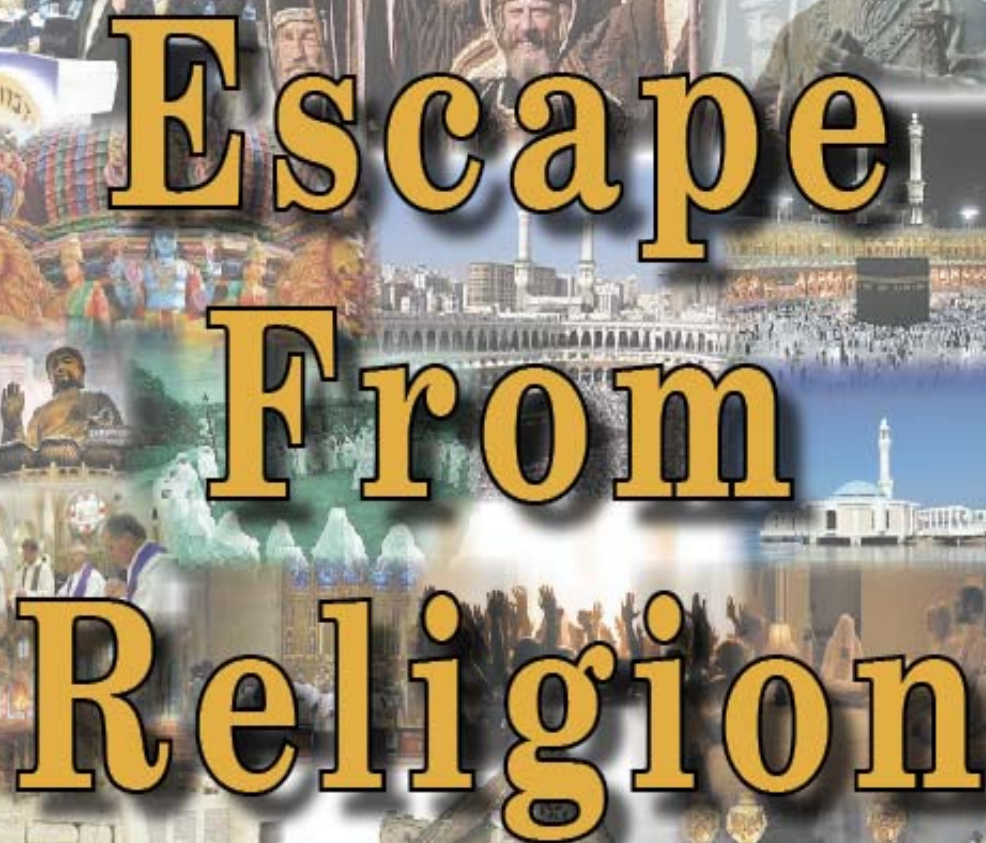


**DICKSON**



**Escape  
From  
Religion**

**Searching Beyond  
The Facade Of Religion**

# Escape From Religion

Roger E. Dickson

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## Preface

For seagoing vessels throughout the world, barnacles are a nuisance. They are a type of anthropoid that attach themselves to the hulls of ships. Over a long period of time, they begin to cover the hull of the entire ship. They slow the ship down, and thus they are a cumbersome attachment to the ship. They are an obnoxious obstruction along for the ride, but prevent smooth sailing. For this reason, every sailor must deal with barnacles.

When restoration movements are young and vibrant, they thrive. The excited proponents of the refreshing wave of simple Christianity seek to be free of the barnacles of religion (traditions) that have encumbered them for so long in the past. Those of the initial restoration enjoy the gospel of freedom that they received in Christ, realizing that their salvation does not depend on defending the barnacles (traditions), but in living the gospel of Jesus Christ. They sail freely through the sea because they are not encumbered with conflicting barnacles that would make them a unique sect of the religious world.

The audience of our writing in the past few years has been to those throughout the world who are seeking to scrape the barnacles of religion from their faith in order that they might be free to sail the waters of life. There are thousands of believers throughout the world who have pulled away from barnacle-laden “mainstream” religions that have over the decades, if not centuries, encumbered

themselves with the barnacles of tradition. “Barnacle free” churches are now independent and on their way. We write to these men and women who are into the word of God in order to discover anew the simple faith that is revealed in the word of God.

Nevertheless, we would give a word of caution to these often young and zealous pioneers. When the barnacles of an old encumbered religion have been scraped away, the sailing at first is fast and furious. Unfortunately, as time passes, barnacles of tradition again start attaching themselves to the hull of the ship. What was once new and vibrant becomes bogged down with that from which the fathers once freed themselves. As ships must periodically have their hulls scraped free of barnacles, so also must restoration movements. We have a tendency to lose our first love, and once again become stagnant with “barnacle religion.”

Since movements are the efforts of men, restoration movements are the efforts of sincere Bible lovers who seek to restore the authority of the word of God for their faith. The problem is with the men of the movement as the movement ages. The initial fathers of the movement braved the trials of getting our thinking back to the Bible and on track. But since the descendants of the movement are men themselves, and many years removed from the pioneers, they must recognize that the movement has picked up some barnacles along the way. The result is

that the restoration loses its energy. It is no longer restoration, but the preservation of a barnacle-ridden heritage. This is simply the way of all restoration movements. There comes a time, therefore, when the ship must scrape itself free again from the obstruction of barnacles that are just along for the ride.

Restoration movements that have been around for half a century have always attached to them some barnacles of tradition. The hull of the ship is being obscured, and thus the ship is identified by the barnacles to be just another ship.

It is the nature of our religiosity to pick up barnacles. If we fail to recognize this, then we are doomed to create again that from which we once scraped ourselves clean. Any ship that does not occasionally scrape itself free of barnacles, will eventually slow down because it is encumbered.

The process of scraping away the barnacles of tradition is hard. Before the days of dry docks, sailors had to hold their breath and dive beneath the surface of the sea in order to scrape the hull free of barnacles. It was extremely hard work. But it had to be done in order to free the ship from that which hindered its smooth passage through the waters of the sea. Those barnacles had to go in order that the ship go.

It is our task to aid those church leaders who love the simplicity of the gospel so much that they are willing to endure all the pain that is necessary in order to dive beneath the surface of their religious heritage in order to scrape the gospel free of the barnacles of tradition.

This is not an easy task, but necessary. If we are to see the hull again, we must scrap away each barnacle one by one. Barnacles cement themselves to the hull, and so, each one must be scraped away with much difficulty.

Our goal is to reveal the hull of the ship that lies beneath the cover of the barnacles. Every ship is sailing with some barnacles attached. But when the accumulation of barnacles becomes so massive, the ship is weighed down and slowed in the waters. When we see a heavily laden ship with so many attached barnacles, we know that the efficiency of the ship is greatly impaired. Because some do not want to suffer the pain of scraping the hull, they simply live in the comfort of the ship regardless of it losing its purpose. There are a number of ships in harbors throughout the world that are just sitting in the harbor because no one wants to clean the hull.

As we journey through the trials of barnacle scraping, we must keep in mind that we are not of the persuasion to sit in a comfortable cabin and allow the ship to sit idle in the harbor, being overloaded with the barnacles of religious traditions. As a barnacle laden ship appears ugly before the world, we seek to dive beneath the surface in order to scrape the hull clean in order that the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ can be witnessed by the world. We ask for others to take up the word of God and join in our efforts to clean away those religious rites and traditions that align us with those ships that have long grown weary of scraping the hull. If you are one of those people, then

this book is meant to be a tool to encourage you in your “hull scraping” duties to keep the ship of our Lord Jesus sailing smoothly through the seas of this world.

Is there an emotional reward for recognizing and cleaning the hull of barnacles? There certainly is! Just ask any sea captain. Ask him his feeling concerning his ship as he sets sail for the first voyage after the hull has been set free from all the inhibiting barnacles. He feels that a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders. He feels the efficiency of his ship. He feels he can conquer the seas with his vessel for it is no longer laden with the encumbering weight and drag of the barnacles.

And for us to whom the metaphor is applied, it is simply great to walk again by faith in God through the purity of His

word alone. We must remember the words of two former Jews who were once entangled in all sorts of legal religious restrictions. But they were scraped clean in the blood of Jesus, and thus they warned some fellow Jews who failed to keep their ship of faith free from the entanglement of barnacles:

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning (Peter - 2 Pt 2:20).*

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Paul - Gl 5:1).*

## PROLOGUE

These things about which we write will be quite unsettling to some people. They will be so because we are all creatures of habit, especially in the area of how we behave our faith in response to what we believe God seeks from us in obedience. There is nothing wrong with this in reference to how we express our faith, either in worship, or in how we carry out those good works that we are driven to do. However, the problem develops when a group of people decide, either consciously or unconsciously, that they will clone one another after the same behavior as to how the disciples will express their faith in obedience to God. They then become a unique sect, a particular denomination, or worse, a cult.

It was into this religious environment that Jesus came and confronted religion. Throughout His earthly ministry, the religious establishment of the day was in continual conflict with what He taught and how He behaved. He did not fit into the norm of the religious behavioral habits of identity that defined a good religious Jew. Because He was preparing His disciples for new wine that would eventually burst the old wineskins of the Jews' religion, He lived that which was coming. He cautioned His disciples to beware of that which He confronted, lest the gospel living that He was introducing into the world would be compromised.

Jesus knew that after His departure, His disciples would put on the mantel of truth that He wore. Subsequently, they

would endure the same rejection by the religious establishment that He endured. As we look into the behavior of Jesus, we learn from His experience what is necessary to confront religion. Religion, as the invention of men to manifest unique beliefs, will always conflict with the revelation of what God would require of those who walk by faith. In fact, religion would be revealed in its conflict with the behavior by which the disciples of Jesus would live the gospel. When the Word who was with God was incarnate into this world, the religious establishment of Judaism rejected Him. Jesus knew that His disciples would receive the same rejection as they took the message of the Word into all the world.

We understand that the ministry of Jesus was not only about His teachings. It would be about how they, in following His example, would be successful in taking His teachings into a religious world that was essentially antagonistic to the truth of the gospel. How He dealt with one of the most stringent religious groups of history, therefore, became the road map that His disciples would need to survive in a hostile world of both Jewish and Roman religion.

Since religion is always the invention of men, then any life-style revelation from God would be in conflict with the religions of men. This is true because men always devise religions that take the place of the will of God. Jesus came into such a scenario of religion in the first century. He lived the example of how to

confront man's religion. We thus seek to follow in His steps, knowing that these steps will be contrary to the religious establishment of the world in which we live, but to which we must go as His disciples.

We would not, therefore, be surprised with the conflict that will arise out of following in the gospel steps of Jesus. These steps are simply contrary to the way of the religions of men. We will suffer persecution because we seek to live the example life of the gospel. Our danger is that we become weary of continuing this conflicting walk. Many have. And because many have, we live in a world of "Christendom" where universalism is the religion of the day.

Universalism is simply an effort on the part of all who have a little Jesus somewhere in their thinking, but do not want to live in conflict with one another. The universalist seeks to live in a religious world of no conflicts, and thus, he or she accepts any thinking that is proposed by others in reference to simply "believing in Jesus." He thus rejects judgment in reference to the word of God because of his aversion to religious confrontation. It is for this reason that books as this are very uncomfortable to read by universalists.

If we fear conflict in reference to matters of faith, then we set ourselves up to be deceived into believing that one can believe anything, and yet be saved. Belief is thus dissolved in the confusion of religious diversity. The problem with this system of thought is that the religious universalist ends up with no commitment

about anything. But if everything goes, then we are going nowhere. Therefore, there must be some distinctiveness about what Jesus taught. There must be some teachings that are absolutes in order that we are accepted into the eternal fellowship of God.

It is our purpose in the pages to come to dig deep. We seek to dig until it hurts because we know that we are creatures who often take our religious habits to the level of doctrine. Once our religious habits are doctrine (law), then we start using our religious habits as the standard by which we both judge others, as well as self-sanctify ourselves before God. When we reach the point of self-sanctification, we have minimized the sacrificial offering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we know who we are, we seek to guard ourselves against being those who walked in conflict with Jesus throughout His ministry. We seek to be on the side of Jesus, not the side of those who based their religiosity upon their theology, and by doing such, brought themselves into conflict with the Son of God. The very conflict that the early religionists had with Jesus was proof that they had created after their own desires a religion that was contrary to the Son of God. For this reason, it is absolutely imperative that we dig through our own religiosity. We must search through the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in order to discover who this Jesus is. And just as important, we must reach into the lives of those in the first century who were deceived into believing that their

religiosity was acceptable to God, when at the time, it was simply built on the foundation of the doctrines and traditions of men.

Because most people are afraid to venture down this path of discovery, we will assume that there will be those who are fearful of even considering that they are guilty of the very thing that brought the religionists of Jesus' day into conflict with what He introduced into the world. Jesus was indeed patient with His antagonists. We seek to be the same, though we realize that we are not perfect in this matter. We simply seek to be honest with ourselves that we in some way might, as the religionists who confronted Jesus, be guilty of the same misguided religiosity. Therefore, we must measure by the standard of the word of God everything we believe and behave. We seek to dig deep into our own beliefs and behavior in order to extract those beliefs and behavioral functions of worship that keep us close to a simple walk of faith.

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal, most of us are like the "faithful" son who stayed with the father, and thus did not end up in the pig pens as the prodigal son. We are often self-righteous, seeking to sanctify ourselves by our "faithful" stay in comparison to the unfaithful stray of the prodigal.

It is difficult for the self-righteous to repent. It is even more difficult for the self-righteous to look deep into his soul and discover those points of religious arrogance that keep him away from the humble Son of God who gave up all in heaven in order to humiliate Himself

unto the death of the cross.

This gospel message would be to those religious groups today who think that they have the "right name," the "right doctrine," the right everything, and thus should be considered "faithful" because of their own self-sanctification and because they have been faithful to "the law." It is this group that is inherently difficult to convince that in some ways they too have become simply religious in their attempts at self-sanctification in order to justify themselves before God through some form of perfect law-keeping. As previously stated, it is difficult for the self-righteous to revisit their own beliefs and behavior, and then repent when they discover that they may have moved into the library of law something that was only a tradition.

Jesus confronted this legalistic religiosity during His ministry. In other words, as some today, He confronted those who had forgotten the weightier matters of the Sinai law and consigned their faith to a system of compliance to a defined legal code of religion that they had constructed throughout years of religious habits (traditions). The religious establishment of Jesus' day found confidence in their obedience to their legal religious habits of identity. In the same way, there are those today who have restructured Christianity into a set of similar legal codes of identity.

The problem with legal religiosity as a system of faith is that it becomes extremely self-righteous. It becomes so self-righteous that it makes it almost impossible for the self-righteous religion-



ist to forgive the stinking prodigal son who crawls back into the father's house on hands and knees and asks for forgiveness. His own whitewashed sin makes it almost impossible for him to identify the sin beneath the sin of his own self-righteousness.

Self-righteous legalism is the curse of the day. Self-righteous legalism and universalism are extremes that oppose one another. The universalist would say to the prodigal that he is fine in the pig pen. The self-righteous legalist would say that the prodigal must clean himself up just like the "faithful" son who stayed. The problem with being as the son who stayed is that it is only Jesus who can clean us up, not our self-righteous deeds of merit in staying with the father. On the other hand, the problem with the universalist is that he fails to recognize that there is light in which one must walk in order to be continually cleaned up by the blood of Jesus. And unless one finds that light, he is still walking in darkness. The prodigal had to return to the father.

This brings us to a discussion on how we must restore ourselves to faith in Jesus. If religion moves us further away from God, and self-righteousness keeps us away because of our determination to behave and believe the religious habits of our fathers, then we must find our way back through faith. We must be willing to find and sluff off any religious rite that would hinder our restoration to simple faith. We must be willing to ignore any religious tradition that would bar us from fellowshiping all those who are walking in the same direction.

The problem is that the self-righteous religionist thinks he has already arrived. This is where this book is going to be very painful. With the prodigal, there is little problem. He simply smells himself, and realizes that he does not smell like Jesus. But the self-righteous religionist has trusted in his legal religiosity for so long that he has associated his obedience to his proof-text legalities as a sign of his own righteousness. We must, therefore, start working our way through these legalities in order to determine if they are truly fundamental behavioral habits that God demands that must be behaved in order to be saved. Or, we must determine if they are simply a manufactured systems of religiosity that are disguised with a cloak of self-righteousness.

We cannot have a simple faith in Jesus until we peel away religion and its rites in which we have for so many years trusted to be necessary for salvation. We seek to prove all things, and then grasp with faith to those things that are true. If we are afraid to do this, then we are doomed. We are doomed to stand before God on the merit of our own supposed perfect obedience of the legalities that we have bound on ourselves, but God never bound. We are doomed to forcing God to judge us according to our self-sanctifying religious rites and good works. We are also doomed to present to God our own self-religious behavior as the standard by which we demand that He judge us. We force God to look past the cross of justification in order to measure us according to the merit of our own perfect

obedience. But all of us know that all self-righteousness is futile in reference to atoning for our sins.

We propose to strip away those things in which we may have trusted for so many years, considering ourselves “faithful,” because we stayed, while the prodigal son strayed. When we get down to the bare bones of faith, it is then that we can start restoring ourselves to the gospel of God’s grace. It is then that we

will start refreshing ourselves in the loving grace of a God who knows all our imperfections, but is still willing to forgive our wayward venture to trust in our own religious behavior to save ourselves apart from, or in conjunction with, the cross of His Son. We must hang on, and thus enjoy the ride to discovering the heart of God that was revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Introduction

The central task of the restoration-ist is to call people back to the authority of the word of God. This is often an arduous task because it is difficult to refocus the minds of people from simply being religious to establishing again the original source of our faith. Restorationists arise because there has been a wayward move from the original foundation upon which the faith of the people was based. We will thus continually “ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it” (Jr 6:16).

The prophets of God arose in the history of Israel because the faith of the people moved from the authority of the law of God to religion. It was thus the task of the prophets of God in the Old Testament to bring the people back to the original roots of their faith. The same work of restoration continues today. We must continually be reminded of who we are and what we behave in comparison to the authority on which we base our faith.

The persistent messenger of God should not be unaware of the difficulties of implementing and continuing the task of restoration. The restorationists of God in ancient times sometimes ended up in pits, isolated from society, and often carried off into captivity. Indeed, some of those faithful Old Testament messengers of God ...

*... were tortured ... had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, also of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned. They*

*were sawn asunder. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—men of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth (Hb 11:35-38).*

It is not the duty of the restorational prophet to be the center of reference of the people. It is his task to lead people to the Leader of the people. When we stray from the foundation of our faith—the word of our King—we must be restored to the authority of the word of our King (See Jn 12:48). We must remember that being religious is not good enough. Wayward religious people in the Old Testament were called upon by the prophets to restore themselves to the authority of the law of God.

Those who must be corrected are those who have created after their own traditions a religiosity that often perpetuates powerful positions and purses. But when this religiosity is opposed, the messenger of the word of God must not forget that traditional religionists will gnash their teeth against the prophet and stone him to death with either literal stones or hardened words (See At 7:54). Even the Founder of our faith was nailed to a tree because He brought judgment on religionists while delivering from sin those who had been captured by the established religion of the day (At 10:39).

The reason for this resistance is easy

to understand. Traditional religiosity, especially that of those who feel they have legally determined for themselves all that is essential to be righteous before God, will often contend vigorously for the faith (traditions) of their fathers and mothers. They assume that their fathers and mothers lived inerrantly before God. They will confuse “contending for the faith” that was delivered to us by our Father of faith (Jd 3), with the religious traditions that were handed to them by their earthly fathers. In a very emotional way, therefore, they feel that they are condemning their own fathers and mothers if they would turn away in any direction from the religious traditions that were handed to them as their heritage of spirituality.

Unfortunately, those who would contend for the traditional faith of their fathers have forgotten two very important points in reference to the faith of their fathers and mothers. First, if the faith that they inherited from their fathers and mothers was truly genuine, then they must remember that their fathers and mothers would immediately accept any new Bible information concerning their beliefs, or correct their beliefs through new studies of the Bible. A genuine faith is defined as such because it continually drives us to learn more Bible. And when we learn more, our genuine faith drives us to change to that which we have learned. Nevertheless, few people are willing to honor their fathers and mothers’ genuine faith by following in the footsteps of their fathers and mothers who sought to learn more. We have few

Bible students today as our fathers and mothers were a generation ago. Too many people simply rely on the faith of their fathers without testing that faith with Bible study (2 Co 13:5).

Second, by refusing to change from an erroneous heritage that they may have received from their fathers and mothers, those who are fearful of change often establish a code of religious traditions that they will in turn hand down to their own children. And when this happens, the heirs of an erroneous spiritual heritage eventually end up under the condemnation of what Isaiah said to apostate Israel in his day, and Jesus repeated concerning His own generation:

*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Is 29:13; Mk 7:6,7).*

The messenger of God’s word must never be intimidated by the religious powers that exist. On the contrary, the prophet must be terrified by the words that God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel:

*When I [God] say to the wicked, “You will surely die,” and you [as a prophet] do not give him warning, nor speak to warn the wicked of his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man will die in his iniquity. But his blood I will require at your hand (Ez 3:18).*

No true messenger of God’s word can ignore these words. The sincere messen-

ger of God is driven by fear of what will happen to him if we does not speak. He knows that the responsibility of teaching the word of God to those who have moved away from God rests squarely upon his shoulders. The restorationist must not, therefore, even in view of beatings and pits, detour from his or her objective to teach the word of God to the people.

We must not be surprised by any disturbance that is caused when the word of God is preached. Restorational messengers and their word are often difficult to accept, for they often remind us of that from which we have strayed. Nevertheless, we must take our Bibles and prove the word of every messenger of God's word. We accept the messengers who would warn us of our wicked way in apostasy. They seek to restore us to that genuine faith that continues to be based on the word of God.

We are wise enough to understand that as time passes, we are always in danger of enshrining the religious traditions of our fathers. We are always in danger of allowing the culture in which we live to influence our faith. We are always in danger of allowing the politics or economics of the day to determine what we should believe. For this reason, we understand that our genuine faith is always in danger of digressing into religion. We are in fear of waking up one day and discovering that we too are as the religious establishment of the day of both Isaiah and Jesus. We are fearful of finding ourselves worshiping God in vain after the religious traditions of our fathers.

Therefore, we will bear with those who call for the restoration of the word of God, though they may be prophets of doom. If we do not repent, we will continue to allow ourselves to be unchallenged by the word of God. If a teacher has a Bible in his hands, and quotes book, chapter and verse, then, for our own benefit, we will spare him from stones and pits. The restorational leader speaks in order that we repent. He speaks in order that we not bring ourselves into destruction as was the case with Israel of old (See Hs 4:6).

In order to be restored to the Author and Finisher of our faith, we must always go back to the simplicity of the heritage of the early disciples. We use the word "simplicity" simply because over time faith is always encumbered with a host of religious traditions that cloud the original source of the authority of our faith. Therefore, we must be "picky" in our understanding of the authority of our faith. We must be willing to identify even the minutest tradition in order to understand that we are encumbered with traditions. It is not that we can live tradition free lives. What we must be willing to do is identify our religious traditions and understand that such traditions are not the foundation of our genuine faith.

God allows traditions, but in our study of the word of God, we must confess up to any tradition that might detour our efforts to restore ourselves to that which is the simplicity of His word. In this way, we can keep the original authority of our faith firmly in mind as we

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struggle to identify our own religious traditions. In this way we will refresh ourselves in the nurturing word that is so refreshing in a world that has invented every form of religion that men can conceive.

## Chapter 1

# THE SUBTLE MOVE TO RELIGION

In her book, *Fugitive Pieces*, the Canadian poet, Anne Michaels, eloquently pieced together several stories of holocaust survivors and their families. She made a statement in the book that is so relevant in reference to any movement into religion:

Nothing is sudden. Not an explosion—planned, timed, wired carefully—not the burst door. Just as the earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so history is **the gradual instant**” [emphasis mine, R.E.D.).

Remember the following statement by the Holy Spirit: “*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning*” (Rm 15:4)? Those things that were written in the Old Testament were not simply in reference to doctrinal matters. Much of the Old Testament was written about the history of Israel in the gradual apostasy of the people from God. These things were written for our learning in reference to our own possible apostasy.

What Michaels was saying in her statement concerning the holocaust was that social norms change gradually over time. Changes toward evil are the “gradual instant” that over a period of time can find their sudden conclusion in a devastating social cataclysm. What may take years to develop, instantly comes to a conclusion. And so it was

with the fall of national Israel. One day they woke up in captivity, realizing that Jerusalem and the temple were lying in ruins.

It was not that Israel was without illustrations of a “gradual instant” in their history. The book of Judges was written because of the problem of social digression that always takes place within a society. As a group, we do not get better morally. We become worse. The consequences of Israel’s moral digression finally came to a conclusion when God allowed their enemies to come upon them in order to punish them for their wayward ways. For example, throughout their cycles of sin and restoration that are recorded in the book of Judges, the cycles began when “*the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord*” (Jg 4:1). As their punishment, “*the Lord sold them*” into the hands of their enemies (See Jg 4:2). Then “*the children of Israel cried to the Lord*” (See Jg 4:3). In answer to their cries, God sent a leader to lead the people back to the way of the Lord in order that they could be delivered from their enemies.

Over and over again this cycle of sin, repentance and deliverance happened in Israel. If we would therefore learn anything from the history of the Old Testament, it would be that we always gradually move away from the Lord. Therefore, we need to be reminded from where we have moved. We must experience a

“gradual instant” for which our digression has prepared for us over a long period of time.

Our move away from the Lord is always slow. It is unnoticed, and therefore deceptive. There is no moral consciousness of the move. Because the moral move is so gradual and painless, we must not be deceived into thinking that when people fall out of love with the word and will of God, they are not on a move away from God. The people are morally moving, but their move is not a move closer to God. Moral and religious moves are always away from God. Apostasy is always a result of man’s religious movement away from God in order to please himself. And in reference to Israel, these *“things were written for our learning.”*

There were numerous examples of fall and restoration throughout Israel’s history upon which the people could continually reflect. Nevertheless, they seem to never have learned. In their end, God judged their spirit of rebellion: *“My people are bent on backsliding from Me”* (Hs 11:7). And so are we. We live in a world of backslidden religiosity that has lost its way.

Israel’s cycle of fall eventually developed into an irreversible fall that resulted from their total neglect of the word of God. There were no more restorations for the nation when this happened. The problem was that they could not repent for they had forgotten that to which they must return. Repentance, therefore, availed nothing for they had gone into the doom of misguided religiosity. It was

a time when God said concerning their state of religiosity, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge [of My word]”* (Hs 4:6). They could not repent and return to that which they had forgotten.

The only recourse for God was purification of the people through the bondage of captivity. Their “gradual instant” finally appeared in the north in the coming of foreign armies. Therefore, in 722/21 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel went into Assyrian captivity, and in 586 B.C. the southern kingdom went into Babylonian captivity.

While in captivity, something new happened in their religiosity. There was a swing of the religious pendulum. They went from forgetting and forsaking the law of God to surrounding the law with their traditions.. Instead of reaping the consequences of captivity again, the people of Israel sought to guarantee that they would never again forget the commandment of God. For example, in order not to forget the Sabbath of the Sinai law, they surrounded the keeping of the Sabbath with countless rules by which they sought to guarantee their obedience to the Sabbath. They added so many rules and regulations to the original Sinai law that they had to write religious books as the Talmud and Tanakh in order that their invented rules and regulations not be forgotten or violated.

The consequence of this system of religiosity was that the simplicity of what God required in the Sinai law became buried beneath heaps of rules and regulations. The commandment of God was



so far buried in their obsession to keep their Sabbath rules that a new society of religious people had to rise to the occasion in order to bring peace of mind to the people concerning the application of all the rules and regulations. These were the scribes, or lawyers of the law. And in order that all the rules and regulations be obeyed of what Paul later referred to as Judaism (“the Jews’ religion”), a religious force of policemen had to arise to make sure everyone followed the rules and regulations. These were the Pharisees. The Pharisees were thus the religious policemen for what the scribes determined should be obeyed.

By the time Jesus came into the world, something opposite had happened to what had developed in the years of Israel’s apostasy during the time of the judges and national Israel under the kings. During those years the people simply forgot the commandment of God and ran after their own religious rules that pleased them. Baal won out over Bible. But when Jesus arrived, the commandment of God became so buried beneath the religious rules of the Jews that the Jews marginalized the commandments. Jesus judged the Pharisees and scribes in the following statement: “*For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the [religious] tradition of men*” (Mk 7:8). Jesus then went further in His condemnation of their religious behavior because they had gone again into apostasy: “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own [religious] tradition*” (Mk 7:9).

The problem with religion is that it

is always a move away from God. If we would learn anything from the history of Israel, it would be that when we either forget the commandment of God, or ignore the commandment of God by focusing on our own religious traditions, we are moving, or have moved, away from God. The problem with being in a state of apostasy where we have forgotten the commandment of God is that we have no knowledge of a base to which we can return. Those who are in the process of laying aside the commandment of God are so obsessed with the religious traditions of their fathers that they feel they are forsaking the faith of their fathers and mothers if they restore themselves to the commandment of God. Their move away from the commandment of God was slow and painless. But their repentance can often be emotionally traumatic.

The Holy Spirit did not leave us ignorant concerning how we find ourselves in the deplorable religious condition of having laid aside, or rejected the commandment of God. He explained in the Roman letter why and how such things occur in a religiously oriented people. Paul explained:

*For they [the Jews] being ignorant of God’s righteousness [justification] and seeking to establish their own righteousness [justification], have not submitted themselves to the righteousness [justification] of God (Rm 10:3).*

When religious people who have forgotten the word of God, but seek to please God, they will invent their own system

of justification (righteousness) by which they will satisfy their consciences before God. After they have created their self-justification through obedience to their own religious rites, they will with great zeal seek to self-sanctify themselves through strict obedience to the religious rites they bind upon themselves. When they falter, they will establish a system of meritorious good deeds to atone for any infractions of the rites and rules. This is apostasy to religion.

Inventors of religion will do as Paul described his fellow Jews: *“For I testify of them [the Jews] that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge”* (Rm 10:2). Regardless of their zeal for God through their own self-righteousness, the Jews stood condemned in their own religiosity. And for this reason, Paul wrote of his fellow Jews, *“My heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved”* (Rm 10:1).

At least one very startling point was clarified when Paul made the preceding statement: **One cannot be saved by establishing his own self-righteousness (justification) in order to please God.** The reason for this is clear. *“For by works of law no flesh will be justified”* before God (Gl 2:16). Whether a religious law is devised by man, or by God, no one can keep law perfectly, and thus all have sinned and fall short of the precious salvation that God offers through grace (See Rm 3:23; 6:23). The road to self-righteous justification is a dead end.

We can see a tear of sadness that dropped on the manuscript when Paul inscribed many years after his obedience

to the gospel the following words as he remembered his former years in the religion of his father and mother:

*And I advanced in Judaism [the Jews’ religion] above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions* (Gl 1:14).

He, as well as many zealous young Jews, had made their fathers proud. As many young Jews who gave so much for the religiosity of their fathers, Paul thought of this as fruitless time he had spent in bearing the burden of a religion. It was a dead religion that brought no salvation.

If there ever could be a system of self-sanctification for salvation, then certainly men as Paul could have arrived at the pearly gates on the foundation of religious performances. Many years after his enlightenment through the gospel, Paul wrote to the Philippian brothers and sisters whom he loved so much, *“Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of the false circumcision”* (Ph 3:2). When Paul wrote these words, he was thinking back to his former years when he was one of those “dogs,” an “evil worker” and of the “false circumcision.” In those days when his religiosity excelled above his fellow Jews, he ravaged the saints through persecution. *“Concerning zeal,”* he remembered, *“persecuting the church; concerning righteousness that is in law, blameless”* (Ph 3:6). But when Jesus confronted Paul (Saul) on the Damascus road, he was shocked into the reality that the gospel was true

and the religion of his father and mother was a dead end street in reference to salvation. The power of the gospel subsequently transformed his thinking and his life.

*Indeed more, I count all things lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them refuse [dung] so that I may gain Christ (Ph 3:8).*

The *King James Version* was correct in literally translating the word “refuse” with the word “dung.” The translation rendered Paul’s statement that he counted his former religiosity “*but dung, that I may win Christ.*” All the zeal. All the works. All the self-righteousness. All the ambition to uphold the Jew’s religion. It was all as human refuse (dung) to be cast out as repugnant waste.

When we speak of discarding a religion that was handed to us by our fore-

fathers, as Paul discarded the religion of his father and mother, something very powerful must come upon us in order to do so. Paul would know. Because of what he had done in his former life as a “dog” and “evil worker,” we can now better understand what he meant when he wrote Romans 1:16: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.*”

In view of what Paul cast out as “religious dung,” we can understand that he was speaking of more in this passage than salvational matters. He was speaking of a gospel that was so powerful in one’s heart that it would move the most ardent religionist to count all his religiosity as dung to be cast out in order to gain the Lord Jesus Christ. One must come to the realization that there is no salvation in religion. Salvation is only in the gospel of Jesus Christ (At 4:12).

## Chapter 2

# CHRISTIANITY VERSUS RELIGION

In reference to society in general, the definition of a “liberal” is one who has lost either his social or moral compass. The liberal seeks to live beyond restrictions. As an individual, the liberal generally seeks to be “free” from the restraints of social or legal norms that would hinder his freedom to do as he would choose to do according to the influences of the general trends of the social environment in which he lives. The

word “progressive” is often used to disguise the desire of the liberal to do that which is right in his own eyes. He is progressive in the sense of “progressing” in any direction without the constraints of any moral center of reference. He is truly a ship without a moral anchor.

Because he is an “anchorless” ship on a social sea, the liberal does not like disagreement with his position at any specific time in his progression to an uncer-

tain destiny. The conservative will answer “no” to the liberal, but the liberal is offended because the negative answer, or argument against his existing position, is contrary to the central core of his philosophy of life.

A society that is built on either a religious, or constitutional rule by law, can usually keep individual “progressive” citizens in check by the majority of conservatives. However, when the majority of the society becomes “progressive”—they are progressing in any direction the majority so chooses—then there are problems. If the majority of society is composed of those who have a liberal philosophy for establishing constitutional social norms (rule by law), then the constitution must be amended when the society morally digresses, or at least be interpreted through the social philosophy of liberal thinking. And thus, this is the inherent curse of democratic government, especially those societies that are not held in check by faith. It is difficult to hold moral standards in check by constitutional law, for constitutional democracies are often established on the basis of a separation of faith and government. Whatever the majority of the civil government chooses to be morally correct, then the majority condones. If corruption in the government is deemed acceptable, then government officials have no scruples about embezzling money from state coffers.

But in a theocratic government, things are somewhat different, but never free from the attack of a liberal philosophy of either moral or theological dangers. For example, the social norm of

the nation of Israel slowly moved in a direction away from their moral norm of the Sinai law. After enjoying their freedom from Egyptian captivity for about a century, the people ignored much of the civil and moral order of the Sinai law. They determined to progress away from God’s moral norms of the Sinai law.

The reason for Israel’s progression away from the moral norms of the Sinai law was stated by an inspired historian: *“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes”* (Jg 17:6). This is the “standard” of the liberal. The truly liberal person seeks to do that which is right according to his own desires. He refuses to be directed by any unchanging mandate of law. When the majority of the citizens of a society conduct themselves in this way, then the society as a whole overcomes the obstacle of the conservatives who seek to hold on to the social norms of what now has become the past.

Liberal philosophy can even affect an entire world generation of people. Progression away from unchanging moral norms happened with the entire world’s population at one time in the past. In the Genesis 6:5 historical statement, the word “wickedness” is used to define moral and religious behavior that is contrary to the doctrinal and moral norms of God. In other words, one can be “wicked” while being religious. As was the case of Israel, the “wicked” at the time Noah prepared the ark were not necessarily bad people who did bad things. They were people who had forsaken Divine standards of moral and social order

in order to progress in the way of behavior that was determined by their own standards. The same was true of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. So the inspired historian wrote of the entire generation of progressives in Noah's day: "*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually*" (Gn 6:5).

The definition of the conservative is that he seeks to establish in government or faith norms by which citizens will live by rule of law in society. He seeks to maintain doctrinal norms in reference to his relationship with both God and his neighbor. In government, he writes out a constitution, or some civil "bill of rights," that will be the social compass by which all citizens of the society must be governed.

One good thing that colonial powers brought to their respective people over which they assumed rule, was constitutional law. Such was unheard of in Africa prior to the arrival of the colonials. In the absence of such, the chief of the tribe established the moral norms of the people over whom he reigned. If cannibalism was right, then those of his tribe could capture and eat anyone of another tribe. If the chief could gain wealth by the slave trade with the colonials, then capturing those of another tribe and trading them for goods from the slave traders on the coast was morally right. But when constitutional rule by law was introduced, and enforced by the colonial armies, then both the slave traders and slave trading chiefs went out of business.

It took religious conservatives in the governments of both America and Europe to banish the slave trade. The law to banish slavery was determined by the moral laws of God. When these laws were activated in society, they eventually banished slavery around the world. This was one time in history when religious conservatives won the day.

A conservative is defined by the very law of governance by which the liberal views as constantly in transition. The liberal seeks to change the constitution throughout the years, or he has forgotten the original intent by which each constitutional mandate was inscribed. In fact, throughout the history of a nation, it is almost impossible for the liberal to make contemporary judgments concerning the constitution because he views the articles of the constitution through the "moral" filter of his own liberal philosophy of life. He cannot identify with the moral conservative norms of the original writers of his constitution, for he judges that his needs, and his social environment, have changed since the original writing of the constitution.

The religious liberal maintains the same perspective in reference to his original "constitution." He assumes that a two-thousand-year-old "constitution" of the law of God's word is far out of date. It is not relevant to present needs. He may remain religious, but the liberal has made obsolete any "constitution" of rules that the conservative would maintain to be applicable today as it was when first written.

In this context we would compare

the position of the Muslim. When Muhammad observed that the Jews were ruled by a system of Judaeo interpretations of the Jews' original constitution (the Sinai law), he assumed that he could write his own. Therefore, as Israel was originally built upon the moral norm of the Sinai law, and thus should be a theocratic government as God intended, then he too could establish the same. If the Jews had a right to change, add to and subtract from the original constitution of the nation of Israel, then he too added his continued mandates. To the Muslim, Muhammad thus became the last of a series of prophets and lawgivers of God. His additions to God's (Allah's) word among men were thus sealed and final.

When Israel strayed from the mandates of their original constitution, God sent prophets to exhort them to get back on course. When that did not work over the centuries, then He sent the Assyrians and Babylonians to take them into captivity. Israel learned their lesson in captivity. However, after captivity, they were now paranoid about straying from their constitution. Subsequently, they added precept upon precept to their constitution in order to guarantee that the moral norms of the constitution be obeyed and never again broken. Muhammad just came along in the seventh century A.D. as a supposed final prophet to make additions and a change in direction and focus.

The liberal West will never understand true Islam, and for this reason, there will always be a conflict between the moral norms of the West and Islam. In order that the individual Muslim not be-

come liberal, and thus forsake the moral and legal norms of the Islamic "constitution" (the Quran), the imams of Islam (the legal judges, as the Jewish scribes and Pharisees), enforce obedience to the mandates of the Quran.

The conservative Muslim views the West to have totally gone liberal in reference to any relationship with God (Allah). The conservative Muslim views the liberal West to be going in the direction of the pre-flood days of Noah where every person of humanity sought to live in conflict with the moral and doctrinal norms of God. And for this reason, the conservative Muslim views the West with the perspective "*that every imagination of the thoughts of his [Western] heart*" is only evil continually (Gn 6:5).

Those Muslims who do not view the West in this way are considered "moderate" (liberal) Muslims, and thus not real Muslims according to strict Islamic law. We may see a Muslim woman with a head scarf parading in a march of liberal Western protestors, but the conservative Muslim views the woman as an apostate who has joined those whose every imagination is wickedness in reference to the mandates of the Quran. And in reference to being consistent with his moral and doctrinal constitution in a true Islamic state, he is right. He is consistent with the teaching of the Quran.

If indeed Allah is one and Muhammad is His [final] prophet, then true Islam can be maintained only in an Islamic state wherein the constitution (the Quran) is not continually amended as individuals of the state become more liberal. There

is thus the necessity for “scribes and Pharisees” (imams) in a true Islamic state in order to guarantee that the liberals of the state do not change the constitution, and consequently change the behavior of the citizens of the Islamic state.

In order to guard against the state determining the moral and doctrinal direction of His people, King Jesus separated the state from the function of His people as a heavenly kingdom. He pronounced that those citizens of His spiritual kingdom would have dual citizenship. They would have citizenship first in His kingdom, but then He said that the citizens of His kingdom must also have citizenship in kingdoms of this world. And as citizens of any earthly kingdom, the citizens of the heavenly kingdom must “*be subject to the governing authorities*” of the earthly kingdom (Rm 13:1). Because Jesus established a spiritual kingdom, those who were citizens of His kingdom would also be citizens of any physical kingdom of this world. Regardless of the moral condition of the physical kingdom, however, Jesus’ citizenship could live freely according to His “rule by law.”

Because the earthly governing authority seeks to establish a kingdom of peace wherein each “heavenly citizen” can function, God gave the sword exclusively to the earthly kingdom authorities (Rm 13:4). If the heavenly kingdom citizens ever try to take hold of the sword of the earthly kingdom in order to enforce their faith and morals on all citizens of the earthly kingdom, then they would be functioning outside the mandate of their

heavenly King. They would be stealing freedom from those they would “convert” to freedom in Christ. In other words, if the church took hold of the sword, then the church would function in contradiction to the very principle of freedom that Jesus brought into the world.

Paul revealed a principle of freedom in the heavenly kingdom in the following words: “*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). This statement was made specifically in reference to salvational and relational matters in the heavenly kingdom. Those who would seek to live under a meritorious system of salvation by works of law would be cut off from the grace that saves (Gl 5:4). As long as civil law does not confine, work against, or subvert the law of the heavenly kingdom, then the citizens of the heavenly kingdom can live in peace. But as soon as a heavenly kingdom citizen lays his hand to a sword to enforce any religious law on all the citizens of the earthly kingdom, then he has become insubmissive to heavenly kingdom freedom.

There is the vast difference between a true Islamic state according to the Quran and Christianity. True Islam is a theocracy. Christianity is not. In an Islamic state, the state has the authority to bind Sharia law on the citizenship. In contrast to an Islamic state, a secular state guarantees freedom of religion through constitutional law. In reference to dress in an Islamic state, for example, the state would bind the hijab (head and facial covering). A secular state that is governed

by constitutional law guarantees freedom, on the other hand, the women have a choice. They may wear the hijab in order to express their faith, or they may not. But if the state mandates that all women wear the hijab in order to express their faith, then the state has infringed on the religious freedom of all the citizens of the state.

The conclusion to the preceding in reference to the subject of religion is evidence of the existence of religion. Christianity is not a religion. Those who would submit to King Jesus do not propagate their faith with the sword of the state, nor with a unique dress code. This is why the Crusades of the Middle Ages did not represent Christianity, but religion in action. In order to recruit soldiers for the Crusades, the religionists of that day used the name of Christ. But this did not mean that the Crusades promoted Christ. To this day, misguided Muslims still do not understand this, for they continue to associate Christianity and Christ with the Crusades. Nevertheless, we continue to educate our Muslim friends that because Christ freed the citizens of His kingdom from any religious mandates of the state, the Crusades were an illustration of an apostate religion that used the power of the state to enforce its religious beliefs on others.

The first sign that one has moved into being a religionist is when he seeks to use the law of the state to enforce others to conform to his faith. This does not mean that Christians cannot be officials in a democratic state. But if the Christian official begins to use the authority of his office to enforce his faith on other

citizens of the state, then he has become a religionist. He is no different than the Muslim official of an Islamic state.

Our efforts as restorationists are not to restore civil states. Our task is to restore the state of God's will in the lives of citizens according to His law. We would not, therefore, confuse ourselves by thinking that if we are obedient citizens of the state, we are also good citizens of the heavenly kingdom of Jesus. One can be a faithful citizen of the heavenly kingdom even though the earthly kingdom goes in the way of wickedness as in the days of Noah (Gn 6:5). Regardless of the wickedness of the day, Noah was righteous before God. We as Christians must remain faithful to our calling regardless of the environment in which we live on this earth. After Paul had instructed the wayward brother to be cast out of the fellowship of the faithful, he exhorted the church not to condone unrighteous living, though they had to live in a world of unrighteousness. Therefore, he said to the faithful:

*However, I did not at all refer to association with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world* (1 Co 5:10).

Christians seek to remain in the world in order to be the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13-15). Therefore, Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Mt 5:16).



## Chapter 3

# CHALLENGE OF THE RESTORATIONIST

All the palaver of the preceding chapter brings us to the challenge of the true restorationist. In view of what happened to the entire world's population before Noah, and the nation of Israel, it was the work of the restorational prophet of God in the Old Testament, and the restorationist today, to call people of faith back to the moral and doctrinal norm of the word of God. But in his efforts to deter the social and religious liberal from progressively taking the people to a destiny that leads only to doom, the restorationist has many challenges he must face. There are pits and persecution in his future because society has dug the pits and he often finds himself hidden somewhere in a cave to avoid being "cut asunder."

In reference to faith, and in view of his mission, there can never be a restorationist who does not know the moral compass by which he is calling on people to restore. **A restorationist who does not know the moral and doctrinal compass is as the blind leading the blind.** If one does not know where he is calling the people, then he will never know when he gets them there.

Herein is one of the greatest deceptions of Satan. There are supposed prophets standing in pulpits around the world who are calling the people back to God and Jesus, but they have little knowledge of the Divine Compass. They do not know their Bibles. They do not study

their Bibles. As a result, their call is more to membership of "their churches," instead of calling people past themselves to the cross. These are those who are "*always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth*" (2 Tm 3:7). They are thus blind guides who blindly lead the blind.

The true restorationist is a zealous student of the word of God, for the motive of his ministry is to call on people to return to the only source of faith that we must have in order to establish a relationship with God.

But herein a problem develops. Those who are "*always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth*" will cry out that the true restorational leader is a "liberal." They do not understand the position of a true restorationist. What the restorational leader is trying to do is shed all the "doctrines and traditions" of men that surround God's standard for moral and theological direction in order to restore to the people a clear and definite compass by which the people can find their way out of religious confusion and moral confusion. Unless all the barnacles are scraped from the hull of the ship, the true ship will never sail smoothly.

In the midst of a world of religious confusion, we thank God for those Bible teachers who study their Bibles in order to come to a knowledge of the truth. They

are able to separate Bible from Baal. Such religious leaders understand the plea of true restoration. Nevertheless, there are also those in the religious world who are not as noble in their desire to study the word of God (See At 17:11). Instead of calling people back to the Bible, these prophets know little Bible to which to call people, and thus they are confused with contradictory messages among themselves. Because they are confused, the people are confused because there are as many different messages proclaimed on Sunday as there are churches in every respective community.

In the midst of all this confusion, the true restorationist seeks to discard any religious tradition that would hinder us from returning to the “old paths” of God in order to enshrine His word in our hearts. The false restorationist considers sluffing off the religious traditions of our fathers the work of a “liberal.” Because the identity of his faith is defined by the uniqueness of his traditions, to forsake any religious tradition would be forsaking the religion of his father and mother. He thus uses the word “liberal” in a wrong context in his argument against the true restorationist.

**To exhort the people to obey the word of God, is not legalism. To discard any religious tradition that hinders obedience to the word of God is not liberalism.** And unless one can understand this, he will never be a true restorationist to bring the people of God back to the final norm of morals and teaching that God has given to us through Jesus Christ.

We would thus consider the following statement of Jesus to be a warning, instead of an exhortation: *“He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day”* (Jn 12:48).

Jesus and His word are the final standard by which all men will be judged (See At 17:30,31). The truly liberal would discard the word of Jesus as the final authority by which all will be judged (See Jn 12:48). When the conservative exalts Jesus and His word to be the final authority in judgment, he is by this defined to be a true restorationist. When one seeks to discard any religious tradition that would hinder all of us from restoring Jesus and His word in our lives, he is not a liberal. If one does not know the word of Jesus well enough to determine the difference between those religious traditions that mislead faith, and the word of Jesus, then that person is a blind guide, *“and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch”* (Mt 15:14).

We are liberal in reference to any doctrines and religious traditions of men that would hinder us from calling the people back to the eternal norms of God. We will thus heed the following words of the Holy Spirit: *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves”* (2 Co 13:5).

Throughout the remainder of this book you will probably judge that we are being “picky” in reference to calling your attention to those traditions that surround the assembly of the saints and other

functions of the body of Christ. But we believe that every aspect of our obedience must be brought under the scrutiny of the word of God. We must do this in order to separate religious tradition and behavior from what is actually required of us in obedience to the word of Christ. If we are afraid to sift through all our “religiosity” in order to strain out any tradition from the word of God, then we are in trouble of making religious traditions an inseparable part of our faith.

It is an axiomatic truth of history, as previously stated, that we gradually move away from God when we enshrine our religious traditions. This is particularly true in these times in the West where society is becoming increasingly liberal. As goes the culture in which we live, so goes our faith if it is not grounded on the unchanging standard of the word of God. If we are simply religious, our religion is often determined by our culture. For the liberal, social norms are the standard that dictate the beliefs and behavior of the religionists. But for those who want to stay close to God through His word, then the only option to a “barnacle free” faith

is to continually reflect on the word of the One before whom we will all stand in judgment (Jn 12:48; At 17:30,31).

If we refuse to recognize the impact of social norms and traditions on our behavior and faith, then we are simply practicing “ostrich religiosity.” If we do not think that the liberal philosophy of society affects the religious behavior and beliefs of the people, then we are in trouble. When society becomes liberal, those who do not base their faith on the word of God become liberal. This is especially true of those religious groups who do not have a heritage that was built on the final authority of the word of God in matters of faith. As more “believers” move toward a doctrine of universalism in faith, the word of God becomes more obsolete as a final norm of faith.

These are times in which restorationists call people to study the history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Our study of the prophets of Israel are frightful simply because they identify the social decline of a people that is so common to our world today.

## Chapter 4

### GOSPEL STIMULATED WORSHIP

Here are some questions to consider in order to begin any study to determine if we have some traditions linked to our worship that could possibly hinder our efforts to restore the word of God as our final standard to guide us in worship:

- Could we worship God in a quiet meadow with David?
- Could we worship God alone in a closet?
- Could we worship alone in any isolated place?

- Could we worship God outside a “spiritual sanctuary” that was built specifically as a place of worship?
- Could we worship God without performing a system of legal ceremonies?
- Could we worship God without the sound of surrounding musical instruments?

If you answered “yes” to all of the preceding questions, then you need to be encouraged to continue on your way of worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

The unfortunate thing about the preceding questions is that many people in the religious world today cannot answer “yes” to all the questions. Being a part of a formal group in a place of designated worship, with ceremonies and instrumental sounds, is believed by many today to be essential crutches that generate worship within the worshipers. And unless they are in the environment of such, there is no inner expression of worship that is spontaneous. In some cases, emotional experientialism is confused with worship. If our worship must be generated by outside influences, then our worship cannot find a spontaneous outpouring from within our hearts.

The series of questions that we posed **focus on the desires of the worshiper** in reference to the One who is to be worshiped. When we speak of the gospel as the motivation that stimulates worship, **we are referring to worship that is generated by the gospel**. The gospel focuses on what God did for us, not on what we must receive or experience in worship.

Gospel worship is in gratitude to what God revealed through the gospel. He gave His Son freely for us without any conditions (Jn 3:16). God the Son gave up being on an equality with God in order to go to the cross for us (Ph 2:5-9). He was incarnate in the flesh of man for us (Jn 1:14). He redeemed us by His sacrificial offering. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit did all this for us. The gospel was the revelation of how much we were loved. The more we realize this love, the more we respond in worship. The more we understand what was accomplished for us through the gospel, the less we complain about what we need in order to pour out our worshipful gratitude to God.

After being with others in worship, we must never complain, “I did not get something out of the worship.” **Worship is not about getting something. It is about releasing thanksgiving.** Gospel worship is never contingent on what the worshiper receives. Gospel worship has no strings attached that are necessary in order to be released. Religionists seek to get something out of worship. But gospel lovers seek to give back praise in thanksgiving for what they received through the gospel. True worship is not about getting.

When discussing the subject of worship, we must caution ourselves about ourselves. One is not driven to worship because of something that is needed, other than the need to worship. We need fellowship. We need friends. Sometimes we just need a place to go. But the gospel will not allow one to confine his wor-

ship to special places, or of necessity to be stimulated by performing legal ceremonies, burning candles, or dimming lights. We have experienced tears of worship driving down an isolated road while singing spiritual songs to ourselves. The more we appreciate the gospel, the more worship explodes from our hearts. We need no stage props to worship the God of the gospel. In fact, the more outside stimuli one needs to worship, the more struggle he or she is having with worshipping God.

If our worship cannot be excited without all the motivational schemes and theatrical performances that are prevalent in so many assemblies in the modern church, then we must dig deep into our hearts in order to discover why we “go to worship.” We must be honest with ourselves that we are possibly “out of tune” with the gospel that generates spontaneous worship of thanksgiving.

Self-oriented worship is an oxymoron. It is contradictory. There can be no self in worship. There can be no demands for comfort, or environment, or empirical input. Worship is defined by what comes forth from our hearts as a result of a gospel outpouring to God. Worship is our appreciation for our salvation. Therefore, we must banish from our minds this thought that worship is in any way a self-sanctifying effort on our part to gain acceptance by God. All self-sanctifying performances, props, or locations cannot be conditions upon which we pour out our hearts in appreciation to God for what He did for us through the gospel.

If we struggle with our worship, and

are honest with ourselves, then we will search for the true worship which God seeks. If we struggle, we grow, for struggle is the evidence that we are not satisfied with our worship. In order to grow in worship, we must discover the first requirement for acceptable worship, and this requirement is to understand the One we seek to worship. We seek to know this God of love who did so much for us in the past, and will deliver on our faith in His promises in the future.

Jesus sought to identify true worshipers with the following declaration: “*God is spirit*” (Jn 4:24). This one statement is enough to sweep away all the physical aids that we have treasured to be so necessary in order to generate worship within us. Gone is the necessity for special sanctuaries. Gone is the necessity to observe ceremonies that we feel we must legally perform. Gone is the necessity for all the instruments and electronic devices. Gone is even the air-conditioning and heating, with the comfortable carpets and pews. Because God is spirit, these physical things mean nothing to Him in reference to Him accepting the worship that comes from the hearts of those who are so thankful for the gospel of His Son.

“*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him **in spirit** and **in truth***” (Jn 4:24). When we discuss worship, there should be no need to interpret this statement. What the Holy Spirit says in this statement is that because God is spirit, the medium through which we approach Him must be as He is. Worship simply does not involve the

physical things of this world that we often feel are necessary in order to worship God. When we understand that it was the heart of God that was nailed to the cross, then we understand that only that which comes from our hearts can be offered in worship of Him. God seeks for a spiritual response to His heart on the cross. Physical things and ceremonies have nothing to do with that which is spiritual.

These are mental and spiritual matters about which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Those things that are in our hearts (spirit) and minds (truth), are those emotional and intellectual responses that must be offered to God in appreciation for the gospel of His Son. **The more emphasis we place on ourselves, the more we are distracted from the objective of our worship. The more conditions we place on ourselves in order to worship, the further we move away from the object of our worship.** In other words, the more physical things we demand in order to worship, the further we move away from the God who is spirit. It is for this reason that legalized worship can never be acceptable to God. Legalized worship becomes a cloak of performance that disguises a heart that has long forgotten how to produce a tear of gratitude for the incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God.

God does not want us to be distracted from the objective of our worship. If the seating is uncomfortable, it must not be a distraction. If the singing is not in tune, this too must not be a distraction. If the atmosphere of the assembly

is not conducive to our comfort, this too, must be ignored. Surrounding noise is a distraction. Worship in spirit and truth must not be distracted by the environment in which we worship. It is for this reason that worship explodes from our hearts in a quiet place in the desert because there are no distractions. Worshipers must always keep in mind that the more we desire to have crutches, props and ceremonies in order to worship, the more difficult it is to go deep into our hearts and minds to dig out appreciation for what God did for us through the gospel.

If we must go to some sanctuary, or be with certain people in order to express our gratitude for the gospel through worship, then we have cheated ourselves. At least, we have limited our worship to places and people. It is simply an axiomatic truth that the more we focus on our own desires and conveniences in order to worship, the more difficult it is to pour out our hearts in worship. In other words, if we must do something in order to generate worship, then that which is generated may not be true worship. It may simply be an emotional stirring of our own spirit. If our worship is legalized through the performance of certain acts of worship, then we satisfy ourselves that we have fulfilled the requirements of the law. However, we often walk away from such legal worship feeling empty, unfulfilled, knowing that something is indeed wrong. We fulfilled law, but there were no tears, no remorse, and no thanksgiving for the gospel of Jesus. There is no serendipitous relief that we have emptied from the inner most recesses of our

soul our gratitude to our God for His love of us through His Son.

Consider this from the perspective of what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him (Jn 4:23).*

Understood in the historical context of when this statement was made by Jesus, the statement carries with it an incredible meaning. If we look close, this statement reveals the gospel motivation that is at the heart of the context in which He made the statement. Consider the following: First, the statement was made in view of the cross to come. We assume, therefore, that the cross to come in the life of the Samaritan woman, and thousands of others who would obey the gospel, would be a paradigm shift in worship.

Second, in the not too distant future from when Jesus made this statement, true worshipers would worship “in truth.” However, there were worshipers of God at the time the statement was made. The indication is that something different was coming that would judge one to be a “true worshiper.” What would determine “true worship” would be the motivation for worshipping, which motivation had not existed with believers from the beginning of time.

Third, the true worshiper would worship in spirit and in truth. The “spirit and truth” had to be something different

than the motivation for worship that existed before Jesus came into this world. Though David and Abraham worshiped God, there would be true worshipers in the future.

Fourth, the Father would accept those who worshiped in “spirit and truth,” though He was also accepting the worship of those who had worshiped Him since the beginning of time. He accepted David’s worship, though there was a different motivation that stimulated David’s worship than the worship that was coming. It was not that God did not seek David’s worship. What Jesus was emphasizing was that there would be a different motivation for worship yet in the future.

Fifth, there were true worshipers right there at the time whom Jesus was in their midst. He was the gospel in action at that time, and would be the final revelation of the gospel at the cross, in the resurrection and in the ascension. The worship of Jesus’ immediate disciples had changed in His presence. As they began to realize who He was, their worshipful response to His presence was as Thomas: “*My Lord and my God*” (Jn 20:28; see Mt 14:33). In the paradigm shift in worship, God would not accept legal worship according to law or locations, specifically the Sinai law. He would accept only the worship that was motivated by a recognition that Jesus is both Lord and God.

In the context of Jesus’ statement of John 4:23, Jesus had listened to the Samaritan woman who explained the worship of her fathers who worshiped on

“this mountain,” and the worship center of the Jews in Jerusalem (Jn 4:20). But Jesus responded, “*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father*” (Jn 4:21). What Jesus meant was that never again would there be a legally designated place of worship for those who believed in Jesus and obeyed the gospel. And since there would be no designated places of worship, then worship would be spontaneous anywhere and at any time.

Jesus taught that the true motive for worship would be generated at any time in the hearts of those who were driven by what was coming. And what was coming was the fulfillment of all prophecy concerning the gospel of the atoning sac-

rifice, glorious resurrection over death, and the consummation of the kingship of the Son of God in His ascension to the right hand of the Father. This inspiring good news (gospel) would generate worship within the hearts of those who obeyed the gospel. Those who sought God through obedience of the gospel would be those whom God would seek to be His true worshipers. No ceremonies would be needed. No purpose-built facilities, no instrumental noise, nor legally acted out ceremonies would be necessary to draw forth worship from the hearts and minds of those who bowed down in appreciation for what God had done for them through the offering of the incarnate Son of God.

## Chapter 5

### GOSPEL WORSHIP

Those who walk in gratitude of the gospel of the Son of God need no official orders of worship nor commands in order to be moved to together with other worshipers. They need no choreographed ceremonies in order to fall on their faces in thanksgiving for the God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. True worship is simply a spontaneous outpouring from the heart of an individual who has sensed the awesomeness of God’s love that was poured out on the cross for our sins.

If Jesus were to appear before us at this very moment, we would not call for a “book of worship.” We would not wait

for someone to plug in a guitar. We would not call for an assembly. We would simply, reverently and fearfully, fall down on our faces in worship. It is for this very reason that any worship that does not surround the heart of men with the incarnational offering of the Son of God, cannot be worship of God according to the true worship about which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Those folks who do not often gather around the Supper of the Lord need to seriously consider this point.

When the gospel was finalized in the world, all other worship of God was nullified. Paul announced that the times



of ignorance of the gospel was overlooked by God. But now God calls all men to bow down in response to the incarnational offering of His Son and in view of the coming judgment by the Son. He no longer accepts worship that is based on ignorance of who He is (At 17:22,213,30,31). All former worship became vain and obsolete when Jesus ascended to the Father. All other worship before the ascension was not based on the gospel by which we are saved. A wrong motive for worship since the cross, resurrection and ascension, cannot produce an acceptable worship of the God who gave His only begotten Son. No worship is true if it bypasses the truth of the gospel of Jesus.

This brings us to a better understanding of Jesus' rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees: "*In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mk 7:7). The scribes and Pharisees not only tried to worship God legally by law, they also added their own religious rites in order to guarantee that their worship would supposedly be accepted. Unfortunately, in making all their additions of traditions, they forgot the law. As a result, they self-righteously worshiped according to their own religious rites (Rm 10:1-3; see Mk 7:1-9). They were as the Athenians who worshiped what they imagined in their minds and fashioned with their hands (At 17:24,25).

We learn a very important point from the scribes and Pharisees: **There is no legal formula devised by man that would constitute true worship.** Accept-

able worship does not result from the performance of any legal ceremonies of worship. Worship cannot be legally acted out. The reasons for this is in the fact that we cannot keep law perfectly in order to justify our worship before God according to law. The scribes and Pharisees tried this. They were masters at creating acts of worship after the traditions of the fathers. They surrounded the Sinai law with so many ceremonial acts of obedience that the law was certainly obeyed in all its legal requirements. However, the original intent of the law was forgotten. Subsequently, their worship was in vain. **We are forced to the conclusion that true worship of God can never be accomplished by any legal performances on the part of the worshipers to legally perform worship.** True worship is simply not a performance of acting out laws, whether laws from God or our own laws. And from the Greeks, we learn that worship cannot be made acceptable through the construction of great temples and religious idols we would make with our hands.

The reason for this conclusion is obvious. Once the assembled worshipers accomplish certain legal acts of worship, then they feel they can go on their way from the "hour of worship" with the deceived notion that they have legally worshiped the Father in spirit and in truth. What Jesus was stating in the context of John 4 was that "in spirit" and "in truth" does not refer to actions or places of legal worship, but to responses. What He meant by using the phrase "in truth" was not the establishment of a legal system of

worship ceremonies. He was revealing what God was at the time preparing through the One who was standing before the Samaritan woman. He was preparing Jesus for the cross. **Jesus was the truth through whom all men must come to the Father in spirit.** He was the revelation of the Word to man, which revelation would inspire worshipful hearts to give praise to God (Jn 1:1,2). The gospel, therefore, inspires worship. Gospel worship is a response to the gospel of Jesus.

In both phrases of John 4:24, Jesus was leading His audience to the cross, resurrection and to His ascension to be King over all things. Through the cross, He was leading the people to the heart of God, and thus, the true motivation that would generate true worshipers. True worship would always be an inward response to God who outwardly put His heart on the cross. No outward performances or creations of our hands could take the place of the heart of men who would worshipfully respond to the heart of God.

We must view worship “in truth” from the perspective of how Paul defended the gospel against those who wanted to continue to worship legally according to law. These were those who were denying the “truth of the gospel” by preaching a gospel of legal justification (Gl 1:6-9).

Paul’s use of the phrase “truth of the gospel” in the Galatian letter would be misinterpreted by the legalist, those to whom Paul wrote to rebuke. The “truth of the gospel” was being denied because there were those in Jerusalem and Galatia

who sought to bring the disciples under certain laws in order that they be legally justified before God (See At 15:1; Gal 2:5). When Peter and others in Antioch “*were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel,*” Paul declared that they were behaving contrary to the gospel of freedom by which Christians have been set free. We have been set free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be saved (Gl 2:14). This is the principle of the “truth of the gospel” that we must apply to every aspect of our Christian walk, including worship. The sufficient justification of Jesus for our sins set us free from the necessity of justifying ourselves through any system of meritorious law-keeping.

In reference to worship, the legalist would assume that the phrase “truth of the gospel” must be a legal outline of ceremonies to be performed for acceptable worship. He assumes, therefore, that worship “in truth” is worship according to a legal outline of law, and thus, one must meritoriously worship according to the laws of the outline. The legalist thus formulates a legal system of lawful actions that worshipers must ceremonially perform in order to lawfully worship according to the “truth.” All other worshipers who do not perform the outline of lawful worship are judged to be worshipping in vain because the prescribed “laws of worship” are either violated or ignored.

If Peter’s actions in Antioch were not according to the “truth of the gospel,” then we must consider that some worship is not “in truth” because it is also not according to “the truth of the gos-

pel.” According to Paul’s argument to those in Galatia who were enforcing justification by law-keeping, he first identified these enforcers to be preaching “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-9). This was a “gospel” that was based on the same erroneous premise as the legalistic Jewish brethren who would bind on Christians meritorious acts of obedience that would supposedly justify one before God (See At 15:1).

What the “other-gospel” preachers had failed to see was the primary premise upon which Paul based the entirety of his argument. It was an argument against meritorious law-keeping that denied the truth of the gospel. The premise of his argument was based on one resounding principle of the truth of the gospel. Paul revealed this truth: “*A man is not justified by law*” (Gl 2:16). To the Roman disciples, he was more emphatic: “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith [in the gospel of grace] apart from works of law*” (Rm 3:28). In other words, through the perfect keeping of any law, including the law of Christ, one cannot justify himself before God. The reason for this truth is axiomatic in that **no man can either live or worship perfectly according to law** (See Rm 3:23).

The gospel set us free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be justified before God. Peter’s actions in Antioch of withdrawing from the Gentiles because he was intimidated by those who sought to enforce law-keeping in order to be saved (At 15:1), was an action that was contrary to our freedom from justifying ourselves through

perfect law-keeping. For this reason, therefore, his behavior, with Barnabas and other Jews in Antioch who withdrew from the Gentiles, was not according to the gospel of freedom that we have in Christ.

Some have sought to dodge the force of what the Holy Spirit said in the statements of Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:28. They have sought to follow some translators who slipped the definite article “the” into the text of both passages in order that the text read, “the law.” In doing this they have sought to divert the power of Paul’s argument away from us by presumptuously assumption that Paul was speaking specifically of the Sinai law. But Paul was addressing any law by which we might presume we can justify ourselves before God apart from His grace. By works of any law, it is not possible to justify oneself before God simply because no man can keep any system of law perfectly.

It is true that the Sinai law is dead and gone (Rm 7:1-4). We know that we are not under the Sinai law. Under that law, the scribes and Pharisees sought to legally, and thus, meritoriously worship God through a self-imposed system of religious rites. However, Jesus judged that their worship was in vain because they sought to worship God legally according to the strictness of law-keeping.

The problem was not in the Sinai law, but in how they sought to implement the law in their lives. In order to keep the law in the strictness of its precepts, the Jews added precept upon precept in order that the law be kept. This was vi-

tally important to those of the religion of Judaism. They believed that meritorious obedience to law indebted God to justify them before Him. But Jesus judged this system of law-keeping to be in vain (See Mk 7:1-9).

If we would today seek to worship according to the same system of meritorious law-keeping, then we would receive the same judgment that Jesus pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees. We would be denying the truth of the gospel (Gl 2:5,24; Cl 1:5). The inherent fallacy of worshipping God according to a self-justifying system of law is that *“all have sinned”* (Rm 3:23). But the gospel revealed God’s righteousness *“that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus”* (Rm 3:26).

**The contradiction within the theology of those who seek to worship God according to a meritorious system of law is that Jesus set Christians free from meritorious worship by law.** But this does not mean that the worshiper has a right to worship God without lawfully doing so according to His instructions. If one would seek to worship without any knowledge of God, then we are worshipping ignorantly. This point is certainly in the meaning of what Paul wrote concerning the vain worship in which the Jews involved themselves.

*For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness [justification] and seeking to establish their own righteousness [justification], have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:2).*

In the letter to the Romans, Paul gave the example of Abraham who was not justified by works of law when he was called on by God to walk by faith (Rm 4:1-3). He then applied Abraham’s principle of faith as an example for all those who would attempt to be meritoriously justified before God according to law, including any legal system of worship as was practiced by the scribes and Pharisees who tried such, but ended up worshipping in vain (Mk 7:1-9).

We must apply Paul’s conclusion to those who would deny the truth of the gospel in their efforts to meritoriously worship God as the scribes and Pharisees. Paul thus wrote, *“Now to him who works [meritoriously in worship], the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt”* (Rm 4:4). Herein is legal worship a denial of the truth of the gospel of grace, and thus another gospel. If one, as the scribes and Pharisees, would seek to meritoriously worship God according to law, **then he would be putting God in debt to accept his worship.** Once the legal performance of ceremonies was concluded with a “closing prayer,” then the worshiper would go on his way, having obligated God to accept his legally performed ceremonies of worship. This is a denial of the truth of the gospel. This was not the worship “in truth” that Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman.

The gospel of Jesus on the cross set us free from the meritorious works of law unto death. We have not ...

... received a spirit of bondage again to fear [of breaking law], but you have received a spirit of adoption [through the gospel of Jesus] by which we cry [in worshipful thanksgiving], 'Abba, Father!' (Rm 7:15).

Christians worship because they have been redeemed from the curse of meritorious law-keeping (Gl 3:10). The curse of law is that we are all lawbreakers, and thus, we all fall legally under the condemnation of law that punishes lawbreakers.

At the conclusion of the argument on this matter, Paul reminded the Roman disciples that because of the gospel, nothing can separate us from the love of God that was revealed on the cross (Rm 8:31-39). We worship God in response to this gospel of grace. If our worship is not perfect according to law, we are still accepted by God. He will not cast us away if we worship imperfectly according to law. Therefore, we do not worship God in order to put Him in debt to accept our worship.

True worship in spirit needs no law to cry out, "Abba, Father." If we would attempt to resort to a law of worship in order to self-sanctify ourselves, and thus put God in debt to accept our worship, then we are no better than the scribes and Pharisees. Paul is so adamant about this point that he reminded the Galatians, "You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace" (Gl 5:4). In other words, if we seek to legally worship God according to a "perfect" meritorious sys-

tem of law, then we have denied the gospel of grace. If we presume to obligate God to accept our legally performed worship, and justify us on the basis of our legal worship, then we have denied the gospel of grace.

If we assume that our worship is legally perfect, then there would be no need for grace in reference to our worship. If we lead ourselves to believe that we have meritoriously performed laws of worship perfectly, then we have deceived ourselves. We are not worshipping straightforwardly according to the truth of the gospel. Our worship is thus not according to the truth of the gospel. It is not "in truth." We are thus seeking to be obedient to another gospel than the gospel that sets us free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in reference to worship (See Gl 5:1).

Consider the fact that the interpretation of some in reference to "in spirit" and "in truth" establish a paradox. It is correctly understood that "in spirit" refers to the spiritual outpouring of one's heart in response to the gospel. However, it is also assumed that "in truth" refers to an outward performance of ceremonial acts of worship according to law. Herein is the paradox. The points of the outlined worship can be performed without any "spirit" being involved. It is assumed that if one would simply go through the outline of acts, then God is obligated to accept our worship. However, if our performance of the outlined acts of worship are used to generate a "spiritual" response in worship, then the outline becomes the crutch upon which

we strive to generate a worshipful spirit. We never consider the fact that if one “act” of the outline cannot be performed, then we assume that our worship is not complete. It cannot be complete until all the dots are connected on the outlined acts of worship.

We need a reality check on what we are actually saying. Suppose we lived in a jungle or desert and did not have access to bread or fruit of the vine for the Supper. Does this mean that we could never worship God “in truth” until all the performances of the outline are completed, which would include the Supper? We sometimes forget that worship is based on love because the worshiper is responding to the love of God what was poured out through the incarnational offering of His Son. It is love that should generate worship, not legal conformity to an outline of legal ceremonies.

It is easy for love to stand outside the “church house” when assemblies are simply a legal performance of acts of worship. We often forget that it is the gospel of God’s love that brings us together to celebrate the grace by which

we have been set free. Christians love one another because God loved them through the gospel of the cross (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19). However, assemblies, according to law, often do not reflect love among the attendees. It is for this reason that thousands of people leave assemblies today without experiencing love. They faithfully and ceremoniously go through a system of legal assembly laws, but they experienced no love, even from fellow spectators sitting at their sides. We sincerely do not think that this is what the Lord had in mind when He encouraged the disciples to assemble with one another in order to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25).

Therefore, we must seek to restore the assembly of love by which we are to be identified as the people of a God of love (Jn 13:34,35). It is gospel assemblies as this that we seek to “attend.” Love “mandates” that we worship because we want to, not because we have to according to the mandates of law. Confidence in our worship is measured by tears, not by some checked off point on a legal outline of worship.

## Chapter 6

### LEGALIZED WORSHIP

Because the Christian is justified by faith in the grace of God, he or she cannot worship God contrary to the gospel of grace. *“Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith **apart from the works of law**”* (Rm 3:28). In fact, the Holy Spirit proclaimed, *“**By works of***

*law **no flesh will be justified**”* (Gl 2:16). The Holy Spirit’s message is that because we cannot obey law perfectly, we cannot be justified before God through law without grace.

It is a contradiction to assume that we can establish an outward recognizable

system of worship according to perfect law-keeping in order to self-justify ourselves inwardly after we have performed a designated system of laws of worship. It is impossible to establish a performance of supposed worship laws whereby we feel that we have justified ourselves for the week if we have legally performed the laws of worship perfectly. The religious leaders of Israel tried this, but to no avail. It led them to a hypocritical behavior. They would perform their legal acts of worship outwardly, but inwardly they were full of dead men's bones (Mt 23:27). Once we realize that we cannot be justified by a legalized worship, then we will focus totally on the grace of God who put His Son on the cross.

If we are justified by faith through the grace of the gospel, then there is no need for a legal system of worship in order to supposedly guarantee that our justification before God is secured through a perfect performance of some system of legalities. **How can those who have been set free from attempted justification through perfect law-keeping, bring themselves again under law in order to supposedly worship God perfectly according to law?**

There was never a legal system of worship established in the New Testament by which worshipers could compare one system of supposedly lawful worship with another. Worship is generated in our hearts when we realize the crucifixion of the heart of God on the cross. The response to this gospel does not produce a legalized worship. If we seek to do such,

then our hearts are moved away from the gospel of grace in order to focus on whether we have legally performed our legal worship. If we are focusing on our legal worship performances, then we digress into arguments over how the legal ceremonies are performed during our legal assemblies.

Legalized worship often leads to two "categories" of worship in our thinking and behavior. First, there is the supposedly lawful worship that is conducted by the performance of certain acts of worship in an "official" assembly. This worship is usually conducted on Sunday morning, which is supposedly the official time of worship.

Second, there is the worship that is performed outside the "official" worship on Sunday morning. The legalized worship must be performed with the completion of certain acts of worship. The other worship can be accomplished without performing the acts of official worship during the "hour of worship." Therefore, one is "official" and the other can exist without the restrictions of ceremonial laws.

There could possibly be a third "partial" worship that is conducted during an "official" assembly when there is no fruit of the vine or bread present to conduct the "act" of the Supper. In some cases, when there is no money to be contributed, we might feel that our self-sanctifying act of worship was not complete because we were personally unable to perform the act of contribution in worship. We have come across many brethren who have no Bibles. They have little

teaching in their assemblies because the Bible is absent from the assembly. The only Bible they may have may be with the preacher who is on a mission somewhere else in the region.

The reason for reminding ourselves of these realities is to reveal our inconsistencies, if not our Pharisaical definition of legalized worship. Worship from our hearts can more often be determined by a tear in the eye than a fat check thrown into the collection plate. Whether in an “official” assembly, or alone in the wilderness, it is the tear that reveals to God a contrite heart of worship.

A good example of the division that legalized worship can often cause was illustrated on a visit we once made to the country of Malawi. We were in Malawi, attending a meeting of several Christians in the area who had come together for a seminar on the Bible. During the week-end meeting, a wise elder of the sponsoring church group stood up to administer the Supper of the Lord. When it came time to serve the fruit of the vine, he realized that there were many in the assembly who had caused contention on whether we could use one cup or many cups in the “legal” service of the Supper to distribute the fruit of the vine among the people. So he wisely had in his hand one large pitcher that he referred to as “the cup.” He said to the audience, “Jesus took the cup.” The wise old elder then said, “Because there are so many of us here today, we will distribute the contents of the cup by using many cups I have before me here.” He then poured the contents of “the cup” into the many cups,

and then served the multitude.

Some in the audience immediately saw the inconsistencies that we have created by legalizing acts of worship in the assembly. The contention among some was often based on legal performances of law, while at the same time they forgot the gospel that the bread and fruit of the vine represented. They forgot the gospel in their contention to remember the gospel, and thus revealed that they were not living by the gospel in arguing over legal worship ceremonies.

We wonder how many there are who have brought themselves into contention with one another over legal worship, and thus, denied the truth of the gospel of grace by which we are justified before God. To such people we would make the same statement that Paul made to some brethren in Jerusalem who were claiming that there were brethren who were worshiping in vain because they had not been circumcised “according to law”: ***“To whom we did not yield in submission even for an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”*** (Gl 2:5).

Of course some might object and declare that there would be those who would not partake of the Supper unless they were under law to do so. Some judge that others are worshiping in vain because they are not partaking of the Supper every first day of the week as they suppose the law states. But there is no such law. Acts 20:7 is not an imperative statement of command. If we would change an example into a command, then we have twisted the Scriptures.



Jesus indeed said, “*Do this in remembrance of Me*” (Lk 22:19). At the time He made this statement, however, the disciples understood little about what He was saying. They had little understanding of the cross that was going to take place only a few hours after He made this statement. In other words, there was nothing yet to be remembered in reference to the gospel other than Himself who was at the time headed for the cross.

However, after the cross, and seven weeks after this meeting in an upper room, on the day of Pentecost and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they knew the whole story (Jn 14:26). It was then that they needed no commandment to do that about which Jesus spoke to them in the infancy of their legal religiosity on the night He took the cup and bread. The cross had set them free from perfect law-keeping. From Pentecost on, they wanted to “eat and drink,” not because of law, **but because of a worshipful thanksgiving of what Jesus had poured out on the cross for them.** Those who neglect the Supper, therefore, fail to understand as blood-cleansed saints, the significance of the cross. We must remember that we are driven to the table of the Supper because of thanksgiving, not because of law.

However, if we do yield to legal matters where God never established such, then we are thinking that we can be justified by our own perfect law-keeping on Sunday morning, and not by the grace of the cross. If this is the case, then we are obligating God to accept our worship on the basis of how perfectly we have kept our legal acts of worship. **We**

**are obligating God to forgive our sins on the basis of our legal performance to partake of the Supper. What we have done is shift the atonement for our sins from the cross to our meritorious obedience to the “law of the Supper.”** We forget that we have been forgiven, and thus we partake. We do not partake in order to be forgiven. If we are observing law in order to meritoriously justify ourselves, then we are not living according to the **truth of the gospel** that set us free from self-justification through perfect keeping of law.

Another example to consider in this context is what happened in Antioch when some “circumcision brethren” came up from Jerusalem to bind law where God had not bound. They came to intimidate Peter and the other Jewish brethren who were in fellowship with the “uncircumcised” Gentile brethren. Peter, Barnabas and the Jewish brethren of Antioch were carried away with hypocrisy on this occasion. They had previously affirmed that they lived according to the truth of the gospel of freedom from justification through law-keeping. But when they were intimidated by the legalistic circumcision brethren from Jerusalem to withdraw from the Gentile brethren, they were living contrary to the truth of the gospel. Paul made the following direct statement about this behavior: “... *I saw that they were **not straightforward about the truth of the gospel** ...*” (Gl 2:14).

If someone from Jerusalem would by chance visit our assembly on Sunday, and there was no bread or fruit of the vine

available, would we as Peter and the other Jewish brethren in Antioch, be embarrassed because we were fellowshiping with one another because there was no bread or fruit of the vine?

When we deny the gospel by legally trying to worship God according to the perfect execution of law, we are not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel of grace and freedom from the necessity of keeping law perfectly. The actions of Peter and others placed them in a situation of being condemned before God. Likewise, by our actions we can also deny the gospel by which we are seeking to live if we succumb to the intimidation of legalists who would bind perfect law-keeping where God has justified us already by His grace. If we seek to justify ourselves through “Supper-keeping” apart from grace, then we are as the scribes and Pharisees who bound perfect law-keeping where God did not bind. As Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of those who withdrew from the Gentiles in Antioch, we would be denying the truth of the gospel. However, if we do such, we pray that someone will do for us as Paul did with Peter: *“I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned”* (Gl 2:11). Peter stood condemned be-

cause he succumbed to those who would bind perfect law-keeping as a means of salvation.

Christians worship God according to the instructions of His word. They do not do so to be justified before Him because they presume to keep His instructions perfectly. In fact, they pour out their hearts in thanksgiving to God for their justification at the cross because they realize they cannot keep perfectly all the instructions. True worship is offered in thanksgiving for the God of grace who has saved us from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to have our worship accepted. It is for this reason that we are moved to the table of the Lord. We are not moved there by law, but by an overwhelming appreciation for the grace of God that was revealed through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God. Those who neglect, or even marginalize the Supper of the Lord, have not yet understood the heart of God that was nailed to the cross on our behalf. They have usually focused their attention on the performance of their religious ceremonies in order to entertain themselves at the expense of remembering the Lord in His Supper.

## Chapter 7

### ASSEMBLIES THAT REFLECT LOVE

There is something that is dramatically different between the assemblies of the early Christians and the typical assemblies that are common in the religious world today. This difference is interest-

ing because of where we are in our assembly culture today and where the early Christians were in their participatory gospel assemblies wherein individuals with the gifts of the Holy Spirit were

given an opportunity to edify the body.

We must not forget that the regular assemblies in the early church were **small groups of disciples who met in the homes of the members** (See At 2:46; Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15,16). There were possibly only a few large assemblies as we witness today, simply because the early Christians had no large facilities in which to meet. They met from house to house, for there were no purpose-built church buildings, no civic halls or school auditoriums in which to meet. Their assemblies thus reflected their personal relationships with one another in a spirit of love. We must always keep this in mind as we approach the New Testament in reference to the function of the disciples in any New Testament assembly. If we do not do this, we will miss a correct understanding of the function of the body of Christians as it is addressed in the New Testament. We will distort the meaning of those texts that speak of the relationship the early disciples were exhorted to have with one another, as well as when they came together in assembly.

The first premise upon which we must study this subject is to understand that **the early Christians' common obedience to the gospel was reflected in their participatory function with one another when they came together in the assembly of their homes** (See At 2:44-47). It may be that some had bound on themselves the assembly structure of the unbelievers, and subsequently never instituted the "one another" participatory function that should naturally result from believers who have obeyed the unifying

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, those who understood the implications of the gospel carried out their unity with one another when they came together.

Because they were only five to six years in the faith, it seems that the new Christians in Corinth were having some trouble in their early relationships with one another. They were behaving in their house assemblies as the pagan unbelievers of the local temple in Corinth. They were behaving as such because in their infancy as disciples, they had not yet been perfected in love. Their assembly with one another was dysfunctional because their love for one another was dysfunctional.

The instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were written on the background of the dysfunctional assembly behavior of novice Christians who had not yet spiritually grown in love. Because they had not grown in love, love was not reflected for one another when they came together in assembly. We assume that the instructions of the context were directed toward their common meeting in their homes. However, there is textual evidence that the assembly about which Paul wrote was an occasional meeting that all the disciples throughout the province of Achaia had when they all came together into one place. The statements of 1 Corinthians 14 seem to indicate this occasional provincial meeting when "*the whole assembly gathers in one place*" (1 Co 14:23).

Since the letters of both 1 and 2 Corinthians were directed to all the Christians in Achaia, we would assume that

Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11-14 were in reference to the provincial meetings that took place occasionally in the city of Corinth (See 1 Co 16:15; 2 Co 1:1; 9:1,2; 11:10; compare 1 Th 1:7,8). It was this occasional assembly that some were corrupting with their unloving sectarianism and competitive use of their gifts (See 1 Co 1:12,13).

Some were behaving in the provincial meeting as those unbelievers who behaved in the pagan feast meetings at the temple. The assemblies of unbelievers of the provincial religionists were **exclusive**. They were the opportunity for self-exalting speakers to seize the opportunity of any gathering to voice their opinions, become unruly, or take up a contribution. Some of the arrogant and self-appointed leaders among the disciples in Achaia were behaving in the same way during the assemblies of the disciples, especially those who were gifted with languages.

Though Paul's instructions were possibly directed to large assemblies, the instructions would also apply to the regular weekly assemblies in their homes. In fact, the unruly behavior in the regular house assemblies would have brought on even more disruption to the participatory environment of the home meetings.

This is a common challenge today when those who are accustomed to large "church assemblies" come into the context of a house fellowship. They naturally bring their behavior of the large assembly into the participatory environment of a house fellowship. In the context of the Corinthians, it seems that some

were doing the same. They were bringing the drunken feast behavior of the common temple assembly into the assemblies of the disciples. In doing so, they had even turned the Supper of the Lord into a drunken ordeal wherein those who traveled from great distances throughout the province were ignored by the gluttonous behavior of those who ate all the food of the love feast before everyone arrived (See 1 Co 11:17-22). They were behaving as they did when they were involved in the drunken and gluttonous temple feast.

But the Holy Spirit would have none of this in the context of the members of the body in any assembly of the disciples. He thus corrected the Corinthian dysfunctional assemblies by correcting those who were walking contrary to the gospel of love and unity (1 Co 1:10). Through His instructions of rebuke, He mandated that the assemblies of the disciples should be **inclusive**. The eating of the love feast was to be inclusive, and reflective of their love for one another.

The partaking of the Lord's Supper was to be inclusive. The ministry of their gifts for edification was to be inclusive of all who were gifted to exhort the body. And because the assemblies were to be inclusive, the assemblies were to be based on the members' consideration for one another (See Hb 10:24,25). The following statement of the Spirit voiced this inclusive participatory "order": "**When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a language, has a revelation, has an interpretation**" (1 Co 14:26).

The assumption of the statement is that every gifted person was to be given the opportunity to exhort the assembled body. However, if one gifted with speaking in languages was present without one gifted with interpretation, then the one speaking in languages was to remain silent. No one who spoke in a language that only he could understand was allowed to speak in the assembly.

On the background of the first century miraculous gifts of ministry, the assemblies of the early disciples were always to be inclusive of each gifted attendee for the benefit of the whole body. In any individual assembly, “everyone” who was present did not have the gift of languages or the gift of interpretation, or some other gift. In order to emphasize this point, Paul presented questions in chapter 12 that the Corinthians, as well as we, could correctly answer: “*Are all prophets?*” (1 Co 12:29). The answer is, NO. “*Are all teachers?*” (1 Cor 12:29). NO. “*Do all speak with languages?*” (1 Co 12:30). NO. It is not that there were those in every assembly who had something to say, or must use their endowed gift for the benefit of the whole. However, since the gifts were to be used for the benefit of others than the gifted, in every assembly where the gifted were present, **there must be made an opportunity for the gifted to exercise their gifts for the “profit of all”** (1 Co 12:7).

The early Christians were meeting in small assemblies in homes in order that the gifted be brought into direct contact with those who needed the ministry of

the gifts. In such communicative assemblies, not all the gifted individuals were always present to use their gift for the edification of the body. However, at least everyone had the opportunity to receive edification when a gifted person was present.

If there were those in every assembly who had something to say, **then they were to be given the opportunity to exercise their gift for the edification of the whole body.** Assemblies that did not give an opportunity for any prophet, teacher, or speaker in languages, to speak, **became exclusive.** In the Corinthian context, the prophets (teachers) were being marginalized by those who prided themselves with their gift of languages. This was the problem in some house assemblies of the Corinthians. Some assemblies, therefore, become exclusive and competitive, if not rude and offensive. From what we understand from the Holy Spirit, instructions in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 teach one very important principle: **No one gifted person in the assembly has a right to dominate the assembly.**

The problem in Corinth was that some of the assemblies became exclusive because there were those who were behaving as they did in their former temple assemblies as unbelievers. In this particular situation, there were those who were trying to dominate the assembly of the saints by the use of their particular gift. Because of pride, **those who spoke in languages wanted to use the assembly as an opportunity to boast in the use of their gift.**

Competition among gifted individuals disrupted the unity of all the believers. There was competition between those who were gifted with languages and those who were gifted with teaching (prophets). In this particular situation in Corinth, the prophets and “tongue speakers” were causing confusion because both were in competition with one another as to who would dominate the house assembly and draw the attention of those who were present. We can only imagine how offensive this became as one teacher always dominated the group, while other teachers in the same house assembly had to sit in silence.

Compare this with our common large assembly scenario today. One prophet (teacher) shows up with his message to be shared with the whole assembly. During the assembly, he is given the sole opportunity to dominate the assembly with what he has prepared to say, while other teachers, who may have a message, are not allowed to share their prepared message. In the same manner, a single song leader comes with his list of songs by which he dominates the singing of the assembly with the songs he has chosen to sing. All other song leaders are silenced because of one dominate song leader. Other songs that are on the hearts of the members are not given an opportunity to be expressed.

There was certainly a difference between the large temple assembly in the first century and the large church assembly today. Nevertheless, the leadership behavior that is cultured by large assemblies does not do well when brought into

the small assembly of a home. The leaders of large assemblies often have a difficult time transforming into the participatory culture of a small group meeting. Some of the Corinthians were having a difficult time in this area. Nevertheless, they had to move from the customary large temple assembly culture of their former years in temple religion into the small house assemblies of the saints without behaving as they did in the temple assemblies.

In large assemblies, it is necessary to place limitations on how many gifted people can minister their gifts to the body of people who have gathered at any particular time. But this necessity must not move us to overlook the assemblies of the early church to whom the Holy Spirit gave the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14. The problem was that the majority of the gifted were required to sit continually in silence. When this happens, both spiritual and numerical growth are stymied because gifted members cannot use their gifts for the edification of the body.

One common answer to this problem for large assemblies today is to give an opportunity for all gifted individuals to use their gifts at different assemblies. In this way no one person is allowed to silence any other person who has the same gift. It should be the objective of the whole body to encourage every gifted member of the whole body to use their gifts for the edification of the whole body, though the exercising of the gifts does not necessarily have to be at the same assembly.

Sometimes the problem arises when

a gifted member would rather sit in silence while others use their gifts to the edification of the body. If this is the situation, then the “silent sitter” must be exhorted not to bury his talent, but to use it for the edification of the body.

In order to maintain order, the assemblies of unbelievers designated those who would participate in an assembly. If there were no order of assembly of unbelievers, chaos often prevailed in the assemblies. We must keep in mind that it is not wrong to have an order of assembly. However, if the order is to prevent disunity in a Christian assembly, then we must go deeper into the problem of why disunity would prevail among those who are supposed to be living the gospel of Jesus. This is exactly what Paul did when he wrote on the subject of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

We must also keep in mind that some order of assembly is necessary for large assemblies. However, we often forget that the instructions of 1 Corinthians were given to those who were meeting in small assemblies in the homes of the members. The common assembly today is often composed of hundreds, if not thousands. In order to prevent chaos in these assemblies, there must be orders of assembly. But this was not the historical context in Corinth among the house assemblies. Paul’s instructions to correct the Corinthian problems in assembly must be understood in the context that the members were meeting in small groups throughout the province of Achaia. The same would be true of the assemblies of the disciples wherever there were Christians in the first century.

In our efforts to prevent assembly disunity in large assemblies, we have incorporated orders of assembly. Such orders were necessary in the assembly function of the first century unbelievers, which assemblies often became chaotic as the one in the temple of Artemis (Diana) in Ephesus when Paul once visited the city (See Ep 19:28,29). However, in our Western institutional obsession with order, we have forgotten one very important point that brought order to the assemblies of the early disciples without becoming exclusive of “everyone” who would come to the assembly to minister a prayer, a song, a message, etc. The most important “order of assembly” that brought order to the assemblies of the early disciples was written on their hearts. Love was written on their hearts, and thus love prevailed when they came together in assembly.

We must think for a moment on this point because our common assemblies today are so far removed from the early church “order of love.” To begin, we must ask why did the Holy Spirit place the greatest chapter in the Bible on love right in the middle of His instructions on how the assemblies of the members were to function? 1 Corinthians 13 is not there because it was time for the Spirit in the document of 1 Corinthians to complete a legal outline on doctrine. It is there because there was dysfunction on the part of some in the assembly who sought to selfishly dominate the assembly with their particular gift. They were not behaving in their assemblies according to the gospel of love.

Some gifted individuals wanted to exclude others from using their gifts in the assembly. A teacher wanted to present the only lesson of the assembly. The song leader wanted to sing only his list of songs. Our inquiry is how the Spirit, who determined the distribution of the gifts (1 Co 12:6,11), corrected their assembly dysfunction in view of the principle that “everyone” must be given the opportunity to exercise his gift when the disciples come together in one place.

According to 1 Corinthians 13, the Spirit’s “order of assembly” was based on the gospel of love by which the mem-

bers of the body in assembly were to relate with one another. Paul wrote, “*Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not exalt itself, is not puffed up*” (1 Co 13:4). 1 Corinthians 13, therefore, must first be understood and applied in the context of how Christians are to relate with one another in an assembly context. After identifying the Corinthians’ disorder when they came together, Paul introduced love-organized assemblies with the statement, “*And yet I show to you a more excellent way*” (1 Co 12:31).

## Chapter 8

### LOVE-ORGANIZED ENCOUNTERS

Here is how we should interpret the instructions of 1 Corinthians 13 in the context of Paul’s guidelines of love:

Love suffers long when several prophets speak on and on because they have something heavy on their hearts. Love does not jump up and say, “It’s my turn.” Love does not sit there and listen, while thinking, “I could teach better than him.” Love does not say, “I wish I were better than him.” Love is not puffed up and says, “I am a better song leader,” or, “I can word a better prayer” or “I can preach that subject better.” Love does not dominate the assembly by exalting one’s gift above others.

**When the gospel of loving others as Jesus loved us is made the foundation**

**of any assembly of the disciples, then order always prevails in the assembly.**

The gifted must remember that their gift is given to them by the Holy Spirit. The gift is not given to exalt one’s self in the presence of others, neither is the gift given in order that the receiver might seek to self-sanctify himself by the use of the gift. It is given in order to minister to others. Love does not say, “We need to sing more songs because we sing in order to be right before God.” Leading singing is for the benefit of others, not for one’s self. In any assembly of the saints, it is the love of the saints for one another that brings order to all assemblies. We minister our gifts for the love of others, not for the purpose of putting ourselves on display before others. “*The manifestation of the Spirit is given to ev-*



*everyone to profit all*" (1 Co 12:7). (Some preachers need to rethink this point.)

Love encourages all things to "*be done for edification*" (1 Co 14:26). Love prevents chaos because there is consideration for one another as members encourage love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25). When others are speaking, love is considerate to be silent and listen (1 Co 14:28). So to all the teachers, Paul wrote, "*For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be exhorted*" (1 Co 14:31).

In early house assemblies, there was given the opportunity for **all** those who had a message to share with the group. No one teacher excluded any other teacher by dominating the stage with his message. If more than one teacher was present, then no one teacher was to dominate the assembly. The order was "one by one," not one excluding the others by exalting his gift over the others. It is assumed from Paul's instructions, that those who were gifted with teaching had to be given an opportunity to teach.

When assemblies are inclusive, then they become totally different from the chaotic assemblies of unbelievers. Love inherently brings order. "*For God is not a God of confusion [as in the pagan assemblies], but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints*" (1 Co 14:33). When "*all the assemblies of the saints*" function in peace, then the world can see that there is something different about those who assemble in peace (See 1 Pt 3:15).

(Some will agree that there is no possible way for the disciples to imple-

ment all the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14 in the assemblies of the typical modern large-assembly church. Now we are getting to the point. In view of what Paul wrote, we will either have to pass over some of the Spirit's instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14 in reference to mutual edification within the assemblies, or we will have to change the structure of how each one of us will function in the environment of a participatory assembly. This is not to say that large assemblies are wrong. Paul wrote to correct disorder in such assemblies. The purpose for the instructions of the 1 Corinthians 11-14 context were at least directed to the abuses that took place in the large provincial assemblies. However, we must question the problems that can arise when the orders of worship that are used to maintain harmony in large assemblies are brought into the context of a small group of disciples in a home. When such is done, the "order" often brings stilted or formal relational behavior between brothers and sisters who assemble around a living room table.)

It seems that we have forgotten one of the most important evidences that the unbelieving world can witness when we are truly the disciples of Jesus. Jesus exhorted that by love "*all men know that you are My disciples*" (Jn 13:35). If our assemblies are inclusive without being chaotic, then the world can see that love is functioning in our assemblies. However, if there is little love, as in the Corinthian scenario, then there will be disorder. And if the assemblies are not participatory where love can be revealed in

the harmonious function of all the participants, then those unbelievers who come into our assemblies cannot experience the love by which we are to be known as the disciples of Jesus. If the assemblies of the Christians were organized after the order of any temple assembly, or according to law, then there is no opportunity for the unbeliever to witness the love of God in action in the hearts of Christians who are actively participating in a relational assembly with one another.

It is difficult to witness love in a large assembly of believers that is highly structured according to the mandate of an “order of worship.” Upon his visit to the assembly, the unbeliever only witnesses the precision by which the attendees can conduct an orderly assembly just as the Gentiles. But if we take away the directive of an “order of worship,” and place the attendees in a living room as a small group, it is then that the visiting unbeliever can experience love in action as the disciples function in a relational consideration of one another.

This should lead us to question our love for one another if our assemblies are chaotic. If we cannot have an assembly of peace without an order of assembly wherein everyone’s duties are organized with specific times, then we are probably revealing our lack of love for one another.

This is why the traditional religious culture of the “hour of worship,” that is enclosed between an “opening” and “closing” prayer, reveals more than we would confess. The belief and behavior of such assemblies reveal more “unity”

that is based on structure or law, than love. The structure of an “hour of worship” that sets between the bookends of two prayers reveals that the assembly is “unified” more on the foundation of institutional orders of assembly than on love. After all, whoever would want to “open” our love for one another with a prayer, and then close one another off with another prayer after we have performed an hour of ceremonies?

If love is to be reflected in our mutual participation in assembly, then love would demand that our being together is always too brief. We must keep in mind that if the “uninformed” (unbeliever) attends our assembly, it is not our “order of performed worship” that will convict him (1 Co 14:23,24). **It is love that convicts.** Therefore, unless our assembly is identified by the function of love, then it has lost its mark of identity as the church of Christ, and its power to convict the unbeliever. For this reason alone, it is quite impossible for an institutionalized large assembly to be the medium through which we can reach out to the unbeliever who may visit. In a large institutionalized assembly, all the unbeliever witnesses is an order of assembly that is executed with the precision of a parliamentary assembly according to *Robert’s Rules of Order*.

The good news about all this is that most of the large assembly churches of the Western world are now using small house fellowships through which they seek to manifest the love of Jesus to their neighbors. They continue to have their large assemblies, but they have realized

that large assemblies alone do not present the opportunity for the members to love others as Jesus would have us be identified by our love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). Large assembly churches that are not into small loving fellowships in the homes of the members are still basing their “unity” on organization, charismatic speakers, autocratic leadership, or “orders of worship.”

We must keep in mind that in the Corinthian context, as well as the context of all the disciples in the first century, the Christians met regularly in small fellowships in their homes on a weekly basis. For the occasional large assemblies when the Christians of the entire province of Achaia came together in one place, there was assembly chaos. At the end of chapter 14, Paul deals with this problem. He corrected chaotic large assemblies in the context of the Achaia’s occasional gathering together in one place. However, he was also correcting small assemblies wherein the pride of some in the city of Corinth was causing disorder. Some were manifesting their pride and arrogance in their assemblies by the use of their gifts. Their assemblies, therefore, were not based on love. It seems that some were bringing their behavior of the large assemblies of the temple before they were Christians into the context of the small house fellowships.

We must not forget that when Paul did give some instructions concerning “orders of assembly,” he stated that the leading participants should function orderly by speaking “one by one.” He at-

tached no “end time” to the time of speaking, or an end to the succession of the participants. Maybe we need to read again the following instructions:

*If anyone speaks in a language, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and **each in turn**, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, **let him keep silent in the assembly**, and let him speak to himself and to God. **Let two or three prophets speak**, and let the others judge. If anything is revealed to another who is sitting, let the first [sit down and] keep silent. For you can all prophesy [teach] **one by one** so that all [the audience] may learn and all may be exhorted. Now the spirits of the prophets **are subject to the prophets** (1 Co 14:27-32).*

We see no “closing prayer” to stop the preceding succession of speakers. Since the “*spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*” (1 Co 14:32), then we suppose that it is the decision of the speakers as to when to conclude the proceedings of the assembly, and not the audience. The number of speakers who had a message of exhortation must be given the opportunity to minister their word of edification. If an “hour of worship” was enforced with a “closing prayer” before all the speakers had an opportunity to speak, then the assembly would become exclusive of some speakers.

If the context of the 1 Corinthians instructions was an occasional provincial assembly of all the members in the province of Achaia, then Paul was stating that the assembly must go on until the last

speaker was finished. If the situation was a regular weekly house assembly, then any speaker who did not have an opportunity to speak could come back next week if he so chose this “order.” The final decision must be left to the speaker, for he may have something heavy on his heart that must be said. If several speakers had something heavy on their hearts, then we would assume that loving patience on the part of the audience would prevail. The assembly would continue until all the speakers, “one by one,” completed their ministry of exhortation. This is what love for the word of God and the speakers would do. Each one of us need to think about this the next time we look at our watches during the end of the Western 20-minute sermonette that has become so common.

Now herein is the behavioral nature

of the small group assemblies that characterized the Christians for over three centuries after the Pentecost of Acts 2. Because the early disciples implemented the gospel of love for one another, they easily followed the instructions of Paul: “*Let all things be done properly and in order*” (1 Co 14:40). This can be accomplished in assembly only when “love suffers a long assembly and is kind to all speakers; love does not allow any speaker to envy another speaker; love does not allow speakers to exalt themselves over one another; and as a speaker, love does not allow one’s self to be puffed up as a speaker” (1 Co 13:4). The “order of assembly” of the disciples is not written on a chalkboard, or handed out on a piece of paper. It is written on the hearts of all those who show up at the assembly with a spirit of love.

## Chapter 9

### FREEDOM AND LAW

The law of God hangs on the two principles of loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and one’s neighbor as himself (See Mt 22:36-40). Because the law “hangs” on love, then freedom from religion cannot exist without law. Those who respond to the love of God seek to know and do God’s will. They seek His will because they do not want to return to religion which is based on the law of man.

However, obedience to the will (law) of God gives no opportunity to boast because we have kept the law per-

fectly in order to demand God’s favor. The law of faith in God, Paul wrote, sets aside any boasting in reference to any proposed justification through perfect law-keeping (Rm 3:27). Paul continued that we do not set aside all law because we trust in God’s justification (Rm 3:31). On the contrary, because we trust (have faith) in God’s love for us, we seek to establish His law in our lives. It is by the law of faith, therefore, that Christians have been freed from the necessity of justifying themselves through the law-keeping of religion. But if one has come out

of a religion of law-keeping, this is usually not the end of the story.

When one is released who has been imprisoned for many years by religion, he walks outside the prison doors. His first feeling is to return to the security of the prison. He has this feeling because he subconsciously, or consciously, realizes that now he must take ownership of his freedom. He must determine for himself how he will conduct his life. And herein is the purpose of law. Law must teach the newly released prisoner how to conduct himself in society. When those who have escaped the prison of religion first walk free, they cry out, "Abba, Father." **They thus seek law from the Father in order to stay free from religion.** Jesus set them free through the justification of the cross. They stay free because they live by the law of faith, and thus need not resort to the perfect law-keeping of religion in order to be justified before God.

When Israel was finally delivered from the bondage of Egyptian captivity, the people had not yet reached Mount Sinai before they complained to Moses and Aaron about not having what was needed to survive in the wilderness. They complained about it being better with the "meat pots" in bondage than in the freedom of the Sinai Peninsula (Ex 16:3).

God knew that the people would emotionally and spiritually be disoriented in their release from bondage. So the first thing He did with the people was to march them straight to Mt. Sinai and give them instructions (law) concerning social behavior. Their minds had been institu-

tionalized in Egyptian captivity. They now had to learn how to relate with God and one another. They had to learn in the desert how to totally trust in Him. In the absence of the "meat pots" of security in prison, they now had to walk by faith in God to take care of them.

Once one is molded by "bondage mentality," it is difficult for him to enjoy the spirit of freedom. The explorer can wake up everyday with adventure on his mind in reference to new things he might discover during the day. On the other hand, one who finds comfort in the traditions of his own religion has a very difficult time venturing outside that with which he is familiar. The common phrase we hear in reference to behavioral matters in Africa is that "it's our culture." "It's our culture" brings a certain predictability about life. It erases surprises, and thus lends one to being unchangeable and susceptible to religious traditionalism. However, God deals with us in a manner by which we must deal with traditional religiosity. We are set free from religion, but we must be brought into the instructions of His will by faith. If we do not submit to His instructions (law), then we will bring ourselves into the bondage of behavior that is contrary to the will of God. We will be right back in the bondage of religion.

But there can be a problem. The problem with a fear of freedom is that we naturally seek to live according to our traditions in order to feel secure, especially if the traditions have been handed to us by our forefathers. In this way, the one who is fearful of freedom does not

have to take ownership of his own faith, even of the traditional religion that was handed to him by his forefathers. Someone else determined the traditions, and now it is only the responsibility of the heirs to continue the traditions.

This is a very common problem because those who would be free of religion do not study their Bibles. They do not study because of their fear of discovering something that might be wrong with the religious heritage they have received from their forefathers.

As long as Israel lived in the bondage of Egypt, they could easily complain about the oppression of their taskmasters. However, when the taskmasters were taken away through Israel's deliverance from bondage, the people complained in order to return to the taskmasters. For many years, they had developed a bondage culture that gave them security, even though the burdens of slavery were difficult. At least they did not have to wake up each morning as an explorer and determine by faith what they would do for the day. The freed Israelites were mentally disciplined to live under law, but in their freedom, they were emotionally insecure. So through Moses, God continued to march them to the holy mountain where they would be given law.

"Bondage mentality" became a problem among the disciples of the first century. Most of the early disciples were former Jews, and thus they had lived for centuries in the bondage of the Jews' religion. **The problem was that one who lives in the comforts of religious bondage usually never realizes that he or**

**she is actually in bondage.** No faith is challenged when one walks in bondage.

Jesus, as Moses, came to set men free from bondage. In the case of Jesus as the Deliverer, He would not only set men free from the bondage of sin, He would also set them free from the bondage of Jewish religion. Jesus once said to some Jews who believed in Him, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*" (Jn 8:31). This was not a problem at the time. But "*those Jews who believed in Him*" had no idea what He was saying or what was coming. So Jesus continued, "*And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*" (Jn 8:32). They did not understand the freedom about which Jesus spoke.

Religious people who are in the bondage of their own religiosity have a difficult time understanding that they are in bondage. The psychological reason for this is simple. Religion is a system of belief and behavior whereby and wherein one finds satisfaction and security in his own self-sanctifying performances of his religious rites or Sunday ceremonies. As long as the religionist performs the rites of his religion, then he can live within the comforts of his own religious village.

Keeping the religious culture of the fathers is comfortable. In doing so, one need not take ownership of our own destiny. This all sounds fine except for one fact. The one in bondage to his own religiosity of self-sanctification needs to have little trust [faith] in God. If one can justify himself by keeping the traditions

of the religion, then God is kept off one's back through perfect keeping the rites of the religion.

So "*those Jews who believed in*" Jesus, responded to Jesus, "*We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to anyone. How is it that You say, 'You will be made free'?*" (Jn 8:33). This is bondage denial! They had certainly forgotten that they had 1,400 years before been delivered from Egyptian bondage. They had 536 years before been delivered from the bondage of Assyria and Babylonia. And at the present, they were in the bondage of the Romans.

But Jesus was not speaking of being in the bondage of another kingdom power. It may have been that the religious leaders were getting the point, and thus, they complained that they were not in the bondage of their own religiosity. But they were, and this was the bondage from which Jesus would deliver them. When religious bondage becomes the culture of an individual, it is a fearful thing to consider leaving that cultural security bondage. So in this context, the Jews may have been arguing against being set free from what they did not consider to be the bondage of the Jews' religion (Gl 1:13).

The revelation of the gospel through Jesus was a wake-up call, a culture shock of reality, and thus, a call to freedom from religion. But offering and giving freedom to those who have been in bondage has its risks. It is difficult for some to adjust to freedom after coming out of institutionalized religion.

When gospel freedom came to

Corinth, those who were freed by the gospel were delivered from the bondage of temple religiosity. But there was a problem with some of the new converts. When Paul wrote to the disciples in Corinth, he made the statement, "*However, not everyone has this knowledge*" (1 Co 8:7). By "knowledge" he was referring to the fact that there was no longer any religious significance to eating meat, which meat the weak still associated with the offerings at the temple. So for these, he reminded everyone that "*meat does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse*" (1 Co 8:8). He said this for the sake of those disciples who were still in the bondage of their past religion in reference to eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

Those who had determined that there was no religious significance to the eating of meat were using their freedom to eat without considering the consciences of those who still had not grown out of their emotional attachment of meat to temple religion. Their minds were still in bondage to former religious rites. Paul reminded those who ate meat, "*Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies*" (1 Co 8:1). "*However,*" Paul continued, "*not everyone has this knowledge [that there is nothing religious about eating meat], for some accustomed to the idol until now eat meat as a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled*" (1 Co 8:7).

The mature disciples who had escaped temple religion had the freedom to eat any meat. But they must forego

this freedom until those who were still in the bondage of their consciences would grow up in their freedom to disassociate meat from idol religion. But until then, Paul exhorted the mature, “*But take heed lest somehow this freedom of yours [from “religious meat”] becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak*” (1 Co 8:9). Though there were those still in the bondage of certain religious scruples associated with the eating of meat, those who appreciated their freedom to eat must be considerate of the weak until they also appreciate their freedom from religious rites that they had received from their fathers.

However, the exhortation to those still in the bondage of “temple religion” was that they must eventually grow until they are as the strong and mature disciples who had completely freed themselves from temple religion. We learn from the Holy Spirit’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 8 that we can escape sin in baptism, but it takes time to free one’s mind from his former religious scruples. Through faith in God one must struggle to leave the “meat pots” in the bondage of religion, and free himself from all binding traditions. Once one has been set free from sin in obedience to the gospel, he is indeed set from the bondage of temple religion when he grows up in Christ.

Those who have already been set free from religion must be cautious with their freedom. They must be considerate of those who are still struggling to set themselves free in their minds from the bondage of their past religiosity. Paul

wrote that for the free “*all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient*” (1 Co 10:23). We have the freedom to function where there is no law, but our freedom must not infringe on the conscience of those who have not yet grown out of the bondage of past religious rites. In the Corinthian situation, some of the new Christians were struggling to enjoy their freedom in Christ. It was the responsibility of those who were mature in Christ, therefore, not to seek their own good, “*but everyone another’s good*” (1 Co 10:24). This is the law of love.

Paul voiced the complaint of the free when he wrote, “*For why is my freedom judged by another man’s conscience?*” (1 Co 10:29). In our freedom to function under grace, we must always remember our purpose as disciples. We would do as Paul in these areas. “*I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved*” (1 Co 10:33). In some things, therefore, it is right to give up one’s freedoms for the purpose of drawing people to the love of God. It is right to give up eating meat in a way that would encourage a brother to eat meat in violation of his religious conscience. Love would dictate that the freedom to eat meat should be sacrificed for the benefit of those who are growing out of their past idolatrous association of sacrificed meat with idol worship. This is what love would do.

But at the same time, we would heed the Spirit’s warning through the hand of Paul:



*Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Cl 2:8).*

Since we have “*been buried with Him [Christ] in baptism,*” we are no longer under the bondage of any “*handwriting of [religious] ordinances*” that Jesus nailed to the cross (Cl 2:12,14). We have been set free from the religious ordinances that once kept us in bondage. When we obeyed the gospel of freedom through baptism into Christ, Christ set us free. Therefore, in our freedom from the legal rites of religiosity, we must beware lest others come along in order to bring us again into bondage.

There were those brethren who had moved into the area of the new disciples in Galatia. They had moved into the region with intentions of bringing the new disciples in that region into the bondage of a legal religiosity. Because legal religion attacks the very core of the gospel, the book of Galatians was probably the first inspired Scriptures to come forth from the Holy Spirit. In this letter to defend Galatian disciples in their freedom, Paul warned, “*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).

Freedom from religion is not something that should be taken lightly. It must be guarded. The fact that the Holy Spirit warned the Colossians about others taking them captive back into religion, and

the Galatians about not being entangled again in the bondage of religion, is warning enough that there is always a real possibility that Christians can return to the prison of religious bondage from which Christ delivered them. We fear when we hear no warnings from religious leaders concerning these matters. The reason we are concerned is because there is little sensitivity in the Christian community of returning to a religion of self-justification through the supposed perfect obedience of religious rites.

Universalism is the belief that everyone is religiously accepted before God on the merit of their own religiosity. Universalism is always a threat to Christianity. When Christians start believing that everyone who believes in Jesus can meritoriously find their way to heaven, then universalism has set in. When we make Christianity a religious system of self-sanctification in order to be justified before God, then the universalist leads himself to believe that everyone will be saved as long as they do good works and believe in Jesus.

We are as God who does not desire that any should perish (1 Pt 3:21). But the fact remains that Jesus said, “*Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21). Universalists must take a moment and consider the fact that if everyone will be saved on the merit of just being a good person, then they have denied the gospel of Jesus. If one is free on the merit of his own performance of deeds before God, then the

gospel was a useless effort on the part of God to so love the world through Jesus. Therefore, there would have been no necessity for the incarnation. There was no necessity for Jesus to suffer on the cross. If everyone is justified before God on the merit of his own self-sanctifying good works, then there is no such thing as freedom in Christ. If we are all free to do as we so choose, then there can be no special freedom in Christ.

According to Peter, there is a realm of freedom that Christians enjoy in Christ. Christians “*live as free men*” (1 Pt 2:16). We live free because we have been set free from the religion of meritorious justification through good works. However, as the free, Peter exhorted, “*Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil*” (1 Pt 2:16). Law was made for the unlawful (1 Tm 1:9). But freedom from law does not mean that the Christian is free to live contrary to law. In the first

century, some turned their freedom from law into a behavior to live unrighteously and contrary to the law of Christ. These denied Jesus, thus denying the resurrection of the Son of God. Jude wrote of these apostates:

*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who were long before marked out for this condemnation, **ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ** (Jd 4).*

Jesus came into the world to set us free from the bondage of our own religious selves (Lk 4:18). And if the Son of God “*will make you free, you will be free indeed*” (Jn 8:36). But if we deny our only Master and Lord, then we deny our freedom. We bring ourselves into again the bondage of religion.