogs will sleep in the same old place until they develop mange. Dogs thus stink, and must have their owners bathe them regularly. But cats can clean themselves. Dogs are not freethinkers. They do only that which they are trained to do by their owners. But cats, now they are different. One does not tell a cat what to do. He has already determined what must be done. And for this reason, and many others, the saying is true: “Dogs drool; cats rule!”

Jesus came into a religious environment and culture that had been taught by the traditions of the fathers, the leadership of which Paul referred to as dogs (Ph 3:2). They behaved only as their fathers taught them through their traditions. Religious tradition governed every aspect of the lives of the Jews. Paul’s statement in Galatians 1:13 clearly explains the social environment of the time. He himself was formerly a part of the religious culture that he called “Judaism.” In fact, Paul defined the religion as the “Jew’s religion,” the translation that is used by some to render the Greek text of Galatians 1:13.

At the time when Jesus came into the world, Judaism was not God’s religion. It was a religion that had been fabricated throughout many centuries after the traditions and interpretations of the Jewish fathers. We must understand, therefore, that when Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4 that Jesus came in the “fullness of time,” he meant that Jesus came into a religious environment where many

people were seeking spiritual deliverance from the bondage of their own religious heritage. Jesus came, therefore, to generate a paradigm shift, not a reformation or restoration. He was the “change agent” of Judaism that moved the people from the bondage of their own religiosity to freedom that He offered through the grace of God.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus indirectly defined the “Jews’ religion” through His confrontation with the religious leaders. The scribes (religious lawyers) and Pharisees (religious stewards) were the guardians of the religion, and thus in the confrontations that Jesus had with them, the inconsistencies, or apostasy of the Jews’ religion, was clearly evident. Paul himself, as a former Pharisee, was a part of this system of religiosity (Ph 3:5). He was such a zealous fanatic for the Jew’s religion that he persecuted disciples of Jesus who were considered rebels (At 8:1-3).

As we study through the Judaism of the first century, we must not relegate this system of religiosity to the first century. The Jews’ religion was not a religious phenomenon that was unique with the Jews of the first century. The means by which it evolved into a system of religiosity that was confronted by the Son of God, and the manner by which it was perpetuated by its adherents, is as relevant today as it was over two thousand years ago. Change the name to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or even many of the “Christian” religions that are based on traditional religiosity, and the same system of religiosity exists today. We still

have traditional religions, though with different names and doctrines.

We still have “scribes” and “Pharisees” today who are the guardians of their respective faiths. And unless we still want to dodge the issue of the first century encounter that Jesus had with the religious establishment of His day, we must always recognize that there are in some areas of the world those who will take the church into being a “Jew’s religion.” They will do so when traditional interpretations and traditional religious ceremonies are bound on the disciples that have no authority of the Scriptures.

Jesus’ confrontation with the type of religiosity that He encountered during His ministry continues unto this day. Satan still uses religious people to oppose those faithfuls who seek to do the will of their heavenly Father. Since there will always be “Lord, Lord” religions in the “Christian world” who pretend to call themselves after Christ, but do not the will of the Father in heaven, there will always be a confrontation between those who seek to do the will of our heavenly Father and those who seek to do the will of their earthly fathers (See Mt 7:21-23). It is imperative, therefore, that we understand the nature of the religion that opposed Jesus in order that we understand the religious leadership of the religion that sent Jesus to the cross. Satan is still using the same tactics today that he used through the Jewish religious leadership during the early beginnings of the church.

In order to effectively lead people from a “Jew’s religion,” we must understand how people end up in a religion that

is fabricated after the traditions of the fathers. **Mark 7:1-9** (Mt 15:1-20) helps us understand how the opposing religion of Judaism was created over time, and why its leaders were so strongly opposed to Jesus and the early disciples. In the Mark 7 confrontation, Jesus explained why the religious establishment found it difficult to accept the new paradigm of grace that He was introducing.

Religions that are traditional are identified by their legal approach to their catechisms of belief and customary religious ceremonies. It is easy to identify religions in this way, for we identify them by their legal compliance to their catechisms and religious ceremonies that have no biblical authority. In this way Jesus defined the uniqueness of the Jews’ religion. In His confrontations with the Jewish leadership, we are able to identify those teachings that identified the apostasy of Judaism. By identifying the legal structures of Judaism as Jesus did, we are able to understand why many strongly opposed Jesus. Jesus’ definition of identity that exposed the Jews’ religion is thus our guideline today to identify similar systems of religion.

All cultures of the world respect their traditions. There is respect for the traditions of the fathers in order that the continuity of a culture might continue from one generation to another. This respect for the traditions of the fathers, however, is almost always brought into the realm of the religious behavior of the people. Respect for the religious traditions of the fathers promotes continuity in order to guarantee the continuation of

any particular religious heritage.

This was the religious environment that Jesus encountered during His ministry. The problem was not a confrontation with the Sinai law, but the Jews' reverence for the doctrines and traditions that had been added to the original Sinai law. On one occasion during the many confrontations that Jesus had with the Pharisees and scribes, the religious leaders asked, "*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ...?*" (Mk 7:5). This one question sparked Jesus' reply that helps us today understand apostate religiosity.

The Pharisees and scribes had noticed that Jesus' disciples ate bread with unwashed hands, which behavior was contrary to the religious traditions of Judaism. Such was a good tradition in reference to cleanliness, but the matter went beyond cleanliness. The washing of pots, pans and hands had moved into the religious culture of the Jews. And when the disciples failed to show up at the sink to wash their hands before they ate, they had not only violated a rule of cleanliness, but the "Jews' religion."

We wonder among ourselves how many customs we have that are good, but have become a catechism for our religious definition. These would be customs that have no biblical foundation. For example, a group of disciples often do not feel that they are validated in their community unless they meet in a church building. We have even heard of those who complained that the government of their country would not accept them as a valid religious faith unless they were sit-

ting on pews in their own building in the community. This is sometimes true. However, this is a secular government speaking, not the Bible.

The urge for a physical "building identity" for some people is so great in some areas that the adherents to a particular group do not believe that they are an "established church" until they build for themselves four walls in which to sit. And when they supposedly arrive at a higher level of religiosity by having their own building, they often confine their religiosity to the four walls they have constructed around themselves. In doing so, they sometimes look down on those who are still struggling to accomplish the same "walled-in mission."

All discussion centered around purpose-built buildings for the meeting of the saints is discussion about tradition, not Bible, for there is no discussion in the New Testament about buildings. It is not wrong for the disciples to build. What is wrong is the belief that if we do not build we are not "a church," and thus pleasing in the sight of God. It is in the realm of freedom for brethren not to build, but rather channel their money into evangelism and benevolence. It is wrong to believe that those who do not build have somehow not arrived at being an "established church."

We must not underestimate the influence that religious icons play among religious people of today. These icons are so influential that if one comes with the notion that we can meet anywhere in assembly without a purpose-built church building, he or she is considered beyond

the norm of the accepted religious norms of the community.

We could extend the list of religious traditions that have become supposed necessities in reference to the belief and behavior of our faith. We could add song leaders in the assembly, a preacher dominating an audience with a sermon, names to identify specific assemblies, and preachers validated by diplomas and degrees. All such practices have a specific origin in the history of Christianity since such things did not exist in the first century. All such beliefs and practices are allowed in the freedom that we have in Christ. However, none are found in the New Testament to identify the church of the first century.

The fact that some readers have at this time become somewhat uneasy with the mention of the examples that we have given proves our point. Church buildings, local preachers, names of specific churches, etc. did not exist in the first century. Such things are “biblical” only because they are teachings that lie within the realm of freedom. Nevertheless, the level of one’s uneasiness in discussing these matters reveals the desire that some have in assuming that such things are necessary to validate the existence of a “local church.” Add at will to this list, and then we have some idea of what Jesus encountered when He came in the “fullness of time” to a nation of people who had added hundreds of traditional interpretations and practices to the word of God, and thus developed what Paul defined as the Jews’ religion. The Jewish religious establishment correctly be-

lieved that if the beliefs and practices of their religious heritage came to an end, so would their religion.

The difficulty of turning the thinking of religious traditionalists to the word of God is that the traditionalists have a difficult time separating tradition from Scripture. When the traditionalist learns new information in the word of God that must be implemented in his life, he is often greatly disturbed. He is disturbed because he feels that not only is his faith under attack, but also his culture. His recourse is defensive, and thus, he often negatively reacts to what is revealed in the Bible because he cannot separate his religious traditions from what the Bible actually states. As a result of his frustration, he often takes his frustrations out on the one who has pointed out the error of either his thinking or his traditions that have no biblical foundation. Those who are not accustomed to Bible study, or those who accept something as truth because it is stated by the preacher, are usually those who react with the most hostility to the messengers of the word of God. **The cross of Christ will always be a testimony to how vehemently traditional religionists will react to the truth of God’s word.**

Consider also the fact that when a supposed religious tradition is believed and behaved by a group, those who point out that the supposed “law” has no biblical foundation are often attacked. It is easier to attack the messenger than study one’s Bible in order to challenge one’s own beliefs. The messenger is often considered a rebel by the group, and thus it

is against him that the group will take out their frustrations because they believe that it is he who is attacking their religious heritage, and not the Bible.

Jesus was considered a rebel by the Jewish religious establishment because of this very thing. The fact that He did not bind the washing of hands as a law labelled Him to be a rebel according to the religious establishment. We must not

forget, however, that Jesus was not rebelling against the word of God, but against that which had supplanted the word of God in the lives of the people. Restorationists are always considered rebels because they seek to point out the difference between tradition and Bible. They seek to obey God rather than the traditional heritages of man.

Chapter 5

Opposition Of The Establishment

Part II

In Jesus' confrontation and rebuke of the Jewish religious establishment in Mark 7, He identified what happens among religious people when they start exalting their religious heritage above the authority of the word of God. When the traditions of men become the controlling authority of our faith, the next stage of digression from the word of God is only natural. Jesus explained, "*For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men*" (Mk 7:8).

We must never underestimate the power that religious traditions have over the authority of the word of God. In fact, we would say that tradition almost always prevails over commandment. The reason is that tradition is the voice of our peers. When the word of God lays silent on our kitchen tables, tradition will always prevail. An individual is often more inclined to believe and behave according to the desires of his peers, than stand alone to believe and behave according to

the directions of the word of God. When we desire to be accepted by our religious community that is walking contrary to the word of God, we will succumb to the pressure of our peers. Friends form the foundation of the faith of those who have ceased studying their Bibles.

An example of the intimidation of the community over the individual was manifested in the behavior of Nicodemus when he came to Jesus at night (Jn 3:1,2). He had questions concerning the teaching of Jesus. However, he did not want to risk being rejected by his fellow religious leaders by asking his questions in their presence. The darkness of the night brought to light the intimidation of his peers. He succumbed to the work of Satan through group intimidation, even though he believed that the signs that Jesus worked were from God (Jn 3:2).

The point is that even though Nicodemus believed the miraculous confirmation of Jesus' message, he was still

intimidated by his peers. We must conclude that when a religious group has a long history as the Jews' religion, and is extended throughout the world, then certainly the peers of every preacher will be greatly intimidated to conform to the heritage of their religion over the authority of the word of God. Most religious people today would rather follow their peers than the authority of the words of the Prince of Peace.

We must add to this social intimidation of one's peers another point that possibly influenced Nicodemus. Judaism was the religion of a social Jewish structure that was built on strong Jewish families. Therefore, when Jesus presented Himself to those of the Jews' religion, He knew that those who would come to Him would find resistance even among their own families. Not only would one have to overcome the religiosity of the community, but also the religion of his own family. And for this reason, Jesus said,

*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, **he cannot be My disciple** (Lk 14:26).*

Though Nicodemus and others were emboldened later in the early beginnings of the church to follow Jesus, the traditions of the religious community during the ministry of Jesus prevailed upon him,

and others, to lay aside that which was right according to the word of God. He sacrificed Jesus in order to avoid conflict with his peers. When a group of people have a high regard for their religious traditions, these traditions are usually elevated above the commandment of God. The commandment of God, therefore, is easily laid aside in order that the traditions of the religious group be maintained.

If one is part of a fellowship of erring religious leaders, as was Nicodemus, it is often rare that within the group he will take a stand for the word of God. If one is not willing to forsake an erroneous religious community, then certainly he will not be willing to forsake the religious heritage of his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters. The desire to be accepted is often too great for most people, who through their personal studies or observation as Nicodemus, have discovered that some things the group believes are contrary to the word of God. When an entire group seeks to maintain the heritage of apostate religiosity, the leaders of the religion would rather lay aside the word of God in order to maintain their fellowship with their friends and family. When an entire family is caught up in a religious fantasy, only a few of the family will be willing to break away and follow the word of Jesus. This is simply one method of work that Satan uses to keep the unsaved lost.

Chapter 6

Opposition Of The Establishment

Part III

In the confrontation of Jesus with the religious establishment that Mark recorded in Mark 7, Jesus moved to the final stage that identified a true apostate religion and how Satan robs the word of God from the hearts of the lost (See Mt 13:1-23). He identified how the Jews developed what Paul called the “Jews’ religion.” This is Satan’s subtle work to move religious people into the comfort zone of their own religiosity. Adherents of the religion become comfortable with the rejection of the commandments of God, for the Bible no longer plays an important part of their faith.

In this stage of development in apostasy from the will of God, the word of God is rejected in order that the traditions of the religious heritage be maintained. When Satan has led a religious group to this stage of digression, then there is little hope for the group as a whole to restore the authority of the word of God.

Jesus came into a religious community that was controlled and maintained by the religious leaders who sought to continue the religious heritage of the fathers. Many of these leaders were sincere in their efforts, for they honored the religious heritage of their fathers. Unfortunately, most of the religious leaders that Jesus encountered during His ministry did not understand the slow progression of apostasy that had taken Israel

away from God into the bondage of their own religiosity. Many Jews had moved away in their own religiosity to a point where the word of God was sacrificed for the heritage of the fathers.

The progression of apostasy to the point of rejecting the commandments of God is slow. It is so slow that the adherents of a particular faith suffer no pain in the digression because they do not recognize that the word of God is moving away from being the central focus of their religiosity. When people are too busy with worldly things and activities to study their Bibles, then the digression is certain. When people become so mesmerized by either their works or cult religiosity, they soon forget that the word of God focuses us on God, not on ourselves. In the digression away from God’s word, religiosity is maintained. The ceremonies of the heritage-based faith are continued. The adherents to the religion, therefore, feel faithful because they are submissive to their religious structures and ceremonies. However, the Bible is rejected as the source that keeps us close to God.

Once a religious group has established a heritage of beliefs and behavior that identifies the uniqueness of the particular group, then the foundation of faith for the group is no longer based on the word of God. It is based on a heritage that has been delivered to the adherents

by their fathers, and perpetuated by the leaders of the group. When the members of the unique group travel from one place to another, the members identify themselves by stating the unique name of their religious heritage, not by the simplicity of being just a Christian who has obeyed the gospel. Notice how many groups are identified on Facebook by the unique name of the heritage after which each group leader seeks to call all adherents of a particular faith into the unique Facebook group.

Any religious group among men that does not respect the word of God as the final authority in all matters of faith, will inevitably develop a religious heritage that rejects the word of God.

We would hope that the adherents of all groups that have moved away from the authority of the word of God would make a decision to search the Scriptures in order to validate their beliefs and behavior. But if their heritage (tradition) is considered to be the identity of the group, then the group will struggle to generate a restoration to the authority of the word of God. These thoughts are in the following statement that God made to Israel through Hosea:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My word], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.” (Hs 4:6).

The statement refers to the word of

God being rejected by Israel, as it has been rejected in most of the societies in which we minister today. The Israelites had forgotten the law that maintained their covenant relationship with God. Because of their lack of knowledge of the word of God, all but a remnant were destroyed through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. There was only a remnant left by the time Jesus was revealed in the fullness of time.

When religious traditions define the religious heritage of a people, then those who would oppose the heritage when they discover a conflict between tradition and the word of God, are often considered rebels within the group. They are shunned by the group. The leaders who consider themselves to be the guardians of the heritage, will shun the rebels, even to the point of crucifying them on crosses. And such they did with Jesus, the leading rebel of heritage religiosity of His time. The agents of change who are crying out for restoration among a “Jews’ religion” are always crucified. If they are not crucified, then they are imprisoned in isolation from the establishment of the leadership.

Jesus came with a ministry to return the word of God as the core of the faith of Israel. In doing such, He was considered a rebel because He led a rebellion against the Jews’ religion. Whenever there are those who seek to restore people to the authority of the word of God, they will always be considered rebels, and such they are. Until men rise up against those who sacrifice the word of God for the traditions of the fathers,

we will continue on a road away from God. And as in the case of the history of Israel, there is only destruction at the end of this road. History always needs within

the religious function of the people those who will stand firm on the Oracles of God.

Chapter 7

The Rise Of Rebels

It is imperative that those who have a deep respect for the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith understand fully the tricks of Satan who works through religious leaders to squash any forms of rebellion against what is accepted to be the “identity” of our religious heritage. The majority of people develop their religiosity either after the traditions of their fathers, their own present emotional desires, or both. Many today have focused their religiosity on “feel-good” assemblies, from which they go having confidence that they have validated their faith by some emotional hysteria. Others continue to feel validated by continuing the religious heritage that was given to them by their fathers. The adherents of every apostate religion establish some validation for the religion they maintain.

In our review of how Satan worked to oppose Jesus through the leadership of the Jews’ religion, we must admit that his resistance was formidable. Our task, therefore, is to investigate how Satan worked in the past to misdirect the beliefs and behavior of religious people. Our study of the word of God to discover the ministry of Satan in misdirecting people will give us a foundation upon

which we can expect Satan to work today.

Satan continues to go about as a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour (1 Pt 5:8). The problem with us is that we believe that his devouring is only in reference to convincing people to do the vices of the world, as drunkenness, fornication, cheating or stealing. But we would not believe for a moment that such vices encompass fully the ministerial tricks of the devil. As in the first century, he has captivated most people today through the lies of religiosity. The judgment that Jesus unleashed on His generation of religious leaders would be the same if He were here today speaking to most religious leaders:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not abide in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and its father (Jn 8:44).

We live in a religious world today where the devil is still the father of many religious leaders. Satan has devoured the majority, and thus, the majority of the

people of the world follow after religious lies. The religious world that crucified Jesus, was not unlike our religious world today. The Holy Spirit prophetically wrote,

*... and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved.** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2 Th 2:10-12).*

A. Old Testament rebels:

The work of rebels as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and the host of Old Testament prophets, is the story of trials that restorationists will always have in their efforts to turn people away from their own religious adventures back to the word of God. When the people love the lie more than the truth, restorationists to them will always be considered rebels, for the restorationist will always be considered one who is rebelling against the established religion, which religion is based on a lie.

We cannot say that the Old Testament restorationists (rebels) were total failures because Israel refused to turn again unto the commandments of God. The fact that there was a remnant of faithful Israelites who survived the onslaught of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities is a testimony of two very important points that we must always remember:

(1) Restorationists (rebels to the apostate religion) must always keep in mind that there are “7000” in Israel who have not yet bowed to the apostate faith that is promoted by Baal prophets (2 Kg 19:18). Rebels must always remember that not everyone in the apostate religion has given himself over to the apostate faith. They have simply been ignorant in their apostasy. If they had a chance to hear the truth of the gospel, they would come, as Nicodemus, out of the captivity of lies.

(2) The faithful 7000 in comparison to the whole of Israel, was a very small number. Therefore, restorationists must never forget that the whole can never be restored, and thus, they must focus on the few. And because the whole cannot be restored, those “rebels” for God who seek to restore the few to the word of God must never be intimidated by the whole. If one has a difficult time standing alone in the midst of a whole nation of apostates with only a small number of 7000 who would remain faithful, then he will have little effect on leading the faithful few to victory in the truth of God. In fact, the “7000” often do not make themselves known unless there are those brave individuals who stand up for the word of God in the midst of apostasy. Restorationists must always remember that Noah, a preacher of righteousness, stood alone in a world of apostates (2 Pt 2:5). His “7000” faithfuls numbered only the seven members of his family.

B. New Testament rebels:

There is more in the statement of

what Paul said in Galatians 4:4 than what we might first think: ***“But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son”***

We have often conceived of a host of reasons that would define the “fullness of time” about which Paul spoke. Some have asserted that reference was specifically to the fulfillment of prophecy. But we believe there is more in the statement than fulfillment of prophecy. After all, God could fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament at any time during the fourth kingdom of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar’s visions (See Dn 2 & 7).

Some have assumed that since the Roman Empire extended throughout the Middle East, then this was the right time in history for the preaching of the gospel, which gospel could easily be spread throughout the known world. But we must keep in mind that the Roman Empire existed unto A.D. 476 when the city of Rome eventually fell. If only the stability that came with the existence of the Roman Empire is meant in the “fullness of time,” then there was more than one century in which God could have sent forth His Son. We would question, therefore, that the “fullness of time” referred exclusively to either the fulfillment of prophecy at a specific date or the stability of the Middle East for the coming of the Messiah.

We assume that the “fullness of time” refers more to socio/religious matters than physical matters. It was the right time in the socio/religious environment of Judaism for a rebel to come in order to call the people as a whole with the

words, *“I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (Lk 13:3). And perish the whole did in A.D. 70 because they did not accept the Rebel who could lead them in the *“times of restoration of all things”* (At 3:21).

When Jesus came, it was a time of great frustration on the part of many. The religious establishment exploited those who were sons of Abraham by faith. The scribes and Pharisees reigned theologically unchallenged until the Rebel came and said to the people, *“You have heard that it was said, ... but I say to you”* (Mt 5:21,27,33,38,43). There was a new teacher in town, one who spoke with authority (Mt 7:29).

The people were looking for someone to deliver them out of the bondage of religious oppression. They were looking for a Messiah who would lead them to a freedom they did not realize. They thought they would be free if delivered from the Roman occupation of their homeland. But the true freedom that would come would be freedom for a world, not simply some nationalistic Jews who wanted it to be again as it was in the days of David and Solomon. The One who was revealed in the fullness of time brought freedom from time.

When the revealed One did come and proclaim freedom across the land, it was then that Satan rose up his host of deceived religious leaders to quail those who attacked his kingdom of bondage. And to accomplish this feat, he withdrew from his chest of evil every tactic possible that would squash rebels of the religious establishment that he had so care-

fully manufactured throughout the centuries of Jewish history. He led his forces against the Righteous Leader of those who would eventually prevail against all

opposition to preach the gospel of freedom to those in the bondage of sin and misguided religiosity.

Chapter 8

The Rejection Of Rebels

Part I

Jesus Was Rejected

It is our human nature to want to be accepted. We want to feel that we are part of the group. With all the emotional negatives that come with our inferiority complexes, the group reaffirms that we are important and a part of the team. And when we speak of religious groups, these feelings are intensified. If we are rejected by our peers in faith for some reason, we feel that we are the outcast who in the end will be cast out by God. When discussing what it takes to stand up as a rebel against apostasy, we must never underestimate our own desires to be accepted. This desire is often greater than our desire to be obedient to the word of God. We too often fear men more than we fear God.

If we would succumb to the pressures of the majority in reference to restoring the authority of the word of God in our belief and behavior, then we should state our complaints before men as Jeremiah and Daniel, men who stood alone in their time to restore the people to God. Neither men were intimidated to conform to the majority in their efforts to restore the people of God. One ended up in a pit, and the other in a lion's den. What we have discovered, however, is that

people are too afraid of pits and lions. The result is that there is no spiritual stamina to stand against the majority that have gone astray. Satan knows this weakness. And because he knows this weak point of our nature, peer pressure is one of the first devices that he uses to silence any opposition against the wayward religious establishment.

We might take another look at how Jesus and the apostles handled rejection. If we would be Jesus' disciples, then discipleship means following Him through the storm of rejection that will come to anyone who seeks to be His disciple by being obedient to His commandments.

We seek to be disciples of Jesus. But we often do not understand the extent to which discipleship will lead us. When John inscribed the testimony of the document of John to substantiate the faith of those who believed, we must seriously consider some of his introductory statements. Note John 1:11: "*He [Jesus] came to His own and His own did not receive Him.*" If we would be the disciple of Jesus, then we must be willing to be rejected by our own who do not follow the commandments of Jesus.

Our desire to be received (accepted)

runs powerful through our veins. If we live in a culture that is very traditional, this emotion is intense. It is for this reason that there are few restoration movements that are generated among those cultures of the world that are very traditional. The desire to be accepted by the people is strong, and thus, any religious rebels to the religious establishment will be intimidated to conform to the majority. Traditional religions still have their “witch doctors” who stand up and cast spells on those who do not conform to the norm. Jesus came into a very traditional Jewish culture. Tradition was the foundation of the Jews’ religion. Therefore, the religious leadership rejected Him because He did not fit into the traditional understanding of who the Messiah should be.

When the “fullness of the time” came, the Jews had intensified their traditional culture and religious behavior in order to establish their identity among the Gentiles (the Romans) who occupied Palestine. They were so intense in their efforts to establish their identity that they would not even venture into a house to eat with a Gentile. Remember the opposition that Peter faced when he went into the house of Cornelius? When Peter, and those Jews who went with him, returned to Jerusalem, the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem “*disputed with him*” on the matter of violating Jewish religious customs (At 11:2). Keep in mind that these were Jewish Christians, not Jewish unbelievers who disputed with Peter.

Peter surely remembered this harsh encounter for some time to come. A few

years later in Antioch, he, Barnabas, and the other Jewish Christians in Antioch, were intimidated by the Jerusalem Jewish Christians to withdraw from the Gentile Christians in Antioch (Gl 2:11-13). The cases of Peter in the house of Cornelius and Antioch illustrate the strict Jewish isolationist culture of the time. This was the “fullness of the time” into which Jesus came with a message that in Christ there would be neither Jew nor Gentile (Gl 3:26-29). Since these were the times in which Jesus came into the world, then we must conclude that it was the right time for His coming. And since it was the right time, **then we understand that Jesus came in order to lead us down a road of rejection that can be overcome.**

We are not surprised by the Jews’ rejection of Jesus. Neither were the early disciples surprised when they began to understand the prophecy of Isaiah 53:3:

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised and we did not esteem Him.

The first Jewish disciples knew, therefore, that if the prophecy of Isaiah 53 referred to the Messiah—and it did—then they understood that if they were to be disciples of the Messiah, their own lives would be as the prophecy stated. They too would be despised and rejected by men. They too would be men of sorrows and acquainted with grief. They too would not be esteemed highly by those

who rejected them. We remember what the despised One said to His first disciples: “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). If one is not willing to be despised for Jesus, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus would say to any who would be His disciple today, “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you*” (Jn 15:18).

If one would be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, he must always be a rejected rebel when in the midst of apostate religionists. We must remember to always be more afraid of the One who can cast us into eternal destruction, than any who would cast us out of a socio/religious establishment of the day (See Mt 10:28). **If we cherish being a part of the crowd in reference to faith, then we must**

make sure that the crowd cherishes the word of God.

In the parable of the Ten Minas, the ten bondservants of the nobleman said, “*We will not have this man to reign over us*” (Lk 19:14). The religious leaders about whom the parable was spoken rejected their King. Discipleship to this King means that we must be willing to be rejected as He was rejected. It is this King who said the following to His disciples when they went out to recruit more disciples:

Therefore, whoever will confess Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever will deny Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven (Mt 10:32,33).

Chapter 9

The Rejection Of Rebels

Part II

Stephen Was Rejected

We must understand the background surrounding the stoning of Stephen in order to understand why religious people can become so infuriated with their opposition that they will stone someone like Stephen.

This story begins with a religious social club of people called the “Synagogue of the Freedmen” (At 6:9). In a debate concerning Jesus—we must not miss this point—these “Freedmen” viciously debated with Stephen. However,

“they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he [Stephen] spoke” (At 6:10).

When men cannot with dignity and truth, win the argument in a fair discussion, they will resort to stirring up a group of fellow debaters to take action as a mob against those with whom they cannot win in a debate. “*So they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes*” (At 6:12). The opposition stirs up the people through slander.

They write slanderous letters and resort to a multitude who hold their position. They recruit followers (Gl 4:17). They threaten excommunication from their social religious club (3 Jn 10).

Once the accused has been brought to trial before the people and religious instigators, then slander and false witnesses, not truth, are launched against the rejected. The text says in reference to slander against Stephen, “*Then they set up false witnesses ...*” (At 6:13). These false witnesses proclaimed to the self-appointed court, “*This man [Stephen] does not cease to speak words against this holy place and the law*” (At 6:13). Now notice what the accusation was:

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses delivered us” (At 6:14).

The accusations were true, but twisted. We have often heard the statement made against an accused, “The perception is” We must always understand that perceptions are never entirely true. There is always a twisting of thinking or behavior of the accused in perceptions. Perception is just a nice word for gossip, and in gossip, nothing is ever entirely true. **Those who are willing to base their judgments on perceptions (gossip), are in company with the self-appointed judges who judged and stoned Stephen.** These judges did not want to confuse their perceptions with the truth. Their desires were twisted because they presumed that the temple of

their heritage was about to be destroyed, and their twisted understanding of the law, was about to be revealed.

The religious establishment rejected Stephen because he spoke of Jesus’ prophecy, that the symbol of their faith, the “holy place” (the temple), would be destroyed (See Mt 24). And to add insult to injury, they were horrified when Stephen said that Jesus would “*change the customs that Moses delivered to us*” (At 6:14; see Mt 5:17,18). This did not set well with the religious establishment because they had inseparably tied their customs to the law of God. So after Stephen had delivered a brief history of all that Jesus said was the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah, and the consummation of national Israel, “*they were cut to the heart*” (At 7:54).

They were cut to the heart, not because they believed the message of Stephen, but that they could not answer his arguments from the history of the word of God, which history was all true. Stephen only brought to their attention that their Jewish history would find consummation in the Messiah. And Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus, therefore, meant the end of their religious heritage.

Those who are rejected by the religious establishment, as Stephen, must never forget this reaction of religious leaders who could not with truth, answer with dignity those who spoke the truth. Luke records the normal reaction of frustrated religionists who cannot use their Bibles to separate lies from truth: “***And they gnashed at him with their teeth***” (At 7:54). We have heard of this very

behavior taking place among some today who were approached about their binding of religious traditions that have no authority of the Scriptures.

It is almost inconceivable that supposedly religious people would react in this manner to those they oppose. Their reaction helps us understand the psychology of those whose foundation for faith is swept away with the word of God. Dishonest religionists who care more for their purse and positions than the word of God will always react to the truth in this manner. So “*they threw him out of the city and stoned him*” (At 7:58). Those who would stand for the truth in the midst of the error of the majority must always expect to be the recipient of thrown stones.

Rejection can be intense. Those disciples who are overpowered with the desire to be accepted by the whole can never be as the One after whom they claim to be a disciple. We would correctly affirm that Stephen was a true disciple of Jesus because he was willing to take a stand regardless of the consequences. Those who are not willing to be crucified or stoned for Jesus are fooling themselves if they claim to be disciples of Jesus. We must not forget that a faith for which we are not willing to be crucified or stoned is really not a faith worth having.

Those who oppose an erring religious establishment must always expect to be rejected by the leadership of the establishment and ejected from its fellowship.

Chapter 10

The Rejection Of Rebels

Part III

The Apostles Were Rejected

The occasion for Peter and John’s rejection by the religious establishment in Jerusalem was the healing of a crippled man who was well-known among all who went to the temple (At 3:1-10). The result of the healing was the opportunity for the two apostles to preach Jesus to those who were amazed at what they had witnessed. Since there were a great number of people who gathered for the occasion, the religious leaders of the Jews’ religion “*laid hands on them [the apostles], and put them in custody ...*” (At 4:3). The religious leaders were envious

of the attention that was given to the two apostles.

Once the key religious leaders gathered, they asked Peter and John to identify the “*authority*” by which they did the healing, or by whose “*name*” under whom they worked. It is interesting to note that the crippled man, by whom these religious leaders had walked every day for years, was actually standing there in their midst. However, they were not interested in the healed man, but in the challenge that Peter and John posed to their authority and positions. We must

not miss this point: **Religious leaders who covet power and positions are more concerned with power and positions than the work of God.**

The religious leaders could not deny that the impotent man had been healed (At 4:14). They confessed that a notable miracle had been done (At 4:16). Nevertheless, lest Peter and John gain more notoriety among the people, they sternly threatened them in order that they speak no more in the name of Jesus (At 4:17,18).

The religious leaders had rejected both the witness of the healed man, as well as the testimony of Peter and John. They then resorted to threats. The fact that they could threaten assumes that they had the power to excommunicate anyone from the socio/religious community of the people. They also had the power of imprisonment, or even worse. Stephen experienced that which was worse ... stoning.

The rejection of the apostles continued in Jerusalem as they boldly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus, the end of national Israel. Their rejection by the Jewish religious leaders continued because there were many signs and wonders worked by the apostles in Jerusalem (At 5:12-16). There were so many people healed in Jerusalem that multitudes from the surrounding cities also brought their sick to be healed. As a result, Luke recorded, *“Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him ... and were filled with indignation”* (At 5:17).

At this time in the history of the

growth of the church, a movement had begun that was in direct conflict with the religious establishment of the day. As a result, all the apostles were thrown into jail (At 5:18). Nevertheless, an angel of the Lord came and opened the doors of the prison. The persistent apostles were again doing that which was contrary to the desires of the religious establishment. They were preaching Jesus in the temple courtyard.

As a result of their preaching, the apostles were again summoned before the council of the religious establishment in Jerusalem. The high priest scolded the apostles, *“Did we not strictly command you that you should not teach in this name?”* (At 5:28). When threatened with this type of intimidation from religious leaders in one’s community, the response of the apostles to the demands of the religious establishment would be wise to follow: *“We must obey God rather than men”* (At 5:29). This one statement judges the beliefs and actions of the religious leaders to be from man and not God.

If the apostles were obeying God, and not men, then the religious leaders were obeying men, and not God. Rebels who preach the truth of God must find comfort in this conclusion. If they are rebels for God by preaching that which is Bible, then those who are standing against them are standing against the truth of God’s word. Every restorationist wakes up one day and looks back to that from which he came and realizes that he too was obeying men and not God in his former religious life.

We must keep in mind that Saul of Tarsus was there in the midst of the religious leaders who were making all these threats of imprisonment to the apostles. He was there when Stephen was stoned (At 8:1). And it was he who later wrote that the religion that he upheld at the time was actually the “Jews’ religion.” It was not from God. When he turned away from that in which he was caught up, Saul later looked back and confessed that as a Pharisee and religious leader he was actually promoting that which was fabricated out of the traditions of men, which traditions led to the rejection of the commandment of God. When people reject the commandments of God, they will reject those who preach the commandments.

It took a miracle on the Damascus road to convince Saul that he was wrong. But God sends no miraculous encounters today to change the hearts of those who oppose and persecute His people. When in the heat of persecution, many would surely ask why they cannot be delivered. The fact is that we must be like Jesus if we would be candidates for eternal dwelling. We must not forget what Peter said to the disciples of his era who were also enduring hard times: “... *Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). We must bear our own cross and follow in His steps of rejection in order to be counted worthy to be His rebels.

Chapter 11

The Attack Of Ignorance

We must not forget the principle of Hosea 4:6. The Israelites about whom this statement was made did not become nonreligious in their apostasy. They forgot the commandments of God, and thus created a god in their minds who would condone their unrighteous religious behavior. In their ignorance of the law of God, they established religious codes that conformed to their own idolatrous thinking. Satan is still using the same weapon today to keep people led astray. In fact, we would say that this is the greatest weapon of Satan today to keep people away from the word of God.

In the absence of the authority of the word of God, religious people will

always resort to all sorts of religious gimmicks in order to maintain the loyalty of every member of their group. What has happened in the area where we live in the last two decades is the rise of the concert assembly. Every sort of invention has been introduced to entice people to participate in the assembly of each particular group. Everything from bands to artificial smoke with ballroom lighting, has been used to set the stage in order to generate an entertaining thrill where attendees are mesmerized. The theatrical spectacle has been generated to appeal to a narcissistic generation who seeks a spiritual thrill rather than an outpouring of one’s heart in worship of God. All

sorts of outside stimuli are used to pump into the minds of adherents an emotional hysteria. Being emotionally stirred into hysteria and mesmerized by a concert of entertainers, has replaced coming together on one's knees in quietness with a contrite heart. Assemblies have been hijacked by entertainers who seek an audience. The concert assembly has become the new idol god to draw people, especially young people, away from a faith that is based on the preaching of the word of God.

When cultures become narcissistic, they seek to change their assemblies from an inward worship to that which mesmerizes their own emotionality. Worship assemblies are thus hijacked from praising God to focusing on what one "gets out of the assembly." It is a subtle change, but one that is slight enough to keep people focused on what they enjoy instead of the worship in spirit and truth for which God calls on man to offer (See Jn 4:24). When one walks away from an assembly with the complaint, "That was boring," then we understand that the attendee did not go to the assembly to offer worship to God, but to be entertained by others.

When religious people become ignorant of that for which God desires, they will create a religion after their own desires. When religious people become ignorant of a Bible-defined description of worship, they will manufacture their own worship. There is nothing surprising about this. It has been the ritual of assembly since men first started forgetting the commandments of God in order

to follow after their own desires. Ignorance of God's word always produces ignorant worship. It has always been as Paul wrote:

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:3).

We are as Paul who wrote to the Achaians who were formerly idolatrous in their worship. We write "*lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his ways*" (2 Co 2:11).

A. Community ignorance:

Ignorance is in some ways a strong word. Nevertheless, it is a word that was used by the Holy Spirit to refer to those who were acting contrary to truth. Out of ignorance, the religious leaders of Jerusalem, through the proxy of Roman law, crucified Jesus. A few years after the event, Peter made this judgment of the Jews in general, but the religious rulers of the Jews specifically: "*And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers*" (At 3:17). What they did was crucify Jesus.

Regardless of their ignorance of the fact that Jesus was the Lord of glory, from the cross Jesus prayed to the Father, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Lk 23:34). Stephen was able to request of Jesus that those who were stoning him not be charged with their sin because they were

stoning him in ignorance: “*Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge*” (At 7:60).

What the Jews did to Jesus, and then to Stephen, was still sin. However, Stephen knew that many of those in the midst of the multitudes who were throwing stones would later recognize their sin and repent. Their forgiveness, therefore, was based on their ignorance and repentance. The word of God would grow among those who recognized their ignorance, and thus repented. After some time in Jerusalem, it is interesting to note what Luke recorded concerning many of the priests in Jerusalem who eventually recognized that in ignorance they had crucified the Lord of glory:

So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (At 6:7).

When Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost the words, “*let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ,*” he was speaking to those people who had called for the crucifixion of Jesus. There people “*were cut to the heart*” (At 2:36,37). “*Then those who received the word were baptized*” (At 2:41). Many years later, the finger prints of some repentant Judean Christians were possibly still on the stones that sent Stephen on to glory.

B. Paul’s ignorance:

One young man who was in the company of those stoning Stephen was Saul of Tarsus (At 8:1). He was there giving his vote to throw the stones. It was for these who were acting out of ignorance that Stephen prayed that their sin not be laid to their charge (At 7:60). Many years later, Saul, now Paul, confessed that he was one, who out of ignorance, condoned the stoning of Stephen. He wrote to Timothy,

I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tm 1:13).

Satan will use zealous people who believe that they are doing right to work and speak against the work of God. Ignorance is one of Satan’s greatest tools against the preaching of the gospel. When the ignorant work against God, they are acting upon the knowledge they have at the time of their zealous opposition. However, their lack of knowledge of the facts and truth is no excuse, or a means for automatic forgiveness, for the sin they commit as blasphemers is contrary to the work of God.

A blasphemer is assigning the work of God to be that of Satan. A very religious person, as Saul of Tarsus, therefore, was a blasphemer because in his ignorance he believed that Christ was a false prophet and Christianity was an apostasy from Judaism. He later wrote to the Philippians about his former life in persecuting the church, “*... concerning zeal, persecuting the church ...*” (Ph

3:6). Paul was a zealous religious person, sincere in his efforts to persecute those who were rebels of the Jews' religion. Nevertheless, he was dead wrong. The rebels were right and he was in error.

When Jesus knocked Saul off his self-righteous horse on his way to Damascus, Jesus said to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (At 9:4). We can only imagine the shock that caused tremors to go throughout Saul's body as he lay there blinded by the One whom he had considered for years to be a rebel to his cherished religious heritage.

The conclusion for those faithful teachers who are persecuted because of the ignorance of their persecutors, is that they must behave as both Jesus and Stephen. If one deducts that his persecutors are doing such out of ignorance, then patience should be the response, not reaction. If we were converted out of a religion for which we exercised much zeal, then we must be patient with those who are still in the ignorance of false religion. Patience, with persistence, will always lead men like Saul out of the error of their way.

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not miraculously appear to the main instigator (Saul) of those who were persecuting the church until after the historical diaspora of Acts 8:3,4. Why did Jesus wait so long before He appeared to Saul? It would be good to consider seriously the historical statement Acts 8:3,4 in view of the ignorance of the primary person (Saul) who was leading the persecution against the church.

*As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. **Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*** (At 8:3,4).

The Judean disciples had not fulfilled their personal duty to evangelize the world until they were persecuted out of their social cocoon in Judea. God allowed Saul, therefore, to flush them out of the Jewish cocoon in Jerusalem and Judea, where they had remained for several years after the establishment of the church in A.D. 30. Once they were flushed, then Jesus appeared to Saul in Acts 9 around A.D. 41,42, for He had no more use for Saul as His "motivator" to get the Judean Christians going into all the world as He had formerly commissioned them (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). **Jesus allowed Paul to remain in his ignorance until He had accomplished His purpose through him to get the message of the gospel moving into all the world.**

Another reason why Jesus allowed Saul to scatter the Christians out of Jerusalem and into all the world was to save their lives and prepare the way for those Judean Christians who would later scatter from Jerusalem prior to the A.D. 70 calamity. At the time of Saul's persecution of the Christians, Jesus was coming in judgment on national Israel in about twenty years. Jesus needed to encourage as many of His people as possible to immigrate out of Jerusalem and Judah in order for them to establish their

homes and businesses in other countries for those Christians who would come later.

Not every Christian left Jerusalem in the Acts 8 diaspora. There were still many Christians in Jerusalem when Paul made his last visit to the city around A.D. 58 (At 21:17-25). Nevertheless, many friends and family members left Jerusalem in order to prepare the way for friends and family who would be forced to leave about five years before A.D. 70, the time of the final fall of Jerusalem. Those Christian friends and family members who remained in Jerusalem in order to receive and teach those Jews who continued to come to the Passover/Pentecost feast, would later flee, but they would have homes to which to go in the Christian diaspora in the middle 60s. Jesus did the same thing with the members of His body as God did with the Jews when He prepared the way for their scattering among the nations prior to the Assyrian (722/21 B.C.) and Babylonian (586 B.C.) captivities. God takes care of His people.

We must, therefore, be patient with those who oppose the truth. It may be

that God is using our enemies for a special purpose. At least we know that those who persecute the saints because of ignorance keep those who know the truth from being too arrogant, and thus motivated to study their Bibles. When one is persecuted for teaching the Bible, he is driven to continue to study the Bible in order to make sure that he is teaching that which is correct.

When those who are ignorant persecute others because of their desire for power among the disciples, then this is something different. (More on this later). But when the persecution comes from sincere people who do not know all the facts and truth, then it is time to be patient, as were both Jesus and Stephen. We must always remember how patient God was with us in our own sin. We must never forget the eternal truth that is revealed in Romans 5:8: *“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* This statement was written by the hand of the one who formerly persecuted the One who had died on the cross for his sins.

Chapter 12

The Attack Of Slander

Evil preaches tolerance until it is dominant, and then it seeks to silence good.

Charles Chaput

In order for one to be condemned by the populace, there must be a trial. If the one who is to be condemned is inno-

cent, then there is no other recourse to generate a guilty verdict than to slander the actions or teachings of the accused. In the case of Jesus, it was both. When the power of religious leaders is under attack by a rebel of the establishment, then the leaders of the established lead-

ership will resort to evil tactics in order to silence the opposition.

Notice what Matthew recorded concerning the trial of Jesus: “*Now the chief priests and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death*” (Mt 26:59). One would think that the religious leaders of a community would seek the truth. But in this case, they sought that which was false in order to condemn the One against whom they had great consternation. They wanted a conviction, and thus, they were seeking for those who would give a false testimony concerning what Jesus had taught and done, or would do. Their goal was not to determine the truth, but to convict the innocent.

A. Slanderers judge.

We must never assume that Satan will play fair in any dispute. When he wants to destroy the influence of any individual, he will resort to that which brings into question the character of those who are making the greatest impact on his kingdom of darkness. Unrighteous men reveal that Satan is using them when they either seek false witnesses against their opposition, or they actually become the false witnesses to be called by the court to give false testimony concerning their opposition.

Diotrephes was one who was willing to speak lies against his opposition in order to protect his dominant position. This was the same tactic that Satan used to have Jesus crucified. Because he loved to be first, Diotrephes slandered the

apostle John and others in order to convince his followers not to receive them (3 Jn 9,10). When a religious group is dominated by a demagogue, the demagogue will always slander those whom his followers might receive. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a dominant preacher to slander another preacher in order to keep him away from “his” church.

It is important to understand this behavior in order to discover the true motives of the one who slanders. Once slander is discovered, then the one who is speaking evil against another can be identified as one who has ulterior motives for his slanderous remarks.

God does not speak kindly of those who intentionally invent evil things to speak against others. When Paul described the degradation of humanity in times of old, one of the characteristics of those of a morally digressed society was slander (Rm 1:30). We would conclude, therefore, that slander is evidence of one who is morally degraded. Unfortunately, this behavior existed among the religious leaders of the first century.

Because of a desire for power and recognition, there will always be those who are eager to speak evil of those with whom they feel they are in competition. When jealousy is rife among power structures in the church, slander is the most common method used by Satan for jealous individuals to discredit those whom they project to be of their own motives. The slanderous person assumes that those against whom he launches his lies is also in competition with him for power and

recognition. He projects his evil thinking on those he believes are doing the same to him.

It is not uncommon for the slanderous person to go to the extreme of questioning the salvation of the one on whom he projects his slanderous statements. But one conclusion is true, if the one slandering another person assumes that the one he is slandering is in danger of losing his soul, then certainly the slanderous person is bringing his own salvation into question. John concluded the book of Revelation with the warning, “*But ... all liars will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*” (Rv 21:8).

The slanderous person will end up in the lake of fire and brimstone because he has an evil heart. His slanderous words only betrayed his heart. Jesus judged, “*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,*” which evil thoughts, He listed, includes slander (Mt 15:19). So the person who willfully generates lies against another has identified himself to have an evil heart.

B. Slander stops preaching.

Misguided religious zealots followed Paul from synagogue to synagogue, spreading lies about what he believed (At 17:13). They did so in order to have him banned from teaching in any synagogue of the Jews. Some preachers do the same today. Paul’s slanderous opposition said that he was speaking a lie concerning the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus. Paul sarcastically

asked his slanderous opponents, “*For if the truth of God has abounded through my lie to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?*” (Rm 3:7). The slanderous opponents of Paul in the church of Rome twisted his teaching on grace. They did so because there was jealousy in their hearts. They “slanderosly reported” that Paul taught that we can sin in order that grace may abound, since we are saved by grace (Rm 3:8; 6:3). When teaching on this most fundamental principle of Christianity, Paul’s words were twisted by some in order to bring opposition against him.

The teacher of the gospel of grace will always be slandered by those who would seek to justify themselves before God through the merit of their own law-keeping. This is true because it is the duty of the leaders of the religious establishment to uphold the legal codes that identify the religious establishment. And if the legalities that define the establishment are not legally maintained, then the establishment ceases to exist. Those who would proclaim that we are not saved by grace, but by legal obedience to creeds and catechism, will make slanderous statements against those who proclaim, “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14).

The fact that one stands for the truth of the gospel assumes that Satan will not be silent. Therefore, in order to discredit the preacher’s name, Satan will work among those who love to be first, or who are jealous of the influence of others. He will work to bring false accusations

against the preacher of grace.

These “slander games” were happening among the Achaian disciples in reference to Paul. There were those in Achaia who were puffed up, and thus, wanted to discredit Paul among the disciples of the entire province. Nevertheless, Paul wrote the following of his work and other sincere evangelists:

*So we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure. **Being slandered, we kindly respond.** We are made as the scum of the world and are the refuse of all things until now (1 Co 4:12,13).*

Those who would be slandered as a result of teaching the truth of God’s word must not despair. They have simply been added to the host of faithful disciples as Paul and the apostles who kindly carried on, knowing that Satan will always stir up slander against those who endanger the kingdom of darkness. The response to slander, therefore, is kindness. If no slander is coming the way of the teacher of the Bible in a religiously hostile environment, then he should probably check to see if he is actually teaching the Bible.

Paul could respond kindly because slander is stating that which is false or a lie. So when he ministered, or taught in the area of freedom, he was assured that he was right before God. To those in Corinth who slandered him, he wrote, “*All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient*” (1 Co 10:23). Christians are under grace, not law, and thus those who would establish law where God has

not established law will slander those who work in the area of their God-given freedom. Those who refuse to be brought again into the bondage of meritorious law-keeping must carry on in the freedom they have in Christ, regardless of slanderous statements that are made against them (See Gl 5:1).

C. Slander prevents freedom.

One does not have a right to work in the area of freedom in some things until those, whose conscience is still judged by their past religiosity, grow out of their self-imposed restrictions of false religions. Those who might be offended by the eating of all meats, for example, are expected to grow spiritually out of the restrictions they have placed on themselves as Christians when eating meats that were sacrificed to idols in Corinth. In order to help these new Christians grow out of the legal restrictions they had placed on themselves because of their former life in idolatry, Paul helped them along with the mandate, “*Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake*” (1 Co 10:25).

It takes time to change one’s conscience concerning erroneous religious practices of the past. But there must be change. If there is no change, then there is spiritual death. In the process of the change, those who walk in their freedom of eating all meats must be patient with others who have not yet grown out of their past religious scruples.

It is interesting to note that the 1

Corinthian letter was written about five to six years after the origin of the first converts in Achaia. We would assume that by the time the letter was written, there would be those who were younger in the faith. We would assume that all those who had been Christians from the beginning to whom Paul was writing in 1 Corinthians could follow the mandate of 1 Corinthians 10:25, that is, that they should be able to eat any meat that was sold in the meat market. Paul expected every disciple in Achaia to grow to the point that their consciences were not controlled by their former life in idolatrous religions. God, therefore, expects spiritual growth. With recent converts, however, the disciples who had grown out of any religious scruples connected to idolatrous sacrifices should be patient with the recently converted.

Because some of Paul's opposition had not spiritually grown, he rebuked them with the question, "*For if I by thanksgiving am a partaker [of meat], why am I slandered for that for which I give thanks?*" (1 Co 10:30). Paul was slandered for doing that for which he had freedom to do. He had freedom to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. But those who opposed him claimed that he was doing that about which he had commanded others not to do, that is, eat sacrificed meats that would offend the consciences of the weak. The problem was in the fact that what they said against Paul was slander because of their competition for power and influence among the disciples in Achaia. Paul had a right to eat all meats. His right, however, could not

be twisted by his slanderous opposition to make it seem that he was not practicing what he preached.

Puffed up accusers of Paul were twisted, and thus, false. Their accusations had no foundation of truth by which Paul could be judged contradictory in his teaching and behavior. "All things were lawful" to him, but "all things were not expedient" to do in some situations. If those things within his liberty caused offense, then he would forego such things until the new disciples grew out of their religious scruples of former idolatrous religiosity (Rm 14:21). But this was not the situation in reference to the Achaians' eating meat that had been offered to idols. By the time he wrote, many should have grown out of their scruples in reference to eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. Paul had the right to eat, and to say that he ate in contradiction to what he taught, was simply a slanderous accusation generated by opponents who were jealous of Paul's influence among the Achaians.

The lesson to learn is that **those who have bound on their consciences those things that God has not bound, will slander those who work in the realm of their freedom in Christ.** The slanderous person will seek to bring into his realm of bondage those who seek to live in the area of their freedom in Christ.

D. Slander promotes bondage.

There will always be a conflict between those of bondage and those of freedom. The fact that there will always be those who function in the realm of bond-

age lies in the fact that there will always be those who stop studying their Bibles. In the absence of belief that is based on the Bible, they begin honoring their heritage as the validation of their faith. The traditions of their religious heritage becomes the standard by which they judge others.

This is the exact religious environment into which Jesus came, and was explained by Him in the context of Mark 7:1-9. When people reject direction by the word of God in order to guard their heritage, then they will create a realm of bondage that is governed by their own religious scruples (traditions). Any who would violate the codes of their bondage, or question any of the cherished catechisms that identify their heritage, are often slandered in order that they be brought back into the bondage of the religious establishment.

Those who function in the realm of their freedom in Christ must always remember the Holy Spirit's words in Galatians 5:1: "*Stand fast therefore, in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*"

We must not make the mistake of believing that those who have created a religion of bondage will not seek to intimidate through slander any who would seek to walk in the freedom by which Christ has made us free. Such people will seek to greatly intimidate others in order to bring them into conformity with the norm. They greatly intimidated Titus to be circumcised when he went into a reli-

gious culture of circumcision in Jerusalem. But both Paul and Titus stood their ground. Paul later wrote concerning the incident, "*But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised*" (Gl 2:3). He identified those who wanted to put the knife to Titus as "*false brethren secretly brought in, who sneaked in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus*" (Gl 2:4). We must always assume that Satan has his spies among us to spy out our freedom in Christ.

In reference to the slanderers in Achaia, we must keep in mind that one of the reasons why Paul wrote the 2 Corinthian letter was to call on the slanderers among the disciples to repent before his arrival (2 Co 12:20,21). If they had not repented by the time he arrived, then he had no choice but to exercise the rod of discipline that he carried as a Christ-sent apostle. In the case of Ananias and Saphira, it may have been a surprise to Peter and the other apostles that these two Christians dropped dead in their presence because they lied—and all slanderers are liars (At 5:1-11). Paul knew that if the liars in the church of Achaia did not repent before his arrival, something tragic was going to happen.

There is no place for the slanderous person in heaven (Rv 21:8), and thus there is no place for such people among the people of God on earth. Therefore, we must heed the warning of the Holy Spirit: "*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you ...*" (Ep 4:31).

Chapter 13

Institutionalizing Individuals

We often hear of discussions that use the word “institution” to define an organizational structure that promotes a particular product or stands for a particular theology. In order to separate one institution from another, each institution is given a unique name. In this way we have often heard of the church being defined as an institution. However, this would be an inaccurate definition of the church if the word “institution” is defined according to the corporate/business world in which we live. The church is not a corporate business that is identified by a unique name, though it is defined by a unique organizational structure and product (the gospel). Jesus is the head of the organization of the body, and the function of the members is to preach the gospel to the world.

In order to be cautious about defining the church as an institution, it might be helpful to be more specific in contrasting the definition of the word “institution” in the corporate/business world and the organic function of the body of Christ. For example, Google is a corporation, and thus, the Google Corporation is defined by its unique name, function and organization. It is a corporate institution of the world, and thus defined by the terminology of the world. If an employee leaves Google and moves on to the Facebook Corporation as an employee, then he has left one institution for another. He is no longer a “member” of

Google, but a member of Facebook.

This is not how it works with the universal body of Christ. Our statements and words sometimes betray our lack of understanding of the nature of the body of Christ. Ever heard the statement, “He has left the church”? The one making the statement is thinking like the institutional corporate world. He is actually stating that a member has left one institution for another, or has just “left” the institution of which he was a former member. He may have “placed membership” with another institution, and thus, he has left one church for another church.

The institutionalist has forgotten that membership of the body of Christ (the church) is **God’s business**. God adds baptized believers to His people (At 2:47). Since God is the one who adds, then it is **only** He who can take away or cast away from His people. No one on earth has the right to cast any of God’s children away from God. Disciples have the right to disfellowship erring members from their fellowship (2 Th 3:6), but they do not have the right to “dismember” anyone from the body of Christ. **This is God’s business.**

One can be disfellowshipped, but he is only a disfellowshipped member. His fellowship means that the remaining members “*have no company with him so that he [the erring brother] may be ashamed*” (2 Th 3:14). And while a member is outside the company of the

faithful, the faithful are charged, “*Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*” (2 Th 3:15).

Here is how we betray our lack of understanding of the noninstitutional nature of the church. When we say that one “has left the church,” we have made ourselves judges and lawgivers over the body of Christ. “*There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (Js 4:12). Judging in reference to salvational matters is the work of God alone. But if we assert that one has “left the church,” then we have identified our thinking to be institutional, for we have equated being a member of the church with being a member of our unique corporate group. If we determine the “Google church” to be an institution, and when one leaves the “Google church” and goes to the “Facebook church,” can we assert that he has left the church?

When we pronounce one to have “left the church,” we have declared ourselves to be denominational. What we are actually saying is that someone has left the legal definition of our group for another legally defined group. If someone across town makes a decision to cease driving across town to meet with a legally defined assembly, and determines to meet in his own house in his own community, he has not “left the church.” He is still a member of the universal body of Christ who is sitting somewhere else on Sunday morning. If we proclaim that he has “left the church,” then we have declared ourselves to be a denominational institution that one can leave in order to

place membership with another legally defined corporate body of believers.

In the context of this book, the word “institution” is often used by religious people who seek to construct a legal outline of laws that would define a unique body (assembly) of people that one can leave in order to join another unique body (assembly). However, we would not codify an assembly as the identity of the body of Christ, for in doing so we would make the body a legal organization according to the definition of the denominations around us. Such is not done in the New Testament, and we are fearful of doing such today lest we bring others into the bondage of our own fabricated “legal laws” that we arrange from our own chosen proof texts to identify our corporate group. The church is not a denomination, but making the church an institution encourages us to denominate one group of members from other groups.

If the church is denominated into individual institutional groups, then each group becomes an individual establishment that must be legally defined and defended. This would be somewhat different from the identity of the universal body according to the beliefs and behavior of the early disciples who were Christians only. What many have done by identifying the church according to a legal code of behavior is to develop a legal identity of the assembly of the disciples, and then from this legal identity of assembly, determined the existence of the church at any particular location.

Allow us to revert back to our early farming history in the rural farming com-

munity of central Kansas. In the nineteenth century, the newly arrived farmers and their families lived on their individual farms and worked the land. In order to meet together for worship, several farmers made the decision to meet on the banks of what was called Peace Creek. So on Sunday they all gathered in assembly on the banks of Peace Creek. After the assembly, the church boarded their covered wagons and went home to their respective farms. Now did the church cease to exist because the members left the banks of Peace Creek?

As time went by, the farmers decided to build a church building for assembly at the location where they regularly met. But the same thing happened after the assembly on Sunday morning. The church got into covered wagons and went home. Did the church remain in a building at Peace Creek? If the church is identified by the performance of legal ceremonies on Sunday morning at a specific location, then when the ceremonies are terminated with a “closing prayer” on Sunday morning and everyone goes home, does the church cease to exist? Or was the church scattered to the homes of the farms when everyone left Peace Creek?

The body of Christ is not identified by assemblies, but by individual disciples of Jesus wherever they may be. In the first century, **disciples of Jesus existed before there were any assemblies**, simply because the church is composed of baptized people who are added to God’s people **by God**. And baptized people were disciples before the first assembly of the saints ever occurred the first Sunday after the Sunday when about 3,000 were added to the disciples (At 2:41).

Christians are not validated as such because of their assemblies, but because of their submission to the lordship of Jesus. Assemblies are only the serendipity of being a baptized disciple of Jesus. Therefore, we would be careful in using the word “institution” in reference to the identity of the church of our Lord in reference to assembly, lest we start using the assemblies of the saints as the identity for the existence of Christians. A Christian is not determined by an appearance at a legally defined assembly. (See Book 55, *The Organic Function of the Body of Christ*, Book 65, *The Power Of Many As One*, at the following website: www.africainternational.org)

Chapter 14

The Early Rise Of Institutional Religion

The Jews of Jesus’ day did not in a short time develop that which rejected Him. Institutional religions develop over decades, if not over centuries. The Roman Catholic Church did not come into existence overnight. However, by the end

of the first century there were signs among some of the disciples that hierarchical institutional religion was coming. Paul warned the Ephesian leaders that there would arise those who would call disciples after themselves (At 20:29,30).

There were those during the ministry of the apostles who intimidated disciples into conforming to their legal system of religiosity (Rm 16:17,18; Gl 4:17; 3 Jn 9,10). These were all indications that there were those who were seeking to organize the disciples as an institution with a hierarchy of leaders on earth.

By the time Peter wrote in the middle 60s there were some elders who began to lord over the sheep of God (1 Pt 5:1-4). Lords only exist where there is assumed or delegated authority. And thus by the time Peter wrote, there were those who were violating one of the first principles of discipleship that Jesus said should not exist among His disciples (See Mk 10:42,43). Leaders were seeking to lord over the sheep of God as the world exercised authority among the secular institutions of the world.

Throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit gave warnings concerning the rise of institutional religion that would be perpetuated by the authority of established rulers. And because the warnings exist in the pages of the Holy Scriptures, we must assume that the Spirit knew that institutional religion would eventually lead a great many disciples away from the sole authority and kingship of Jesus.

We have often witnessed the same today among religious people. There are countless institutional religions throughout the world that are sustained by authorities who perpetuate the religion. These religions exist and have their own unique heritages. In order to separate these groups from one another, a common name of identity has been claimed

by the adherents of each group. Succeeding adherents are intimidated to remain loyal to each named institution. This is especially true in reference to the established leadership of the groups who draw any type of salary from the institution. Threats to withdraw salaries are used to bring the preachers of each particular institution into conformity with the unique catechisms that are promoted to identify each particular institution.

In order to solidify a particular religious institution, regular meetings are conducted by the leaders. Reports are made and leaders are checked for their compliance to “doctrinal soundness,” and conformity to the “constitution of the church.” Required attendance at such meetings is demanded by the establishment of the religion in order that each be checked off as faithful to the institution. Schools are often established by the institutional church in order to give a “diploma of validation” to preachers in order that they be indoctrinated with the correct shibboleths to be judged faithful to the institution. Everyone is brought into conformity to the worldwide organization of the denomination, and thus faithfulness to the organization is perpetuated throughout the world and history.

And then comes a rebel as Jesus. He was a rebel because He did not conform to the authoritative structures of the Jewish religious institution. Neither did He promote the legal identity of the organization. In fact, He violated their rules. He had no theological diploma from the “Theological Seminary of

Jerusalem.” He preached without the authority or approval of the established urban leadership in Jerusalem. He did not attend the preacher meetings. Nor did He seek to be sanctioned by the existing religious establishment in order to preach in the villages. He was a rebel of both the institution and the established leadership. He was a true protestant for He protested against the leadership of the establishment (See Mt 23).

Jesus was often summoned to appear before the authorities of the religious institution. And because He refused to conform to their wayward religion that they had fabricated after their traditions, they secretly plotted to rid Him from their religious society (Mt 26:3,4). As many today, they would threaten with slanderous letters that they would circulate among the synagogues. They would threaten and intimidate with courts and councils. But because He would not conform to the heritage of their religion, nor submit to the authorities of their institution, it was judged that He had to go, that is, go to the cross. Though He had done no evil, the religious leaders cried out, “*Crucify Him!*” (Mk 15:13,14; Jn 19:6). So they “... *led Him away to crucify Him*” (Mt 27:31).

If one would be a disciple of Jesus, he must take the same road of suffering as Jesus. Just in case Timothy forgot this, Paul admonished him with the words, “*For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God ...*” (1 Tm 4:10). In fact, “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12).

We would give a word of caution to those who seek to follow after the order of religiosity that was characteristic of the Jews’ religion. When church leaders regularly assemble to encourage one another through Bible study, they must be cautious that such meetings do not turn into synods where opinions are considered doctrine, and thus judgments made in reference with those who may disagree in matters of “doctrinal opinion.”

We live under the authority of the word of God alone, not the authority or pronouncements of any man or group of men. If attendance to meetings of leaders with authority is necessary in order to be considered faithful to the heritage of a particular religious institution, then such meetings have become synods by which the established leadership would judge others. If pronouncements are made during such meetings concerning those who are not present, then the meetings have become the meetings of judges with sectarian motives. If the meetings are exclusive of any disciple being present, then the meetings have become synods of exclusive authorities who have assumed authority over the church. If the meetings represent only those of a sanctioned heritage who conform to a specific name and a legal man-made catechism of definition upon which everyone has fully agreed, then the meetings have become a group of authorities who would pronounce judgments on the disciples.

The Roman Catholic Church started with such meetings where elders gathered in order to make judgments concern-

ing the church. The meetings eventually became synods from which pronouncements of doctrine were delivered to the church. The result was what we witness today as the Roman Catholic Church.

In the beginning of the American Restoration Movement, such meetings were conducted by church leaders in order to establish unity among many independent church groups. In order to promote unity, the representatives of churches drew up a doctrinal statement (“confession of faith”) in order to guarantee conformity for the sake of a fabricated unity. But one day all of those who had signed their names to the document realized that they had become a religious institution, as the religious institutions from which they had all fled. By producing and signing a document that defined their agreed upon doctrinal positions, they became the accepted establishment of leaders who would defend the document of faith. They eventually discovered that they were circling around through the document (creed) and becoming an institutional religion against which they had all previously struggled to leave.

All the leaders eventually agreed to have one final meeting. In this meeting they drew up another document. It was called, *The Last Will And Testament Of The Springfield Presbytery*. They thus killed their former document that was initially drafted to promote unity, but actually became a catechism to which the supposed faithful were to conform. They determined that everyone go forth from this last meeting only with the authority

of the word of God, claiming their freedom in Christ, and thus preaching the gospel of the grace of God according as each individual interpreted the Scriptures. They realized that there was a logical contradiction between promoting a restoration to the authority of the word of God in matters of faith, and at the same time establishing any document of man that would steal the freedom of individuals to study the word of God alone and apply its teachings.

If one finds himself among those religious leaders who seek to morph into a synod of authorities among the disciples, then it would be wise to seriously consider the direction to which the meeting of the established leaders is moving. Meetings for leaders are good, but if such meetings become a means by which to intimidate everyone into conforming to the norm of opinions and organization upon which everyone must agree, then the meetings should be banned. If such meetings are not banned, then each attendee must make a choice. He can remain with the meetings until they become one day just another synod of authorities that identify the institutional religion of the day, or he can simply not show up and move on with his Bible alone.

Paul urged both Timothy and Titus not to show up at those meetings where debates are generated in order to intimidate the attendees into conformity for the sake of a man-fabricated unity (See 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9-11). We should seek to meet with those who seek not to bring us again into bondage (Gl 5:1), but into being better disciples.

As we move on from this point, we must caution ourselves about any religious movement of men. Whether reformation or restoration movements, movements have a tendency of giving too much honor to the man or men who started them. Because there is too much honor given to the initiators of the movements, the followers often call themselves after the “father” of their respective movements. Those churches that align themselves with the movements thus adopt a unique name in order to be associated with a particular movement, or a unique systematic theology that was first taught by the originators of the movements. Many such religious movements originated out of Europe and America, all of which can today be identified by the unique name attached to each aligned church that is associated with each unique movement.

Man-made movements eventually establish themselves as heritages. And when movements established themselves as heritages, it then becomes the duty of the preacher or synods of the movements to defend their heritage. When the “job” of the preachers depends on the existence of the heritage, then it is almost impossible to call any of the leaders out of the heritage since at this stage in the existence of the movement the dedication of the leaders is first to their heritage, and then to Christ. In reference to loyalty, heritages have a tendency to move Christ into second place. And when Christ is moved into second place, the word of Christ is rejected in order that one maintain his identity with the movement (See

Mk 7:1-9). When a leader within a heritage does start questioning any particular doctrinal position of the heritage, it is then that he will come to Jesus in the night, or baptize his family in secret. Heritages are always on their way to being firmly established when the leaders start laying aside the commandment of God. The next stage of progression is to reject the commandment of God in order to protect the legacy of the heritage.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must establish our heritage only in Him. We are heirs of His kingdom only because of Him, not because of some religious leader who took a stand against apostasy. We call ourselves only after Christ.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rm 8:16,17).

Because we are “justified by His grace,” we are “made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Ti 3:7). Christ only is the means by which we are heirs of the kingdom (Js 2:5).

We are not called after Christ via some movement or religious heritage that was initiated by men. For this reason, we call on all men to put away the names of movements that identify their association with unique doctrinal or organizational heritages. We call on all men to be Christians only.

In order to make a bold change away from the “Jews’ religion” of a particular

religious heritage, it takes great courage on the part of those who have for years validated their existence as “church leaders” by the existence of the heritage that was delivered to them by their fathers. In order to take a stand for unity in Christ alone, we can better understand what

Paul, who changed from his religious heritage that existed for centuries. Those who would change from the religious movements of men to Christ alone would do well to read the testimony of Paul: **Philippians 3:1-11.**

Chapter 15

Institutional Judaism Against Christ

Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians referred to as an institution according to the definition of institutions of this world. In fact, much of the confusion that hinders our understanding of the organic body of Christ is that we want to create the body of Christ after the definition of worldly institutions. All that is essential to understand the organization of the body of Christ is that there is only one Head in heaven, and this Head has all authority over all things as King of kings on earth (Mt 28:18; Cl 1:18). The word of our King Jesus is the only standard of authority by which all men will be judged (See Jn 12:48). Discipleship is no more complicated than this when referring to the “organization” of the disciples. Neither is the organic function of the body of Christ more complicated.

On earth there are to be no authorities or rulers among the members of the body (See Mk 10:35-45). And thus, there are no authorities as popes or pastors to defend the mandates and propagate the legal codes of an earthly religious organization. We can use our titles and subtitles to define the work of our ministries, but when we start using such titles and

subtitles to define authorities among the slaves of the King of kings, then we are moving into the realm of defining the church as an establishment that must be propagated. When this happens among disciples, the “authorities” begin preaching the church and not the Christ. They focus on defending the codes of identity of the institution, and not the discipleship of the believers to Christ.

The best way to define the nature and behavior of an institution, specifically institutional religion, is to use the Holy Spirit’s accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In these documents, the Holy Spirit defined institutional Judaism, or the Jews’ religion. The Jews had established an institutional religion after their own desires (traditions of the fathers), which definition was not based on the Sinai law. The Sinai law defined God the Father as the King of all Israel, though after about five hundred years in Palestine the Israelites called for a king over themselves at the beginning of the years when they were rejecting God and His word (See 1 Sm 8).

By the time Jesus came into the world, the Jews had the Roman-ap-

pointed King Herod. He was not, however, necessarily a king of their choice, since he was appointed by Rome. Herod eventually died in 4 B.C., and his sons were appointed by Rome over different regions of Herod's reign. The Jews thus continued to have their king.

The Jews' desire for an earthly king helps us understand the error of institutional religions. When people seek to establish authorities on earth after whom they can call themselves, then the foundation is laid for institutional religiosity, or what is called "organized religion."

When an establishment of leadership is established among religious people, they are trying to protect their heritage or identity. And in order to protect their heritage and their identity as different from all other religious institutions of the day, they organize in order to exalt authorities among themselves. This progression, or digression into authorities on earth, was the specific thing that Jesus stated would not be among His disciples (Mk 10:42,43). This system of religion was what the Jews had constructed in the "fullness of time" when Jesus came into the world as the Messiah. They had assimilated all the traditions of the fathers into a religion that was contrary to that which God had instituted at Mt. Sinai. Their religious institution, therefore, was identified by Paul to be the Jews' religion (Gl 1:13).

We must keep in mind that institutions are founded on the authority of individuals who have been entrusted with the responsibility of guarding the heritage of the institution. The authorities

that are established by the institution are responsible for defending the institution. When men leave the authority of the word of Christ, they have no other option but to "ask for kings on earth" who can propagate the institution from one generation of authorities to another. The institution is thus preached worldwide in conjunction with Christ, and thus, **one is in fellowship with Christ through the institution**. Outside the structure of the worldwide institution, it is taught that one cannot be in fellowship with Christ, and thus saved. Therefore, membership in the institution becomes the method by which one is saved, and not one's obedience to the gospel of Christ. In order for one's baptism to be valid, he or she must have been baptized by one of the representatives of the institution. "Baptismal authority" is a cherished doctrine of an institutional religion.

If one were to leave the institution, it is pronounced by the establishment, "The rebel will lose his soul." "He has left the church." What is meant is that he will lose his soul because he is no longer a member of the institution. And thus, discipleship to Jesus is denied on the basis that one's salvation is dependent on membership in a particular institutional religion.

Remove Christ from this picture, and we have the definition of the institution of the Jews' religion of the first century. It was this institution of bondage that the religious leaders had constructed by the time Jesus came. All the rules had been established to identify the institution, especially rules concerning the

keeping of the Sabbath. All the authorities had been set in place to guard the heritage of the institution and to pronounce judgment on those who made any infractions of the rules. The primary means that was used to keep all the adherents (Jews) in conformity with the mandates of the institution was social intimidation.

Jesus was thus condemned because He did not conform to the legal codes that defined the Jewish religious institution. The Holy Spirit witnessed to the fact that He lived without sin (See Hb 4:15). However, this was not the pronouncement of the Jewish religious establishment, for they affirmed that He had violated their laws, especially their laws concerning the Sabbath. And because He did not conform to their laws, the religious establishment condemned Him to the cross.

Since Palestine was occupied by a Gentile government, the social orders of the Jewish institutional religion were highly organized by the time Jesus arrived. The strictness of the rules that identified Judaism was intensified so that no adherent to the institution (the Jews' religion) be associated with the Gentiles. The Jews were socially structured to the point that no Jew had any dealings with those who were half Jews, the Samaritans (Jn 4:9). If there were social infractions and violations of the rules that identified the Jews' religion, then there were chief priests, Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and the senate and councils (the establishment), who would deal with the violators. And since the people were

in fear of the established leadership, they were intimidated into conforming to the rules of the institution.

John explained the social scenario in reference to one incident when Jesus healed a blind man at a time when doing such was contrary to the rules of the Jewish institution:

*These words his parents spoke because **they feared the Jews**, for the Jews [the establishment] had already agreed that if anyone confessed that He was the Christ, **he would be put out of the synagogue** (Jn 9:22).*

Social intimidation by the Jewish establishment was one of Satan's greatest tools that he used against those Jews who would accept Jesus as the Christ. It was a very effective weapon. Diotrephes used the same tactic in reference to those over whom he had assumed authority. He threatened to excommunicate from the fellowship of disciples those who would accept other evangelists as the apostle John (3 Jn 9,10). Through his assumed authority, he instilled fear in the hearts of those over whom he functioned as a demagogue. If the members did not submit to his mandates, then they were kicked out of the fellowship of his loyal following. He had established an institutional religiosity that was propped up by his self-designated authority over the people.

Those who would maintain their freedom in Christ will run head on into institutional religiosity. It was this system of religion into which Jesus came in the fullness of time, and it was the lead-

ership of this religiosity that eventually nailed Him to the cross. The problem with the digression of the church into an institutional establishment is that the members are intimidated by the leader-

ship to conform to the rules of the institution that are exalted above the lordship of Jesus in the hearts of the individual members.

Chapter 16

The Opposition Of Heritage

In reference to religion, it is not uncommon for some people to resist being confused by the facts. Those who are seeking to preach the truth of God's word to the world must understand that this is often common among those who are steeped in their own religious heritage or dogma. One of the means by which the Roman Catholic Church establishes truth is through binding heritage. For example, James Gibbons, a former Catholic authority in "church" doctrine once wrote the following in his book, *Faith of Our Fathers*:

For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity Baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century the practice of baptizing by infusion [sprinkling] has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than Baptism by immersion.

The point is that if a particular teaching of the Bible is not convenient, but is historically practiced by the church, then the church has the authority to mandate as law that which is a tradition of church heritage. If the error of this heritage is pointed out by those who stand for the

final authority of the word of God, then they are often accused of being "change agents," and thus, they are threatened with excommunicated from the fellowship of the religious institution.

When confronted with the change that was made by the "church," it is asserted that the "church" has more authority than the written word of God. Some who strongly disagree with what the Catholic Church did in changing immersion to sprinkling, would often do the same in reference to establishing their own traditional practices or interpretations. Those who would question any teaching according to the word of God, are often questioned why they would question established interpretations in matters of opinion.

A. Religion based on heritage:

The preceding is what Jesus walked into among the Jewish religious establishment of the first century. The religious establishment had laid aside the word of God in order to honor their heritage, which heritage was often contrary to the word of God (Mt 23:23; Mk 7:8). In many areas of their theology, the religious establishment of Israel had rejected

the word of God in order to keep the teachings of their heritage (Mk 7:9).

When religions are created after either the heritage of the adherents, or the doctrines that have been established as codes of identity of the religion, **then there will always be confrontation between those who teach the word of God and those who seek to maintain their heritage.**

Teachers of the word of God must not be surprised at this confrontation. One of Satan's greatest tools by which he promotes the kingdom of darkness is to convince good and sincere people that their heritage and catechisms of faith are valid in order to be the foundation of their faith. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, and on more than one occasion, Jesus confronted the religious leaders in reference to their heritage upon which they based their faith.

During one encounter when Jesus said that the religious leaders had rejected the word of God, He pointed out that they honored their teachings more than the revealed word of God. Jesus reminded them of what God said through Moses: "*Honor your father and your mother ...*" (Mk 7:10). But the religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees who were lovers of money (Lk 16:14), said that the children must first give their money to the religious establishment before they take care of their mothers and fathers. (Mk 7:11). Upon the pretense that their support of the religious establishment should be pronounced Corban, that is "given to God," the religious leaders coveted the money of the children. They convinced

the children to give to them first, before considering their God-given responsibility through Moses to take care of their mothers and fathers. For selfish reasons, they thought of themselves, rather than the principle of the law of Moses that the children are to care for their parents.

Jesus reminded these religious leaders that they were "*making the word of God of no effect through your tradition that you have handed down*" (Mk 7:13). In other words, they were teaching that their traditional teachings should be honored above the word of God. The adherents to the religion, therefore, listened more to the doctrine of the religious institution, than their Bibles. When the religious tradition of the fathers is more important than the teachings of the word of God, then the effect of the word of God in the lives of the righteous is minimized.

Jesus continued in His rebuke of the religious leaders by saying, "*And many such things you do*" (Mk 7:13). At the time when Jesus came in the fullness of time, the religious establishment had constructed a religion that was not based on the law of God. It was based on the traditions of the fathers. The religious leaders promoted and propagated this religion throughout Palestine. The advantage that Jesus and His disciples had, therefore, is that they could point out the many areas where the religious leaders were maintaining a religion that had been handed to them by their fathers. They brought to the attention of the people that their faith was based on the heritage of Judaism, rather than the word of God. This

opened the door for those who were sincerely seeking God. They could see the difference between what Jesus was teaching from the law of Moses, and what the religious leaders were propagating from their heritage.

B. The power of heritage:

The problem with basing our faith on a heritage of teaching is that the minds of the adherents of the heritage are often closed. They are sometimes so closed that even a miracle of God will not convince the adherents to reconsider their beliefs. In fact, the heritage is so strong that the adherents will maintain their faith in their heritage regardless of any teaching of the word of God that would contradict the teachings of the heritage. In the first century most of the Jews maintained the faith of their Jewish heritage regardless of all the miraculous confirmation that Christ and the apostles unleashed in the world.

The Holy Spirit confirmed that the early disciples went forth and preached everywhere, *“The Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed”* (Mk 16:20). God bore *“witness with them, both with signs and wonders and with various powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit”* (Hb 2:4). However, the staunch attitudes by which many of the religious leadership of the day refused to accept the confirming miracles of the word that was preached, also led them to refuse the gospel.

When Peter and John were put on trial by the religious establishment in

Jerusalem, their opposition had in their presence the man they had healed. He was standing right there before them (At 4:14). Everyone knew that this healed cripple had begged on the temple steps for years, begging from everyone who passed by. So the people *“were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him”* (At 3:10). But neither the witness of the man being healed, nor the people who witnessed the healing, was sufficient to change the minds of those of the religious establishment. If they accepted the fact that the man was healed, then the foundation for their religious heritage would crumble. They would have to accept the message that the apostles preached. Since the religious leaders could not work miracles to confirm their own teaching, then we would assume that they would turn to the message of Peter and John since their message was truly confirmed miraculously. But they did not.

We must notice what was affirmed by the religious establishment at the trial of Peter and John: *“And seeing the man who was healed standing with them [Peter and John], they could say nothing against it”* (At 4:14). When the religious leaders put Peter, John and the healed man out of the court room, they said among themselves something that would be true of those today who maintain their religious heritage and teachings above any confirming miracle of God:

What will we do to these men? For indeed, a notable miracle has been done by them and is apparent to all those who

dwell in Jerusalem. And we cannot deny it (At 4:16).

The statement of these religious leaders reveals the nature of those who are confronted with truth they cannot deny. The two “change agents” in town not only taught that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God, but God also confirmed their message with a miracle that followed their preaching. So when confronted with undeniable proof, those who are in the bondage of their heritage can only use threats. In this case the leaders of the religious heritage “sternly threatened” the two apostles.

When confronted with teaching that is from the Bible, those who have established their faith upon tradition, or their religious heritage, can resort only to threats and violence against those they oppose.

We must never forget that the primary source that establishes a religious heritage is something that originates from the fathers, not the Bible. The heritage may contain Bible teachings, but those of the heritage who are honest and sincere will always maintain that the authority of the Bible must be maintained over any traditional heritage. When those who are sincere students of the Bible point out some contradictions between the heritage and the word of God, those who are in the bondage of their heritage will often resort to threats in order to maintain their heritage. They assume that their threats as religious leaders of the heritage carry some authority among the people. They thus lead by the intimidation of threats.

The threats are often covered in the cloak of “the brother’s soul is in danger,” or the brother should be excommunicated from the church (3 Jn 10). But when threats are used to maintain a heritage of faith, then one knows that there are serious biblical flaws in the heritage.

In the case of Jesus during His ministry, the threats did not work, and thus, a scheme was carried out to have Him eliminated from the people (Se At 16:16-24). In the case of the early disciples, the religious leaders, through Saul, “*made havoc of the church, entering into every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*” (At 8:3). And some, as Stephen, they stoned to death (At 7:54-60).

When religious leaders cannot deny truth, they will first threaten, and then they will often carry out their threats with bodily harm. We have heard of some preachers of the word of God who have been threatened with bodily harm. In the case of some, the threats have been carried out. One elder punched out a brother because he supposedly would not submit. Another brother stood up in a council meeting and screamed to his opposition, “If I had a gun, I would shoot you.” When one resorts to threats, one point is very clear. The one making the threats, as the religious leaders of the days of the early disciples, has no truth to substantiate his position. He believes that threats will prove his position, and thus, bring his opponents under his control.

When faced with threats, there is always the correct recourse of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:44: “... *love your en-*

emies and pray for those who persecute you ...” (See Lk 6:27-29). We often conclude that when He used the word “enemies,” Jesus was speaking of wicked people and evil governments. This would certainly include some of the enemies that the disciples would face. However, in the context in which Jesus both made the statement and lived His ministry, His enemies were religious leaders who set themselves against Him. He loved those who became His enemy. He brought them into eternity when they eventually realized that He truly was the Son of God, and subsequently repented. Therefore, if one loves his opposition, and those who would bring a railing accusation against him, he too would be as Jesus concluded. We love so that we “*may be the children*”

of our Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:45).

When was the last time we prayed for another who made a threat against us (Mt 5:44)? We must always remember that God so “*loved the world,*” which world included the One who came into the world to save it from sin (Jn 3:16). Nevertheless, though we love our enemies, we must heed the warning of Jesus in reference to religious leaders who are more concerned for their positions and purse, than they are for the truth of God’s word: “*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*” (Mt 16:6). Paul was a little harsher when he warned the Philippians: “*Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of the false circumcision*” (Ph 3:2).

Chapter 17

Opposition Of Heavy Purses

We were once sitting with several preachers at a conference in Zimbabwe. Many of the young preachers in the conference were complaining that the church would not support them. The discussion carried on for some time until a frustrated old businessman from Malawi yielded out, “Men, get a job!”

That was the end of the discussion, and the introduction to one of the means of attack by which Satan works against the preaching of the gospel. At the conclusion of a parable in Luke 16, Jesus made the statement in reference to the religious leaders of the religious establishment of His day, “*And the Pharisees*

who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they scoffed at Him” (Lk 16:14). What these preachers had heard from Jesus was a parable that was spoken against them as religious leaders.

In the parable, Jesus spoke of a certain rich man (God over Israel), who had an unjust steward (the Pharisees) who plundered his goods (they stole the loyalty of the people). So the steward was fired. The steward said to himself, “*What will I do? For my lord takes away from me the stewardship* [his means of support]. *I cannot dig* [for a living for myself]. *I am ashamed to beg*” (Lk 16:3). So the steward set out to embezzle sup-

port from his Lord's debtors. In the parable, Jesus stated that the unjust steward did act shrewdly, because he acted according to his character (Lk 16:8). He provided for himself, though the means by which he did so was shrewd. In a moment of desperation when he lost his salary, he did that which any shrewd servant would do. It was in this context, however, that Jesus was speaking against the hiring practices of the Pharisees.

A. Opposition of idol-makers:

When the preaching of the word of God endangers the financial security of fully supported religious workers, one can only expect that they will rise up in opposition. Demetrius, a silversmith in Ephesus, and many others like him, made a great deal of money from the idol-making business that was associated with the temple of Diana (Artemis). But when Paul came to town with the message of the gospel, multitudes of people disposed of their idols and obeyed the gospel. This did not set well with the idol-makers (At 19:23-35). Demetrius rightly stated of the results of Paul's preaching of the gospel that "*almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods*" (At 19:26). Demetrius then added that the idol-making trade was being disenfranchised (At 19:27). So when his fellow idol-makers heard this, "*they were all full of wrath*" (At 19:28; see also At 16:16-24).

When men who make money through religion feel that their salaries

are in danger, they will be "full of wrath." They will spill their wrath out on the ones who persuade the people away from gods that are made with the hands of men.

B. Preaching for money:

Sometimes, men who have great abilities to speak to the people use their gift of speaking for the purpose of gain. This often occurs among religious leaders who use their gift of speaking for personal profit. Such happened in the case of Balaam (Ja 24:9ff). He sold his gift for gain. His legacy was that an example was made of him for all time that he ran after money to the extent of betraying his ministry for God (See Jd 11). Balaam ended up dead because he preached for money (Ja 13:22). At least those who do the same today end up spiritually dead.

We can understand why one of the qualifications for being an elder of the body of Christ is that one not be greedy (1 Tm 3:8; Ti 1:7; 1 Pt 5:2). Leaders are often in the position to take advantage of others in reference to money. If one is greedy, the temptation to receive money can become too great, and thus he will sell his gift of ministry for money. This is a common practice among many today who have shamed Christianity for the sake of their own purse. This is especially true of some independent church leaders who see the members as an opportunity for a salary.

Traditional religions ordain those who are to preach for their churches. Being ordained means that the preacher must conform to the doctrinal guidelines

of the particular religious organization by which he was ordained. Therefore, when approached with truth that conflicts with the established catechism of the religious organization, the preacher has his hands tied by his salary. We once read an interesting newspaper statement in a Namibian paper. The short article was entitled, "Anglican preachers baptize their families in secret." The preachers studied themselves out of the practice of infant baptism, but were afraid of losing

their salaries because they preached adult baptism for remission of sins.

When a preacher is wedded by money to the message he preaches, then he is in the bondage of money. He is a servant to his support, not knowing what he would do if he lost his "job." The only answer to those sincere preachers who know the truth, but are afraid to preach the truth because of the intimidation of the religious establishment, is to "Get a job!"

Chapter 18

Opposition Of Politicians

We were once on the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies in the early 1980s, conducting a seminar for church leaders. There was some frustration among the church leaders concerning some brethren on the island who were teaching a matter of opinion, but different from the accepted "traditional interpretation" of the established church. The leaders of the establishment were having some difficulty "refuting" the "erroneous brethren" simply because the matter of contention was a matter of opinion, not a fundamental Bible teaching. So one of the brethren of the establishment made the statement, "We need to take them to court to bar them from promoting their teaching since their teaching infringes on the name of our church."

And so it goes among church politicians. When the Jewish religious leaders could not win their argument against Jesus, they resorted to the government

of Rome to do their dirty work for them. They could not crucify Jesus on their own since Palestine was an occupied land by the Romans at the time. So the Jewish leadership went to the higher court of the Roman governor, Pilate, in order to rid the Jewish religious establishment of a rebel whom they could not refute. They delivered Jesus to Pilate for execution. Satan still uses misguided brethren today to accomplish his evil deeds.

One case in the life of Paul illustrates the motives of church politicians. Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote the Philippian letter. In the introduction of the letter he made a very interesting statement concerning some local church leaders in the city of Rome. Though we do not know all the details, these political leaders must have been out in the streets preaching against the jailhouse preacher in the local prison.

We might better understand their

motives for their political preaching if we better understood the socio/political environment in which both Jews and Christians lived in Rome. Caesar Claudius had run all Jews out of Rome a few years before (See At 18:2). The infamous and narcissistic Nero was in power as Caesar at the time Paul was in prison. It was not a good social situation in Rome in the early 60s, and thus, some of the local church leaders evidently succumbed to the intimidation of the powers that existed. These leaders were locals, but Paul was an expatriate from out of town. They were free, but he was in jail. To them, he may have been an embarrassment to the church. They were willing, therefore, to sacrifice him for their own selfish ambitions. At least this is how Paul explained the situation to the Philippians,

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not with pure motives, supposing to add distress to my chains (Ph 1:15-17).

We would not confine Paul's statement to the social culture of Rome. Throughout his ministry, Paul faced envy and selfish ambition (At 14:1-6,19). It continued even to his imprisonment in Rome, for through their envy and selfish ambition, some leaders of the church would be so political that they would add distress to his chains while he was in a Roman prison.

Envy is when one seeks to have the influence or possessions that which another has. Here are some preachers who possibly envied the notoriety that Paul had. Maybe they envied his influence. We are not told exactly what they envied in the life of Paul. But in their envy, they caused strife among the disciples. They were as some arrogant preachers in Achaia who spoke slanderously against Paul, judging him to be afraid to show up in Corinth and defend himself (2 Co 10:10). Paul would show up, but he would show up with a rod of discipline (1 Co 4:21).

When preachers envy other preachers, Satan is at work to sow strife among the disciples. When preachers are cursed with selfish ambition, they will preach and behave in a way that will add to the distress of those who preach out of pure motives. The religious leaders of the Jews' religion envied Jesus. Their envy drove them to remove the influence of Jesus from the people. Pilate "*knew that because of envy they [the religious leaders] had delivered Him*" (Mt 27:18; Mk 15:10).

When a preacher starts to envy another preacher, only evil will result. And with evil envy, the Jewish leaders followed Paul from one city to another. Luke recorded,

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy. And contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed those things that were spoken by Paul (At 13:45; see At 14:19).

When a preacher finds himself “contradicting and blaspheming,” and opposing truth that is preached by his fellow preacher, then he should know that he has assigned himself to the company of those envious Jews who opposed Paul. Paul reminded the Corinthians with a question: “*For where there is envying and strife, are you not carnal and walking as worldly men?*” (1 Co 3:3). Political preachers are carnal. They are walking as worldly men.

Love does not envy (1 Co 13:4). And thus, when one envies his fellow leader in the faith, then he knows that he does not walk in love. He is walking according to the flesh (Gl 5:21). Such a person ...

... is obsessed with controversy and disputes about words, from which come envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, perverse disputings between men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that godliness is a means to gain (1 Tm 6:4,5).

Paul’s above instructions to Timothy in reference to his relationship with carnally minded leaders was direct: “***From such withdraw yourself***” (1 Tm 6:5). Timothy was to personally withdraw himself from those religious leaders who would stir up controversies about “*disputable words*.”

Satan uses church politicians to stir up all sorts of contentions. Paul mandated that both Timothy and Titus not give such carnally-minded church leaders their fellowship in discussions over

nonsense (2 Tm 2:23). We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit wrote the following in reference to church leaders who are obsessed with causing controversies among the disciples:

*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. **Reject a factious man [a brother] after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned*** (Ti 3:9-11).

Satan uses factious brethren to disrupt the peace of the disciples. Once a person is identified to be a factious man by his obsession with arguments over matters of opinion, then he is to be given no opportunity to express his foolish controversies before the church. We must keep in mind that the factious brother is a politician. He is seeking a following. He is trying to recruit members to agree with his foolish controversies (See Gl 4:17). The church that allows the factious man to have an audience before the church has violated the mandate of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:4,5 and Titus 3:9-11.

A contentious brother can usually be identified by his call for others to meet with him concerning one of his foolish “disputes about words.” When those with whom he would argue do not answer his call or letters to come down to Ono, as some enticed Nehemiah, and discuss his matters of contention, then he accuses the godly brethren to be in error because they would not show up for his

contentious meeting. Godly leaders need to answer the contentious brother as Nehemiah answered Sanballat and Geshen: “*I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?*” (Ne 6:3).

Our advice to godly leaders who have identified a contentious brother in their midst, is that they follow strictly the mandate that the Holy Spirit gave through Paul to both Timothy and Titus. **Do not go down to the meetings that are about disputable words of those who are filled with envy and selfish ambition!**

Some envious church leaders in Corinth, who were filled with selfish ambition, slandered Paul. They thought that he was too weak to come to Corinth and face their accusations against him (2 Co 10:10,11). Paul answered them:

Therefore, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Co 12:10).

It was not that the Christ-sent apostle Paul was weak in spirit. If he came and found his accusers arrogant in an unrepentant frame of mind, some were going to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Co 5:5; 1 Tm 1:20). As a Christ-sent apostle, Paul had no choice in the matter of exercising the discipline of the Lord. Ananias and

Sapphira dropped dead at the feet of Christ-sent apostles (At 5:1-11). Something similar was going to happen in Corinth if the slanderous church leaders did not repent before Paul arrived. Everyone in the church throughout the world had heard of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. “*And great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things*” (At 5:11). It was for this reason that Paul wrote the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians. He wanted to come to them with joy, not grief (2 Co 2:1). He wrote that some repent before he came.

The encouraging thing about the Corinthians is that they stopped listening to those who were causing the strife among them. Paul eventually went to them with joy, for he did not need to use the rod of discipline as a Christ-sent apostle. No one was struck blind; no one dropped dead; and no one was delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

God is not working in a direct manner as this today. Nevertheless, we read these things in the New Testament as a warning against anyone who would behave as those who were judged directly in the first century. All judgment for the envious person who is corrupted with selfish ambition, and thus sows strife among the disciples with his disputes, will be his part of what John described in Revelation 21:8.

Chapter 19

God's Work Through Change

Several years ago in a mission area of the world we had friends from “back home” come and visit us. We always remember the inadvertent compliment of one of these friends. He said, “All of you are always making a liar out of me when I visit you and return home. I make a report of what you are doing, and when I come back the next year, you are doing something different.”

Our friend realized that we allowed God to work in our lives. And as we lived in the ministry, doors would open that demanded a change in ministry. Changes needed to be made according to the opportunity of each open door. If we did not change our methods or tactics by changing our thinking, then we would have been shutting God out of our plans. Our inability to change would have shut God out of our lives.

We have known of several supporting churches throughout the years who have submitted the evangelist they supported to work according to a “contract of work.” The contract would carefully be drawn up after much thinking and prayer, and then committed to paper. The supporters, as well as the supported, would dutifully sign the contract. The evangelist would then begin his designated ministry with his hands tied. What everyone had done when they signed the agreement was to limit God in the lives of the evangelists. Prayers were made that God would work according to the

contract, that is, “God please bless our plans.”

The more one confines his ministry to his plans, the less God can intervene with His plans for His own glory. If we are successful with our plans, we seek to take the glory. After all, did not God bless our plans? God does not work according to the corporate world of good business management that is outlined on a spreadsheet. We cannot manage God with our plans. God is not confined to our corporate agenda.

When an evangelist engages in ministry, he should be thoroughly prepared in his mind to change from what he first envisioned in order to enter those doors that God continually opens. As he encounters open doors that God makes available, he should be prepared to change. When things change, the effective evangelist will change in order to take advantage of new opportunities.

The same is true in reference to the work of disciples who are trying to reach the folks in their own community. We remember when a “gospel meeting” or a “campaign for Christ” was productive in most urban centers of the world. The problem was that this method of preaching the gospel publicly in many urban centers of the world died several decades before we were willing to give up our plans. One day we did wake up. We looked at the audience who attended our gospel meetings. We were looking at our-

selves. There were no visitors. We were preaching to the choir.

If churches are not able to change according to the receptivity of the people in their community, then they will die. Their inability to change to enter new open doors will eventually lead to the removal of the lampstand from Ephesus. No matter how many good works we are doing, or how great a name we make for ourselves in the community, our inability to change with the times will vacate the lampstand of the gospel from our community (See Rv 2:2,19; 3:1). Satan will have used one of his best tools to terminate the church in our city.

The apostle Paul sometimes faced this challenge. He worked with purpose and dreams. As an independent personality, we would expect nothing less from him. So the Holy Spirit had to do some fine tuning with him in order that he learn to change his plans. On one occasion he was traveling through Phrygia and Galatia. He planned to go into Asia and preach the gospel. But he was "*forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia*" (At 16:6). We do not know how he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit, but we do know that he had to change his plans. At the time, Asia had to be stricken from his "contract."

As Paul, Silas and Timothy continued on their journey, they came to Mysia. Again he, Silas and Timothy had plans to go into another region and preach the word of the Lord. On this occasion the team of three evangelists wanted to go to Bithynia (At 16:7). "*But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them*" (At 16:7).

They had made their plans, signed their contracts, but they had to change. They continued their mission to preach the word of the Lord, but their plans had to be changed. After they were informed by the Spirit of Jesus that they were not to go into Bithynia, it seems that they may have been somewhat disheartened. For some special reason, the Lord sent Paul a special vision concerning where he must go. In the vision, "*a man of Macedonia was standing and pleading to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'*" (At 16:9).

Now notice how quickly Paul was willing to change his plans once he saw the vision. "*Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia ...*" (At 16:10). Paul, Silas, Timothy, and now Luke, were men who allowed God to work in their lives according to His will, not theirs. We must keep this lesson in mind when we make our own plans. We must be people who are entirely opened to God working in our lives. The business world may think that we are unpredictable in our work. We are as predictable as the many open doors we see before us. We work for an unpredictable God who does not open doors until we have launched out of the security of our own plans. If we do not have a spirit of change, we will lock God out.

We have always wondered what Paul's friends from back home would have said when they visited him in Macedonia. Would they have said, "Paul you made a liar out of us back home. We reported that you were going into Asia. But here you are in Macedonia. And then

you said you were going to Bithynia, and you ended up in Macedonia. You certainly are unpredictable in your ministry.”

We are reminded of the following statement of the Holy Spirit:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out (Rm 11:33).

If one finds security in writing up a contract for his own destiny, and is not will-

ing to change when God opens doors along the way, then he may be limiting God in his ministry. But if one seeks to serve the God whose ways are past finding out, then he should be prepared to tear up contracts that may bind the work of God in our lives. When we allow God to plan in our lives, we will be willing to change in order to enter many open doors. We remember that the truth of the gospel never changes, but the methods by which we preach it to all the world change continually throughout history.

Chapter 20

The Result Of Persistence

When we focus on historical studies of the early beginnings of Christianity, we would become discouraged if it were not for the result of what actually happened in the first century in reference to the growth of Christianity. There was tremendous opposition to Jesus and the preaching of the early disciples. Satan used every tool of opposition that he had at his disposal. He used the religious leaders of the time to crucify, stone, slander and imprison the early messengers of the gospel. But the word of God prevailed. There was nothing that Satan could do to stop the work of Jesus to take the gospel into all the world.

In his efforts to oppose the preaching of the early disciples, it is interesting to note what the historian Luke said actually prevailed over all opposition that Satan could offer:

So the word of God increased. And the

number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (At 6:7).

When Christians today are persistent in teaching the word of God, then the number of disciples will multiply. It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit, in this historical statement of Luke, focused on the increase of the word of God. When messengers of the word persist in their efforts to plant the seed of the kingdom, the number of disciples will be multiplied. God’s word is so powerful when preached that it will bring to Jesus even those who lead in the onslaught of persecution against the word. If the disciples are vigilant and persistent, even the religious leaders will bow to the power of the word of God.

Teaching the word of God must become our customary behavior. “*And Paul,*

as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (At 17:2). It was not that Paul taught the word of God when it was convenient, or when he had the opportunity. Many today are "convenient" teachers, that is, they teach the word of God only when an opportunity comes their way. But Paul, and the early disciples, took the initiative. They looked for gathered people who loved their Bibles. Paul once took the initiative to go to a "prayer meeting" where he "*sat down and spoke to the women who had assembled*" (At 16:13). The early disciples were aggressive to teach the word, not passive as the opportunity offered itself. They were looking for places to teach the Bible.

We have found that the word of God will not increase in any area where Christians have become totally passive in their witness to the word. This is surely what happened in the city of Ephesus. The word of God increased significantly in the city in the early beginnings of the disciples' teaching the word. Religious people even burned their deceptive religious books when they accepted the word of God (See At 19:19). But many years later when Jesus addressed the disciples in Ephesus, He said, "*Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love*" (Rv 2:4). They had maintained a great number of good works among themselves (Rv 2:2). Jesus had no complaint in this area. But they had lost their first love of teaching the word of God to others. They were great on works, but dead on the word. What disciples often do is content themselves in

their good works, but there is no preaching of the word to the unbelievers. And works without the word is death.

Highly organized churches are often highly dead. They have often organized themselves into neglecting that which produces fruit. They grow by attracting "converts" through their enthusiastic activity. But there is no emphasis on teaching the word of God. When a church is built on the enthusiastic activity of good works, without emphasis on faithfulness to the word of God, then the church becomes a social club of religionists who are afraid to focus on the word of God lest members be driven away by the commandments of God. If a church is built on those who have responded to the word of God, and then go to work for Jesus, there is never a fear among the leadership that members will be driven away when the word of God is taught. **A church built on works is dead, whereas a church that is built on the word of God is alive with the works of a word-based faith.**

The reason why the disciples increased in Ephesus in the early beginning was stated clearly by Luke in Acts 19:20: "*So the word of God grew mightily and prevailed.*" It is the word of God that will prevail over lies, error and deception. It is the word of God that causes religionists to burn their religious books that are full of lies. Our good works may offer the opportunity to attract many to our group. But we must never forget that it is the word of God that leads us to prevail. Deceived religionists burn their religious books of lies when they are confronted with the truth of the word of God.

The power is in the word of God, not in our person as disciples of Jesus. We must never forget that ...

... the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hb 4:12).

When we teach the word of God, we must never forget that people are “... *born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides*” (1 Pt 1:23). When this imperishable seed is planted in the hearts of men and women throughout the world, God will give the increase. “*I have planted,*” Paul wrote, “*Apollos watered, but God gave the increase*” (1 Co 3:6). If there is no planting of the word of God, then God cannot give an increase. If Christians do not take the initiative to plant the word from city to city, then there will be no increase.

We must always remember that Satan has gone on before us to every city. He has deceived people into being satisfied with their religiosity in the bondage of deception. Only when teachers of the word of God enter into Ephesus will the word of God be able to prevail. If the disciples of Jesus do not take the initiative to enter into the city with the word of God, then the religious people of the city will continue to read their religious books, and thus continue in the deception of that which is false. God can give no increase while we sit idly by and wait

for an opportunity to teach the word of God. If we do not make it the custom of our lives to teach the word of God, then God cannot give the increase. Teachers of the word, therefore, must create the opportunities to teach the word.

The power of the gospel is not in ourselves, but in that which comes from God. Paul reminded those in Achaia who trusted in themselves, “*Not that we are adequate in ourselves to think anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God*” (2 Co 3:5). We might think that our social religious club is adequate to draw people to Christ. We will certainly draw many people through our many works (See Ep 2:2). We will even be known in the community for our good works. But we may be as the church in Sardis: “*I know your works,*” Jesus said, “*that you have a name that you live, but you are dead*” (Rv 3:1).

Jesus will recognize our good works (See Rv 2:2,9,13,19). He would commend some with the words, “*I know your works and love and service and faith and your patience. And as for your works, the last are greater than the first*” (Rv 2:19). However, in commending the disciples in Thyatira for the increase in their works, He judged, “*I have a few things against you because you tolerate ...*” some sin in your midst (Rv 2:20). They were good in works, but lacking in implementing the commandments of God in rebuking the immoral behavior of some among them. They tolerated the immoral among them, though they were known for their good works.

If Jesus’ message of judgment

against the seven churches of Asia teaches one clear point **it is that the word of God must be implemented in the lives of those who call themselves after Christ.** “Lord, Lord” cries to claim allegiance to Christ is not good enough. We must do the will of the Father in heaven (Mt 7:21). We must be doers of the word of God, and not hearers only (Js 1:22). If we do not, then we will eventually hear the words of Jesus when He comes to judge the world, “*I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness*” (Mt 7:23). Therefore, “...

be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Js 1:22). When we are doers of the word of God, we can have hope that we will eventually hear the following words from Jesus when He comes again: “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Mt 25:34).

If we are confident in teaching the word of God, the word will prevail over error. And in the end, we will prevail over the world when our Lord comes.