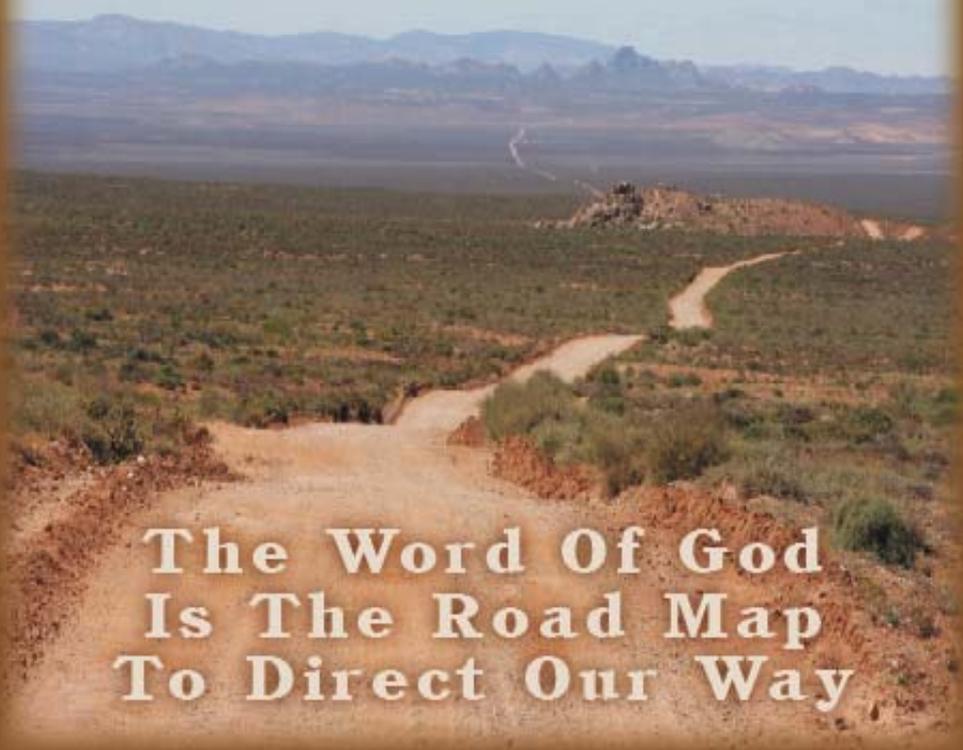


# FINDING OUR WAY BACK

A photograph of a dirt road winding through a desert landscape. The road starts in the foreground and leads towards a small hill in the middle ground. In the background, there are mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

The Word Of God  
Is The Road Map  
To Direct Our Way

**DICKSON**

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# Finding Our Way Back

Inscriptions IV

Roger E. Dickson

## CONTENTS

Introduction – 3

1 – *Going The Wrong Way* – 4

2 – *Autonomous Fellowship* – 6

3 – *Agreeing To Divide* – 8

4 – *Preaching Good News* – 10

5 – *The Legacy Of Balaam* – 13

6 – *Accountability To The King* – 15

7 – *“Holy Ground”* – 21

8 – *The Attack On Faith* – 23

9 – *Focus On The Gospel* – 31

10 – *The Ant Farm Culture* – 45

11 – *The Incarnational Mind Of Christ* – 48

12 – *Defiant Dreamers* – 56

13 – *Religious Rites Make Religionists* – 64

Biblical Research Library – 70

Abbreviations – 71

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## INTRODUCTION

When society considers being constrained by the rules of a Higher Power, there is always a constant resistance. There is a resistance to being controlled by that which is outside the parameters of those who seek to live after their own free-moral choices. This was God's risk when He created mankind with the option of free-moral choice. It was a necessary risk, since no preprogrammed robot could ever have sincerely returned the love of God. And when we consider ourselves, life would not be life if we did not have the ability to make our own choices.

So here we are in a world where so many bad choices have been made. Though individually we are not responsible for all the bad choices, we live in an environment in which we suffer the consequences of the bad choices of others. If we bring these bad choices into the realm of faith, then we come to the conclusion that religious people have been quite inventive. Though God implanted within man the urge to seek after his Creator, the reality is that we have a tendency to create a god after our own imagination. We then proceed to create religious rites and rituals and ceremonies with which we make ourselves believe that our god is satisfied. We assume that if we perform our established rites, rituals and ceremonies, we have some sense of self-sanctification, or at least a good conscience toward our imagined god.

As Bible-believing Christians, it must always be our task to direct humanity back to the authority of God's communication through His revealed word. The religious world offers all sorts of resistance to our mission. Nevertheless, we must be persistent in teaching the word of God, and thus offering mankind the way back to the one true and living God. In this way, we deliver ourselves from the blood of the generation in which we live.

It is true that the Christian is the only hope for those who have created religious rites, rituals and ceremonies after their own desires. It is for this reason that we must be serious students of the word of God. The editorial *Inscriptions* are our efforts to at least identify where religious people have gone astray. The *Inscriptions* are simply areas where we seek to lead people back to the authority of the word of God. Occasionally, several *Inscriptions* are brought together into one book, which book we also add to the Biblical Research Library. This is one of those volumes that contains discussions on subjects wherein we feel that those of faith throughout the world should reconsider the authority of the word of God.

## Chapter 1

# GOING THE WRONG WAY

As Bible students study through the books of the Kings and Chronicles, one question will always come to mind. Why did Israel, with such a rich history of the direct work of God, fall into the extreme apostasy of worshipping imagined gods, and in some cases, sacrificing their own children to their imaginations? The answer to the question lies in the nature of how we, as created religious beings, conduct ourselves in reference to divine authority and the life-style by which we seek to live.

We seek to be free from accountability, especially accountability in reference to our Creator. Though God gives us divine directives by which we should conduct ourselves, we seek to do that which is right in our own eyes. This desire leads to a gradual fall from a conscious responsibility to submit to the word of God. It may take generations for this apostasy to play out in the history of any particular society, but the decline and fall of all civilizations is inevitable without a conscious sense of being accountable to a High Power.

A study of the Kings and Chronicles is a classic example of how men move away from being accountable to God. God originally did not want Israel to have a king. He knew what would happen. Having a king in Israel was more than centralizing government around one man on earth. God had originally intended that He only be their King, and that He would reign from heaven through the authority of His word that was taught by the Levites. This was a very successful plan that held Israel together for over four hundred years. But the Israelites rejected this theocratic system, for they sought to continue to live after their own desires. They could manipulate a king, but they could not change the law of God. God, therefore, had to go and the kings with their false gods had to come in order that they could do that which was right in their own eyes.

Once a king was anointed, the rapidity of the apostasy accelerated. The kings became political in order to retain the favor of the people. This point is brought out clearly in the kingship of Saul, for he yearned for the

approval of the people. In the life of David, however, it was different. David sought to direct Israel according to the commandments of God. He had a deep sense of responsibility to obey the will of God. But after David, everything changed. From the time of Solomon the mold for apostasy was established as each king, except for a few, followed after the gods of the nations they failed to eliminate from the land. The people sought to live after their own desires. It started with Solomon, David's son, who sought to please all his idolatrous wives. The religious beliefs of the people gradually changed to focus on the lusts of man, not the commandments of God that were considered too restrictive.

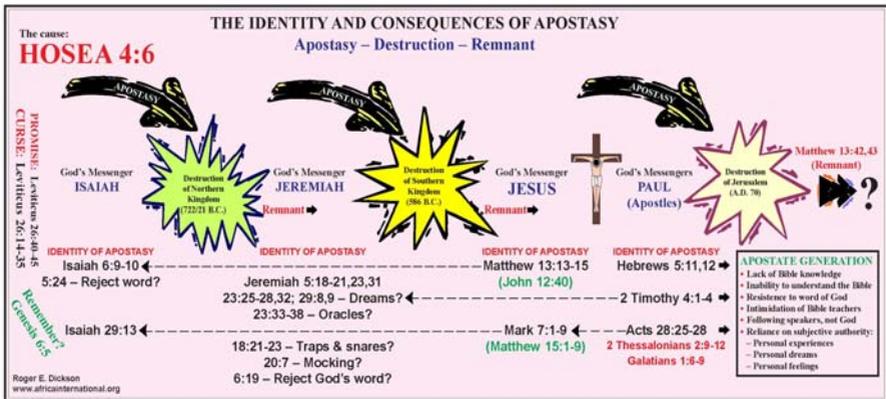
As a society that sought to create religious behavior after one's own desires, it was easy to create a god that would condone their desires. When the culture of the society has been established for ruin for decades, even the righteous actions on the part of a king who would seek to restore the people to God will not turn the people from continued digression. When Israel initially arrived at the Jordan in order to possess the land under the leadership of Joshua, the Canaanites, because of their culture of sin, had given up their right for existence. However, Israel, throughout her history, followed the same social route as the Canaanites. At the end of Israel's history, the twelve tribes of Israel were left with only a remnant existence after the Babylonian captivity. It was a tragic ending to such a great nation of people who had been miraculously delivered out of Egyptian captivity. Their search for God brought them out of captivity. Their forsaking of God took them back into captivity. Only through repentance were they able to again come out of captivity.

The political desire of a king to maintain the favor of the people increased when kings started to assassinate one another. Israel digressed from God-anointed kings, to people-appointed kings, then finally to foreign-appointed kings. Paranoia developed among the kings as they turned from being obedient to God who anointed them, to politically pleasing the people who appointed them, and then finally, to pleasing the foreign nations who appointed their kings for them. The script of this play is written in the Kings and Chronicles. It is written for many nations throughout the world today who would forsake teaching the principles of God to their people.

Once the leadership of Israel was changed, then it was easy for the

people to follow after that which became commonly practiced. In order for commonly accepted religious behavior to be imposed on others, false prophets were chosen to intimidate all who would not comply with the norm of social and religious behavior. Any person who would speak against the message of the community of false prophets was shunned, and thus considered a troubler of Israel. Once this religious culture was established, then there was no level too low to which the society of Israel could sink. It was for this reason that God did not want a central government in Israel that was centered around a king. He did not want the religion centralized. He did not want any particular tribe to take ownership of His presence by the construction of a temple like the religions of the nations around Israel. Unfortunately, Israel did all the preceding, and thus we have the inscription of the Kings and Chronicles that explain how this epic history played itself out in the lives of the Israelites who fell from the one true and living God.

### CHART STUDIES



## Chapter 2 AUTONOMOUS FELLOWSHIP

Understanding the social structure of Israel and her economics during the initial years of her possession of the land of Palestine helps us to interpret the book of Judges. It helps us to understand why the tribes came to the

point in their history when they went to war even with one another.

When the Israelites settled in the land, they became an agricultural nation with families living independently on farms throughout the territory of Palestine. Each tribe settled in a particular allotted territory where they farmed the land and grew into a clan of families.

There were 46 cities given to the Levites, and thus at least these cities were places to which the people were to go for instruction in the law of God. The people took their offerings to these cities for the Levites, and thus these cities were not centers of trade, but centers for offerings. Neither were these cities business centers as we would conceive them to be after the modern-day cities in which we live today. The cities of the Levites were actually small towns or villages that could be fed by the produce of nearby farms, and those who brought their offerings to the Levites.

Those Israelites who lived in the rural area of Palestine had to live independently, and thus they sought to sell their produce to any nearby people. The Israelites, therefore, lived in the country, farming the land, and making periodic visits to the cities of the Levites. The tribes settled throughout their allotted territories. The families developed into clans as sons and daughters stayed in close proximity to one another and the patriarch family of the clan. In this way the Israelites grew to populate the land that was initially given to the families after the conclusion of the national wars of Israel with the Canaanites.

As each tribe developed within their allotted territories, they became somewhat autonomous from one another as independent farmers, and to some extent anonymous from one another. This spirit of autonomy eventually led to a sense of nationhood within each particular tribal group. Since each tribe failed in their responsibility to drive out the remaining Canaanites within their allotted territory after the conclusion of the national wars that were led by Joshua, their autonomy became an opportunity that led to oppression and raids from nations surrounding each tribal territory. Because of their spirit of autonomy, the Israelites began to associate and trade with the remaining Canaanites in their particular territories. With the trade came social contact and intermarriage. The Canaanites eventually took advantage of this by economically subjecting the Israelite farmers to supply their needs by demanding tribute. Those farmers who did not subject themselves were

raided by nearby foreign powers as the Midianites. In their autonomy, and often anonymous relationship with one another, the Israelites were easy victims to the oppression of the Canaanites and raids by neighboring foreigners.

The tribes' socioeconomic relationship with the Canaanites led to the Israelites acceptance of the religious beliefs of those with whom they traded and intermarried. The Israelites did not reject their belief in the one true God, they only added to their religious beliefs the gods of the Canaanites. Their compromise of beliefs, thus led them to compromise their values, and subsequently their behavior. In this spiritual adultery they were led away from the will of God.

The lesson is that God's people should never become so autonomous from one another that they cannot stay together. In a world that has so great an influence over the behavior of our children, the church needs every edge it can get to preserve the next generation of the church. Several African leaders have said to me that the doctrine of division was sowed in them from the day the first missionary stepped on the continent. They have told me that they were crippled from the beginning because they were taught that they could not work together in order to accomplish works and to survive a hostile environment where the nations around them were so strong.

## Chapter 3

### AGREEING TO DIVIDE

**1 Kings 12:25-33** is the text for a historical event of division in the history of Israel.

Shechem was Jeroboam's capital during his reign, though the capital was later moved to Tirzah (1 Kg 14:17). At the time he established Shechem as his initial capital, he added to the buildings that already existed, for the city existed long before Jeroboam (1 Kg 12:1; Ja 24:1). Omri later reaffirmed Samaria as the capital of the northern kingdom (1 Kg 16:24). Jeroboam also fortified Penuel that existed long before his time (Gn 32:24-32; Jg 8:8,9,17). All these places laid the foundation for the division of worship in

Israel that later led to the “sins of Jeroboam” that were perpetuated throughout the history of Israel.

After the death of Solomon, the twelve tribes of Israel divided. Two remained loyal to David through Rehoboam in the south. Ten gave their allegiance to Jeroboam in the north. Jeroboam extended the division of the Israelites by saying, ***“If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem”*** they would continue religious loyalty to the house of David (1 Kg 12:27). Therefore, something very significant happened at this time in reference to Israel violating a fundamental plan of God to keep Israel as a united nation throughout their history. God’s original plan was that the tabernacle was to be used as the center for their burnt offerings throughout the history of Israel. For this reason God gave them detailed instructions in the Pentateuch as to how they were to continually repair or rebuild the tabernacle throughout their history until the Messiah came. However, they failed to do this, and thus the center of sacrifices was claimed by various tribes as the tabernacle remained too long in any one territory.

God never intended that Israel centralize the place where they would go to offer the burnt offerings, and thus no tribe would ever be too far away every year (See comments Dt 12). But when Jerusalem was made the capital, and the temple was built by Solomon to centralize sacrifices in Jerusalem, then the foundation was laid for the division of the nation. Building the temple in Jerusalem consigned the northern tribes to being continually too far away to go and offer their burnt offerings before the Lord. At the time of the division, centralization of the sacrifices had been going on since the completion of the temple. The northern tribes were consigned to being too far away to bring their families for the burnt offering. The resentment of the north toward the south grew, and the foundation was laid for division. Jeroboam simply took advantage of this situation. He said to the northern ten tribes, ***“It is too far for you to go up to Jerusalem”*** (1 Kg 12:28). And it was. For this reason Jeroboam went too far from the law of God by building an altar in Dan (or, Laish - Jg 18:24-31) and another in Bethel (or, Luz - Gn 28:10-21; 35:5-15). He thus kept the people away from Jerusalem and away from the ark of the covenant that was permanently located in the temple in Jerusalem. He simply accommodated the northern tribes in the fact that it was too far for them to go on an annual basis to offer their burnt offerings

before the Lord in Jerusalem. The centralization of government around a king, and the administration of government in one capital (Jerusalem) where their faith was also centralized, eventually bore the fruit of division among the tribes of Israel. We could blame the division of the kingdom on the harshness of Rehoboam. However, the division had already started to take place years before when Israel rejected God in order to have a king on earth. The kings on earth eventually centralized the administration of the nation's affairs around a single capital where they built a temple after the nations around them. The division was inevitable. God saw their future, and thus worked to use what the people caused to His own advantage.

Jeroboam established many religious practices that were after his own design. He restructured the religious beliefs of the people, who at this time, were ignorant of the word of God, for they had no copies of the law by which to direct their lives (See Hs 4:6). He thus made the people sin by offering them the opportunity to satisfy their religious desires according to his desires to maintain the loyalty of the people. What Jeroboam established as religious behavior was continued throughout the remainder of the history of the northern kingdom. The kings that followed him thus sinned by carrying on with the tradition of his apostasy.

Permanent places of worship do present a foundation for division. While God desired that worship in Israel be regularly centered around the homes of His people, collective places of worship on a weekly basis does not encourage the unity that God would have among His people. Something can be a concession on the part of God, and thus not in and of itself wrong. But the long-term results of any deviation from the desires of God will bring unfortunate consequences.

## **Chapter 4**

# **PREACHING GOOD NEWS**

I wish I could remember the poet who wrote the following:

*He wasn't much for stirrin' out,  
It wasn't his desire;  
No matter what the others did,  
He was sittin' by the fire.*

*Same old habit, day by day,  
He never seemed to tire;  
While others helped to build the church,  
He was sittin' by the fire.*

*And when he died as all must do,  
They said he went up higher;  
But if he's still doin' what he always did,  
He's still sittin' by the fire.*

The church is in an evangelism crisis. We have blended a “whatever” generation with a biblically ignorant generation, and come up with a generation that could care less about snatching people off the pathway to hell. It is a generation that wants to live within the sound of church and chapel bell, but not within yelling distance of souls that are falling through death into eternal damnation. There’s little excitement today about sowing the seed of the kingdom, because there is no excitement about seeing the need of a spiritually starved generation of people. When challenged about their lack of evangelistic fervor, we receive only the reply, “Whatever.” When a generation arises that is ignorant of what the Bible says concerning the damnation of those who do not obey the gospel, then they have little concern for preaching the gospel. Where are those who have a passion for the lost?

These are times for serious repentance on the part of the church. In many ways we have lost our identity. While seeking to impose on ourselves some legal identity by the performance of acts during our assemblies, we have forsaken the identity by which Jesus said the world would know that we are His disciples. Our identity was to be manifested by our love. That love was to extend to believers, as well as to unbelievers. A love that will not take us to our lost neighbor’s house will certainly not take us to heaven. Paul had it right. *“For the love of Christ compels us ...”* (2 Co 5:14).

We will not bring the world into Christ unless the love of Christ compels us to take His name into all the world.

We have a bookshelf full of “feel good books” that seek to motivate us to do this or that in order to feel good about ourselves. But there is a limit to feeling good when the feeling does not come from doing that which I know I should do in saving the lost. So where are the books that emphasize the wrath, terror, judgment, fear and condemnation of a just God who will send people to a fiery hell because they did not obey the gospel? Or worse, where are the books that tell me where I am headed if I am just “sittin’ by the fire ...”? Again, Paul said it right, and probably correctly translated by the old versions, **“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men”** (2 Co 5:11). If I understand the fact that the Bible teaches that those who do not obey the gospel will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord Jesus, then I understand that Jesus is more than a sweet teacher meandering down Judean pathways with His disciples. I read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 frequently. It talks about a Jesus of vengeance when He comes again. As Paul, though we knew Jesus according to the flesh, we want to know Him as He now is as King, Head and Judge over all things (2 Co 5:16). He is coming with vengeance on all those who do not obey the gospel of His death for their sins. He is coming with vengeance on a “whatever” generation that has lost its passion for lost souls.

It’s time for an evangelistic paradigm shift. And believe me, such shifts come with great pain, the pain of repentance. Our laughter must be turned into mourning. We must remember the words of Jesus, “Blessed are those who mourn.” We must start mourning over our sin of laziness in order to be blessed.

I write these words in order that no one misunderstand the motives of all of those who are sincerely concerned about world evangelism. We are serious about accomplishing the only reason for the existence of this world. That reason is that we search throughout the population of the world for those who want to prepare themselves for eternal dwelling in the presence of God. We are in the business of populating heaven.

## Chapter 5

# THE LEGACY OF BALAAM

Balaam was minding his own business, doing the work of God. He was known for his work throughout Pethor. But Balak, king of Moab, had another agenda for Balaam. He had a list of sermons he wanted preached to a people he feared. He was afraid of the blessed people of God, the Israelites, who were coming his way (Nm 22:3,12). He thus sought for a preacher to hire to carry out his agenda against Israel.

Balak had the sermons to be preached and the audience to whom he wanted them delivered (Nm 22:5,6). So he went looking for a preacher he could tempt with purse and position in order to carry out his mission to a foreign nation. He knew that there were preachers out there who would sacrifice their freedom and principles for the sake of a salary.

Balak knew how to approach religious hirelings. He went looking for a dynamic and successful religious leader. He said of Balaam, *“I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed”* (Nm 22:6). His method of tempting Balaam to preach his agenda was to send a delegation of elders to the preacher. With the delegation he sent the greatest temptation to acquire a hireling preacher. He sent “the diviner’s fee,” a handsome salary (Nm 22:6). So with an impressive delegation from a foreign land, and the temptation of great support, Balaam was tempted to accept the agenda of someone other than God.

At first Balaam held out against the temptation of salary and fame by refusing to compromise his principles. He would not allow his freedom to be bought with foreign support from those of a foreign country who had their own agenda. He even consulted God concerning the request of the delegation of elders. And he initially followed God’s command not to go with the delegation of elders, or to accept their support (Nm 22:8-12). This was God’s ultimatum. It was not to be changed under any circumstances.

But Balak was relentlessly persistent. He thus sent a greater number of princes who were more noble and numerous than the first delegation. These were political people who would appeal to the political ambitions of Balaam

(Nm 22:15-17). With the temptation of the high salary he initially received from the first delegation, this time Balaam was tempted by the foreigners with a great position and any request he might have from the nation of the foreigners (Nm 22:17).

Balaam again held out. He refused to go with the political delegation that was sent from the foreigners (Nm 22:18).

But Balaam weakened. He asked the political delegation to spend the night. God knew Balaam's heart, and thus accommodated his carnal desires for gain. He thus allowed Balaam to be ensnared in his own greed for gain (Nm 22:19,20). *"So Balaam rose in the morning ... and went with the princes of Moab."* The mold was then cast for the hireling preacher to sell his gift to another for the sake of support. Balaam wrote his own legacy that the Holy Spirit recorded in Jude 11: He ran ***"greedily in the error of Balaam for profit"*** (Jd 11). Balaam established a "way" of behavior that would always be identified with his name and would describe those who compromise their principles for the sake of a salary. Peter defined *"... the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness"* (2 Pt 2:15). The angel to the church of Pergamos condemned those who *"hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality"* (Rv 2:14).

How could a preacher who was minding his own business establish forever a legacy of greed and selfish ambition? Simple. **We must never underestimate the temptation that comes with a delegation of elders from a foreign country who come with a great "diviner's fee" in order to hire those who would preach their agenda of sermons.** It takes men of great spiritual stature and dignity not to sell themselves to such great temptations. When preachers live in great poverty, it is not difficult to understand why some would be tempted to sell themselves for a salary.

## Chapter 6

# ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE KING

It is interesting to survey the life of Paul in reference to his custom of supporting himself throughout his ministry. One of the principles that he teaches through this policy is the principle that every member of the body of Christ has the responsibility to support himself while he preaches and teaches the gospel to others. In fact, Paul referred to this policy as a “tradition” that he had left with the Thessalonian church (2 Th 3:6-12). It was a tradition that they were to follow.

It is not certain why Paul followed this principle in his life. It may have been a result of his personal insight into the corruption of the Pharisaical system of support that was a part of Judaism. Paul was a former Pharisee, and thus, he knew the greed of the Pharisees as religious leaders of Israel. Luke said of the Pharisees that they were lovers of money (Lk 16:14). In order not to be accused of preaching for money, therefore, Paul sought to support himself in his ministry of preaching the gospel.

The reason why he did such was probably more for giving us an example of individual ministry, as opposed to the “clergy” oriented system of “full-time” religious leaders in his day, which system is very prevalent in our societies today throughout the world. Once churches hire a preacher, they at the same time hire their work done for them. Regardless of what we might say, there is a mental switch that goes off in our minds as soon as we put someone on salary to work locally for the church. We have hired someone to do something for us, and thus, we relieve ourselves of a certain part of our responsibility. It is like one person once told me, “Before we had a full-time preacher, all of us felt responsible for the growth of the church.”

We must keep ourselves in perspective here in reference to the support of evangelists. It has always been a principle that workers be supported full-time in their service of the needs of the church. Paul wrote, “*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel*” (1 Co 9:14). There is no question concerning the church’s responsibility to support evangelists. We must not muzzle the ox who treads

out the grain (1 Co 9:9). The laborer is worthy of his hire (1 Tm 5:18). These are unquestionable mandates to the church to send forth evangelists to preach to those from whom they do not take support (3 Jn 7,8). Therefore, we ought to support such in order that we be fellow workers for the truth.

In reference to sending forth evangelists, we have often failed to emphasize the efforts of evangelists who have gone forth supporting themselves. The self-supported evangelist is the evangelist who has chosen to support himself in his commitment to fulfill the great commission. Paul was one of those men. During most of his life after his conversion, he was of that group of evangelists who sought to support themselves. Though he was at times supported by the church, a close examination of his ministry suggests that he mostly supported himself rather than be supported by the church. If you would allow us the privilege of some assumptions in conjunction with some plain statements of Scripture, we believe it would be good to reconsider Paul's financial self-sufficiency by which he carried out his Christ-given commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, Jews and kings (At 9:15,16).

Paul was a tentmaker by trade (At 18:3). This was a mobile type of work that could be carried out at any place in the ancient world of Paul's day. A needle, thread and cloth was all that was needed in order to set up shop and start producing tents. It was a self-employment job where Paul was not punching the time-clock of an employer. Therefore, the job allowed one to be independent and mobile. It was the ideal trade for one who would be given a mission to preach the gospel to the world.

Paul was converted between A.D. 40 and 45. After his conversion, he spent three years in Damascus and Arabia (Gl 1:17,18). We could assume that he was supported by the brethren in Damascus while he was in the city. However, we do not know how he lived or where he lived when he went to Arabia. We do not know how much of the three years he mentioned in Galatians 1:17,18 was actually spent in Arabia. Whatever the case, according to the tenor of his life after his conversion, we could assume that he supported himself at least some of this time.

From Damascus he went to Jerusalem and stayed for two weeks (Gl 1:18). From there he traveled to Syria and Cilicia (Gl 1:21). It is believed that he stayed in the region of Syria and Cilicia from seven to ten years.

During this time we would assume two things. First, we would assume that he continued to preach the gospel. Secondly, we would assume that he made tents, and thus, supported himself throughout this period. We have no revelation in the New Testament concerning what Paul actually did during his many years in Syria and Cilicia. However, we could assume that he was not quiet concerning the gospel which was confirmed to him on the Damascus road. Since he was unknown by face to the churches in Judea prior to his visit in Acts 15 (Gl 1:22), we could also assume that these churches did not support him, and thus, he supported himself.

After the death of Stephen, many were scattered abroad to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (At 11:19). When converts from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch, they preached to the Greek speaking Jews, many of whom were converted. Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem in order to exhort those of this new church establishment (At 11:22,23). After exhorting the brethren, Barnabas went to Tarsus in search of Paul in order to have help concerning the newly established church in Antioch (At 11:25). After Barnabas returned with Paul from Tarsus, both of them taught the church in Antioch for an entire year (At 11:26). We would assume that during this year Paul could have either supported himself through tentmaking, or he and Barnabas could have been relieved of such by the Antioch church. From what Paul wrote of himself and Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:6, it appears that they both worked on the first journey and in Antioch in order to support themselves. Paul wrote, "*Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?*" Paul wrote this in the context of accusations of preaching for money. However, both he and Barnabas had always sought to support themselves when they were located at a particular location for any period of time. We could correctly assume, therefore, that from the time of his conversion until his arrival in Antioch of Syria, a period of possibly ten to twelve years, Paul supported himself most of the time.

After some time in Antioch, the brethren in Syria took up a special famine relief contribution and sent it by the hands of Paul and Barnabas to the brethren in Judea (At 11:30). We would assume that the church would have supported these two evangelists on this benevolent mission to Judea. We do not know how much time Paul and Barnabas spent in Judea, but they later returned to Antioch, bringing with them John Mark (At 12:25). We

could assume, therefore, that since neither Paul nor Barnabas had time to set up their tentmaking work on this trip, they were fully supported by the church of either Antioch or Jerusalem.

What is commonly referred to as the first missionary journey of Paul began in Acts 13:3,4. When the Antioch church sent Paul, Barnabas and John off on this journey, we would assume that they gave them some money to sustain them for several weeks. This first missionary journey lasted about two years. We would not assume that the Antioch church gave Paul and Barnabas two years of gold coins to carry around on their person on this journey. Such would have been both impractical and unsafe. Neither were they given a Visa card or a check book. We would conclude that they had to support themselves after the Antioch support ran out.

A few years later when Paul wrote of his mission travels with Barnabas, he spoke of he and Barnabas both foregoing church support in order to support themselves (1 Co 9:6). We would conclude that both evangelists made tents on the first missionary journey, and thus, they were self-supporting on most of the journey. Paul boasted of his preaching without charge (1 Co 9:18). He did not seek the support of those to whom he preached in order that he might be free from the strings that are often attached with the support. He wrote, *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more”* (1 Co 9:19).

At the conclusion of the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria (At 14:26). They remained in Antioch “a long time” (At 14:28). During this time we would assume that the Antioch church supported Paul. However, because it was his principle not to eat other men’s food without charge, and what he said of himself and Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:6, we could also assume that he set up his tentmaking business while he stayed in Antioch. When he was a resident evangelist in Ephesus he *“coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel”* (At 20:33). He worked with his own hands in order to support himself (At 20:34). While in Thessalonica he did not eat bread free of charge (2 Th 3:8). In the recorded cases where Paul spent any period of time, it seems that he supported himself without taking the support of the local brethren (See At 18:3). We could thus assume that the times he stayed in Antioch, he supported himself.

Around A.D. 50, the Antioch church sent Paul and Barnabas, with

some other brethren, to Jerusalem in order to deal with a conflict over judaizing teachings (At 15:2). We would assume that the Antioch church supported these men on their journey to Jerusalem and during the time of their stay in the city. After the Jerusalem meeting, Paul returned to Antioch (At 15:35).

Around A.D. 53 he set out on his second missionary journey with Silas as his fellow worker. We would again assume that the Antioch brethren gave them money to last throughout the first part of their journey. However, when the money ran out, they were back to making tents.

From Antioch, Paul and Silas traveled to Derbe and Lystra, where they were joined by Timothy (At 16:1). From Galatia Paul, Silas and Timothy went on to Troas where they were joined by Luke (At 16:8). From Troas they went to Philippi where they stayed for only a few days (At 16:12). From Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy went on to Thessalonica (At 17:1). Luke stayed in Philippi.

While in Thessalonica, the small church of Lydia, her household, the jailor and his household, sent support once and again unto Paul, Silas and Timothy (Ph 4:15,16). However, when Paul later wrote to the Thessalonian church, he rehearsed the fact that he worked to support himself while preaching in Thessalonica. *“For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God”* (1 Th 2:9). They did such in order to establish a tradition that in working we also should help the poor (At 20:34). When Paul wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians, he stated, *“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you”* (2 Th 3:7,8).

From Thessalonica Paul went on to Berea (At 17:10). From Berea he went to Athens (At 17:15). Since the Philippians were sending once and again to his needs (Ph 4:15,16), we could assume that at least some of his support came as a contribution from brethren while in Athens. However, when he went over to Corinth, he established himself with Aquila and Priscilla who were also tentmakers (At 18:1-3). Throughout Paul’s eighteen months in Corinth he did not receive any support from the Corinthians (1 Co 9:6). He preached to them “free of charge” (2 Co 11:7). He did not want to be a

financial burden to them (2 Co 12:14). Titus also followed the same principle when he visited them several years later (2 Co 12:18).

Though Paul did make tents in Corinth in order to support himself, what was lacking in support was made up by contributions that came from the Macedonian churches. He wrote to the Corinthians, *“And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself”* (2 Co 11:9; see Ph 4:15,16). The nature of his statement in 2 Corinthians 11:9 indicates that it was his custom to make tents in order to support himself, which support was supplemented by church support. It was not the other way around. He was not supported by the church, and then supplemented his support by making tents.

The Macedonian churches, therefore, supplemented his tentmaking. Because of this, Paul later rebuked the Corinthians by saying that he robbed other churches in order to minister to them (2 Co 11:8). Though he said he wronged them by not taking their support (2 Co 12:13), he said that in the future he would continue not to take support from them because of their arrogant false teachers among them who were accusing him of preaching for hire (2 Co 11:10-12). Because he did not take their support, he could boast that he preached to them without taking support (1 Co 9:15). He used his self-support as a challenge to his accusers that they should do the same if their motives were genuine.

From Corinth Paul traveled on to Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla (At 18:19). He left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus and went on to Jerusalem. From there he returned to Ephesus (At 19:1). Paul stayed two years in Ephesus. He again supported himself. He taught in the school of Tyrannus. We are not told if he taught in this school for a salary. However, when he talked of his tenure in Ephesus with the Ephesian elders a few years later, he said, *“Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me”* (At 20:34). He did not take support from the church while he was two years in Ephesus. He supported himself. His reason for doing this was as he stated to the Ephesian elders. *“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus,*

that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (At 20:35).

Paul concluded his third missionary journey around A.D. 58. He was arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea from A.D. 58 to 60. He was another two years imprisoned in Rome in A.D. 61,62. During these four years he was on government "support."

It would be difficult to determine exactly how much time during his missionary journeys he was supporting himself. However, one thing is quite clear. It was the principle of his life to support himself. It almost seems as if Paul would accept support from the church only as a last resort for survival. He had learned "*not to speak in regard to need*" (Ph 4:11). He wrote to the Philippians, "*I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*" (Ph 4:12). His answer to living the committed life without great concern for his financial well-being was, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (Ph 4:13). These are impressive words when one considers the fact that they were written by one who was in a Roman prison on trial for his life.

Paul's determination to accomplish his God-given destiny did not depend on the support of the church. He accomplished his work regardless of support, not because the church supported him. The tremendous lesson that he teaches us through this principle of his life is the fact that every self-supporting wage-earning Christian has a ministry as Paul. Paul's priority was on preaching the gospel. Such should be the priority of every Christian. How one supports himself in his personal ministry to preach the gospel is only the means by which he can sustain himself in his work. Paul sought to leave us an example. He left a tradition, that by laboring night and day, we should minister the gospel to others (2 Th 3:6-9).

## Chapter 7

### "HOLY GROUND"

In man's inner self there is a God-created sense of worship. Regardless of God's written revelation concerning how He seeks to be worshiped, men

often devise their own expressions and places of worship. This apostasy in worship is brought out clearly in the Kings and Chronicles. In reference to the worship of Israel in her digression into apostasy, three key things constantly appear in the worship of the Israelites that were related to their apostasy. (1) People seek to do that which is right in their own eyes, and then create a concept of god that conforms to their behavior. This is the spirit of idolatry. The gods of the nations around Israel, which gods Israel adopted, were not really gods, but only the imagination of the people who sought to live according to their own desires. Once the false god was created in one's mind, then the natural thing to do was to relate to that god through an image or idol that one created to symbolize the god. The worshiper then established a place to which he could go in order to worship his imagined god.

(2) People seek to sanctify a place where they can act out their worship through various acts of worship or ceremonies. By doing this they are seeking to leave the environment of their daily lives in order to "go to" a place where they can worship. This gives them the opportunity to feel that they can leave their daily conduct, and then go to face God at a place where they can feel worshipful. The places that the apostate Israelites constructed for this worshipful feeling were called the "high places." These places were often associated with sexual orgies, and in some cases, human sacrifices. Regardless of the reforms that some kings made at different times throughout the digression of Israel into apostasy, these places to which people went with offerings in order to commit deplorable acts of worship, were usually not destroyed.

(3) People seem to feel closer to God on high places, and thus, the Asherah (wooded places, or groves) were built on high hills. These were sanctified places of worship. The high places were thus sacred and prevailed throughout the history of the apostasy. The high places became customary places to go for worship, and thus the reforming kings usually did not touch these places in their restoration movements.

The high places played a significant role in the apostasy of both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. When Israel entered the promised land, God told them to destroy all the molten images, figured idols and high places (Nm 33:52). But they failed to drive out all the Canaanites (Jg 1:19-35), and thus failed to eradicate the idolatry and high places from the land. The

people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders who lived after them (Ja 24:31; Jg 2:7). However, after these great leaders the worship of the Canaanites began to play a part in the worship of Israel. In the days of the judges, the worship of Baal became a strong part of Israelite worship, for the judges often had to deal with idol worship (See Jg 6:25). When Solomon became king, idol worship on high places was entrenched in the worship culture of Israel. Restorers as Hezekiah destroyed the high places (2 Ch 31:1), but apostate kings as Manasseh restored them as places to which people could go for worship (2 Ch 33:3). When Manasseh was disciplined by the Lord by captivity, and then restored to his throne, he was a changed person. However, he failed to destroy the high places to which people continually went to perform their acts of worship (2 Ch 33:17). The extent to which apostasy and restoration went in Israel depended on whether the high places were retained or destroyed in the worship culture of Israel (Compare Josiah's restoration - 2 Kg 23:1-25).

The culture of going to the high places worked against God's original plan that worship be family oriented and conducted according to the general principles of teaching that Moses stated in Deuteronomy 6. But the simplicity of God's original plan that worship be focused at home in the daily lives of every person was too simple for the people in comparison to the Canaanites who had elaborate temples and went to the high places for entertaining worship behavior. Once this Canaanite worship culture became a part of the culture of Israel, it was not possible to detour their end in captivity. The worship culture led them away from God, not closer to Him and His word.

## **Chapter 8**

### **THE ATTACK ON FAITH**

In 1971 John Lennon wrote the song "Imagine." It was later embraced by what Yoko Ono stated when Lennon completed the song, "This can be an anthem." And indeed it was for those who acclaimed it to be the "anthem for atheism." Leading up to the January 1, 2020 celebrations in New York City, the X Ambassadors singing group were asked to sing this

song during the celebrations on New Year's Eve. You can "imagine" our shock when the lead singer voiced the words in the lyrics of the song, "*Imagine there's . . . no religion, too.*" A 2019 updated revision of the original lyrics reads, "*Imagine there's no heaven ... It's easy if you try, No hell below us.*"

### A. "A seriously ill society":

After much criticism of the song when it was initially published, Lennon tried to defend his original lyrics that they were not meant to be a "Communist Manifesto," saying that he was not a communist. But before millions throughout the world on New Year's Eve, X Ambassadors voiced the belief of millions in America that we must "imagine" a world in which there is no more religion. In some way, we would agree with this simply because it is religion that leads to a great deal of conflict throughout the world. But this is religion, not Christianity. When Lennon sought to defend the meaning of his original lyrics, this was what he had in mind. It was religion, not faith, that drove millions to military conflict and terrorism. It was religion that inspired individuals to strap on a suicide vest in order to blow up babies.

But in an overall perspective, Western civilization, specifically America, is leading the way to a new world order that is weak on faith. In a December 2, 2020 broadcast of *Russia Today*, Peter Levelle, the host, posed the statement for discussion, "*Defending Christianity in America is no longer politically correct.*" Mike Huckabee, the former governor of the state of Arkansas in the U.S.A., stated on a *Fox News* interview, "There is a spiritual war going on in the world." In reference to the American society, he stated, "We are a seriously ill society." And then he questioned, "What kind of culture kills over one million babes a year [through abortion], and then cries out about anti-Zionist attacks on Hanukkah in the house of a Jewish Rabbi?"

It is sometimes not very encouraging to study those sociological statistics that deal with the faith of a society. It is not encouraging because we often have to face up to some facts in reference to the decline of faith. Nevertheless, it is necessary to make such studies in order to refocus our energies on what we are to be doing as disciples of Jesus. When we study the

figures concerning faith in the Western civilization, we are not encouraged. This is particularly the case with an older generation that can look back over a half century and clearly see that it is not better today in reference to faith than it was back in our childhood.

However, as subjects of the King who reigns supreme over the universe, we know that all will turn out for the best according to His purpose for which we were created to reside on this small blue planet we call earth. We were created in order to populate heaven. And because we were, we conclude that no matter how bad things become spiritually on this earth, all things are working together for the consummation of all things at the appearing of King Jesus. Before that time, however, we must not forget that the state of faith during these years could become similar to what existed during the days of Noah. During those days Noah faithfully prepared the ark for the salvation of only a few survivors of faith. The spiritual state of the civilization throughout the world at that time was epitomized in one statement: *“God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gn 6:5).

We are not there yet, at least in the majority of societies throughout the world. But in some quarters of the population of the world, the spiritual degradation of the society into “evil religion” has come to fruition. It is for this reason that we are always concerned for the societies of the world that have in the past been the source of faith for the world. In particular, this would be our concern for the Christian faith of Western civilizations from which came the spread of Christianity throughout the world. Therefore, bear with us as we take you on a journey of where we are going spiritually in Western civilization. We want to present those principles that will stem the tide of faithlessness. If you are stuck in a declining church situation, then we present some things that can turn around a dying church.

## **B. Statistics do not reveal a hope for church:**

We recently received a report of church growth statistics in reference to the spiritual situation in America. One of the common news subjects among all churches in America is that people are leaving the traditional church, or

religion. This was what was expressed in the New Year's Day song by John Lennon. Those who chose the song for the occasion wanted to say to the world that we must imagine a world in which there is no more religion, and in their interpretation, no more "church" or faith. The departure from churches is so common now that religious leaders of all churches are trying to figure out what is going wrong with Western civilization in reference to church attendance.

It seems that people are turning away from the traditional church, if not faith in general. So the statistics that we received on this matter are stunning. If you have access to the internet, google the following subject: "The decline of churches in America." One of the statistics in reference to churches in America is that **over 200 churches of all religious faiths in America are closing their doors every week**. Certainly, this is something about which we should be greatly concerned. It is an indictment against the church of Western civilization, and specifically, it is a paradigm shift from what existed about a half century ago when America was known for being a world leader in faith. But as the eighty-million strong American Millennial Generation—this generation is only about six percent Christian in faith—moves into adulthood, it is calculated from studies in the past five years that the present number of church closures per week will accelerate.

The Pew Research team came up with what we consider the most telling statistics of all their surveys. They measured that **23%** of those Americans who were raised as "Christians," **no longer identify themselves with Christianity**. This is about a quarter of the present fathers and mothers who are now rearing their children in non-Christian homes. The next generation, therefore, will far exceed 23%. And then the grandchildren will take the American society into a truly nonreligious, secular society. The Pew Research report concluded that the "nones," or those not affiliated with any "Christian" religion in America, is increasing in the population.

We must not view these figures with a total resignation that faith is dying out in Western civilizations. It is true that in the last decade about 32,000 churches closed their doors. However, this figure must be considered in view of the fact that there were also many new church beginnings during the same period of time. Also consider the fact that many small churches closed their doors in order to merge with larger churches in nearby cities. Never-

theless, the number of closures of individual assemblies has been far greater than the establishment of new churches. “Church closures” point to a closure of Christian faith in the America society. Such transitions happen over generations, not decades. One hundred years from now we will know the conclusion of this story.

But there is a clear and present danger for the survival of faith in the American West. Nevertheless, regardless of the demise of faith, there is a remnant that is fighting back. As Generation X sang the lyrics on New Year’s Eve, “*imagine a world in which there is no religion,*” at the same time in Atlanta, Georgia in the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, 65,000 Millennials and Generation X young people gathered for worship, prayer and Bible reading. The organizers of the event proclaimed that 2020 will be the “Year of the Bible.” Louie Giglio, founder of Passion, said, “We’re not simply keepers of the light, but we are carriers of the light of Jesus to the world.”

There is hope for America. In 1949 it is estimated that there were four million “Christians” in the nation of China. Today, it is estimated that **there is over seventy million**, with this number increasing at an annual rate of seven percent. It is certain that Christian faith is declining at an alarming rate in America. However, it is not moving into extinction throughout the world, but simply moving to another nation. As China claims a greater part of the future in world economics and culture, it may be that China will be the last bastion of Christianity in this world.

### C. **Going the way of Israel:**

We must look beyond the present situation of Christian faith in the American West and look into the future. If a great number of the present fathers and mothers are not showing up at the doors of any religious group across America, then their children will take America into a secular society that is almost void of faith. This is presently happening in our country of residence in South Africa. Shopping malls that were shut down on Sunday morning in the country over thirty years ago, are now crowded with parents shopping with their children and enjoying all the entertainment that is provided to distract people from any faith. Fathers and mothers, with children, are taking the societies in which they live into a faithless future.

Nevertheless, some faith will survive. But the faith that will survive this great demise will be a religiosity that is carved out of a self-oriented society whose constituents seek their own strictures in reference to religion, and not the Scriptures. Therefore, it is time to study diligently our Old Testaments in reference to where Israel went, and the reason for which the Israelites were removed as God's people from the promised land. The principle that they would be blessed if they stayed close to God in the land, but cursed if they left God, should be of concern to everyone as we move into the future.

In view of the loss of religiosity in the American culture, some traditional churches have sought to meet the challenge with what we might consider spiritually sterile placebos. Some have simply changed their names to a "no name" brand of religion, thus seeking to disguise old traditional churches with new branding. Therefore, gone are those traditional names that have denominated and identified different faiths according to the heritage of the forefathers. But we see the "no name" branding of religious groups to simply be a rehash of religion in different clothing.

The name change has not stopped the accelerating decline of churches in America. The central fact is that religion has failed the American culture, as it did in Israel of old. Church (religion) as we knew it failed to meet the needs of an emerging culture of people who were not tied to the traditions of the fathers, and thus the traditions of any specific religion. But aside from traditional religion, we still affirm that the gospel does not fail to meet the inner most needs of the human being in any society. Gospel will always be relevant in every culture of the world at any time in history.

"No name" branding can never cloak the power of the gospel. If churches are really interested in stopping the disappearance of "church" in the American culture, then there are some things that must change. The American culture is moving the average American citizen away from faith, and specifically, any religion that is ushered in to preserve faith. But this is never the case in reference to the gospel. In the past history of America, religious institutionalism always moved people away from one another. This is in contrast to the gospel that always moves people closer together. And in a culture of young people, gospel fits right in the midst of a culture that craves relationships. However, in order for the gospel to produce its unifying effect, the people must sluff off religion that divides us.

In this new generation, people have finally decided that religious division is completely out of step with the nature of the God of love, which love was often hypocritically preached by the proponents of denominated religions. Denominationalism in religion is entirely contrary to the relational encounters that people seek to have with one another in a new society of relationships.

#### **D. Unity that is based on a gospel moral:**

The American society is probably more politically divided today than it has been at any time in history. We must remember, however, that it is politically divided because it is morally divided. Those who seek to retain some sort of faith in a morally and politically divided society expect a faith that produces unity among all believers and the establishment of moral norms that will produce such unity. For this reason, therefore, the old style of religious institutionalism that was inherently divisive no longer appeals to a generation of people who seek to enjoin on themselves some sense of unity in such a morally divided landscape. If the religious institutions to which one has contracted himself through membership does not sense this urge, or struggle on the part of the average citizen to find some moral stability, then we will eventually hear the door slam shut on religious groups in the years to come. But herein is the opportunity of those who preach the gospel that brings unity and a moral foundation for those of faith who cry for some sort of togetherness within a society that is being attacked by a new-liberalism that seeks to extract moral norms from society.

The present culture of America is focused on relationships. If religion cannot so focus individuals, then the people will move away from that which continues to keep them denominated from one another. This is not something in reference to the doctrines of each particular religious institution. When we speak of the Christian faith, the world is crying out for something that will bring a divided humanity together, not keep them separated from one another into fellowships of favorite doctrines. In this religious scenario, therefore, religious doctrines are often forsaken for the sake of unity. Nevertheless, we still see this as a tremendous opportunity to preach the gospel that brings people closer together. When gospel is preached, all those dividing

religious rites and rituals that have a tendency to keep us apart from one another, are marginalized in our efforts to be drawn together on the basis of a common moral foundation. In this case, rites, rituals and ceremonies that sustain religion are viewed as obstacles in our efforts to develop relationships that are based on common morals and goals.

However, we do not forget that the same scenario existed in Israel. As the populous forsook the one true and living God, the people did not become irreligious. On the contrary, they simply became religiously misguided in following after their many Baal (gods) that they had created after their own imagination. The word “Baal” in Hebrew is plural, not singular. The people simply became religious under whatever god (religion) they so chose. This is universalism in reference to faith. It was a universal Baal faith that was void of the word of God (See Hs 4:6). We see the same happening today as religious groups are more focused on relational unity that is based on any belief than the one gospel that must always be the foundation for unity.

This seems to be the reason behind the Holy Spirit inspiring the apostle Paul to inscribe the document of Romans. Paul was held up from traveling immediately to Rome. Therefore, he penned the letter of Romans to explain what he wanted to say personally to the disciples in Rome. He was aware that they were moving toward meritorious religion as the Galatians were turning from the gospel to another gospel (See Gl 1:6-9). In his first words of the letter, therefore, he explained his intentions for going to Rome, as well as what he would preach upon his arrival.

Paul said, *“I often planned to come to you”* (Rm 1:13). He then explained why he wanted to go to the disciples in Rome. He explained, *“That I might have **some fruit** among you also”* (Rm 1:13). This is fruit that would be produced by his preaching the gospel to the Christians in Rome. So he wrote, *“So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you [Christians] also who are at Rome”* (Rm 1:15).

**The gospel produces fruit in the lives of believers as it does in the lives of unbelievers.** If we are to detour the apostasy of the church into being just another religion, then the church must be restored continually to the foundation of the gospel. This is not a reference to reminding ourselves about correct doctrinal points on a legal outline. It is about learning

and living the gospel of the incarnational Son of God, His offering for our sins, His resurrection, ascension, coronation and present priesthood and reign as King of kings. These are motivational principles that keep us in the word of Christ. Studies in this gospel will produce fruit in our daily lives, as well as turn us from digressing back into religion.

## Chapter 9 FOCUS ON THE GOSPEL

The following studies in the gospel will turn the tidal wave of decline of faith in the society of America, as well as in all those societies throughout the world where we would seek to build the body of Christ. We say this because much of the religion that has led to the decline of the American church, has through missions, been propagated throughout the world. For this reason, some “mission churches” that adopted the religion that was propagated out of America in the last two centuries are now in the same decline, if not already dead. Therefore, the following emphasis is gospel oriented. The gospel must be restored if we are going to preserve faith in this present world:

### **A. We must restore the power of the gospel in our daily living.**

If the confidence of our faith is in our religious heritage, then it is based on man, and not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those churches that are fading away in the society of America are those groups who have often placed more faith in the traditional heritage of their religion than in the gospel of Christ. We appreciate the faithfulness of those who have kept showing up on Sunday for the past decades. But there is a real need for a paradigm shift from the same-old-same-old to something that touches the hearts of the people in a modern world. Keep in mind that heritage focuses on the head, but gospel focuses on the heart. If our struggles to maintain the “church” are focused on persevering our religious heritage, then we have almost guaranteed the demise of our heritage as upcoming generations change. It is only the gospel that permeates time.

Today among people of faith, there is a desire to restore faith in Christ alone, apart from any baggage of the traditional religion of the fathers. We see this as a positive move. However, we must understand that in this rebellion of the past, the future must be guided by the word of God, wherein we discover the gospel of God's grace. If our faith is not so directed, then in a few generations from now we will end up where we are now, that is, in a religion that bases its authority and the heritage of the fathers, we being the fathers who passed down to our grandchildren another heritage, not the gospel.

## **B. We must restore in our behavior the inherent nature of the gospel of grace and peace.**

The gospel is good news for the souls of despondent people. Since it is good news, then it is something that must be broadcast throughout villages, towns, cities of every nation of the world. If we believe that people will on their own come to us in the buildings wherein we have housed our religion, then we have deceived ourselves. Satan works in every way possible to keep people "out of the church house." He uses every tool to dissuade people from considering faith in God as an answer to the problems of life.

There is too much beer and liquor sold in the world in which people can drown their problems. And now, there is too much opioid remedies prescribed to give some relief to life. We might add that there is also too much money to provide a pseudo-happiness to those who are afraid to be idle. There are too many people who live after the ways of the world and can offer a party of like-minded despondent people in the same situation. In other words, Satan has every distraction possible to dissuade people from showing up at some assembly of religious people.

Gospel is not religion. The gospel of the incarnation, sacrificial love offering (the cross), hope in giving a final resurrection, empowering ascension, and coronation of King Jesus is a way of life for those who have believed and obeyed the gospel. Once we take the message of the gospel to the discouraged, then the tidal wave of people moving away from faith will change. When we stop "going to church" as a symbol of our faithfulness and

start being church in our communities, then the community will have a daily opportunity to come into contact with the power of the gospel. It is the gospel behavior of Christians to “love their neighbors as themselves.” Communities need the example of the gospel light (Mt 5:16). People need the preserving leaven of our gospel-driven leaven (Mt 13:33).

### C. Restore the universal appeal of the gospel of God’s grace.

The worldwide power that is inherent in the gospel is that it is universally applicable to all cultures of people. One of the identities of religion is that many religions are culturally linked in some way. Even within a particular culture, the religion of the existing body of believers is often linked to the traditions of a particular generation of people within the society. Inherent in the gospel, on the other hand, is that it is never culturally linked. If we link the gospel to a particular generation of people, then it is no longer gospel. It has been turned into a religion, or as Paul described such, “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-9). When some Jews demanded obedience to the tradition of circumcision as a basis for salvation, they were preaching another gospel (At 15:1,2). If a religion is culturally linked, then it often fades away as the ways of the fathers passes away.

One of the characteristics of the Millennial Generation in the American religious scene is that this generation seeks to be unhinged from the traditions of the past. We would not say that this is something that is unique with the American culture in these times. In fact, in the general African tribal church, culture has historically identified each particular tribal group. To a great extent, this tribal identity has infiltrated many churches throughout the continent with local cultural norms. But a new and educated generation seeks to throw off the culture of the fathers, and in doing so, throw away the “cultural church.” The social media of today has accelerated this movement away from the ways of the past. Unfortunately, the past generation has linked their faith so tightly to the culture of the past, that the younger generation simply moves on from the existing identity of the local church. Any church that is culturally linked to the traditions of the fathers will not stand against those who can distinguish between traditions and Bible.

The beautiful nature of the gospel is that it is **not** culturally linked. Gos-

pel links us to a “heavenly culture” where the Head is seated at the right hand of God. Unfortunately, those who are traditionally linked in their faith with the ways of the culture around them have not discovered this truth about the nature of the gospel. They may have discovered it, but when change is imminent, the reply is always, “that is not our culture.”

Those who struggle against the “change agents” have not discovered that the cultural traditions of the fathers should play a minor part in the implementation of the power of the gospel in the lives of every cultural group around the world. Therefore, if we would stem the tide of decline, then we must disengage the gospel from the traditions of the past in order to identify the purity of the simple gospel. We must be able to unlink gospel from culture. We have found that many who are against the “change agents,” have a difficult time in separating religious heritage and traditions from the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **D. We must be willing to follow the incarnational gospel of the Son of God.**

An illustration is in order here in reference to living the incarnational example of the Son of God. When Paul admonished, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus,*” he was asking the Philippians to pause for a moment in order to consider the paradigm shift the Son of God made on our behalf. Formerly, and before the incarnation, the man Jesus was in the form of God. This meant that He was spirit (Jn 4:24). He was with God in spirit (Jn 1:1,2). But He gave up that form and environment and transitioned into the form of the flesh of man (Jn 1:14; Ph 2:6,7).

This was an incarnational transition out of the “culture” of heaven and into the culture of the Jews when He was born into the flesh in Bethlehem. When we speak of making all necessary cultural changes in order to accommodate our Savior who did the same for us, then we are living the incarnational mind of Christ. Those who are not willing to do this do not have the mind of Christ. They are not living the gospel incarnationally.

We must go further into this incarnational journey of the Son of God. We believe in the incarnation of God the Son into the flesh of man. There is no problem with this belief until we start allowing “this mind” to be in us in

order that we live the example that He left for us to follow. So Peter cautioned us with these words: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). We have found that Christians feel comfortable about applying the “suffering” of this statement only to the cross. The cross is indeed in the picture, but the suffering began long before the cross. It was the Son of God in spirit who was incarnate in the flesh of a person who could suffer from disease. He could suffer from a broken arm. He could suffer from cuts and bruises. As soon as Mary lifted the incarnate babe from the manger, that babe began living a life of suffering, which suffering was for us.

So He began His suffering after birth and before the cross. We might therefore ask, “Into what skin did Jesus incarnate? Was His skin white, black, yellow, red, tan, or whatever we might witness in this present world?” It was into this human skin that the Son of God in spirit placed Himself. When the prophet said, “*A body You have prepared for Me,*” (Hb 10:5), we might wonder what the skin color of His incarnate body might have been?

If one has been following the thoughts of this incarnational journey, then he or she should have by now concluded that there is no cause for racism based on skin color when living the incarnational example of Jesus. In fact, if there is any racism in the mind of a Christian, that “Christian” is not living the incarnational example of Jesus. Jesus was born a Jew, and certainly He suffered a great deal of racist remarks from the Gentile Romans. But He incarnationally lived without reacting to racist remarks or prejudice. He marched to the suffering of the cross for those who smeared Him with all sorts of racist remarks.

If we live the incarnational gospel of the Son of God, therefore, we will love the skin we are in. We will be thankful for the hair under which we walk. We will neither portray racism nor prejudice toward others, neither will we allow the racism and prejudice of others to affect our gospel behavior. We live in a world of racism. If we react to any racism, then we will simply bounce from one racist comment to another. Ever hear of the statement, “The water simply runs off the back of a duck”?

Jesus was born as a Jew into a Jewish culture. He was not a Gentile. Therefore, all His life He knew all the prejudice that the Gentile Romans had

against Him as a Jew. But He still went to the cross for the Gentile Romans. The next time we belittle the culture of another people, or person, then we know that we still have problems in living the incarnational example of Jesus who suffered all things for all the cultures of the world. Any church, therefore, that is not willing to include all cultural groups, and any skin color that may come by, is not a church of the Christ who came into the skin and culture of men.

### **E. We must restore the stable foundation of the gospel in our lives.**

We must remember that when the Holy Spirit spoke in reference to the gospel, it was a message “*in which you stand*” (1 Co 15:1). “Stand” is a metaphor in this statement for something that brings emotional stability to one’s life. As one stands on a firm foundation, so the gospel is a mentally firm foundation upon which we emotionally stand.

Now we must not be confused in reference to the stabilizing psychology of the gospel. This is not a foundation of supposedly pure doctrinal correctness. It is a foundation of pure gospel. It is a foundation of faith in the gospel reign of the incarnate Son of God. It is a committed faith in King Jesus that He at this time has all things under His control. It is a “mind of Christ” that we have brought into our psyche in order to stabilize all our emotional responses to the trials of life. It is an inner peace that allows us to do what James stated: “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials*” (Js 1:2; see Ph 2:5-7). It is thus a spirit of mind and heart that is totally focused on King Jesus, His gospel reign, and the good news that He is coming again to deliver us from this world. This is gospel psychology, not doctrinal purity. If one would seek to grow in this gospel psychology, then the gospel according to Hebrews is a good textbook to absorb.

We live in a world today that is filled with social instability. When we turn on our international news media of events around the world, there are people marching everywhere for some particular change that will bring social stability. As the far left political wave that engulfs society becomes more dominant, societies will become more unstable. It is the central identity of political liberalism to extract laws that have built stable societies. But when law is extracted, then instability in society results.

What is now being witnessed in the American political scene is an example of how political liberalism seeks to destroy the social norms of the past. Inherent in liberal political socialism is the destruction of that which brought a particular society to its present social stability. In order for liberal socialism to be implemented, however, the social structures that brought a particular society to its present stability must be destroyed. Unfortunately, the socialist has nothing to offer to sustain the moral stability of either the financial structures of a society, or the moral norms upon which people can stand with reassurance. We have found that socialists who march in the streets rarely think beyond the demands that are written on their placards.

When a society is in social chaos, it is the gospel of the unchanging King Jesus that brings stability to our lives. Though individual citizens may not be able to control the social and financial chaos around them, they can stand within the power of the gospel that brings peace within. Though the world may seem like it is coming apart, we must never forget that it is our King who upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3). Unless church leaders understand this inherent nature of the gospel reign of King Jesus, people will not be drawn to the cross that we preach. Preaching religion will never bring an inner peace of God that goes beyond human understanding (See Ph 4:7). But gospel will. Religion, especially culturally linked religion, usually adds to the problem of instability, rather than offering a safe haven for those who are in the midst of social chaos.

## **F. We must restore the gospel as the motivation for abundant living.**

Gospel-driven people must offer hope to those who are struggling in the midst of social and political chaos. Gospel-driven people do not allow the environment in which they live to influence the emotional state of their lives. They realize that He who lives in them is far more powerful than he who is in this world (1 Jn 4:4).

If a church of members has moved away from understanding how the members must live according to the gospel, then it has no gospel power to offer to those who are living in social and political chaos. If the preachers do not know how to preach gospel living to the people, then they will often

preach religion, which theme perpetuates division and instability. Some will even make an effort to preach “sound doctrine” in hopes of comforting the people with the hope that if they believe what is right doctrinally, they will be right emotionally. But at the time same, the hearts of the people are in turmoil because of the chaotic circumstances in which they find themselves. Their “abundant living” is based only in what they consider to be “sound doctrine.” Unfortunately, legalists rarely have the peace of mind that surpasses all understanding.

“Sound doctrine” will not calm an emotionally disturbed heart. One can be totally disturbed in heart while his head is filled with correct doctrine. But gospel is not according to doctrinal purity, though it is based on the truth of the incarnate Son of God and truth of His present gospel reign. A correct system of religiosity may supposedly be intellectually pure, but it is a particular problem in reference to religion in general, and legalistic religion in particular. One may be faithful to the faith of the fathers, but still this does not bring the peace that passes all understanding.

Religion is that form of faith that people are fleeing because it brings no inner peace of mind. Religionists do not understand that the gospel makes the body of believers a rescue center for the downheartened in the community. **It does so because gospel deals with the heart, whereas religion and doctrine deal with the head.** The “church of your choice” no longer appeals to those who feel that they are without any choices in a chaotic world of religion and politics. Therefore, it is only the gospel that will bring the abundant life to those who seek comfort and stability in a world that seems to have gone wrong, which it has because of sin.

## **G. We must restore incarnational living as a witness of the gospel to the world.**

When Paul wrote, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus,*” he was not promoting a narcissistic system of religion (Ph 2:5). He was reminding the Philippians that the One whom they claimed to follow “*did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation*” (Ph 2:6,7). Incarnational living after the mind of Christ is about giving up, not getting something for our own pleasure.

A narcissist thinks everything is about him. When narcissism is brought into the family of God, the assembly often becomes an opportunity to show one's self to the public. The preacher seeks to perform, and subsequently, receive all the compliments in the foyer at the end of the assembly. Those who have sought to draw people to a band, seek to perform in the band in order to make a theatrical performance before an audience. The instrumentalists in the band are often so narcissistic that they will turn up the speakers of their instruments in order to drown out those who are singing. They seek to be seen for their much playing on their instruments, regardless of the performance of the singers. A narcissistic audience goes to the assembly to get something out of the assembly. Many assemblies today have turned into an opportunity for performers to make their performances, not an occasion for worship together. Unfortunately, in too many cases worship has turned into an entertainment session for performers and the opportunity for the audience to be mesmerized by cheerleading speakers.

We must not forget that narcissism in a society moves one into focusing on his or her feelings. As the far left liberalism of a society extracts any restrictions of law, feelings become the norm by which something is judged appealing, or right. Those churches that focus on the feelings of the people are growing. But those churches that focus on the "law" of the traditions of their religious heritage are dying away. Likewise, those churches that consider the word of God to be the final norm by which any faith should be judged are also giving way to those who want their feelings and less Bible. The result is that churches become social clubs where people go to feel good about the bad situation in which they live. The assembly becomes a momentary opportunity to forget one's woes in the midst of a theatrical concert.

We must remember that whenever a group of people focus on themselves, they are not focusing on the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit said this in the following words: "*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God*" (Cl 3:1). This is the only cure for a narcissistic emotional disorder in church assemblies. The preacher who can lift the hearts of the people with the gospel into the throne room of King Jesus is right on track.

The problem is that any traits of narcissism are against the mental attitude about which Paul wrote to the Philippians: ***“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ”*** (Ph 2:5). When one’s mind is filled with self, then gospel cannot penetrate one’s heart. The mind of Christ is about humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God as the Son of God humbled Himself to come in our flesh in order to go to the cross (1 Pt 5:6). If our narcissistic religiosity is all that takes us to an assembly of saints, then we will be enabled to continue after the “closing prayer” with the same dysfunctional mind we had before the “opening prayer.” It is only the gospel mind of Christ that will deliver us from this fretful world in which we live. It is only the gospel that will give us the opportunity to count it all joy when we must endure great trials (Js 1:2). Therefore, when the gospel of Jesus Christ is the center of attraction around the Lord’s Supper in our assembly, it is then that we walk away with a deeper sense of gratitude. It is then that we have discovered the cause and reason for our worship.

## **H. We must restore gospel definitions to our dictionary of biblical references.**

For example, the word “preach” is used in the New Testament to refer to those who announce the good news to unbelievers. **We preach the gospel to the lost**, but we teach one another as the body of Christ. Believers have teachers before them, whereas unbelievers need preachers of the gospel to stand before them. “Discipleship” often infers that it is all about us, whereas being a disciple of Jesus means it is all about Him and others. A narcissistic generation likes the word “discipleship” because the word can be twisted to refer to our own needs. We seek classes on discipleship in order to better relate with one another. But this is not the focus in reference to being a disciple of Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus means that we must let the mind of Christ be in us. And the mind of Christ can be summed up in one statement that was made by Jesus: *“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Lk 19:10). Seeking the lost as a disciple (follower) of Christ means that we must be focused on others, especially the lost.

We too often use the word “fellowship” in reference to a food party.

But New Testament fellowship is a reference to the common organic function of a body of believers who have all obeyed the gospel. We seek “relationships,” but this word that is not used in the New Testament should be defined with a gospel definition. Too often “relationships” are inwardly focused, but those living the gospel are outwardly focused on the lost. It is easy for social-club Christians to turn inward, forgetting that their responsibility as disciples of Jesus is to continue the commission of Jesus to go into all the world with the gospel (Mk 16:15,16).

### **I. We must restore our gospel identity with the Lord Jesus Christ.**

In the past, we have often identified ourselves, and our common fellowship, with a specific name. Some were very inventive with their names, glorifying either specific doctrines, special men in the history of their particular religious group, or a specific day of the week, or even a Jewish feast day. People today, however, turn away from unique names of identity.

As in the New Testament, there were no specific names given to the disciples of Christ, especially names in reference to assemblies. The early disciples identified with the risen Christ. As in the first century, many folks today simply want to be identified with Christ, and thus not form a lump of disciples in the worldwide leaven of the Bread of Life. They seek to be Christians only in a world of believers, without having been labelled with a particular name in order to be in membership with a unique religious group.

We must remember that unique names cause people to divide into groups, whereas gospel draws people together into Christ alone. Christians must be Christ drawn, not name drawn. If the first Christians could be Christians only outside the identity of a unique group that meets at a specific location, then it is assumed that the same can exist today. Being tied to a particular institution of authority with a membership card is not in the thinking of those who simply want to be Christians only. Christians seek to be identified, through their obedience to the gospel, with Christ alone.

### **J. We must restore a positive mental attitude about preaching the gospel to the world.**

In order to do this, we must not allow the knockers, knit pickers and no-no birds to run the organic function of the body. Among our leaders, it can never be “my way, or the highway.” When critics want to shoot the body full of negativity holes, we must ignore them and move on. Gospel is positive. And it is the nature of the good news to be told to others in a positive manner.

If we are not compelled to preach the gospel to the world, then we have not fully understood the nature of the gospel. If one is willing to let his “*behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ,*” then he must repent and seek to preach the gospel to the world (Ph 1:27). We must be gospel motivated to the extent that each one of us will, as Paul, do the following: “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15). Inherent in the gospel is a positive mental attitude, for it is good news. Those who are negative in their faith do not have the spirit of the gospel within them.

### **K. We must restore self-initiative among those who seek to live the gospel.**

If one has to ask for permission to do that which he or she must do in daily gospel living—that is, serving others and preaching the gospel—then he or she is stuck in an institution that is run by those who seek to lord over the flock of God.

Jesus said that lords of authority would not exist among His gospel-driven people (See Mk 10:35-45). So if one finds himself asking for permission to serve others, then he can conclude that he is not among the gospel-driven people of God. He is stuck in a religious institution that is under the control of lords. Some of these are those religious institutions that are closing their doors because people no longer seek to be confined to the service of lords, but to their only Lord Jesus Christ. Just remember that if you must ask for permission from some religious head, then your only head in reference to faith is not the Lord Jesus. If you have to ask permission to preach the Lord Jesus, then you have one too many lords in your life (See Ep 4:4-6).

## **L. We must restore life-style faith as opposed to assembly-oriented identity.**

In the midst of the present decline of assemblies in Western societies there has often been futile efforts on the part of religionists to revive the assemblies of endangered churches. The focus on changing assembly identity has revealed a serious problem. The problem is that religion digresses to a “worship hour” assembly that is commenced with an “opening prayer.” The adherents are ushered through a series of ceremonies that are signed off after completion with a “closing prayer.” Religion is thus defined by the performance of both personalities and ceremonies that are boxed into an official assembly of the membership during the “hour of worship.” Contrary to life-style faith, the assemblies of the saints have become the highlight of the “Christian life.” The primary problem with this system of religion is that in the New Testament our faith is not defined by how we perform in an assembly. It is identified by how we focus our behavior on things that are above this world (See C1 3).

Because the institutional religion of the day has identified itself by the rites and ceremonies of a performance-oriented assembly, there is a decline in “religion” (assemblies) in the American church. There is a decline because people have enough sense to understand that a faith that does not take them throughout seven days of victorious living during the week is not worth having. People thirst for a faith that is with them 24-7 throughout the week, not a faith that is active only during the “hour of worship” on Sunday morning.

Because of the assembly identity of religion today, there have been some frantic pseudo remedies introduced into the assemblies of many churches in order to stem the tide of the decline in the attendance at the religious theater. For example, some sort of entertainment has been brought in to excite the audience in order that everyone go away with some sense of emotional relief, or exhortation. Speakers have become “feel good” psychologists who can present messages that any good professional psychologist can present on a couch in an office.

One of the interesting complaints that we have witnessed is that in order for an assembly of religionists to be contemporary, women must have some public part in the theatrical performance. Regardless of what we might

feel is the role of women in the large religious assemblies of the modern church, the placement of women in some role of notice in such assemblies seems to betray the fact that we have digressed into a norm of assembly behavior that was foreign to the New Testament disciples. For this reason, we are using a functional system of assembly today in order to read into the historical context of the early church some participation of women.

But we forget that in the first century, except on rare occasions, all the regular assemblies of the saints were conducted in the homes of the members. During these house assemblies nothing changed in the relationship between the husband and wife that was normal in the common day to day household behavior of both parties. The relationship between husbands and wives did not change whether there were visitors in one's home on Sunday morning or evening. The husband remained the head, and the wife retained her submissive relationship with her husband (See Ep 5:22-33). This did not mean that the wife had to assume silence when a neighbor came over Sunday morning for worship.

Regardless of whether the neighbors came over to one's home for praise and worship together as a household, the host husband and wife of the home carried on as usual. The role of the wife in her relationship with her husband remained the same in the home assembly on Sunday. But in the modern large assembly environment it seems that people are resorting to politics in religious institutional assemblies that were foreign to that which existed in the early church. It is necessary, therefore, that we take another look at those passages that deal with women in general in reference to the fellowship of the saints. It may be that we are missing something, or at least, using some passages out of their historical context.

## **M. We must restore the present gospel reign of King Jesus over all things.**

When people feel that they are outside the realm of the reign of King Jesus when the assembly is terminated with a "closing prayer," then there is little emphasis on maintaining a submissive spirit in every aspect of one's efforts to live the gospel throughout the week. Add to this the present theological obsession that everyone is waiting for the rapture in order that King

Jesus come and reign on this earth for one thousand years. During this supposed period of reign it is assumed that believers will have some carnal authority by which they can reign over others in the carnal kingdom reign on earth. If the supposed earthly kingdom is yet to come, then there is a twisted understanding of the present gospel reign of Jesus.

If we do not instill in others the present gospel reign of King Jesus over all that now exists, then there is little impetus to be submissive to a reigning King who has limited authority and power. We cannot put off the kingdom reign of Jesus to some time in the future. Though we do not see everything to be in subjection to Him at this time, we must not be fooled. He is still reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). If we think we can put off our submission until the one thousand years, then there is little urgency to live the submitted life today.

If unbelieving people are not willing to submit to the present reign of King Jesus, then there is no hope to bring them into the realm of His present gospel reign. Guaranteeing the submission of present unbelievers in a supposed kingdom to come is useless in giving hope to people who are now seeking in this life a hope that will take them beyond this world. If a church of religionists believe that they are preaching the gospel by approaching the unbeliever with a message that they do not have to submit to King Jesus in this present life, then they have lost the motivation to humble themselves in the sight of God. If people are taught that King Jesus only has limited power over all things at this time, then power has been extracted from His gospel reign. It is this power that motivates peace of mind in a troubled world. The present gospel reign of Jesus as head over all things, King of kings and Lord of lords brings peace of mind to those who live in a world of social turmoil. Therefore, the doors of those churches that are not preaching the present gospel reign of King Jesus need to close. These churches do not represent the King of kings. They do not have a message that brings peace of mind.

## **Chapter 10**

### **THE ANT FARM CULTURE**

When we were young and on a farm in middle America, we purchased

an ant farm from a mail-order catalog. Being farm boys, we were all amateur entomologists who studied insects and how they related with people, the environment in which we lived, and animals with which we worked. So we acquired this ant farm that was constructed out of two panes of glass with a space of about two centimeters between the two panes. We also received a fresh stock of ants to confine in the enclosure, and then every day we had the responsibility of caring for our industrious little creatures. We learned a great deal from our industrious fellows as they bore their holes and made their homes in the soil that was enclosed between the two panes of glass. It was indeed a great learning experience.

Others have done the same with ant farms. In fact, there is a variety of ant farms that can be obtained today for future entomologists who seek to study in this field of science. But one curious thing we have never encountered is that no entomologist seems to become so attached to any particular ant that he or she would consider said ant to be a “pet.” Curious.

Recently, we had difficulty explaining what the Son of God did in the action of His incarnation. In fact, we have found that many preachers and teachers avoid this subject. We have found that people have no difficulty sharing the gospel of Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross. Somehow, that subject is safe. Neither have we found anyone who has had difficulty in sharing with others the excitement of the resurrection of Jesus from the death, and His gospel ascension to the right hand of God. These historical subjects are all safe to study and share, for they all simply rely more on knowledge and less life change.

But we recently stood among about one hundred preachers and asked them if they had ever preached specifically on the subject of the incarnation of the Son of God. One hand went up. All of us in the room were quite amazed. The reason for the lack of preaching and teaching on this subject varies. However, one reason why the subject is not taught is most common among those who have the responsibility to lead the church in teaching. **This is not a safe subject to preach.** The reason it is not safe is that the preacher knows that in the back of the minds of the audience to whom he would preach such a subject, the thought lingers, “Preacher, practice what you preach.”

So in preparation for one of the lessons on the incarnation that we

wanted to deliver to an audience of people recently, we went out to our backyard. We had a jar in hand, and thus went on the search for an unwilling volunteer. It was not the time for ants to be out and about, but one example trophy had to be acquired for the illustration of the incarnation of God into the flesh of man. So eventually, a small representative of the ant world was spotted, and thus there was an effort to transfer the unwilling volunteer into the jar. Unfortunately, the first attempt was unsuccessful, resulting in the crippling of the frail creature who was to be imprisoned. In fact, the imprisonment eventually led to an entombment for the unfortunate critter.

Therefore, the search resumed for another volunteer who scurried from our presence with the greatest of zeal, knowing possibly, that he too would suffer the same fate as his fellow ant. Nevertheless, with a licked finger and gentle touch, the frail creature was seized in saliva. Our example ant thus found his way into the enclosure of our jar. And now it was off to the lecture hall.

With a raised jar, we said to the audience, that there is an ant therein. “How many of you love ants?” No hands went up. “How many of you would like to have an ant as a pet?” Still no hands went up. “Well then, can we release this poor captive ant on the floor at this time and give him freedom?” Nervous tension set in, and a few feet were lifted from the floor. We then stated, “How many would be willing to become as this ant in order that this ant eventually be transformed into an eternal being as we are?” Everyone looked dumbfounded. We added, “It seems that no one here really understands what the Son of God did through the incarnation in order to be as we are in order that we be as Him in eternity.”

From the eternal security of a heavenly dwelling, the Son of God looked down from an ant-free environment and saw us as ants scurrying about here and there looking for food, building homes, and surviving in our environment. Unfortunately, we became a cesspool of sin. But still the Son had created the ants, because He, the Father and Spirit needed those on whom they could pour out the affection of their love. As the Son stood on the edge of heaven and was about to go fetch His “ants,” the Father and Spirit surely cried out, “Do you know what you are about to do?” There may have been such pleas on the part of the two spirits of the Godhead who would stay

behind in the realm of heaven. They could have said to the Son, “Humanity on earth is but a cesspool of refuse into which You are about to plunge” (See Rm 5:8).

But the Son turned and replied, “I know. But I have that covered with incarnational blood.” And then He leaped for us, “*taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:7). Though He was one with God, “*He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God*” (Ph 2:6). Therefore, “*He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Ph 2:8).

That was not a safe leap from heaven. It came with a great cost. God the Son leaped right into the filth of humanity that eventually took Him to the cross. We can all feel safe about that being His mission, His sacrifice, and His death. But here is a startling context of what was written by the apostle Paul in the above Spirit-inspired statements: “***Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus***” (Ph 2:5). Jesus took a humiliating dive from heaven for “ants” as us because He loved us. Paul said that if we want to have the mind of Christ in us, then we too have to take the same incarnational dive, even if it means death (Rv 2:10).

## Chapter 11

### THE INCARNATIONAL MIND OF CHRIST

It is safe to talk about gospel things in the second person, that is, in reference to what the Son of God did for us. But what the Holy Spirit said is that we must have this same mind in us. We must move from the second person to the first person singular if we are to transform our minds into the minds of Christ.

As the Son of God incarnationally humbled Himself for us, we must also personally walk the gospel of the incarnation. We have found that people feel safe about “being baptized.” They feel secure in the fact that they have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of the incarnate God. But they need to back up before the water, and first consider what the Son of God did for them. It is there that we need to reconsider what having the “mind of Christ” is when living the gospel of the incarnation.

**A. The incarnational mind of Christ is gospel living without a lust for possessions.**

In fact, the Holy Spirit said, “***Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him***” (1 Jn 2:15). “***Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal***” (Mt 6:19). Therefore, “***set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth***” (Cl 3:2). Those who have the mind of Christ have their minds set on heavenly things. Their treasures are not on this earth. The Son of God did not have His mind so linked to heaven that He could not give up being God in order to come for us. We are His treasures for which He came into this world. This is the mind of Christ that must be reflected in everyone who would claim to be a disciple of Jesus.

**B. The incarnational mind of Christ is gospel living without the thirst for advancement in religion.**

We remember what happened in the life of Paul when he encountered the mind of Christ. He wrote, “***What things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for Christ***” (Ph 3:7). On one occasion he recalled his former religiosity as a Jewish religious leader, “***After the strictest sect of our religion [the Jews’ religion] I lived a Pharisee***” (At 26:5). He remembered, “***I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries***” (Gl 1:14).

But when Paul obeyed the gospel, and subsequently lived the mind of Christ, things changed. “***I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things***” (Ph 3:8). In fact, the Holy Spirit allowed him to write very specifically concerning those things that he once pursued in this world, especially in the world of religion. He wrote, “***I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ***” (Ph 3:8). The word “refuse” in this statement comes from the Greek word “dung.” In other words, and in our metaphorical language today, he flushed down the toilet all the advancement in religion that he had attained as a religious Pharisee. Living the mind of Christ meant

that all the positions of pomp and pride became the “stink” of Jewish religion. He could not have the mind of Christ while carrying on with all those things and positions in his former religious life. Those who consider themselves successful “churchologists” should seriously consider these matters.

And now we know why few preachers will focus on the subject of the incarnation of Christ. Instead of three-piece suits and ties, they might end up as John the Baptist, with camel-hair clothing, while munching on grasshoppers. Or they might find themselves as Paul with the loss of all things in order to live the gospel mind of Christ.

When we grew up in the faith over a half century ago, most preachers drove around in old broken down cars. They lived in “parsonage houses” that always needed repairs. Their children grew up going to numerous schools throughout their school years. For the love of preaching the word of God to the people of God, the preachers made every conceivable sacrifice in order to fulfill their ministry. They were incarnational leaders whom the people followed.

A survey of preachers was once taken in 1972 by Harding University. One of the astonishing facts that the survey revealed was that preachers in those days stayed at churches two years and less before they moved on to preach for another church. And when in their old age the preachers could no longer utter words from a pulpit, they often ended up living with their aged wives in a house on wheels. The surprising thing about this survey was something that was never mentioned in reference to these godly men and their wives who incarnationally lived in service of the people of God. The church throughout their years of incarnational leadership in America was the fastest growing church in America. We remember that in 1961 the number of missionary families from the church of those days was the highest in history.

It is interesting to note that the church is always growing in developing country societies. The reason for this is that materialism has not diverted the thinking of the people, especially the leaders. Church leaders must live incarnationally out of necessity. And when leaders so live, the people follow. The people understand that the leaders are not into their faith for material gain. When everyone struggles to survive, there is a camaraderie among the people.

When preachers live the mind of Christ, the sheep follow. But since those days in the American social environment, preachers started to boast about staying longer at churches, having better salaries, living in their own houses, and retiring with comfortable compensation. And now the church in prosperous America is declining in numbers every year. Churches of all faiths are closing the doors of over two hundred churches every week. And what is surprising is that no one seems to be able to connect the dots for the real reason why these doors are closing. Could it possibly be that we now have fewer incarnational leaders?

### **C. The incarnational mind of Christ is gospel living without consideration for skin color.**

In every society that claims to be “Christian,” but at the same time, expresses racial tensions because of skin color, one thing is true. **Church has failed the people!** When the Son of God was about to take the dive from heaven into a physical body here on earth, we wonder if He ever considered what color of skin that body should have? Would He be more accepted in a brown body? Or possibly, a black body. Maybe He would take on a white body, or red, or whatever. Since skin color is only “skin deep,” then we know that skin color was of no consequence in reference to His incarnation into the flesh of man (Jn 1:14).

There is no issue with skin color in those who have the mind of Christ. Unfortunately, throughout one’s childhood the parents often prejudice one’s mind in reference to skin colors. But regardless of one’s skin color, he or she can be assured that the Son of God did not determine His incarnation according to skin colors. All those who claim to be His disciples, therefore, must be of the same mind regardless of skin colors. If skin color is an issue in reference to relationships, then one can be certain of one thing. He or she is not yet made perfect in the mind of Christ.

### **D. The incarnational mind of Christ is gospel living that does not exalt culture over the incarnational life-style.**

Sometimes skin color is associated with differences in culture, though

this is not always true. People of the same color can represent different cultures. When Jesus was born into a Jewish family in Palestine, He was incarnate into Jewish culture, which culture at the time was very dysfunctional in reference to any association with the Gentiles. In fact, it was not lawful according to the “Jews’ religion,” for a Jew to go into the house and eat with a Gentile. Peter discovered this when some brethren confronted him for doing this when he went into the Gentile house of Cornelius (See At 11:1-3). He also experienced something similar to this when he and other Jewish Christians withdrew from Gentile brethren in Antioch (See Gl 2:11-16). In fact, when Paul confronted him on this matter, Paul judged that he stood condemned for such actions (Gl 2:11). We must not forget that the gospel is not linked to any particular culture.

Because the coming of the Son of God into this world was initially promised to Abraham, Jesus was to be of the seed of Abraham (See Gn 12:1-4). At the time this promise was made two thousand years before, Abraham was not a Jew. No Jewish race existed at that time in history. Jews came from the descendants of Abraham, while the nation of Israel (Jews) developed in Egyptian captivity. When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, God established a national covenant at Mount Sinai with the seed of Abraham that descended from Jacob. It was then that the Jewish culture officially began. Within the Sinai law and covenant were restrictions that the Israelites were not to intermarry with other people. They were to be a nation to themselves in order to preserve a segment of humanity for the coming of the incarnation of the Son of God. For this reason, therefore, the Son of God came into the world as a Jew. He lived in the culture of the Jews.

Nevertheless, while in the incarnate flesh of man, Jesus demonstrated that His people would break out of the Jewish culture. His first demonstration of this was when He spoke directly with a non-Jewish woman from Samaria (See Jn 4:1-38). On this occasion, the disciples “*marveled that He talked with a woman,*” and in particular a woman who was a Samaritan (Jn 4:27). When Jesus set His face to make His final trip to Jerusalem, the messengers that He sent before Him “*entered into a village of the Samaritans to prepare for Him*” (Lk 9:52). After this, Jesus presented a parable of the “good Samaritan” (Lk 10:25-37).

Jesus prepared the way for His disciples to break out of the culture of the Jews. After they were prepared for a cultural break out, then He commissioned them: “*Going, therefore, disciple **all the nations***” (Mt 28:19). The Greek word for “nations” in this mandate is *ta ethne*. The English word “ethnic” is derived from this word. Therefore, in order to obey this mandate of Jesus, the Jewish disciples were to go to every ethnic group of the world, for the incarnate gospel had no ethnic boundaries.

The conclusion to this point is simple. Unless one is willing to communicate the message of the gospel to any culture of people, **he or she does not yet have the complete mind of Christ**. Paul illustrated this matter in his own life. He wrote, “*We endure all things so that we should not hinder the gospel of Christ*” (1 Co 9:12). He continued, “*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). This was the point of his incarnational living after His Savior who came into the culture of his world: “*I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some*” (1 Co 9:22).

If a church claims to be of Christ, but does not make an effort to either take or send the gospel to all ethnic groups around the world, then that church simply does not have the incarnate mind of God. We can function comfortably within our own culture. However, if our cultural comfort hinders us from seeking to link with others who are not of our culture, then the mind of Christ has not fully come into our lives as disciples of Jesus. Living the gospel mind of Christ demands that we must preach the gospel to every ethnic group of the world, regardless of their culture. We must never forget the following words:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. **For you are all one in Christ Jesus*** (Gl 3:28; see 1 Co 12:13).

## **E. The incarnational mind of Christ is gospel living in a community of those who are slaves to one another’s needs.**

One phrase marks the identity of Christianity. That phrase is “one

another.” It is a phrase that is stated throughout the New Testament in reference to the relationship that Christians have with one another: *“Love one another”* (Jn 13:34). *“Love one another as I have loved you”* (Jn 15:12). *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another”* (Rm 12:10). *“Be of the same mind toward one another”* (Rm 12:16). *“Owe no man anything, except to love one another”* (Rm 13:8). *“Be of the same mind toward one another”* (Rm 15:5). *“Accept one another as Christ also accepted you”* (Rm 15:7). *“Admonish one another”* (Rm 15:14). *“Have the same care for one another”* (1 Co 12:25). *“Serve one another”* (Gl 5:13). And on and on we could go throughout the New Testament.

We get the message that if we are to live the incarnate Son of God in our own lives, then we must have the mind of the Christ who directed all His attention to serve our spiritual needs. It is as He said, *“As I have loved you, that you also love one another”* (Jn 13:34). He so loved us in order to redeem us from our state of sin, and then transform our minds into His mind. Therefore, the Holy Spirit wrote, *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Rm 12:2). *“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”* (Ep 4:23). If we would live the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, we will *“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has also forgiven”* us (Ep 4:32). This is incarnational living according to the gospel.

## **F. The incarnational mind of Christ respects the life that Christ created.**

We must sit back for a moment and consider the awesome inferences of the mind of Christ about which Paul wrote in Philippians 2:5-8 in the sociological context of societies throughout the world today that have gone wrong in reference to the honor and respect for life. This is in reference to the present mania throughout the world in reference to abortion, which act of murder is commonly carried out by many societies around the world.

We must consider this in the context of our deepest understanding of the incarnation of the Son of God that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We first note what the angel announced to the shepherds at the time of the birth

of Jesus: “*For to you a Savior is **born this day** in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord*” (Lk 2:11). At the time of this announcement, the son of Mary and Joseph had already come forth as the incarnate Son of God in the flesh (See Jn 1:1,2,14). But we must go back before this physical birth because of one statement that was made in reference to this newly born babe.

But before we go there, consider the fact that some abortionists of our times affirm that life begins at the time of birth. In other words, there is no life before birth. Other abortionists say that at the sign of the first heart beat life begins. In all this confusion of murderous thinking there is little or no respect for life before birth. Unrighteous people of the world today have set themselves up as gods to determine life and death. But we must notice something very profound in these matters in reference to the incarnation of the Son of God into the flesh of man for the sake of our eternal salvation.

The Holy Spirit inspired apostle Matthew revealed that the life of the incarnate Son of God began long before His birth in Bethlehem. In this case, as in the case of all human life, the life of our Savior began nine months before the birth of baby Jesus, which fact cries out loudly that there is life before birth. The Holy Spirit revealed this concerning the conception of Jesus: “*When His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together [in a sexual relationship], **she was found with child by the Holy Spirit***” (Mt 1:18). It was the testimony of God the Holy Spirit in this statement that the incarnate Son of God was a “child” at the time of conception, nine months before birth. In order to explain the pregnancy of Mary who was with child, and calm his apprehension, an angel specifically clarified the matter of the pregnancy to Joseph with the following words: “*Joseph, the son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is **conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit***” (Mt 1:20). **Jesus was the incarnate Son of God in life before His birth in Bethlehem.** If He were conceived by the Holy Spirit, then He became life at the time of conception, not when He was physically born.

**The incarnate Son of God was a living “child” in the womb of Mary.** And since He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, then it is perfectly clear that it was the Holy Spirit who fertilized the seed (embryo) of woman nine months before the birth of the child (See Gn 3:15). The incarnate Son

of God was first one single-celled seed in the womb of Mary that was then fertilized by the Holy Spirit. He was life in her womb from the very moment the seed of woman was fertilized by the Holy Spirit, and thus, became a living soul in the body of Mary.

It was certainly a good thing that the Son of God was born in their times and not in ours. If He were born in our time, He could have possibly ended up behind some abortion clinic in a black bag in a rubbish bin. He would have been aborted long before any announcement could have been made as that by the angel to the shepherds, “*For to you a Savior is born this day.*” If abortion was practiced then as it is today, then the unwed and embarrassed Mary could have headed for an abortion clinic instead of ending up in a barn in Bethlehem. These are thoughts about which we must pause for a moment and consider. Our society in which we live may have digressed into a Nazi genocide culture of murder.

## **Chapter 12**

### **DEFIANT DREAMERS**

The New Testament letters are just as alive and relevant today as they were when first written two thousand years ago. In order to discover and appreciate these documents, it is necessary to understand them in the historical context of the first recipients. When we understand that the initial recipients were ordinary people who lived in situations that were similar to our situations today, then the letters that the Holy Spirit penned to the early Christians come alive for us today. We are ordinary people who thirst for encouragement when we go through trying times. Letters as James and Jude come to life in our own lives when we understand that the message of encouragement that was written two thousand years ago to recipients who were going through trying times, are also messages of encouragement for us today.

The letter of Jude is a good example of how historical Bible study illustrates how the New Testament letters are as relevant today as they were when first written. Jude wrote in the historical context of the turmoil of national Israel to which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24. The fulfillment of

Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 (Lk 21) concerning the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70 was less than five years away when the Holy Spirit directed the hand of Jude to write a brief document to alert Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire. At the same time, the Holy Spirit through James wrote to the Jews a more lengthier letter with similar thoughts. James' inscriptions were also directed to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the Empire (Js 1:1).

Both James and Jude were preparing the Jewish Christians for the onslaught of Rome to settle the "Jewish problem" of the Empire. It was a problem of radical Judaism that had been building over many decades. These radical insurrectionists wanted to throw off the oppression of Rome in order to enjoy their own national independence. They hated Caesar and they hated Roman oppression.

However, regardless of the efforts of the zealot insurrectionists, the Romans continued throughout the years to execute would-be messiahs who called the Jews to unite in national rebellion against Rome. Many years before Jude wrote, some Romans believed that a Jew from the city of Nazareth was asserting Himself to be a "king of the Jews." Some of His disciples also believed that this Nazarene was the Messiah who would reign on earth in order to restore national Israel. For this reason, some during His ministry attempted to make Him a king against His will (See Jn 6:15). The Romans, therefore, nailed this self-proclaimed Messiah to a cross outside Jerusalem about thirty-five years before both James and Jude wrote their letters. In the middle 60s, therefore, James and Jude wrote in order to remind all Jewish Christians that the coming of the Lord in judgment on national Israel was at hand (Js 5:7,8).

Both James and Jude, who were the earthly brothers of Jesus by Joseph and Mary, were called specifically by the Holy Spirit to warn the followers of their older crucified brother. The two brothers wanted to remind their readers that Jesus had indeed prophesied thirty-five years before what was about to transpire in the lives of His disciples. They had accepted their older brother as the Messiah and Son of God. And now, the two brothers wanted to exhort the disciples of their older brother that nothing was out of control as they transitioned through the social chaos that all of them were about to experience.

Before the days of impending chaos, one messiah after another was subsequently chased down by the Romans, and eventually killed in battle, or caught and crucified on a cross (See At 21:38). But at the time the two brothers, James and Jude wrote, things had heated up to a social breaking point. Rome thus made a determined decision to solve the problem of Jewish radicalism once and for all. So the Roman army organized and started a march toward Jerusalem. When the signs of the end were in view, James and Jude immediately sat down in some quiet place and allowed the Holy Spirit to reveal a message to all Jews, especially Jewish Christians. It was the worst of times for national Israel, but the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24.

But this is not our primary point. We must historically infuse ourselves into the social and political chaos of those times in order to understand the behavior of those who would rise up against the civil authorities of the day, specifically the government of the Roman Empire. We must assume that the Holy Spirit wrote through James and Jude a message that would identify those who would set themselves against the rule of law. In our application of this message to our own selves today, this helps us to identify those in a democratic society who are taking their nations in the way of ruin by twisting the application of both moral and constitutional law.

Every government goes through those times in which there is a chaotic movement within society that thirsts so much for power and change that proponents of the movement are willing to go to extreme measures in order to gain control of the government. This is the inherent social "disorder" of all democracies. In a democracy there is a constant struggle for the power of the government in order that a particular political party might impose the party's social and economic agenda on the populous as a whole. There is thus a perpetual confrontation within democratic societies that lends itself to producing levels of conflict as one party seeks to gain power over all other parties.

In those monarchies of the past that were led by some king, the resistance simply assassinated the presiding king, and then a new king took over. But in a democratic society, the entire society will divide itself into political parties who launch endless attacks against one another in order to gain power. In our "modern" societies there is usually no assassination of kings by guns

and swords. However, there are constant assassinations with the lies that one party would launch against another. The lies are issued in order to discredit the leaders of each party. Fake news subsequently flourishes throughout the media of the society. So it was in reference to the execution of Jesus. Lest the executed, and supposed King of the Jews, become a martyr of another sect of Jewish rebels, there was fake news spread abroad about the missing body of the supposed national King Jesus (See Mt 28: 11-15).

This is where the Holy Spirit, specifically through Jude, would have something to say. Those Christians who live in democratic societies today need to listen up while the Holy Spirit moved the pen of Jude across a parcel of papyrus in order to forewarn the Jewish Christians of those unbelieving Jewish zealots within the society who were recruiting all Jews, as well as Jewish Christians, to join the resistance against Rome. The Holy Spirit wrote a stern document in order that the Jewish Christians identify the heart and behavior of those who were seeking to rebel against the rule of the law of Rome. We can identify some of the very same characteristics in the politicians of your own country.

Jude began with a series of pronouncements by which the faithful could identify the leaders of the arrogant resistance: “*I want to remind you, though you once knew this*” (Jd 5). Since the word “knew” is in the past tense, it seems that Jude’s readers had forgotten what his older brother had prophesied in Matthew 24, as well as God’s harsh judgment that He brought upon insurrectionists. Some Jewish Christians may have been caught up in the emotion of the radical resistance to the point that they simply forgot that being a disciple of Jesus meant that one must submit to the authority of the government in which he lives (See Rm 13:1-7). But in the context of the statement, the Jewish Christians forgot to read their Old Testament Bibles. So Jude reminded them of three examples of those who resisted the authority of God.

Jude first reminded his readers of the example of the arrogant resistance of those who acted against the God-ordained authority of Moses. This case happened immediately after Israel was delivered from Egyptian captivity. In this case, the resistance could not accept the authority of one man over Israel. Before the establishment of “constitutional law” for Israel

at Mount Sinai, there was a rebellion against the authority of the one who would be the example of another authority who would eventually rise up in Israel centuries later (See Dt 18:15,18,19; At 3:22,23). But in the rebellion at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Lord “*destroyed those who did not believe [obey]*” (Jd 5). In order to cleanse the newly established Israelite nation, Korah and his cohorts, with their following, had to be purged from the society of Israel (Nm 16).

Jude then went on to the fallen angels who rebelled against the authority of the archangel Michael who was God’s ordained authority over the angels. Because of their thirst for power, some angels, led by Satan, rebelled against the established authority of the day (See Rv 12). These rebellious angels sought to “impeach” the established God-ordained order of authority in order that they might seize control of the order of angels. But their thirst for power resulted in their being cast down to “*everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (Jd 6).

And then Jude advanced into the moral behavior of those who seek to deliver themselves from any restrictions of moral behavior. These were “*ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness*” (Jd 4).

Jude spoke of those whom we would define as “liberals,” or the far left. Liberals seek to establish their own moral codes on the populous. In the example of Sodom and Gomorrah, the citizens of the cities gave themselves over to all sorts of sexual dysfunctions (Jd 7). It is simply the moral philosophy of the liberal to reject any moral standards by which the people should conduct themselves in their social relationships. Their rebellion against authority reveals itself in their desire to live a life of unrestricted moral behavior. They will elect to office in their democratic society those who live contrary to the moral codes of God. The constituents will, as Sodom and Gomorrah, elect those who live according to their own dysfunctional codes of morality.

When societies change in reference to their conservative moral codes of the past, the society as a whole rejects any standard of moral codes. This change is often reflected in the attitude of the majority of the society who vote against the traditional standards of law that were handed down by the fathers. As the moral behavior of the society changes, the society seeks to

change the leaders who would promote their own moral behavior. In this way, constitutions must be revised as a nation “progresses” throughout the decades. The populous must change from conservative moral values that are defined by Divine standards. This is why the liberals of a society are referred to as “progressives.” They want to progress beyond the restrictions of any standards of morality.

In a constitutional society of law, the morally dysfunctional will seek to change the “constitution” of their government in order to justify the means by which they would resist the existing government. In the case of the American society, many of the people would even consider electing for president someone who lives in a same-sex “marriage” relationship. This is a relationship that is contrary to the moral code of the fathers of the nation who defined marriage to be between a male and female. “Marriage” is now redefined, and thus, civil law must be changed in order to establish the new moral order. We must now vote into office those who reflect our definition of the new marriage order. In reference to abortion, murder is defined as “abortion” of individuals who are physically aborted, but can be murdered (left on a table to die) after the abortion.

Jude then goes on to identify the behavior of those who were “progressives” in rebelling against the authority of Rome. His description of those who have given themselves over to resist rule by law, whether moral or civil, is fitting for all those of all time who would put themselves in such a situation. If anyone has reflected on the present moral digression in the American society, it is easy to identify the behavior that the Holy Spirit revealed through Jude’s hand in reference to those who were against the God-ordained authority of Roman government.

Notice how the Holy Spirit identified those who were “progressives,” specifically against the authority of civil law. These progressives were identified by three specific characteristics in belief and behavior in reference to law: (1) They are dreamers who “*defile the flesh.*” (2) They “*despise dominion*” (authority). (3) They “*speak evil of dignitaries*” (the officials) (Jd 8).

When a society is morally and socially imploding, the preceding three behavioral principles characterize the society. If the society is a democracy, then the people will reflect their beliefs and behavior in the politicians they

elect into office. Those who despise authority in their own lives, find it easy to recruit and rail against the ruling establishment of the country, specifically the king or president. In their personal lives, their rebellion against authority is revealed in their rebellion against the moral codes of the past.

These are as those who lived before the day when God purged the earth with the flood of Noah's day. There were those during those days who professed to be wise, but in their arrogance, Paul said that they became fools (Rm 1:22). Paul explained: "*Because even though they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful. But they became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened*" (Rm 1:21). David said that the fool has said that there is no God (Ps 14:1). But in the historical context of Noah's day, the fool is the one who says that there is a God, but has no fear of living an ungodly life.

Those of Noah's generation carried on with the foolishness of their common behavior in order to promote their twisted religiosity. They professed a false humility, while at the same time, they despised the established dignitaries of the day. They were religious hypocrites in their presumptuous religiosity. They thus reaped the judgment of God: "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*" (Rm 1:18).

When people reach the moral low of despising the rule of law, whether moral or civil, it is then that God will give them over to uncleanness "*through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves*" (Rm 1:24). We seem to forget that the identity of a society that has no respect for the authorities of the day is first revealed in the immoral behavior of the people within the society. As in the days of Noah before the flood, and Jude before the destruction of Jerusalem, moral digression proceeded the eventual judgment of God.

Jude wanted the Jewish Christians of his day not to be deceived by those who professed a zealous religiosity for national Judaism in order to recruit others to join in their rebellion against Roman authority. He wanted his fellow Jews to know that the recruiters to Jewish nationalism "*speak evil of those things that they do not know*" (Jd 10). In their hearts, the Jewish insurrectionists were as brute beasts who promote corrupt interpretations of the Sinai law in order to prove their rebellion against Rome. Jude

wanted to exhort the faithful disciples concerning the behavior of these radical “progressives” in their midst. They must not be deceived by the radicals’ supposed adherence to the Sinai law, which in this case was their manufactured interpretations of the law.

*Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain [assassinations] and have run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward [greed], and perished in the rebellion of Korah [who rebelled against the God-ordained authority of Moses] (Jd 11).*

These rebellious Jewish radicals had actually come into the fellowship of the disciples. They sat right there in the love feasts (Jd 12). They were “*feeding themselves without fear*” while they spoke of rebellion against the law of the state (Jd 12). They exalted themselves with their great promises of an independent freedom from the oppression of the evil Nero who was Caesar of Rome at the time. They were clouds who promised rain, but were without any fulfillment of what they presumed. It is as a radical liberal in government who makes endless promises of free everything at the expense of the rich. They are those who make vain promises in order to deceive the hearts of the populous in order to gain their vote.

But Jude described these deceptive political and religious charlatans with the following words:

*They are raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jd 13).*

If we did not have Jude’s document around for two thousand years, we would certainly assume that he wrote these words about many chaotic situations in societies throughout the world today. We would assume that he had some modern-day politicians in mind when he concluded with the following statement:

*These [politicians] are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts. And their mouth speaks great swelling words, flattering*

*people to gain advantage [of votes]" (Jd 16).*

If we could add an interpretive statement to what Jude said here, it would be that we can sometimes identify our leaders by the dogs nipping at their heels.

## **Chapter 13**

### **RELIGIOUS RITES MAKE RELIGIONISTS**

*Can God command things to be done, which things when obeyed, can become the identity of religion? For the sake of clarity, we need to ask this question from another perspective. Are there some things that God has commanded in the past, which if obeyed today, we would be considered religionists?*

Certainly! If one has a difficult time answering, or understanding the preceding questions, then the problem may be that one is having difficulty separating the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel, from the law of faith and grace under which Christians now live. In fact, if one does not understand this, then he or she could be preaching the “other gospel” about which Paul warned the Christians in Galatia (See Gl 1:6-9).

Therefore, a few examples are in order. If we bind on ourselves and others that which God considers void, even though He initially commanded such to be done, then we are religionists if we practice these things today. In doing such, we have brought into our faith and grace a system of meritorious law-keeping that is contrary to the gospel of grace.

Consider the rite of circumcision. Circumcision was commanded both to Abraham and Israel as a nation (See Gn 17; Ex 12:44,48). Circumcision was a command of the Sinai law, and thus, when one was born of a Jewish family under the Sinai law, he was to be circumcised the eighth day after birth. But the law that required circumcision was nailed to the cross (Rm 7:1-4; Cl 2:14). Christians today are not required to be circumcised in order to conform to the law of circumcision. In their obedience to the gospel, they were made dead to the Sinai law.

Some Jewish Christians in the first century did not understand this.

They sought to bind the rite of circumcision on the Gentile disciples in order that the Gentiles be saved. In fact, they taught that “*except you [Gentiles] are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved*” (At 15:1). These Jewish teachers became religionists when they bound on the disciples something that was a part of the Sinai law that was at the time void. They were binding a religious code on those who had been made dead to the law of circumcision through their obedience to the gospel. Therefore, the Holy Spirit stated that those who were preaching the law of circumcision were preaching another gospel (Gl 1:8). Paul comforted the Gentile Christians of Galatia by writing, “*If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed*” (Gl 1:9).

These are serious words. In fact, by the time Paul arrived at revelation from the Spirit in Galatians 5, the Spirit directed his hand to write, “*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 one would bind on Christians today that which is not bound by God, then that person is severed from Christ.

Religion is defined as a system of rites and ceremonies that are required to be performed by any religious establishment in order to be saved. Even if the rite or ceremony were once a requirement of the law of God, when that law of God was made void, so also were the precepts of that law. Once void, any rite or ceremony of the law becomes a religious ordinance if bound on Christians. To bind such on those who are now under the law of faith and grace would be turning the people into a religious sect. Therefore, those Jewish Christians in the first century who bound circumcision on Gentile Christians as a rite to be saved had fallen back into the bondage of the Jews’ religion from which they had been set free by their obedience to the gospel. They were subsequently changing the gospel of freedom into the bondage of religion (See Gl 5:1).

This brings us to another illustration that should make us cautious about becoming religionists by binding that which may have initially come from God, but was made void when it was supplanted by God’s revelation of the truth of the gospel.

When Paul came through Ephesus on a mission journey, he encountered about twelve disciples who were meeting in someone’s home in the

urban area of Ephesus (At 19:1). Upon his initial contact with these disciples, he asked them concerning matters of the Holy Spirit. They replied, “*We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit*” (At 19:2). Paul’s obvious reply was, “*Into what then were you baptized?*” (At 19:3). They responded, “*Into John’s baptism*” (At 19:3).

The baptism of John was certainly from God. In fact, “*John came in the wilderness baptizing and preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Mk 1:4). But between the time of John’s ministry to introduce the Son of God into the world, and about twenty-five years later when Paul encountered the disciples in Ephesus, John’s baptism became a religious rite if people were so baptized after the cross. John’s baptism was supplanted by baptism in the name of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. If it was bound as a religious rite after Pentecost, then it would make those who obeyed it disciples of a religion, but not Christians.

Luke recorded in Acts that there were about twelve disciples whom Paul encountered on the Ephesus visit. We could assume that one or two of the group had initially encountered John years before on a visit to Judea, or possibly were baptized by Apollos who initially knew only the baptism of John. Apollos then possibly left them, and rushed on to Corinth (At 18:27; 19:1).

Apollos had been teaching the baptism of John, but was corrected by two tentmakers in Ephesus (See At 18:24-28). He may have left the disciples that Paul encountered when he went on to Corinth. This may have been a possibility, but we feel that it was not in the nature of Apollos to leave the twelve walking in what had become at the time only a religious rite. Apollos had been preaching a religious rite out of ignorance because the baptism of John had been supplanted by baptism in the name of Jesus on Pentecost about twenty-five years before. Nevertheless, his ignorance of what was required by God after Pentecost was no excuse to change what he believed and preached at the time he arrived in Ephesus.

The twelve Ephesian disciples were sincere when they heard that they must be baptized with John’s baptism in order to receive remission of sins. They were sincere religionists. Whether they heard this message from one or two of their number who had encountered John the Baptist many years

before, or from Apollos, John's baptism had been supplanted with baptism in the name of Jesus.

By the time the twelve disciples heard of John's baptism, it had become a religious rite, a rite that had originally come from God. But at the time God revealed this baptism to John, it was not a religious rite. It was a commandment of God that had to be obeyed if one wanted to receive remission of sins, and thus, fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). But by the time Paul encouraged the twelve disciples, John's baptism, as circumcision, were only religious rites. If one obeyed either with the belief that both were necessary for salvation, then he or she obeyed another gospel. (Those who teach tithing according to the Sinai law, as opposed to gospel-inspired giving under Christ, need to seriously consider this point.)

Only baptism in the name of Jesus is valid today. We know of a great number of people who have made their own self-declaration that they were saved, thus supposedly receiving remission of sins upon the basis of their own claim. They then made baptism a religious rite to be obeyed in order to conform meritoriously to a system of the faith that is promoted by a particular religious group into which they were initiated through baptism. Instead of knowingly being baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (At 2:38), they had declared their own remission of sins, and thus, assumed their salvation before any baptism for the remission of sins in the name (authority) of Jesus. After their self-declaration of remission of sins took place, they were then baptized as a religious rite of the church to which they presently belong.

We must ask ourselves, if we make baptism a religious rite we perform following our own self-declaration that we are saved, then is this baptism for the remission of sins? If we have remission of sins upon the fact of our self-declaration of salvation, then why would we be baptized? If we were baptized, then were we not baptized as a religious work of merit?

Some have been baptized as a meritorious work of law. If we made our own self-declaration of salvation by "receiving Jesus," "bringing Jesus into our lives," saying some "sinner's prayer," and then were baptized, then we may have made our own baptism a religious rite, or simply a work of law. If we did, then we are religionists who made a self-declaration in reference to our salvation. Our obedience to the gospel in baptism was not in

response to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God who declares the remission of our sins upon our response to the gospel in baptism.

We must not forget that baptism is not a meritorious work of law. It is a submissive response of gratitude because of one's understanding of the incarnate sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross. This is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote, "*You are not under law [of baptism], but under [the gospel of] grace*" (Rm 6:14). "*And if by grace [you are saved], then it is no more by works [of merit or law], otherwise grace is no more grace*" (Rm 11:6). "*For by grace you are saved through faith [in the gospel of God's grace]*" (Ep 2:8).

We are not saved because we have been legally immersed in water. The action of immersion is not a work of merit by which we can put God in debt to save us. If it were, then no apostate Christian would ever be lost. He would be saved on the merit of his baptism.

Paul rebaptized those in Ephesus who had obeyed John's baptism, which baptism was relegated to a religious rite when the gospel was first preached twenty-five years before on the day of Pentecost (At 19:5). We would suggest that anyone do the same if they feel that they made baptism a religious rite because they had before their baptism declared their own remission of sins. They were baptized under the authority (name) of the wrong person, and thus, not in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They became their own self-declared authority for the remission of their own sins. But it is God who declares our remission of sins, and subsequent salvation when we are baptized into and under the authority of Christ (At 22:16; Rm 6:3-6; Gl 3:26-29).

Each person must be his or her own judge of this matter. It is not our place to judge the hearts of people. We can only read what is stated in the New Testament in reference to the purpose of baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. If one does have questions concerning his or her motives for being baptized many years ago, then it would certainly be wise to be baptized again for the right motives in order to have a good conscience toward God. You be your own judge. At least when the Ephesians recognized that they did the wrong thing, in their sincerity, they corrected the matter.

When we speak of baby baptism, a whole new set of problems are

uncovered. But it is appropriate in the context of the Ephesian situation to remember that the Ephesians individually heard and were baptized as adults into John's baptism. Then they individually heard and responded to Paul's teaching that they be baptized in the name of Jesus. No parents made any decisions or declarations for them. No parents baptized them with John's baptism. No parents immersed their babies in the name of Jesus.

If one cannot get the point on this matter, then certainly one cannot understand that baby baptism is nowhere in the New Testament. But if one was "baptized" as a baby, and gets the point of the Ephesians' freedom to choose concerning their salvation, then he or she, if baptized as a baby, should find someone, and head to the water in order to be truly baptized in the name of Jesus. Just keep in mind that your parents out of their ignorance were practicing a man-made religious rite and ceremony. When they handed you over as a baby to be sprinkled or immersed, that was not your voluntary decision. It was theirs. It was theirs in order that they conform to the religion of their fathers. Baptism in the name of Jesus must be your decision. We would urge people to be like the Ephesians. When you learn something new, just do it.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**