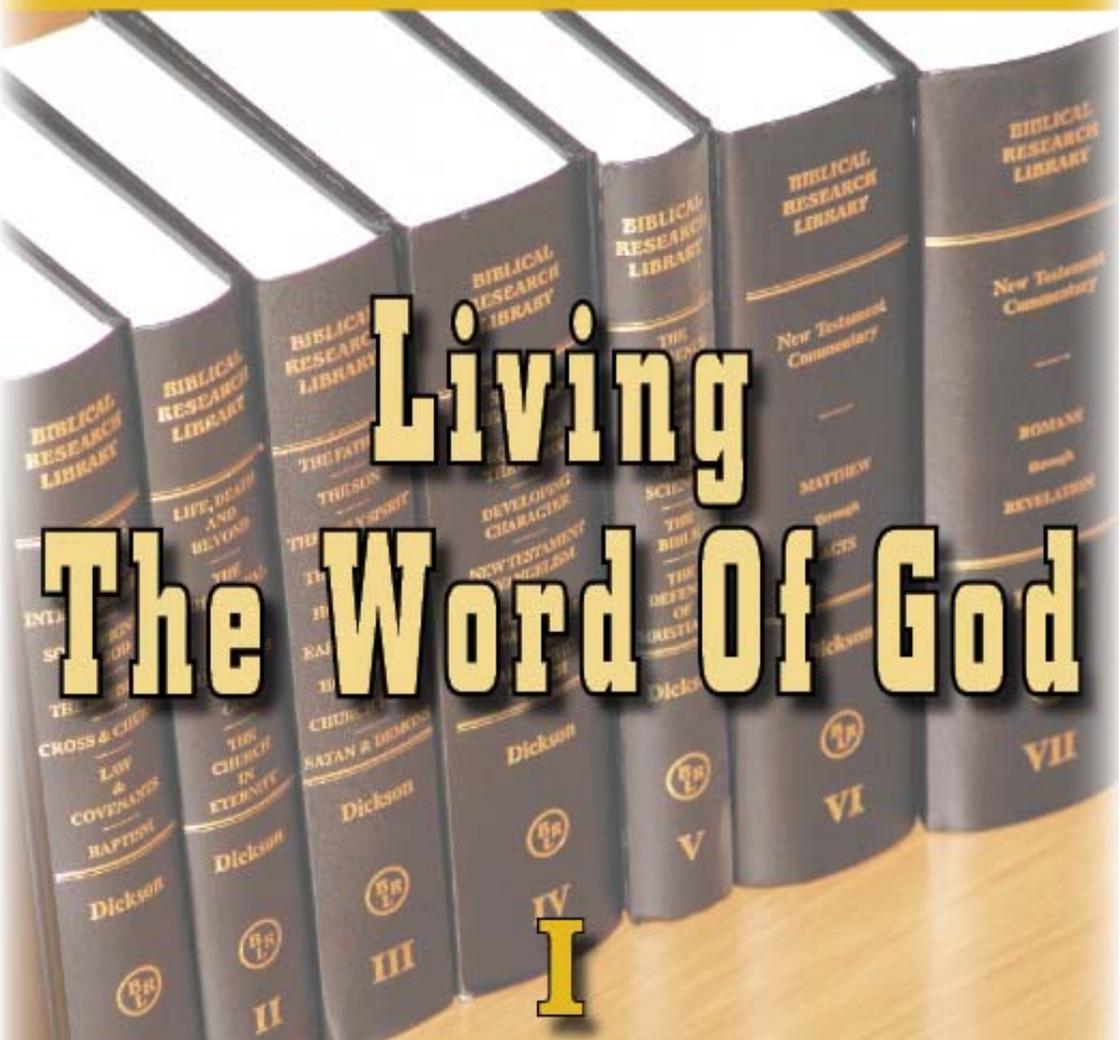


INSCRIPTIONS



Living The Word Of God

I

ROGER E. DICKSON

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Roger E. Dickson
 rdickson@mweb.co.za
 www.africainternational.org
 www.blog.africainternational.org
 Facebook: Africa International.org
 Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa
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 Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Preface

Each chapter of this book was written as an independent concept that covers a specific subject. This material originally appeared under the heading of *Inscriptions* when it was first published as editorial installments on our Facebook Page (Africa International), and on our blog website (www.blog.africainternational.org). They were written as editorials concerning theological discussions and events that were relevant at the time of writing.

There is no particular order by which the chapters are arranged. Though we have sought to organize together some of the *Inscriptions* that relate to one another, please keep in mind that these are random editorials that were on the author's mind at the time of writing.

The reader should not treat the information of the entire volume as an effort to bring the reader to a validated conclusion. Each chapter must stand alone in reference to the particular subject that is covered.

It is our prayer that the reader will glean from the material some concepts that will enhance personal Bible study and teaching. In reference to those *Inscriptions* that are directed to the social/religious environment of the world today, it is the prayer of the author that his understanding of the Bible as expressed through this material will aid the Bible student in his or her daily teaching and living of the word of God.

The author has sought through the writing of the *Inscriptions* to challenge readers in reference to the application of biblical truth to the life of a disciple of Jesus. In challenging long-held traditional thought, the *Inscriptions* were written in order to encourage Bible students to research again those favorite passages of scripture that need to be reexamined.

The author wants to encourage recipients of this Volume I to use the material in any manner he or she may deem appropriate to encourage discipleship. If for some reason the recipients feels that a particular chapter should be copied and distributed, the author grants full rights for such being done, as long as credit is appropriately given. In reference to the Internet distribution of this volume, the author likewise gives permission that the material may be freely distributed. If copies are printed, they can be sold only for the cost of printing.

This is the first e-book publication of the *Inscriptions*. If the Lord wills, the author will continue to write individual editorials that will be electronically and individually published, and eventually organized and published as e-book Volume II.

Chapter 1

Gambling With Faith

The atheist and Christian are in a confrontation of faiths concerning origins. Both believe in a beginning, whether launched by a Big Bang, or the whispered word of a Supreme Being. Neither atheist nor Christian was there when it all began, and thus each depends on faith in Whom or what started that which now exists. Both fervently analyze extracted bones, or dig up rocks, in order to seek some solution to the beginning of all things. Regardless of the world view of either, each promotes a faith as to how all things began.

In order to answer the question concerning the present existence of life, the atheist is subject to the theory of evolution, which theory he labors zealously to convince others that it is actually “fact.” The Christian, on the other hand, holds to a faith in the power of a Creator, who, sometime in the past, spoke life and the material world into existence. He too is zealous to convince all that his faith in origins must be accepted because his faith too is based on geological, biological, plus Bible “facts” concerning past events

So here we are in a confrontational debate where there is mutual rejection of one another’s faith. In reference to beginnings, the atheist rejects the answer of a Creator, and the Christian rejects the answer of materialistic evolution. It is a passionate standoff between dedicated “theologians” or “philosophers” who reject the faith of one another because each contends that his faith is the answer for

the existence of that which now exists. Unfortunately, some on both sides of the debate seem to forget that both beliefs concerning origins are a matter of faith, for neither was there when it all began. Each faith concerning origins, therefore, depends on deductive reasoning from what we now presently observe.

So with whose faith would you side? Now consider this: Both the atheist and the Christian will die. If the atheist is correct, then the Christian, when he dies, loses nothing in reference to his faith, which in the end, was false. There really was no God. Nevertheless, because of his faith, he lived as if he would give account of his behavior before an eternal Judge. He lived a good life. He helped others. He lived morally the best he could because of his belief that he would eventually be held accountable for his behavior.

On the other hand, the atheist, when he dies, sits with a tremendous gamble if the Christian is right. The atheist lived according to the mandates of human laws, and his desire to do good to his fellow man. He sought to be a good citizen only because of the motivation that a peaceful and orderly society is best for humankind. But if the Christian is right, **The atheist misses out on everything!**

Now the question is with whose faith is one willing to gamble? For us, we would rather live with the Christian’s faith, with the hope of being right, than with the faith of the atheist, with the possibility of being wrong.

Chapter 2

The Man In The Moon

As children, we were told about the “man in the moon.” So at night, we gazed intently at the moon in order to see this man. But he was not there. He was only the imagination of some creative mind.

Some never grow out of their childish desire to imagine God after their own physical and emotional image. The psalmist wrote, “*The Lord’s throne is in heaven. His EYES behold. His eyelids test the children of men*” (Ps 11:4). And thus the childish adult concludes that God has literal eyes and eyelids.

In missing the metaphor of such statements in the Bible, our spirit of idolatry moves us to create a god after our own physical image. In our yearning to conceive of a god with whom we can identify, we bring God down to the definition of our earthly terms. Some even go so far as to carve an image of their imagined god in a stone or piece of wood. In all our child’s play to create a god with whom we can better identify, we forget that God is spirit, and the definition of “spirit” is that there is no physical form (Jn 4:24).

Our efforts to create a god after our own image result in a very unfortunate conclusion. If the God of heaven were no greater than the appearance of a physical man, then there could never have been an incarnation of the Son of God into the flesh of man. Statements in the Bible as John 1:14 would simply be theological contradictions: “*And the Word was made*

flesh and dwelt among us.” If the Word were already flesh—some supposedly conclude that Moses saw some fleshly hinder parts of their fleshly god—then there could never have been an incarnation of God who “was made flesh.” If the Son of God were already flesh, then His incarnation would have been only a parallel transfer from some heavenly location in the galaxies to this planet.

Our spirit of idolatry urges us to move even beyond the creation of a being who conforms to our physical image. We seek to create a god in our minds who is no greater than our own emotionality. It is true that “*he who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). But we must not confine the extent of God’s love to the limits of our own capacity to love. Human loving is only a beginning to understand the God of love. We must remember that when our love toward our fellow man has reached its limit, God’s love continues without limits. It must. Upon repentance, the most vile person can still be brought into the loving “arms” of God. God’s love could have extended to Hitler if only Hitler would have truly repented of all his wickedness. If we believe that God’s love could never have extended to such lengths, then we have limited the love of God to our idol god who is no greater than our own capacity to love.

We thus use the English word “incomprehensible” when speaking of the

God of the Bible. We do so because there are no words in any dictionary of man that fully define God's existence, being and character. We catch a glimpse of His love through His loving behavior as it was demonstrated through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate body of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary. This "incomprehensible" act of love is recorded in the pages of the Bible, but with the limitation of the words of our dictionary. If we throw away the Bible—as many do in their failure to study the Bible—then we would be driven to create a god after our own image and according to our own limited love. (Idol gods are always humanly defined gods.)

People who do not know the Bible, therefore, can never know the loving God of the Bible. Without the recorded message of the incarnation and cross, we are doomed to limit God's boundless love to the boundaries of our own limited love. In our ignorance of the Bible, we become idolaters, worshiping a god whom we have sculptured according to the limitations of our own limited reasoning.

We believe in a loving God who is beyond the words of our dictionary. We so believe because it is only reasonable to believe that God, the true God, is far beyond what we can comprehend. If He is not, then He is no god at all. He would only be the figment of our imagination.

Chapter 3

No Love Without Law

The Bible records the words of Jesus concerning the most important commandment (law) of all commandments: *“You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”* (Mt 22:37). And the Holy Spirit defined this loving of God in the statement, *“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments [laws]”* (1 Jn 5:3). There is no loving of God unless one obeys the laws of God.

Now apply this definition to what Jesus said was the second greatest law: *“You will love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mt 22:39). Loving one’s neighbor as himself is to obey law in reference to one’s relationship with his neighbor. Civil government is ordained by God to establish law in order that there be order among the citizens of society. *“Therefore, whoever resists authority [of the government], resists the ordinance of God. And those who resist will receive judgment on themselves”* (Rm 13:2).

The problem with addiction to drugs is that the addiction works against the second greatest law among the citizens of a nation. Government laws against substance abuse are established for the purpose of maintaining civil order among the citizens of a country. Drug abuse is almost always the problem of those citizens who have no financial basis by which they can support their addiction.

The addicted, therefore, must resort to stealing from their fellow citizens.

Crime rates soar in those communities where drug addiction prevails. The drug addicted citizen cannot maintain any love for his neighbor when he persists in stealing from his neighbor in order to continue his selfish addiction. He does not love himself, for he is destroying his body. And in his self-destruction, he does not love his neighbor, for he or she must steal in order to continue the addiction. It is for this reason, therefore, that there can be no law and order in a drug addicted society.

If a government for and by the people would maintain law and order in a society where substance abuse is running rampant, then it has no option but to crack down on drug users. The citizenry, therefore, must make a decision. Either they as a government for themselves be lenient with substance abuse and theft, or will they rise up against all forms of drug abuse and its consequences?

Civil societies take a stand against those who behave in a manner by which society is destroyed. It is for this reason that a society that is infested with substance abuse must rise up against those who would destroy the fabric of a civilized society.

Chapter 4

Islam . . . And The Rest Of Us

When discussing the subject of Islam, the “rest of us” is everyone but a Muslim. The Hindu, the Shinto, the Buddhist, and even the Christian, are included in the “rest of us.” The political Muslim seeks to make this clear so there will be no confusion concerning the teaching of the Quran and the implementation in society of its “constitution” (sharia law).

We would like to think that all faiths (religions) are somewhat the same in reference to morals. In some areas this is true in reference to most basic morals. But this is not true in reference to the totality of the teaching of any particular faith, especially political Islam. For this reason, the political Muslim strives to help the “rest of us” understand the very nature of true Islam. The personal struggle of some Muslims to modernize Islam in order that they conform to being citizens with the “rest of us” in secular governments is somewhat difficult. Maybe the following will help the “rest of us” better understand the dilemma of the Muslim, and in particular the political Islamist:

- In theology and practice, Islam encompasses the totality of the human experience. According to the Quran, there is no such thing as a separation between religion and state. For the Christian, the existence of a secular state is necessary, for in this separation, state never takes control of religion, and vice versa. When the Holy Spirit said to every Christian,

“be subject to the governing authorities” (Rm 13:1), we understand that there is a difference between the state (“governing authorities”) and faith (religion). When the Holy Spirit explained that the “governing authority” (state) was given the “sword” by God in order to prevent anarchy (Rm 13:4), Christians get the point. Being separate from the “governing authorities,” Christians do not have the authority of the “sword” to enforce their faith on others. But with the political Muslim, there is no separation between religion and state. And for this reason, political Muslims will perpetually be resistant to the existence of a secular state in which they would reside as citizens along with the “rest of us.”

- In the beginning of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad was initially a war lord. In order to accomplish his “secular” ambitions in the Middle East in the early part of the seventh century, he mustered his adherents together both politically and theologically. Unlike Jesus Christ, Muhammad led a military conquest to acquire territory by preaching to his followers both his theology and political ambitions. He built a new state by capturing and holding a particular territory of land, making Mecca in Saudi Arabia the capital. In order to accomplish his political end, therefore, there could be no separation between the faith of the followers and his political ambitions. Thus state functioned through the implementation of

sharia law (“civil law”). For the political Muslim, therefore, sharia law must always exist in contrast to the governance of any people through secular (nonreligious) constitutional law. For the political Muslim, state and religion are one.

- For Christians, Jesus was the Word who was revealed as God’s message (gospel) to man. As the bearer of the message (the good news of the Word), the Son of God was incarnate into the flesh of man (Jn 1:14). Eventually, the message of the gospel (good news) was recorded in words of men (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) in order that the message not be lost or distorted throughout history (See 1 Co 15:1-4). But for the political Muslim, the very Arabic words of the Quran are the direct and literal communication of Allah to man. It is this communication, this written word, that is sacred. And since it is believed that this “incarnation” of Allah in the words of men came directly to Muhammad in Arabic, then the distribution of the true word can only be in Arabic. For the Christian, translations of the Bible can never change the message of the gospel. But for the Muslim, translations of the Quran into other languages are always questionable, for the “true word” can never be exact in a translation. For Muslims, therefore, the text of the Quran in Arabic can never be dismissed, and must always be idolized as the “incarnation” of Allah.

Now here is the challenge for the political Muslim: Political Muslims can never settle for residence in a secular state

wherein is guaranteed the freedom of all the religions of the “rest of us.” As a state religion, Islam is the religion that establishes the constitution of the state, and thus, must govern the function of all other religions in a politically controlled Islamic state. And unless Islam becomes the sole politic of the state, forming its policies and determining the judgment of its courts (sharia law), then the political Muslim can never feel comfortable as a citizen with the “rest of us” in a secular state. Political Muslims, therefore, find it difficult to assimilate into the culture and society of a secular state. Their very existence as Muslims makes it difficult for them to accept the fact that they must simply join the “rest of us” in allowing a democratic government of elected authorities to maintain the sword of the state through constitutional laws.

Those Muslims who have modernized in a secular state, therefore, are not considered true Muslims by those political Muslims who are citizens of a supposedly true Islamic state. In fact, political Muslims who are seeking to follow the Quran in its literal application, seek to make the modernized Muslims, who are living comfortably in a modern secular state, feel guilty about their modernized life-style. This is why some modernized Muslims in a secular state can be “radicalized” by a recruiting political Muslim who seeks to restore the life-style of a society that is trapped in poverty in the mountains of Afghanistan or the deserts of the Middle East. If one is made to feel guilty enough about going to a shopping center and fulfilling the mate-

rial desires of the flesh, while his “brother” suffers in a struggle to survive in a hostile environment in the Middle East, then eventually he will take out his frustration on those who encourage him to indulge in fulfilling the desires of the flesh in a secular state.

If those of a secular state demand that a Muslim must assimilate into the culture and politics of a secular state, then we must understand that the modernized Muslim, with great struggle, must remove sharia law (his civil constitution) from this faith. If in a secular state a Muslim stands up and brandishes the constitution of the secular state in which he lives, giving allegiance to it, then you can understand that with great sacrifice he has compromised a great deal of the authority of his faith (the Quran) by conforming to the demands of a secular state. As a part of the “rest of us” we would commend this commitment, but we also understand that those Muslims who seek to modernize with the rest of the world in order to maintain peace, are doing so with great

sacrifice of some of the mandates (sharia law) of the Quran. And they are doing so by separating themselves from political Muslims who claim to have established again a true Islamic State.

We thus indeed commend those modernized Muslims in their efforts to convince the “rest of us” that they too do not want to go back into a “dark age” socioeconomic environment where there are no hospitals and modern medicine for their children when they are sick and nigh unto death. If the “rest of us” can understand this struggle of the modernized Muslim, then we can exercise a little more support, and less suspicion. They too want to live in a state where secular civil law guarantees the right of all citizens to discuss their religious beliefs in an environment where there is no fear of physical reprisals.

Suggested reading
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
 Book 56: *The World As It Is*
 Chapters 8-15

Chapter 5

Theatrical Religion

Have you heard of the spectacle of religious showmanship that has been circulated throughout the world on the Internet? It seems that there was this bizarre religious reality show sometime in the past where several preachers climbed upon an altar and started jumping up and down on a sacrificed animal like a troop of drunken monkeys on steroids. They were screaming at the top of their voices, which screaming eventually made their voices so hoarse that they could no longer speak. They then resorted to cutting themselves with knives in order to excite an entranced audience of onlookers. The preachers were so intense in their outlandish performance that blood gushed from their severed veins and was strewn on the audience, many of whom were likewise stirred into a hypnotic frenzy of uncontrollable emotionality. It was a display of religious nonsense. Some in the audience were moved to uncontrollable rolling on the ground. Some were crying out at the top of their voices. Others just fell to the ground as stunned mummies because of what they saw in the behavior of the preachers. They laid there emotionally paralyzed in the exhaustion of a semiconscious stupor. We are sure you did not miss this hysterical display of reality religiosity that has gone viral throughout the world.

If you looked closely at this theatrical picture of a religious extravaganza—maybe somewhat embellished by our imagination of the account—you could

notice that there was this one preacher seated off to the side by himself from the enraptured crowd. He was calmly watching the outrageous behavior of the entire spectacle. He was unmoved by all the horrific experiential display of humans who were emotionality out of control in their fit of hysteria. After observing this psychotic and misguided religiosity for some time, do you know what he did? He mocked the theatrical preachers. He mocked them by chiding that they appeal more intensely to their god that they had created after their own imagination: “Cry aloud,” he mockingly chided, “for he is a god. Either he is meditating or he is busy or he is on a journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

We are sure you have read the account of this theatrical spectacle. If not, then you can download from the Internet the Bible book of 1 Kings that gives a historical account in chapter 18 of this bizarre event. It is interesting that this event has been circulated on the Internet for years, but it is seldom read by those who seek to lose themselves in their own ignorance of the word of God.

1 Kings 18 is an ancient record that reveals how long experiential religion has been with us. Theatrical religiosity is an obsession of misguided religionists who believe that their release from their struggles in life is a Sunday morning outburst of emotional hysteria. It is an obsessive behavior that we seek to move into our religion by justifying our bibli-

cal ignorance with the plagiarized word “worship” from the Bible. In our efforts to validate the being and behavior of a god we have created after our own experiences, we imagine a god in our minds whom we have subjected to sitting and listening to our obnoxious theatrical performances.

We thus create this idol god whom we would narcissistically worship, and whom we suppose would accept as worship our religious theatrics. We produce the most exotic and spiritually toxic assembly by which we reassure ourselves that such experiential events must exist every Sunday morning when we seek to “awaken our idol god from his sleep,” or call him back in our minds from a “journey” on which he may have gone. The more noise we can amplify, and the more rabid our emotionality can become, the more we dupe ourselves into believing that our hysterical extravaganza will call him up from the quietness of his sleep in order to give attention to our worshipful chaos. So we combine the deafening noise of a rock concert, plus the preachers’ rhythmic cheerleading cries, and then suppose that we have awakened our god out of his sleep in order to administer a spiritual placebo that will carry us through to the next Sunday extravaganza. It will be then that we will again proceed through the same theatrical ritual of jumping up and down on a vainly offered

sacrifice while severing our emotional veins with unspiritual knives.

So you think we are being somewhat critical? You think we are mocking when we chide these theatrical religionists with the words, “Cry aloud, for you suppose he is a god! Maybe your god is asleep! Maybe he is on a journey!”? You are exactly right. We stand with Elijah, the prophet of God, the preacher who mocked the 450 Baal preachers in 1 Kings 18 who had lost their dignity before an audience of people whom they had led into the captivity of uncontrolled religious hysterics. These preachers had sacrificed the word of God for an experience of religious theatrics by which they thought they could conjure up the dead god they had created in their own minds. They presumed that their emotional hysteria on the stage of the altar would lead the people to believe in the nonsense of their misguided religiosity that was void of any knowledge of the Bible. The biblical record of this theatrical spectacle proves that nothing has changed among some religionists since the day Elijah challenged the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel almost three thousand years ago.

Suggested research:
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
 Book 44, *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*

Chapter 6

Experiential Religion

Not long ago we were lounging in the humble house of one who was an “ex-preacher” of a particular urban church. There too, and across the room, was the brother-in-law who was the ex-band leader of the same group. These two men told us a very intriguing and relevant story that could be repeated many times over throughout Christendom today.

In the hands of our aged preacher friend was an old dilapidated and cherished Bible that was inscribed with laborious marginal notes that evidenced many faithful years of diligent Bible study. His brother-in-law likewise clutched his Sacred Volume that also revealed the same evidence of a sincere love of God’s word. These two “exes” revealed to us a misguided journey in their ministry where they confessed that they in the past made a wrong turn in their leadership of those whom they led spiritually.

As church leaders in the changing times of the postmodern urban church in which they ministered, they explained that the young people started leaving “their church.” The youth were going over to neighboring altars where prophets and bands were theatrically entertaining on stages with ear-piercing concerts and performances that led the people into a rapturous hysteria that would equal that of the Ephesian temple of Diana (At 19:28,29,32).

Our two discouraged hosts explained that the experiential younger gen-

eration of “their church” had become bored with Bible preaching and study. With itching ears, they explained, the youth were drawn to the experiential assemblies that neighboring temples offered. The youth were thus leaving what they considered a “boring worship” from which they “got nothing,” and thus, were going out in search of an experiential assembly where their narcissistic personalities could be nourished with the noise of a modern-day religious concert.

When the flight began, the preacher and his brother-in-law explained that they said to themselves, “We will do likewise in order to retain our young people.” So the brother-in-law started a Sunday morning concert that would appease the ears of an experiential generation who sought an outward stimulus to generate an inward response. He and his band friends thus organized and commenced to play their hearts out before a people who had become “bored” with Bible. Their instrumental playing with guitars and drums went from background to foreground as they turned up the amplifier to generate some emotional response from the temple attendees. After the theatrical concert was over, the preacher said that he stood up with his Bible and vigorously preached the word of God .

But then they realized something that puzzled both of them. The young people were still leaving. So they asked the young people what the problem was. The answer shocked the two leaders.

“We love the band,” the youth responded, “but we are not so much for the boring Bible sermon that follows.”

Eventually, the preacher who loved his Bible, with his brother-in-law, who loved the same, realized the futility of their efforts to compete in the urban environment of neighboring temple concerts that drew great assemblies of young experiential religionists, but did so without any Bible preaching. But it was too late. Both of our leaders concluded that if this was the experiential road on which many temple religionists desired to continue today, then they must start over. So there they sat together with their wives, families and Bibles in the solitude of their home. It was there that they sought to start again a solemn assembly of worship of the one true and living God, who seeks to be worshiped reverently in spirit with focus on His revealed truth (Jn 4:24).

Not long after the preceding encounter another preacher in our area called, and then related to us the same story over a cup of coffee. “The young people want to come together to jump up and down in experiential praise,” he related, “but they could care less for the preaching of the word of God.” There was frustration in his voice when he said, “I’m fed up with it. I want to start over

with a group who truly loves to study and teach the word of God.”

In the present environment of religious experientialism, we are constantly reminded of God’s following statement to His apostate children of Israel:

“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 children of the religious experientialists will have truly lost their way because their parents did not nurture them in the word of God. If the parents forsake teaching their children the Bible, then the destiny of the children is that they will be forgotten by God. They will be forgotten by God because their parents did not assume their parental responsibility to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the word of God.

Suggested research:
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
 Book 44: *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*

Chapter 7

Narcissistic Religiosity vs Word-Based Faith

The problem with experiential religion is that it does not challenge us to change our behavior. It does not because we often validate our faith by our religious experiences. The result is that we live as frustrated disciples who have a difficult time in correcting our behavior according to the instructions of the word of God. When we place our experiences above the word of God, the power of God's word to transform attitudes and behavior is minimized in our lives. What happens next in this psyche of religiosity is that we are fearful of studying our Bibles lest we discover that our lives are out of tune with the will of God.

The primary problem is that the religious experientialist is depending on experiences to confirm his often narcissistic (self-centered) psyche. He is not looking for direction from the Bible to direct his way, nor instruction on how God seeks to be worshiped on His terms (See Jn 4:24). He is not seeking a God who gives commands and demands obedience. He is trusting in a god who supposedly creates experiences that would validate his self-imposed religiosity. It is for this reason that the experiential religionist argues so vehemently against any suggestion that one should obey the commands of God as conditions for salvation. In reference to salvation, he must sustain a truly "faith only" theology lest he be driven to commandments in the word of God that must be obeyed in order for one to be saved.

In the realm of religious psychology, it would do one well to caution himself about what is the true validation of faith. This is particularly true in a world of religionists who are obsessed with subjective emotional experiences that one uses to validate one's relationship with God. This experiential psyche is often revealed in religious assemblies. For example, if one uses the word "boring" in reference to any assembly where believers come together to worship God, then "the bored" should know that they are probably seeking an experiential assembly that pleases themselves.

Such narcissistic "worship" could not be further from the true worship that Abraham experienced with his family in his wanderings, and David with his sheep in quiet meadows. These heroes of faith did not need or seek a subjective experiential assembly with people in order that they not be "bored" in worship. Can you imagine young David being "bored" in worship in a quiet meadow with his sheep?

When our assemblies must be choreographed in order that the attendees not become bored, then we can be assured of one specific truth: We are focusing on what we want, and thus, we have become immune to what God instructs through His word. In satisfying our experiential desires, we personally push God and His word away in our efforts to create a "worship" that awakens the spiritual deadness of unchanged lives. God's word, there-

fore, becomes peripheral to our worship, for our faith is validated by our self-imposed subjective experiences we idolize as the validation of our faith. The problem is that the experientialist can walk away from an exciting assembly with unchallenged and unrighteous behavior. He lives in a self-imposed bondage by which he is self-justified by his own subjective experiences.

Those who are legally dead spiritually do the same. Legalists are in bondage to their religious ceremonies. Dead legalism and subjective experientialism have one thing in common: The assembly for both the legalist and the experientialist often allows the adherents to continue with unholy living outside the “hour of worship.” When the switch of the “closing prayer” is flipped, both go on their way, having been validated by either a legal ceremony or an experiential performance in the assembly.

The experiential religionist can arrive at the altar on Sunday morning with a drunken hangover, but still feel justified before God if he has an emotionally driven experience in assembly. The legalist does the same in a different way. As long as assembly legalities have been performed, the legalist, who may be living in adultery before the assembly, has justified himself to go home and continue the same adulterous relationship after the assembly. The argument of a husband and wife on their way to the assembly, and before the “opening prayer,” continues on their way home after the “closing prayer” concludes the “hour of worship.”

The religious experientialist has a

particular problem with “double tongued” religiosity. As long as the experientialist can validate a superficial spiritual relationship with the god he has created in his mind, which god he supposes condones an unrighteous life-style, he then feels little motivation to change any unrighteous behavior. This is the spirit of idolatry. The idolater creates a god in his mind who condones his self-centered (narcissistic) religiosity.

However, to the experientialist, the Holy Spirit writes: “*He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar. And the truth is not in him*” (1 Jn 2:4). And to the legalist, the Holy Spirit writes: “*But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*” (1 Jn 3:17). The experientialist seeks to be a disciple by minimizing, or being ignorant of the word of God after the “opening prayer” and before the “closing prayer.” The legalist seeks to be legally correct in his assemblies while minimizing or ignoring the needs of his brother before the “opening prayer” and after the “closing prayer.”

In reference to discipleship, experiential religionists have a particular problem in being led by a false validation of faith. Since the commandments of God are minimized as the foundation of his faith, the experientialist must find something to take the place of his Bible (the commandments of God). He thus substitutes Baal for Bible. The spirit of idolatry takes over. When one believes that subjective experiential worship is the

validation of one's faith, then one's self becomes the foundation upon which faith is built. Every Sunday experience is an event to resurrect the "emotional idol" that validates one's faith until the idol is raised again the following Sunday. We have found very few experiential religionists who cry out, "Jesus, Jesus," but at the same time, are serious Bible students.

John 6 is a record of this truth during the ministry of Jesus. When people could no longer "experience" the free handouts of fish and bread, they left Jesus (Jn 6:64-66). The experience of filling bellies with fish and bread will sustain a physical life, but we must remember that it takes the words of Jesus to produce and sustain eternal life (Jn 6:63,68; Rm 10:17). Many of the people who wanted to be disciples of Jesus could not handle His words, though they loved the free bread and fish experience. They thus turned away from Jesus when He said "hard" statements that demanded change in thinking and obedience to commands (Jn 6:66).

In their carnality, some of the Corinthians behaved narcissistically in the exercising of tongues and prophecy as the center-of-reference for their assemblies (See 1 Co 14). They were so drawn to the experience of speaking in languages and prophesying, that confusion and chaos characterized their assemblies. Paul said that the unbeliever who might visit their assemblies had enough sense to conclude that they had all gone mad in their narcissistic behavior (1 Co 14:23). We would conclude from Paul's

exhortation that if any unbeliever judged our behavior in assembly to be madness, then we must take another look at how we are behaving in assembly.

We must never forget that it takes obedience to commandments, not subjective experiences, to draw us closer to the One who can preserve us for eternity. It takes knowledge of the word of the God of heaven to know whom we should worship. The Jews crucified Jesus through ignorance, and thus they were seeking to form God in their minds according to their own desires (At 3:17). The Athenian philosophers worshiped in ignorance the one true and living God (At 17:23). If we create a god after our known experiential desires, then we, too, will be worshiping contrary to the worship that the true God desires (Jn 4:24). It would be good to heed the words that Paul uttered in Acts 17:30: "*The times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent.*"

Idolatry is defined as something of this world that is outside us that is used to spark a subjective emotional experience within us. True worship is defined as a spirit of gratitude within us that pours out thanksgiving to the God in whom we live, move and have our being. Grateful hearts need no outside stimulus to pour out worship to God. If our assembled worship is diminished when the electrical power goes out, then we know we have created a necessity of this world that is outside our hearts to produce that which we should spiritually pour out to God from within us. The drums of spir-

itists in Africa are used to generate hypnotic trances in which the worshipers lose control of their senses. We must be careful that a failure to pay the electricity bill does not reveal that we, too, have created an idol that must be plugged in to create worship as that when Nebuchadnezzar set up his great idol before the people (See Dn 3). We must not forget that the idol worshipers of Corinth com-

mitted fornication with the priestess of the temple in order to experience their religiosity before an idol deity. When one starts down the road of experiential worship, there is no end to the moral confusion that awaits at the end of the road.

Suggested research:
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
Book 44: *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*

Chapter 8

A Possible Conversation Before Time

“If We do this thing, then Our action will come with many risks.”

“I know, but Our very existence and nature necessitates that We act.”

“That’s true. If We do not act, then Our lack of action will be the very denial of Our existence. Our existence as one eternal divine entity would not be a reality if we did not create beings who would be terminal in the presence of Our eternity. As there is no light without darkness, then there is no eternity with finality. If Our eternity must be evidenced by those who can miss out on eternity by not conforming to the nature of who We are, then Our eternity would be the only reality, and thus, have no definition. How can We say that We have existed for all eternity if there never existed those who were not eternal, for eternity is defined by that which is not eternal.”

“So We are all in agreement that We must create. But if We create, then that which We create must in some way emulate the essence, nature, and character of who We are. Those We bring into the realm of ‘terminableness’ must be created with the possibility of becoming eternal in Our presence. If Our created ones cannot become as We are in existence, then there will be those who conclude that We do not exist as We are. As the origin of that which is terminal, the terminal

must have the possibility of eternity. If not, then We have left ourselves with the task of continually creating in order to reveal Our power to create. And if this were the case, then the created would conclude that their existence was only the result of some natural process of spontaneous generation.”

“I know. But creation comes with a risk. If We do not take the risk, then We are an eternal anomaly without definition. Because of Our nature and being, therefore, it is necessary that We create. In creation of that which has the possibility of entering into eternity, the created must be given the freedom to make moral decisions—we must not create preprogrammed robots. If there were no risk in creating individuals who have the freedom to make moral choices, and thus have the possibility of eternity, then there would be no reason for creation. We would thus remain in eternity as We are, having not expressed Our love through creation.”

“In order for those We create to emulate the true nature of who We are, then We are taking the risk that Our creation will go wrong. In fact, most of those we will allow to exist will take selfish control of the image after which We create them in order to make themselves, on their own volition, as We are.”

“Yes, but it is a risk that is necessary. It is necessary in order to reveal to Our

created ones that We are who We are in eternity. We must, therefore, plan the revelation of one of Us in a way that will evidence Our nature of love, and at the same time, offer them the possibility of eternity if they emulate in their lives Our nature of love. Since the risk of choice on the part of those We create infers the possibility of some exercising extreme hate, We must still take the risk of creating free-moral individuals. Unless those whom we create have the freedom to choose, they will never understand the extremity of Our love if they do not have the freedom to go extremely right or extremely wrong.”

“So we must embed within their nature the instinct that their origin is extraterrestrial. After Our image they must be given an innate desire to search for Us in the terrestrial environment We will create for their temporary dwelling. In their search beyond themselves, some will conclude that there must be ‘something’ beyond their own existence. In their search, therefore, some will find Us. However, the fact that most will not discover Us in their search must not deter Us from creation. There will certainly be those whose search will not go beyond the limits of their imagination. Because these will not see beyond themselves, they will create in their imagination beings that are contrary to the very nature of who We are.”

“Yes, those who create gods after their own earthly natures will go wrong. In fact, most of Our creation will go af-

ter the carnality of the environment that they create for themselves. Dominant individuals among them will rise up and dominate. The instinctive nature We will place within them will be confused with their own carnality, and thus, they will seek to destroy their own kind. They will subsequently follow after the original rebellious one whom we will allow to roam among them for the purpose of destruction. Therefore, Our created beings will invent for themselves cults of death by which they would destroy their fellow man.”

“But their religious cultures of death will manifest the extreme of Our culture of love by which We are identified. Their death cult will reveal that they have created a god after their own carnality and a religion that justifies their desires to dominate.”

“The risk of freedom to choose comes with the possibility that Our creation will often throughout time turn on itself. Self-extermination will always be a possibility. However, if there are no extremes to the freedom of our creation, then there can be no final identity of who We are. If Our creation will follow the deceiver to the extreme of destroying themselves in the name of religion, then one of Us must reveal to humanity that We are not that way. We are an extreme culture of love, and thus, Our visitation among those whom We create must reveal Our love.”

“We recognize that Our dilemma is that We must create because We are love. Nevertheless, We must allow hate to ex-

ist in order that those who choose to be as We are, will understand that the environment in which they live cannot be their final destiny. Those who choose Us will be identified by the nature of who We are. The religions of hate and death that are invented by the carnally-minded will give the honest searcher the opportunity to conclude that We exist, and that Our existence is based on love, for We created because of love."

"In order for those who love to understand that We have everything under control, We must reveal to them that before We spoke one atom into existence, We had a plan to bring them out of their finite environment into an infinite existence of that which We are."

"Therefore," spoke the Father, "we all agree that when We utter the words, 'Let there be ...,' one of Us must have already volunteered by saying, 'I will go.'"

"I will volunteer," agreed the Son.

"So We all agree," repeated the Father.

"Let the beginning begin," replied the Spirit.

Suggested research:
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
 Book 12: *God the Father*
 Book 13: *God the Son*
 Book 14: *God the Holy Spirit*

Chapter 9

Hydrophobia

We once concluded with the outpouring of our heart to an electric audience of attentive Bible lovers. After the lesson, one seemingly apprehensive, but convicted believer, stood up and valiantly said, “I want to be baptized right now!”

So after initial preparations for the event, both of us proceeded down into the water. There was a sense of nervous apprehension in the willing subject who had declared his intentions to follow Jesus. He was quite nervous with his first step into the water. As the subject was in the process of being laid back into the water in order to be immersed, arms and legs went flinging everywhere. Hands and feet grabbed after everything that was above water. He was hydrophobic (terrified of water).

After some reassuring persuasion, the self-confessed hydrophobic believer fought against his fears. Nevertheless, we almost both went down into the water, he wide-eyed and struggling, and me not seeking to be rebaptized. What was so encouraging was that he overcame his fear of water in order to follow Jesus into the Jordan River. He had not informed us before of his phobia. However, regardless of his phobia of water, he was determined to be baptized as Jesus had commanded. After the experience, no one in the attentive audience let him pass without hugs and encouragement for his courage to overcome his fear of water in order to obey the gospel.

It is unfortunate today that there are

thousands of “believers” who claim to be followers (disciples) of Jesus, but they do not have the courage to overcome their hydrophobia. They claim to be followers of Jesus, but they will not follow Him to Aenon where there was much water into which they would be immersed after the example of Jesus (Jn 3:23). They will not follow Jesus by obedience to His instructions to be baptized in order to be saved (Mk 16:16). And thus, they are not willing to be “of Christ” by baptism into His name (1 Co 1:12,13).

Paul said, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). But there are hydrophobics today who will not follow Paul to the grave of water as he imitated Christ by following Him (Acts 22:16). Some hydrophobics today are so afraid of the water that they would never even “follow the crowd” of those who followed Peter’s instructions on the day of Pentecost to be “*baptized for remission of sins*” (At 2:38). A crowd of about 3,000 men and women followed Peter’s instructions on that day to be immersed for the remission of their sins (At 2:41). They followed his instructions right into and out of the water in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6). We are sure there are some who could not say as the Ethiopian eunuch, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?*” (At 8:36). Instead, some religious hydrophobics would say, “See, here is water! Get me out of here!”

Too many seem to forget that when a pagan idolater responded to what a Christian believed in the first century, he was not initially told to either repent or confess that Jesus was the Christ and Son of Christ. He was not initially informed about baptism. Pagan unbelievers were initially told what Paul said to the idolatrous Philippian jailer, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved*" (At 16:31). Idolatrous unbelievers had to first believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and then they were taught the rest of the story. Paul and Silas continued with the rest of the story to the Philippian jailer by speaking to him "*the word of the Lord*" (At 16:32). And the result? "*And immediately he [the jailer] was baptized, he and all his household*" (At 16:33). One must first believe in Jesus, and then obedience to the rest of the story will follow. And the rest of the story involves repentance and washing away of sins in the waters of baptism.

The entire gospel according to John was written that the idolatrous unbelievers to whom John wrote "*might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing*" they might have life through His name (Jn 20:31). In his book, John was not writing to believers. He was writing to idolatrous unbelievers who knew nothing or little about the life and ministry of Jesus, especially the fact that Jesus was the Word (Jn 1:1-14), the Son of God who came down out of heaven for the salvation of man (Jn 3:13). Idolatrous unbelievers must first, as the eunuch and idolatrous jailer, believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. Af-

ter belief, that which was necessary to be born again would come (Jn 3:3-5).

It is highly unfortunate that so many throughout the religious world have twisted the gospel of John out of John's purpose for which he wrote the book. His message, that was only to be the beginning of the message of the gospel, has been made the conclusion. We must not forget, however, that belief is only the beginning of one's journey to do all that God requires of each individual in order to be saved. If one stops at the beginning, then no obedient repentance will occur (Lk 13:3). There will be no confession that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (Romans 10:9). There will be no baptism into Christ (Gl 3:26-29).

When those on the day of Pentecost believed that they had crucified the Lord and Christ, they said to the apostles, "*Men and brethren, what will we do?*" (At 2:37). The apostles did not leave them at belief by telling them that they were saved by "belief only." Instead of allowing them to remain lost in a "state of belief," Peter instructed that they follow through with their belief. We read the gospel according to John in order to believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. We read the book of Acts to find out where to go from belief. Belief in the New Testament is more than a smile on one's face, or a warm feeling. It is an inward activation to follow Jesus to the Jordan River in order to be immersed for the remission of all past sins. Once they believe, true believers will overcome their hydrophobia by asking, "Where is the water?"

Chapter 10

Baptism: A Relational Response Of Faith

If one seeks to establish and maintain a relationship with God, then it is only reasonable to believe that one must establish this relationship on God's terms. To believe otherwise would be an effort to manipulate God to conform to one's own terms, and thus, demand that God accept our terms to establish a relationship with Him.

We live in a world of Christendom today where most religious people have sought to have a relationship with God, but on their own terms. And because we are living in a world where most people have very little knowledge of the word of God, then we would suppose that the vast majority of Christendom is seeking to establish a relationship with God on their own terms without ever considering the terms of God.

John did not initially write to believers. The New Testament book of John was written to those whom John urged to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). If the unbelievers to whom he wrote believed, then they would have an eternal relationship with the Son of God. They could have this relationship if they followed through with what God required to be born again (Jn 3:3-5) John affirmed that belief in Jesus was the foundation upon which they could establish this eternal relationship with God. In this way, belief was relational in reference to their salvation.

We find throughout the New Testa-

ment the rest of the story about the "relational belief" about which John wrote. In reference to the eternal relationship into which his readers must come with the Son of God, John wrote briefly about the door of entry, that is, being born again (Jn 3:3-5). To be born into this relationship with the Son of God in whom one believed, a response to belief (obedience) was necessary on the part of the believer. Belief, therefore, could not be an end within itself. It could not be a simple acceptance of facts. **It had to be a relational response to what God required in order to connect with His Son.** The eternal relationship with God that John desired that his readers have had to be a behavioral response to the intellectual information that he wrote in words.

How one establishes a relationship with God can only be defined by God, and thus, only in His word are we to determine how and what a relationship is with our Lord Jesus Christ. We have found that most people are more inclined to use the common religious definitions of the confused religious world in which they live to define how one establishes a behavioral relationship with Jesus. The common accepted theology of the majority is often easier to believe than opening one's Bible to determine how God defines these matters and establishes His terms for being born again.

In order to explain what John meant when he introduced the subject of being "born again," Jesus continued to explain

at the end of His ministry what He meant by the term. The declarative statement of Jesus in Mark 16:16 is a record of concluding thoughts of Jesus that reveal the seriousness of what is most important in one's restoration to a relationship with God. Jesus' statement was simple, but loaded with meaning when considered in the context of His entire message of the gospel.

Jesus said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*" Every theological wiggle possible has been made in the religious world to discount what Jesus meant in this statement. But the statement is blatantly clear. The meaning can be clearly understood in the context of the truth of the gospel of Jesus. If we do not consider the whole text of His message, and what the Holy Spirit explained in the whole of the New Testament, then belief becomes a simple legal recognition of facts with no resounding confession or repentance in one's life. Baptism is subsequently relegated to a legalistic plunge into water in obedience to a command to "get baptized." Such a conclusion is both impersonal and a denial of the truth of the gospel and the relationship that the Father seeks to have with those who believe on His Son.

The "belief" about which Jesus spoke was relational in that it must move one to respond to Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. The gospel (good news) must be received in mind (intellect) and in heart (emotional). It is God's ultimatum for sinners to bring themselves into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Belief, therefore, is an emo-

tional response and foundation in reference to the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul explains, "*I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand*" (1 Co 15:1). The word "stand" is metaphorical in reference to emotional security. Belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (the gospel), therefore, is an emotional response to an intellectual knowledge of the event of the gospel that Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4: "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*" (1 Co 15:3,4). One must intellectually know and believe that Jesus, as the Son of God, died for our sins. However, one's intellectual belief in the death of the Son of God for our sins is not good enough. Intellectual belief is not relational in reference to connecting with the saving power of the gospel. There must be an emotional attachment, and subsequent action, to the event of the gospel in order to emotionally "stand" upon an assurance that we are saved by the event of the gospel. Knowledge of facts must be combined with behavior. It is one's emotional response to the gospel that moves one from knowledge to behavior (obedience).

This brings us to Jesus' connection between belief, baptism and salvation. Jesus explained in Mark 16:16 that in order to be saved, baptism must occur in response to one's intellectual and emotional response to the event of Jesus'

death for our sins and resurrection for our hope. Baptism is not a legality. It is a relational response to the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And when one relationally responds to his belief in the salvational work of Jesus at the cross, and in the resurrection, then the blessing of salvation comes into the life of the one who obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. One is thus born again (Jn 3:3-5).

Paul explains the relational response of baptism to the gospel in Romans 6:3-6. Notice carefully how he makes baptism a personal encounter with the death and resurrection of Jesus. He begins with a question: "*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death*" (Rm 6:3). Jesus' death was personal, and so is our baptism into His death. Paul explained: "*We were buried with Him through baptism into death ...*" (Rm 6:4). The preposition "with" makes the response of baptism relational in reference to our contact with the death of Jesus. Baptism is not a ceremony. It is not a legal obedience to commands. It is establishing a personal connection with Jesus right at the cross of Jesus and in partnership with His burial and resurrection. If one cannot establish this relationship with Jesus at the cross, and in the burial and resurrection, then he has no real, true and personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus died for our sins at the cross. If one would establish a relationship with Jesus, then he must begin this relationship with his own death, burial and res-

urrection in obedience to the gospel. Only through baptism into His death can we be at the cross with Jesus. This is why Peter reminded those on Pentecost in Acts 2 that they must be baptized for remission of their sins (At 2:38). If the separation from God through sin remains in one's life, then there can be no relationship with God against whom we sin (Is 59:2). When one is baptized for the remission of sins, then his relationship with God is established.

But Paul was not finished with his commentary on what Jesus meant in Mark 16:16. Belief leads us to be "*united together in the likeness of His [Christ's] death,*" and thus, "*we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection*" (Rm 6:5). As "*our old man was crucified with Him*" at the cross in repentance, our new man walks in newness of life when we come forth from a grave of water (Rm 6:5,6). Paul, through the inspiration of the Spirit, could not have explained the relational obedience of baptism in a better way. **There can be no relational walk with Jesus in the new life, if there is no death and burial of the old man.**

At the end of His mission on earth, Jesus concluded with a relational statement to His disciples in reference to baptism. He commanded His disciples to "*disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Mt 28:19). In this statement, Jesus used the Greek word *eis*. *Eis* is relational. In baptism, one comes into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is belief in

Jesus as the Son of God that moves one to go to the cross with Christ. It is belief that takes one into a grave of water with Jesus in order to wash away sins that keep one separated from God (At 22:16). It is belief that brings one forth from the grave into a resurrected life in a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Unless one's belief results in crucifixion and burial with Jesus, therefore, one has no true or personal relationship with the One who will return from heaven to collect His people who have been washed in His blood (1 Jn 1:7). Those who have not believed, gone to the cross, grave and experienced a res-

urrection with Jesus, do not have a redeeming relationship with the Christ who went to the cross and grave for them.

We must keep in mind that it is not the responsibility of the sinner to determine his own means by which he would establish a relationship with God. This is God's business. And since it is God's business, then the only way one can discover how to establish a covenant relationship with God is in the word of God.

Suggested research:
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
Baptism

Chapter 11

Fellow Workers

There are fundamental concepts in the Scriptures concerning relationships that are often glaringly contrary to the accepted behavioral norms of the world in which we live. One of these Spirit-inspired norms is critical in defining how Christians are to relate with one another as the organic body of Christ. This is a relational norm that is often the most violated mandate of all Scripture. Jesus explained, *“You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you**”* (Mk 10:42,43). No interpretation need be exercised to understand what Jesus meant in this statement. Nevertheless, this very clear principle in reference to relationships in the body of Christ is a principle that is often ignored by those who seek to rule over their fellow disciples. When it is ignored, the relationship that disciples must maintain with one another becomes very dysfunctional.

In order to explain the relational servitude by which His disciples were to function as His body, Jesus illustrated His teaching on relationships with the practice of slavery that was a common socio-economic structure of the Roman Empire. Jesus used the relationship of slaves (bondservants) with one another to define the relationship that Christians, as fellow slaves, should have with one another in His kingdom.

Slaves were **fellow** bondservants

(or, servants) (Mt 18:28-35; 24:45-51). Jesus explained that the disciples’ relationships with one another must be as fellow slaves. The disciples understood the slavery of the Roman Empire, and thus, they understood what Jesus meant when He spoke of them as fellow slaves of one another (Mk 10:44,45; see Jn 11:16). Being “fellow” meant that no disciple was given the right to have authority over any other disciple. Before His departure from them, therefore, Jesus reminded His disciples that all authority among all His fellow bondservants would always remain with Him (Mt 28:18). Discipleship, therefore, meant serving one another as fellow workers in Christ, not being in positions of authority among slaves.

After the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit took over in defining the relational function that the disciples should have with one another. The Spirit first focused on the reason for the disciples’ relationship as fellow members of the body. They were *“fellow heirs with Christ”* (Rm 8:17), and thus, *“fellow heirs of the same body”* (Ep 3:6). The Gentiles were *“fellow citizens”* in the household of God (Ep 2:19). Now if the disciples were called to be “fellows” in reference to their salvation and kingdom citizenship, then, as Jesus had previously stated, there were to be no lords or rulers among them. The definition of disciples being “fellows” in their relationship with one another dismisses the possibility that one “fellow” should rise up over his other

“fellows” in Christ. There are no bosses among fellow heirs.

For example, Paul stated in reference to Andronicus and Junia, that they were his *“fellow prisoners who are notable among the apostles”* (Rm 16:7). Being “notable” does not mean being exalted with authority over the apostles. They were fellow prisoners “among,” but not over one another in the kingdom. Aristarchus and Epaphras were likewise fellow prisoners with Paul in Rome (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 23). So there are no lords or rulers among fellow prisoners.

“Fellow” means that we equally share in the same thing. Christians equally share together as heirs with Christ. If required, they equally share together as prisoners for Christ. They equally share together as citizens of the kingdom. And thus, they equally share together as “fellow bondservants” in their organic function as members of the body (Cl 1:7).

Herein is the definition of the disciples’ relationship with one another as members of the body of Christ. The absence of lords and rulers among the disciples means that there is an equality among fellow citizens. Disciples cannot equally share as fellow workers if some “fellows” are designated with authority over their fellow disciples. As soon as one of the “fellows” assumes authority over his fellows in Christ, then the one who assumes authority has made his fellow bondservants his employees. In his claim of authority, therefore, he has denied the fellowship of equality among the

disciples (See 3 Jn 9,10).

Timothy was a fellow worker with Paul, though Paul was not a boss over Timothy (Rm 16:21). Paul would not rule over the faith of the Corinthians, but reminded them that he was a fellow worker with them (2 Co 1:24). Titus was a partner and fellow worker with Paul (2 Co 8:23). The two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche, were also fellow workers with Paul (Ph 4:3). In their relationships with one another, the disciples in the New Testament were identified to be fellow workers, or servants (See Pl 1,24; 3 Jn 8; Rv 6:11). Being fellow workers meant that no one disciple had any authority over any other disciple.

This is the secret to the dynamic function of the body of Christ. If there are no lords or rulers among fellow members, **then each fellow member must take ownership of his or her responsibility to be a functioning member in the body.** All members must assume their responsibility to function equally, though equality does not mean in same way. We have different gifts (1 Co 12:12-31). With the control and authority of only one Head, each fellow member assumes his or her role to function with his or her gift that was granted to them by the Head in order that the body function. Dysfunctions in the body come when members refuse to function as fellow parts of the body (See Ep 4:7,8,11-16).

There is no competition for power among equal fellow workers. If Paul had authority over Apollos, he, on one occasion, could have commanded him to go to Corinth (1 Co 16:12). Since Apollos

did not go when Paul requested, Apollos was not sinning against some apostolic authority that was supposedly invested in Paul. Paul simply expressed an opinion that Apollos go immediately to Corinth. He did not issue a command. Likewise, when Paul and Barnabas disagreed over taking John Mark on the second mission journey, Barnabas was not rebelling against any apostolic authority of Paul (At 15:36-41). Paul, Apollos and Barnabas were all fellow workers, and thus, none of them had any authority over the other, and none had any authority over the function of the church as a whole. And for this reason, each of these men assumed their responsibility to use their gifts to be functioning fellow workers in the body of Christ. Each functioned in a global body according to their gifts, and how they individually chose to function in ministry.

We live in a world of lords and rulers. Our social environment, therefore, makes it quite difficult for some disciples to leave the business boardroom of the

corporate world and function in equity as fellow workers among the disciples. The boss in the boardroom often wants to treat his fellow workers in the body as his employees. The CEO of his own business often seeks to be the president of the body of Christ. Those invested with authority in government sometimes seek the same among the disciples. However, leaders among the members of the body do not lead with authority. The notable leaders among us do not “*lord over those entrusted*” to them, but function as “*examples to the flock*” (1 Pt 5:3). When disciples take ownership of their responsibility to function as fellow workers of the body, it is then that the body grows. When leaders lead by applying their gifts of ministry to the glory of God, then we follow by doing likewise (See Ep 4:11-16).

Suggested research:
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org
 Book 19: *Servant Leadership*

Chapter 12

Device Disconnection Disorder

I confess. I am self-diagnosed with occasional attacks of DDD (Device Disconnection Disorder). It is an electronic disorder that sometimes makes me socially disengage. I am sitting here in front of my device (computer) communicating to you somewhere on the other side of the world. OK, it's great that I can do this, for we both know that we would never have any contact with one another whatsoever if it were not for our devices. However, you are there and I am here, both of us being non-threatened by any personal contact with one another, and thus, guarded in the sanctuary of our seclusion. The only contact that we have with one another is my statement here, and possibly . . . I say possibly . . . your "like" or "amen" to what I am saying. So I welcome you to the Internet world of social reclusion wherein we both protect ourselves from any face-to-face engagement, thus risking rejection, if not some confrontation. We are both secure in our "keyboard" relationship with one another.

Device Disconnection Disorder is becoming an increasing social phenomenon, if not relational dysfunction. CNN recently ran a focused documentary on young people in Japan who have quit school. They quit school and confined themselves to a reclusive box (room) wherein their only contact with the personal world is through their devices (smartphones or computers). There are over a half million young people in Ja-

pan who have chosen reclusion over social integration. In CNN's interview with one of these young teenagers, the response was, "I do not like personal engagements with others." This teenager now represents what has become a social dysfunction of the real world in which we now live.

Has that which brought so many people into electronic contact with one another becoming the demon that is separating so many from personal encounters with one another? Have our devices become social Trojan horses that discourage young people from learning the social skills of personal relational behavior?

This is not a story of fiction as I sit here in my reclusive cocoon and connect with you on the other side of the world through my device. The World Wide Web has become that Trojan horse embedded in our social "connection" to the point that we now justify ourselves to be isolated in our non-threatening quarters. In his extensive article entitled, *Tyranny of the Mob*, Joel Stein opened his recently released article in *Time Magazine* with the statement that "*the web is a sociopath with Asperger's*" (*Time*, August 29, 2016). It is sociopathic without social values, and thus enables our inability to socialize with one another. According to Stein, and a choir of psychologists, our DDD has moved many into a dysfunctional relationship that if the battery runs down, or the electricity goes off, we are

totally disenfranchised from one another. We are at the point that if a restaurant has no WiFi, we will not eat there. And horrors, if we drive down a road where we lose our connection.

The disconnected millions in society that now “enjoy” this “connected disconnection” through their devices has led them to what psychologists call “online disinhibition” (Ibid). Connectors through impersonal devices have allowed their personal inhibitions to explode on others through what is called trolling. Trolls are people, who in their anonymity and invisibility, relish online freedom in order to tweet out garbage on others, which garbage they would not spew out if they were at risk of their garbage being thrown back in their face in a personal encounter with the one on whom they spewed. Stein explained that trolls are “monsters who hide in darkness and threaten people” (Ibid). And if you don’t think that tweeting garbage is a present social dysfunction, then consider the arena of American politics that has been thrown into the quagmire of a media rubbish bin.

Christians dealt with this problem of humanity long before it was amplified through the Internet via our devices. Back before devices it was called malicious gossip and slander. And the Holy Spirit had a corrective answer to this social dysfunction. His first remedy to correct unspiritual trolls was by command: “*Do not speak evil one of another*” (Js 4:11). His second remedy was to draw the spiritual trolls out of their places of obscurity by mandating them to be in the

presence of those with whom they might be tempted to troll: “*And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” (Hb 10:24,25). You cannot be a “monster” who “hides in darkness” if you claim to be a Christian. Christianity is about face-to-face relationships.

Society has spent thousands of years in building social norms whereby individuals can in dignity relate with one another in their personal relationships. Individuals who suffer from DDD are tempted to circumvent these social mores in a time of personal depression, rejection, and discouragement. We are thus tempted, through unspiritual tweets and comments, to project on others our misery. We find a placebo of relief by downing a few pills of criticism. If you discover that you have become an unspiritual troll suffering from DDD, our advice is to first render yourself to the above instructions of the Holy Spirit. Come out of your cave of criticism and find real people with whom you can connect face-to-face. We must be willing to forsake our devices in order to find real friends. We must not forsake our friends by confining our “relationships” to electronic connections. And on that advice, we will seek not to be hypocrites. We will now leave our computer and the security of our cocoon, and go find someone with whom we can do some face-to-face time over coffee. And in doing this, we will be smart and leave our smartphones at home.

Chapter 13

Alienated Urbanites

On wooden pews this side of comfort, we settled into an old “church building” that was built two hundred years before. The old Dutch architecture of the premises glowed with antiquity and reverence. With the usual “church building culture” of yesteryear, the ornate pulpit was elevated so high that we assumed the preacher had to take oxygen in order to complete a full sermon. The hard and smooth worn wooden pews made spectators out of all of us as we quietly listened to expositions of Scripture resonate from the speaker of the hour. We sensed coolness in the atmosphere that was mixed with orthodoxy. Nevertheless, we breathed an air of solemnity as we witnessed a tear here and there trickle down dedicated cheeks. And then we erroneously concluded, “This religion is cold and dead, and the spectators have no relationships with one another.”

We were cold dead wrong. Our judgment came two centuries too late. When the old church house was built two centuries before, the people were as neighborly as neighbors could be. It was a relational era in history when “church buildings” were actually meant to be only “places of community worship.” They were not designed to be four-walled factories to manufacture superficial relationships, nor the site of religious concerts.

We grew up in the last remnants of this type of rural neighborly culture in America. When holidays came around, we remember when the entire rural com-

munity would come together to celebrate and commune. When there was a school function, all the people in the area were present. Everyone! Well . . . almost everyone. (There was John who lived alone by himself down the road in an old debilitated shack. We called him a “hermit” because he wanted to be left to himself. But in the entire farming community of the York District of Stafford county of Kansas, there was only John who wanted to be alone. No church-house assembly with others would have changed John from being a hermit.)

Back in those days, when Sunday morning came, no one had any thought of allowing different church meetings to separate us as a community simply because we all shuttled ourselves off to sit on pews in different premises throughout the area. We were still a connected community. The premises where we all sat on Sunday were constructed for Bible teaching and worship of God. Places of worship were never constructed in an effort to establish relationships between the attendees of any particular community. The people were already community with relationships before they showed up at the premises of their respective “church.” Communities were “one another” before they came together to worship with one another.

But the modern urban culture has changed us. Modern metropolitan existence has alienated us from one another as citizens. In our efforts to chase money

in the urban business world, community relationships are sacrificed for job promotions. In rushing from one appointment to another, we simply bypass one another. The consequence of our alienation is that the “hour of worship” on Sunday morning has become an effort to rewire our relationships. We seek to inject some relational experience into ourselves in order that a temporary and superficial connection sustain us until the next meeting. Some churches use Wednesday nights to check the wiring unless our relationships become frayed in between Sundays. Our wiring is simply disconnected with too many “closing prayers.”

Ever hear the statement, “I went to that church and no one greeted me.” The one making such a statement “went to church” with the wrong expectations. Spectator assemblies of disconnected people do not establish relationships. The one who has made such a statement usually had few relationships before he or she showed up at the doors of the sanctuary. Those who have strong relationships with others do not show up at the assembly in order to “get something.” They show up to give worship to God. If we seek to establish “one another relationships” at an assembly where worship is to be poured out, then we are out of touch with those with whom we should already have a relationship. Assemblies of the saints were never intended to establish relationships. They exist because relationships already exist. The early saints were together daily because they already had a relationship with one an-

other in their common obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:46). They were not together in order to establish relationships with one another. For this reason, it is never the prime objective of the cross-cleansed community of God to construct cathedrals where relationships are to be established.

And in the context of this subject, Hebrews 10:24,25 has since the beginning of the alienated community been twisted out of its historical relational context. The entire context of the Hebrew letter is about maintaining a vertical relationship with Jesus who is the Son of God and our high priest. The context of 10:24,25 is that those who have this vertical relationship with Him should already be in a horizontal relationship with one another. When we take our community relationships with one another that we already have outside our assemblies, and bring such into our assemblies, then expression love is manifested for one another. The connected must then determine in assembly how their love for one another is to go into action through good works in our communities.

There is nothing about legalities in a genuine relationship that is built on love. If our community as “church” exists because we are pushed together by a legal command, then the premises in which we assemble become cold and orthodox. Our assembly becomes theatrical. We will get nothing out of being with one another if we are legally driven to one another. But if we are drawn to one another through love, then regardless of the premises, we will explode into wor-

ship of the One who shed blood to make us one united body. Physical premises then become irrelevant to our assemblies. They are convenient, but they are not the foundation upon which we establish our community with one another as the children of God. It is for this reason that the saints who meet under a tree have as much a relationship with one another as those who meet in an air-conditioned/heated orthodox cathedral. Places and premises mean nothing in reference to the “peculiar” people who are precious in the

heart of the Prince of Peace who poured out His blood for them. When we are connected with one another outside our assemblies, then our worship, as Jesus explained, can take place anywhere and at any time (John 4:1-38).

Suggested research:

Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Book 35: *Worship God*

Book 36: *Worship Freely*

Book 43: *Exercising Sobriety & Self-Control*

Chapter 14

The Organic Body Of Christ

The organism of the church can be organized, but its identity is not determined by any organizational structure on earth by which the individual members are marshaled into order. The church is the organic body of Christ that is ordered by Jesus alone as the only head (Colossians 1:18). The church is people regardless of how the people may be organized to accomplish any particular task on earth.

One is a member of the church, not because he or she is fitted into an organizational structure on earth, but because each member works universally, and individually, under the common authority of one Head in heaven (See Ep 4:11-16). For this reason, there can be only one structure of authority for all the members of the worldwide organic body. This is what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 12:12: *“For as the body is one [universally] and has many members [universally], and all the members of the one [universal] body, though they are many, are one [universal] body, so also is Christ.”* Christ is the one head of the universal body. He has all authority that reaches from heaven to earth (Mt 28:18; Cl 1:18). No rulers or lords are needed on earth for the organic function of the individual members of the body.

During the end of Jesus’ ministry, one earthly ruler asked Jesus, *“Are you a king . . . ?”* (Jn 18:37). Jesus responded, *“You say correctly that I am a king. For this reason I was born . . .”* (Jn 18:37).

When we speak of rulers, heads, lords and kings in reference to the organic function of the body of Christ, we must understand that Jesus is the only Ruler, Head, Lord and King. If ever there were appointed rulers, heads, lords, and kings of the body on earth, then the church would turn into an earthly organization. It would morph into a religious institution of men. This would be so because the organic function of the body would be controlled by men on earth, not from King Jesus in heaven. Therefore, it would no longer function organically, but organizationally. The organism would become an organization, and thus be defined as “organized religion.”

The New Testament teaches that the members of the body function organically to reach out to those of the world, wherever there are lost people. If the members were confined only to themselves in order to function organically, then, as Paul said, they *“would have to go out of the world”* (1 Co 5:10). They would have to confine themselves to themselves. But there can never be anything as a “Christian monk in a monastery.” In order for the members to function organically, they must associate with those to whom it is their mission to invite into eternal glory. In this way, therefore, the members of the organic body always function individually in their relationships with their friends of the world. It is always “one-on-one” in an effort to bring one’s friends into Christ.

The institutional (organized) church “plants churches” that are clones in organizational structure. But the organic body simply spreads as leaven throughout the world, influencing and teaching others about the Son of God (See Mt 13:33). The result of the organic function of the body is not organized “planted churches,” but new members who also begin to function organically for Jesus in their communities. The organic body of Christ was “planted” once over two thousand years ago. That “planting” was the first and last planting. Since the planting of A.D. 30, the organic body has simply permeated the world and time as one spiritual beggar told another beggar where to find spiritual bread. Organic “church growth” is no more complicated than that.

Association does not determine fellowship. And fellowship among members of the body does not necessitate agreement on all matters of opinion. Of necessity, the members of the body must associate with one another, but this does not mean that they are a cloned cult group bound to agree on all matters of opinion. Also, the members of the body must organically function individually in order to reach those of the world, but this does not assume that they condone the evil of the world.

The association of the members of the organic body with those who are of different beliefs does not assume that the members of the body accept the beliefs of those with whom they differ. It was Paul’s custom to function organically by going into the synagogues and associat-

ing with the unbelieving Jews (Acts 17:2). But this did not mean that his association with unbelieving Jews in the synagogues would somehow compromise his faith. Aquila and Priscilla associated with the unbelieving Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus, but they did not become unbelieving Jews because they showed up at the synagogue every sabbath (At 18:24-28). On one occasion, Paul wanted to enter a pagan temple of idolatrous worshipers (At 19:29-34). But his association with those of the temple of Diana was not a compromise of his faith, neither would we assume that he was fellowshiping the erroneous beliefs and behavior of idolatrous worshipers. Organic members go everywhere and engage anyone in order to give everyone an opportunity to have eternal life.

The fellowship of the members of the organic body is based on each individual member’s obedience to the gospel through baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one [universal] body...*” (1 Co 12:13). Members of the body, therefore, have a common organic function because of their “*common salvation*” (Jd 3). Their common obedience to the gospel has placed them on “Jesus’ team.” They obeyed the gospel individually, and thus, they organically function as individual members of the one universal body. And being on some team of men of organized religion is not necessary in order to be on Jesus’ team universally as members of His organic body.

The members fellowship with one

another because of their common obedience to the gospel. This is a universal fellowship that allows them to function organically wherever they live in the world. Their common individual loyalty to the one Head, brings them into an organism of members that functions universally. Wherever they sit on Sunday morning has nothing to do with their common connection to the Head as individual members of the universal body. Where they are located any day of the week does not determine their organic connection with one another as individual members of the universal body. They function daily. Their regular assembly encourages their organic function as individuals (See Hb 10:24,25). However, regardless of their assembly behavior with one another, each member is responsible to function individually as an organic member of the body between Sundays. The members do not assemble in order to function organically. They assemble because they are functioning organically. We must not forget that the members of the body were organically functioning as individuals **before** there was an assembly of the members the following Sunday after the A.D. 30 Pentecost (At 2:41).

The problem develops when an organized church establishes authorities who become the standard by which individual members must be subjected before their organic function is validated as “faithful.” When groups of disciples become highly organized under a common authority on earth—this is “high church” in the minds of some—then they

often become the judge and lawgiver of those who do not fit into their spreadsheet organization. In this way, institutional hierarchies hinder the universal organic function of the members of the body. Organized religion always considers those who seek to function organically to be a virus to the organization. And in truth, organic members are always a threat to organized religion because they seek to function autonomously from any of the hierarchial authorities that constitute organized religion. They, as Jesus, will always be a threat to the religious establishment of the day.

The organized Jewish religious establishment of Jesus’ day could not cope with the early disciples because the disciples would not conform to the hierarchy of authority of the Jews’ organized religion. On one occasion, the Jewish establishment even “*commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*” (At 4:18). This is the attitude of institutionalized leaders toward those who would seek to be autonomous from the constraints of their religious organization. Those who preach freedom from bondage are always a threat to those who hold the keys to religious prisons (See Gl 5:1).

The behavior and attitude of institutional religious leaders has not changed since the days of the Jewish hierarchy of Jerusalem. The organic function of the body continues to be judged by those in “high places” who seek to be rulers and lords of the organized church. By behaving as such, they behave as the Pharisees and scribes who sought to intimi-

date individual members of the body into compromising their freedom that they have in Christ to function organically wherever they are and with whomever they may encounter every day of their lives.

Suggested research:

Biblical Research Library

www.africainternational.org

Book 47: *Fellowship and Unity of the Organic Body*

Book 55: *Organic Function of the Body of Christ*

Chapter 15

Organized Religion

Many of us today live in highly organized business/industrial societies. As a result, many churches in such societies have not escaped the influence of corporate organizationalism. How one functions as an employer/employee in the business/industrial world, often determines how he views and functions in the church of our Lord. When an entire membership lives in such a society, it is almost natural for members of the church to behave corporately in their function in the body. The extreme of this invasion of worldly organizationalism into the function of the disciples of Jesus is the conclusion that if one is not a part of the “corporately organized church,” then he is outside the religious “church loop,” or simply a rebel from within. Some have even concluded that those who do not want to involve themselves in organized religion are simply uncooperative.

We must not assume that the stifling efforts of organized religion are something new. The same religious environment prevailed during the era when the Son of God became flesh in order to reveal an organic movement of people outside the function of organized religion. Jesus did not come to establish an institution. He came to empower individuals in their faith. His focus was on people (church), not organizational structures. He thus came to energize an organism of believers that would grow into all the world.

When Jesus came in the fullness of

time to begin an organic body (His church) in the midst of a very structured religious organization (Judaism), from the very beginning His ministry was in constant conflict with the authorities of the religious establishment. The establishment called His movement a “sect” simply because His disciples did not conform to the norm that defined the existing religious organization of the day (See At 24:5). The books of Matthew through John explain in detail the conflict between the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus as He initiated the organic function of His disciples. The book of Acts not only explains the organic function of His body of believers, but also the conflict that the Jewish religious leadership in Palestine continued to have with what they considered a virus in their organized religion. **Organized religion always considers organic function an infectious virus simply because those who function organically are not controlled by the earthly authorities of the organization.**

Organized religion is defined by the existence of rulers and lords on earth. In order to prevent His organism from becoming an organization, Jesus said that there would be no rulers and lords among His disciples. The function of the disciples would be as an organic body of servants functioning in their relationships with themselves and in their communities (See Mk 10:42,43).

An organization (institution) exists

because there is a chain of authority on earth of men who seek to maintain the structure of the organization. There is thus pressure from these “powers that be” that everyone who claims to be a part of the organization must conform to their authority structures. Membership in the organization is required. Some sort of attendance to the meetings of the organization are required in order to be considered loyal (faithful) to “the powers that be.” Budgets and spreadsheets are necessary in order to control the income that comes into the common “treasury” of the organization. In order that the leadership of the organized religion be perpetuated, diplomas and degrees often hang on the leaders’ office walls, which diplomas and degrees are usually earned at the accepted Bible training schools of the organization. A specific name is used by the organization in order that members easily identify the groups who are in fellowship with the organization worldwide.

Inherent in any organized religion (institution) is a spirit of sectarianism, for each organized group of a worldwide network of groups must in some way maintain their identity as unique from all other religious organizations. Since competition for members is inherent in sectarianism, a unique name for the religious organization is thus necessary in order to identify the particular organization to which members give allegiance. The validation of one’s relationship with Jesus is thus defined by one’s faithful allegiance to the religious organization of which he professes membership.

It is incumbent on the accepted lead-

ers of the institutional church to preserve the identity of their church by teaching the mandates of the organization that identify its uniqueness. Members are subsequently subjected to the sanctioned leaders by referring to them with titles that separate them from one another. Authority is relinquished to the leadership by the membership. By doing such the members have established a head of each local church, or the universally organized church, depending on how worldwide the organized church seeks to function according to hierarchies similar to the Roman Catholic Church.

In one statement of the New Testament the organized church is deemed contrary to the organic function of the universal membership of the body of Christ.

“... from whom [Christ] the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love” (Ep 4:16).

The words “every” and “each” assign the individual members of the body to one another. There can be no “eyes” or “feet” functioning separately from one another. *“If the foot says, ‘Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body . . . ,’”* then how would the whole body function as one body without feet (1 Co 12:15)? We must remember that *“God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as He has desired” (1 Co 12:18).* The body, therefore, is one, and thus functions in unity.

We must keep in mind that when Paul wrote the above instructions of 1 Corinthians 12, he was speaking globally in reference to the church, not locally. Since the early church met in homes, most local assemblies were only a few people. But throughout a city, or region, there would have been many members. Therefore, there may have been only a “foot” that met in any particular home in Corinth, but another part of the body across town, or across Achaia, the audience to whom Paul directed both 1 & 2 Corinthians. When the global body functions with what every part supplies in all the assemblies, then the body does not simply function according to who shows up at any particular assembly. The one universal body functions with the necessity of all the parts of the body wherever they may be throughout the world.

No man or local group of men has the authority to set any part of the body

above any other part of the body that may be located somewhere else. The function of the body, therefore, is the business of Jesus as He directs the global body from heaven through the authority of His word on earth (Jn 12:48; Rm 10:17). Therefore, there need be no local rulers and lords on earth to command the organic function of the body wherever it may exist. Upon the foundation of love, each part of the body throughout the world is energized to function equally and in unity with all parts of the body throughout the world (See Jn 13:34,35). No authorities on earth are needed. The body needs only one Head, one King, and one Lord, the Jesus Christ, who has authority over all things (Mt 28:18).

Suggested research:

Biblical Research Library

www.africainternational.org

Book 47: *Fellowship and Unity of the Organic Body*

Book 55: *Organic Function of the Body of Christ*

Chapter 16

Church: The Serendipity Of Loving Others

We were all physically born into this world as individuals. After our earthly journey, death will take all of us physically and individually out of this world. However, between birth and death there is the serendipity of the community of all of us who are on the same journey through life. All of us as individuals seek to help one another to make it through life in peace with one another and without loneliness.

We could choose to divorce ourselves from one another and live as hermits, but that would be unnatural. It would be contrary to how we as individuals were marvelously created as social beings. We were not created to live and die alone. We were emotionally wired to have someone say to us, “I love you, too.” Our desire to love and to be loved drives us to be connected to the collective of humanity. It is the same in reference to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we as Christians are emotionally wired for community, we naturally seek out others who have likewise been spiritually born anew. “Church” is simply the plan of a Creator who designed us to function together socially as a collective of those who choose to be born again in order to be disciples of Christ. Though we are spiritually born anew individually into the universal body of Christ, it is not natural for us to function autonomously from the body in our spiritual relationship with all those who

have likewise come individually into an obedient relationship with the Son of God.

Our innate desire to be with others who have been born again sends us as individuals on a quest. We seek to function in fellowship with the “church of the firstborn ones” (Hb 12:23). It is for this reason that the body (church) is always defined in Scripture to be a relational function of all those individuals who have been individually born again, and thus lovingly function under the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. When our Founder stated that we would be identified by our love of one another, He was saying that we would be known by our relational function of love (Jn 13:34,35).

Jesus taught that His disciples would be defined by loving relationships, not as a legally defined corporate institution. Christians are identified by their mutual gratitude for the grace of God, not by the restriction of perfect law-keeping. Grace excludes justification through perfect keeping of law, but especially the restrictions of man-made laws (Rm 6:14). We are saved by grace through faith in God’s grace to save us (Ep 2:8).

Law challenges the relational nature of the body of Christ, for law sets aside mercy. But mercy rejoices over judgment according to law (Js 2:13). If we would seek to be under the legalities of the laws of man-made religious institutions, then there would continually be strife or competition among individual members of the

universal collective (church). There would be continual dissension as to which lawgiver the members should follow in a legally structured organization. In our dissension as to which legally defined religious institution we would adhere, we would naturally denominate into our favorite groups. Lawgivers would choose their favorite names for their groups, and thus, offer options for us concerning which group to which we would “place membership.”

In legally defined institutions there is always competition “to climb a ladder of power” for influence and recognition. Where love should be exalted, seniority marginalizes the weak, or those who are unfamiliar with the accepted laws of the legally defined institution. Lordship always encourages competition. However, love always considers others before one’s self. Lordship always prevails in institutionally defined groups. But where fellowship is based on love, relational servanthood prevails. **We must never forget that lordship among leaders in the body always marginalizes the Head of the body.**

Legally defined institutions are defined by organizational structures that encourage lords, judges and lawgivers to reign. On the other hand, the New Testament definition of “church” is the relational behavior of the members with one another that is based on and defined by love (Jn 13:34,35). The more legally we define the church of Christ, therefore, the less relational the members become in their patience with one another through love. The relationship between lawgiv-

ers and judges is always strained.

The more the members focus on maintaining the institutional ordinances that define a man-made religious organization, the less they function relationally. The more the body of Christ is defined by institutional structures, the more stringent we seek to maintain legal codes that define our existence. We become legally stringent because we are afraid that we will lose what we believe defines who we are. Leadership in such institutional organizations turns from teaching the word of God to lords who see their duty to regiment the members of the body into conforming to legal structures that define the institution. Lords always function as regimenting leaders.

In lordship scenarios, relationships are always sacrificed in order to sustain the legalities that define the institution. It is for this reason that the religious institutions of men work contrary to the relational identity of those who have individually been born into the body of Christ. And it is also for this reason that the more we identify the body of Christ as a legal institution, the less relational the membership becomes, and subsequently, the more divided the members become in their debates over defining the legalities of the organized church. The problem with a legally defined church is that judges and lawgivers always seek to insert and bind their opinions. We thus end up squabbling over whose opinions must be legally bound in order to define who we are.

At the end of our journey in life, and when it is time for all of us to stand

individually before the Creator in judgment, each one of us will not be held accountable for keeping or forsaking any legally bound opinions that were established by men to define a legal religious institution. Each one of us will be held accountable for his or her relational behavior with all other individuals of the body. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” are relational identities that are not enjoined on the members of the body through law (See Gl 5:22,23). They are inspired by love. Nevertheless, these are relational standards by which each member will be held accountable. And because the degree of each of these qualities in our lives always falls short of perfection, there must always be grace to make us perfect in Christ. Being judged by relational abstracts, therefore, must always be by God’s grace and through our faith in Him to bring us into His glory (Rm 4:16). Grace and mercy, therefore, must always reign in the hearts of body members in order that we be at peace with one another.

That which destroys peace in the body are relational dysfunctions as “fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, etc.” (Gl 5:19-21). These behavioral dysfunctions are not based on the love by which the disciples of Jesus are to be identified (Jn 13:34,35). They identify those who are void of love for other members of the community of born again disciples. These “works of the flesh” are relational dysfunctions for which we will be held accountable, since being identified by such character quali-

ties and behavioral practices disqualifies one from cohabiting with others in eternity. Social dysfunctions of the body on earth make it impossible for one to transition into an eternal society that will dwell in peace in the presence of God.

Individuals are born into a fellowship wherein they are held together as one body because of the fruit of the Spirit that is emulated by each member. The members of the body are identified as the collective body of Christ because of their relational function with one another through love. Their function through relational identities, therefore, results from their love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). When the New Testament historian stated, “*Now all who believed were together and had all things in common,*” he was defining the relational function of the body according to the implementation of the fruit of the Spirit, not the submission of those who were born again to a legally defined institution (See Act 2:44). Those first believers knew little or nothing about “church,” but they knew everything about Christ. And because they were obedient to Christ in their baptism for remission of their sins, they were church (At 2:38,41). They were born again through baptism into a relational function of love whereby each member was communally loved into eternal glory through the fruit of the Spirit. When members so function, any efforts to define the body through legal statutes pales away under the power of love. Keep in mind that the 3000 who were baptized in Acts 2 were not handed an outline that define “the church.” They were church

while they were still dripping from water.

It is for this reason that we must first identify the church through love, and not by the adherence of the members to legal identities. Do not be mistaken. We

seek to be obedient to the commandments of God, but being so obedient without the love that generates the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, is futile in reference to salvation. Perfect attendance without love will not take anyone to heaven.

Chapter 17

Going Down

It was just a few days past my tenth birthday when I found myself in a situation where, if I did not survive, I would undoubtedly enjoy no more birthday cakes. On our farm in central Kansas (U.S.A), my brother James and I were helping our father to empty a metal grain bin that was cooking hot inside at over 120^o (about 50^o C.). With our father on the outside of the bin in the truck, we were shoveling the grain inside the bin. Since the bin was full, there was a natural vortex created as the grain was being sucked down through an outlet at the bottom. We were in there to shovel the grain to the inviting vortex as grain was sucked toward the outlet below.

Whether unwilling, or just adventurous, I somehow stepped into the inviting vortex that sucked grain to the bottom of the bin. Once seized by the vortex, however, I realized that I was subject to the forces that be, and subsequently, as quicksand grasps its victims, I knew that I was in deep, deep trouble. I frantically started to grab for anything that would save me from my certain doom. But there was nothing within reach. Being now waist deep in a downward spiral of death, I frantically cried out to my brother. But the suction of the vortex downward was too great and my clawed grasp of his hands was to no avail.

The engine of the auger outside was noisily blasting away as my father was shoveling grain in the truck. As I was approaching neck deep unto death by suf-

focation, and going down fast, my brother screamed above the noise of the engine to our father in the truck. Everything seemed to go into slow motion in a surreal experience of certain death. I knew that I was helplessly subject to the forces of the vortex as panic took over every emotion of my senses.

But help was there immediately. My father leaped from the truck to the opening in the granary. He immediately grabbed my desperate outstretched hands. I was in terror mode with eyes of horror that surely motivated my father to respond with the reassuring words, “I got ya, son. It’s ok now.” I can never in words explain to you the peaceful sensation of salvation that swept over me. A sense of being saved permeated my very being as my father gently pulled me from the grasping fans of the vortex of death. I would enjoy another birthday cake.

Never think that I cannot understand the release of death-threatening anxiety that surely came over the fisherman Peter when he too experienced a similar moment as a new disciple of Jesus. All the facts of his ordeal were recorded by Matthew, who was there, and Mark, who had heard the apostles speak many times about Peter’s “vortex of death” (Mt 14:22-32; Mk 6:45-52).

It was the middle of the night. The disciples had been laboriously struggling against persistent stormy winds throughout the night. They were experienced fisherman who knew the sea, and thus

all surely concluded that they would probably not survive the night. They had unquestionably obeyed the command of Jesus to board a small boat in order to go to the other side of the Sea of Tiberias. But it was one of those times when, because of their knowledge of the sea, their confidence in Jesus had to overcome their apprehension about sailing the sea at night. Regardless of their questionable sailing in the middle of the night, impetuous Peter just made things worse for himself.

A not uncommon storm arose in the night over the sea. The disciples subsequently struggled against a fierce head wind. And then, something faint appeared in the midst of the darkness. The frightened disciples looked out over the cold dark sea and through blackness that could be cut with a knife. In horror, their eyes were immediately drawn to something that emitted light, but could not be identified. And being people of the time who were often spooked with supposed spirits and ghosts, their creative minds conjured up an erroneous conclusion. "It is a spirit, a ghost," they cried out in terror to one another. It was neither. In fact, it was Jesus who was walking parallel to them if He had not stopped to address their real life drama. So with reassuring words, Jesus looked their way and responded, "*Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid.*"

Everything would have gone right at the time except for Peter. He always wanted to go one step further to test the boundaries of his faith. And so, as we all do at times, he said the most stupid

thing. "*Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.*" Who in his right mind would be so inept that he would say such a thing in the midst of a stormy sea? Well, probably all of us. Forrest Gump's mother was right about us: "Stupid is, stupid does." This was a Forrest Gump moment for Peter . . . and the rest of us.

The answer that Peter surely did not want to hear came immediately back from Jesus: "*Come!*" In our impetuous humanity we too often open ourselves up for disaster. As Peter, we get our minds running before our brain is in gear. We are the victim of our own bad choices. Our arrogance leads us to places from which we cannot, on our own, return. We often play out in our lives the theme of the old song of Johnny Cash: "I fell into a burning ring of fire. I went down, down, down, and the flames went higher." And being trapped by our own bad choices, the fire "burns, burns, burns."

In the agony of defeat, we come to our senses that we don't like the storm of life we have created for ourselves. So we make a desperate choice to fall for some mental placebos that we think will deliver us from the vortex of death into which we have cast ourselves. We then try for another "fix" by buying more pills, and thus satisfy ourselves with a temporary euphoria until our self-made remedies wear off. So out of desperation of knowing the terminal results of our "ring of fire," we will follow after the command of any ghost. But in Peter's case, it was not a self-imagined ghost. It was really Jesus.

But following the command of Jesus to “Come,” does not release us from our responsibility that we must take ownership of our own predicament. In his walk on water to Jesus, Peter neared within arm’s reach of his Savior. But being reassured that Jesus was close, he had a moment of himself. He took his focus off Jesus. And in doing such, he placed himself in his own vortex of death.

“When he saw the wind, he was afraid.” Life is an environment of one storm after another. There are always stormy winds that seek to take us down. And Peter was going down. It was not a slow sink into the watery vortex of death. He was going down fast, so fast that he cried out to Jesus, *“Lord, save me!”* By faith, Peter had stepped out of the boat. He had taken the watery walk to Jesus by focusing on Jesus. But in a moment

of himself, he found himself helplessly plunging down into a grave of water. Ever been there? Maybe you are there now?

“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him.” Peter was going down so fast that he needed to be caught by Jesus. And when Jesus caught him, how do you think Peter grasped His hand? I know you want to ask me how tightly he clung to the hands of Jesus.

When we cry out to the right Person, we will be caught out of any self-made vortex of death that is taking us down. But we must first reach out in desperation to our Father. It is He who is always there with the reassuring words, “I got ya, son. It’s ok now.” And so, Peter, too, would enjoy another birthday cake.

Chapter 18

The Bunny Liberators

“If you boys don’t let that rabbit out of that box, he will die.” So said our mother to my brother and me in reference to a fluffy baby bunny rabbit we had just captured from running free in a field on our Kansas farm. She knew that one could not pluck a young bunny from the freedom of the wild and expect it to survive in bondage. Nevertheless, for both of us bunny snatchers, the bunny was just too cute and cuddly to let go. And besides, we had captured him by running to and fro in the field until we were exhausted. We wanted to secure our first bunny catch in the bondage of our box as our own pet.

My brother and I had not yet reached our teens when our mother taught us our first lesson about freedom. It was a lesson from nature, for God had created all living creatures to be free. Nevertheless, my brother and I were persistent captors. We were going to keep the prize of our pursuit in the bondage of a box that we deemed better for the small helpless bunny than allowing him to run free in the wild. After all, in our box the cuddly little bunny was safe from hawks and crows who could swoop down from the skies in order to snatch unsuspecting bunnies for a tasty meal, or from a snake that might be lurking in the grass.

It was not that we did not care for the little soft bunny. We picked grass for him to eat and placed a cup of water in the box for him to drink. We were sincere in our efforts to care for the cap-

tured creature. But at the end of the first day of captivity, the poor bunny had not even sniffed the food, nor touched the water. So we poured out more gracious gifts upon him by giving him store-bought celery and lettuce from our mother’s refrigerator. He still refused to eat. He simply cowed in the corner of the box, shaking from fear of the two giant captors who had snatched him from the freedom of the wild and stuffed him into a confining environment which he had not chosen to be born.

After two days in bondage, our mother again rehearsed her original message: “You still have that rabbit in that box? I told you, he will die!” And looking upon the poor creature who had refused to eat and drink for two days, we relinquished to mercy and the wise counsel of our mother. We lifted the now frail bunny from the bondage of the box, took him back to the field, and then released him into freedom. We left him there, somewhat guilty because we had not heeded the wisdom of our mother concerning creatures of the farm. We do not know what happened to that little fluff. We kept telling ourselves that our selfish desires to overpower and keep him in our bondage did not suck out of him all his instincts to survive in freedom. We hoped he had wandered off and eaten a fresh blade of green grass and taken a refreshing drink from the dew of a plant, and thus, lived a long life. But we can bear testimony to our own hearts. It truly felt

good to set him free. We were converted from being captors of death to “bunny liberators.”

We caught more small bunnies after the boxed bunny incident, but we never again held them in captivity. We would run after and catch them, rub their furry ears, and then release them again into freedom. It just felt good to release them.

In a related experience, we once heard a high pitched squeal in the grass near our old farm house. We were guided by the sound to its source. We were astonished to find a small bunny about half way down the throat of a Kansas bull snake. Now that we were “bunny liberators,” and not captors of death as the snake, the snake was immediately dispatched and the now fortunate bunny set free. He ran off joyfully into the freedom of the wild, being a little more cautious about slithering predators of death that lurked in the grass. We felt joyful about saving the hapless creature, but not half as joyful as the bunny whose beckoning cries had reached the ears of the “bunny liberators.”

The gospel of freedom was first preached in the regions of Galatia by a liberator named Paul, a former liberated captive from the bondage of a religious box. Those who willingly heard and heeded his message of the freedom of the cross and resurrection were immersed out of a box of legal Judaism and into the freedom that is in Christ (Gl 3:26-29). The first converts of Galatia were born again into what James called the “perfect law of freedom” (Js 1:25). It was a

realm of freedom, because under the law of Christ, believers are guarded from living again under a legal code of boxed law. They were set free by the law of faith (Rm 3:27). As long as the disciples in Galatia lived under the freedom that they received through the law of faith, they would “live and prosper” (Spock).

But there was a lurking problem in Galatia. There were snakes in the grass. It was a threat of legal-oriented religious captors who sought to bring the free back into the bondage of their religious boxes. “Box makers” were thus lurking among the free in order to confine the free. Paul warned, “*They zealously recruit you, but not for good*” (Gl 4:17). The religious “box makers” were seeking those whom they could capture and confine in the bondage of their legal boxes. They were recruiters who ran across Galatia in order to bind their opinions as law upon the consciences of the free. Through threats of intimidation and excommunication, they recruited the free in order to bring them into the bondage of their death boxes. They were pursuers of the free “*who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:4). Once they had collected together a group of captured “bunnies,” they would lord over them with deceptive religiosity that they thought would sustain spiritual life, but actually was the behavior of bondage. They came in among the free in order “*that they might bring us into bondage,*” into the bondage of their own legal boxes (Gl 2:4).

It is true that those who are in bondage usually never realize that they are in

bondage, especially those who know nothing about the scriptures we have herein referred. Those in bondage usually feel reassured by their religious heritage. They feel confident in the defense of the traditions of their fathers. Or, they may feel validated by concert assemblies that excite the emotions, but disguise true worship. Bondage is always a deceptive thing to those who religiously behave and believe outside the freedom of the word of God.

“Recruiters” for bondage assume that they are doing that which is right by placing the captured into what becomes a box of death. In their diligence to recruit those who were once born into freedom, they seek to lord over their autonomous boxes until the free are starved to death by proclamations of legal religiosity or exhausted with religious performances.

Those who are in religious boxes sometimes realize that something is wrong. Bondage is just not natural. However, for those who have been institutionalized by bondage, it is difficult to discover freedom. It is difficult for them to remember the freedom they once enjoyed when they first came forth into freedom by their obedience to the gospel. So they languish in stagnation, or religious euphoria, while being reminded every week by the proclamations and performances of those who have convinced them that legalities and religious ceremonies should be prioritized over faith, and

in doing so, they can be “justified by works of law” before God. But the spies are wrong. They forget that “*a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:16).

The fact that one is born again into the freedom that is in Christ is evidenced by Paul’s concluding warning in his letter to the free: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

We can still hear an echo of our mother from the past: “If you keep that rabbit entangled in that box of bondage, he will die.” It feels good, therefore, to be a “bunny liberator” proclaiming freedom to the captives. It is a feeling of accomplishment to release those who were once held captive by religion in order that they run free in Christ. It is a victorious feeling to snatch the captives from the fangs of the old serpent. So we seek to find those in bondage in order to bring them the message of freedom. We, too, feel the spirit of Isaiah within our bones as he spoke prophetically of the Messiah:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the meek. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ...” (Is 61:1).