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An End-Time Church Manifesto

by Fred London

One day a Tzadik came to Sodom; He knew what Sodom was, so he came to save it from sin, from destruction. He preached to the people. "Please do not be murderers, do not be thieves. Do not be silent and do not be indifferent." He went on preaching day after day, maybe even picketing. But no one listened. He was not discouraged. He went on preaching for years. Finally someone asked him, "Rabbi, why do you do that? Don't you see it is no use?" He said, "I know it is of no use, but I must. And I will tell you why: in the beginning I thought I had to protest and to shout in order to change them. I have given up this hope. Now I know I must picket and scream and shout so that they should not change me." - Excerpt from Elie Wiesel's Book, Witness

Why this book? Fair question. It was the same question I posed to myself prior to embarking on this humble work. "*The writing of many books is endless,*" so, why add one more to this ever-increasing glut of books? While we have an abundance of teachings on the Church and an abundance of teachings on the end-times, the same cannot be said for teachings about the eternal purpose, internal essence, and relevance of the Church with respect to Israel's ultimate redemption in the end-times, presented as a single, theological thought.

It might appear on the surface that we do in fact have books in abundance that deal with this theme. But, I would contend that there is a humanly subtle, yet glaring omission common to virtually all of these teachings. My contention is that the emphasis of these books is on the external out-workings, and not upon the internal and eternal in-workings of the Church as the foundational springboard leading to the essential corporate delivery system necessary to implement her end-time calling.

For years I have been waiting for someone more qualified than myself on many levels to publish a book which addressed the theological and practical connection between eschatology and ecclesiology, with Christology being at the center of it all, "*holding all things together.*" As such, it is imperative to begin building this all-important and long-neglected bridge between the externals and the internals, without which, we have a rather myopic view of the eternal.

Well, after many, many years, I found myself still waiting. Far more importantly, however, was the fact that the Church was still waiting, and yet, the vast majority of the Church has no idea that she is waiting for anything, other than the Second Coming of Christ. Frankly, she is not too unlike the "fourth son" spoken of at the traditional Jewish Passover Seder, "who does not even know enough to ask." But, above all else, the times demand such a book. We must take the message to heart and apply it in practice, so that, "*in that day,*" we will have already been properly prepared.

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I have no illusions as to the likely inadequacy of this work, and all the more considering the limitations of the vessel through which it is written. But, if something can be ignited, which will stir up the Church to pursue this typically overlooked, yet most critical aspect in earnest, then, it will have been deemed worth the effort. It is also hoped that not a few will even carry this message forward with deeper levels of understanding, having a far greater positive impact upon the Church than this writer.

Fred London

Introduction

I John 1:1-3 - In light of this personal testimony, it can be reasonably stated that the apostle John was a bona fide expert on the Person of Christ. Applying this same criteria to the New Testament Church, do I presume myself, or anyone else, for that matter, to be a bona fide expert on this subject? My reply is that while there are certainly those who are quite knowledgeable in their theological and historical research in this area, in my view, all the real experts are gone.

Why? Because none of us who came afterward can bear witness to having experienced it first hand. And, yet, we have not been left without a witness as to God's intention for the Church in character, function, and purpose. We have the Scriptures, a record of Church History, and the Holy Spirit to illuminate our spiritual understanding with respect to the Church - all that she was, all that she is, and all that she will be required to be in the End-times.

The time is long since past to begin to address this Mystery of the Church with respect to her originally intended historical calling, character and function, in order to be an effective *corporate "vessel, fit for the Master's use."* during the *"Time of Jacob's Trouble."* The reality is, the vast majority of the Church has erred by making this issue a mere afterthought, rather than endemic to the foundation of the faith, as well as the key to End-time fulfillment, which will be more extensively addressed later on.

II Peter 1:19-20 - If I may, I would like to share what was a significant chapter that would have an indelible influence upon my spiritual life. Back in 1974, as a very young believer in the Lord, a man named Gene McCarley, who I consider my spiritual father, taught me, among many other things, the following Golden Rule of Interpretation by Bible Scholar, Dr. David L. Cooper, which has been the guiding principle in my understanding of the Scriptures ever since:

WHEN THE PLAIN SENSE OF SCRIPTURE MAKES COMMON SENSE, SEEK NO OTHER SENSE; THEREFORE, TAKE EVERY WORD AT ITS PRIMARY, ORDINARY, USUAL, LITERAL MEANING UNLESS THE FACTS OF THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT, STUDIED IN THE LIGHT OF RELATED PASSAGES AND AXIOMATIC AND FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS INDICATE CLEARLY OTHERWISE.

And, yet, Dr. Cooper, considered to be one of the foremost theologians of the Twentieth Century, was a Dispensationalist, who believed in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church, arguably, in violation of his own methodology of interpretation. It is a lesson to us all that the potential for being predisposed to a particular view despite our natural brilliance and sound methodology is always lurking at our doctrinal doors, "but we must master it" for the sake of theological integrity, "*Knowing that as teachers, we will incur the stricter judgment,*

In stark contrast, in using the identical method of Biblical interpretation, it was Gene's belief that the Second Coming of Christ was to take place at the end of the "Great Tribulation," coupled with the view that another holocaust of the Jews would take place

in the future in order to bring Israel to a Godly repentance leading to salvation.

Gene had arrived at these conclusions many years before. His love for the Jews and Israel was genuine and intense, but contrary to human, sentimental love, his love was based upon a Divine reality, with a spirit of sobriety, believing all that is written in the Scriptures concerning God's dealings with Israel.

He was something of "A voice crying in the wilderness," in addressing these issues during a time when the popular notion of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture was in full swing, and on the heels of Hal Lindsay's best seller, The Late Great Planet Earth. And, he knew the Scriptures as well as any man I have ever personally known, "having known the sacred writings since childhood."

I am, therefore, eternally grateful to God for orchestrating a truly Divine connection with this man in a little town in northern California, and to Gene, who welcomed me as a son, and seized the unexpected opportunity to invest in a Jewish young man over the course of almost a year, the full dividends of which are yet to be realized.

Later on, I adopted an additional principle which significantly deepened and expanded my Scriptural understanding. It was T. Austin-Sparks who said, "God's end is always present in His beginnings." As a result, I began filtering my understanding of Scripture through this perspective; a perspective which interprets the word of God in light of His eternal purpose.

Therefore, I would submit that failure to apply this principle leads to a type of Bible teaching which engages in areas of specialization. It is an approach which tends to focus on one particular area of the Scriptures as an isolated doctrine unto itself. It is teaching which is issue-oriented, topic-oriented and taken out of the greater context of the eternal purpose of God. It is an approach that is inconsistent with apostolic teaching and which runs contrary to Paul's statement in *"not shrinking from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."*

Of course, there were times and situations where specific issues had to be addressed, but nowhere will you find any indication whatsoever that any teacher in the Early Church could be identified with some area of specialization. They simply did not think this way, and they certainly *"did not learn Christ in this way."*

How then, shall we remedy this porous approach to Biblical understanding? We must theologically take all the loose ends of specialized, issue-oriented teaching and tie them all together with the Divine knot - the eternal purpose of God.

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God's Eternal Purpose

What is God's eternal purpose? In Genesis 1:26, we see God's original intention for man; to bear the image of God and to have dominion over the earth. In a nutshell, it was to provide God with an earthly habitation in which to dwell. When man sinned, his representation of the image of God became tainted, and as a result, he was driven out from the Garden of Eden, his primary habitation. Ever since, God has been "working all things after the counsel of His will," to create and establish that suitable habitation for Himself - ultimately, "*a temple made without hands*" - Rev. 21:3.

Generations later, God, through the patriarchs, would raise up a corporate man, Israel, who would be called to bear the image of God as a nation and given a specific land as his home. And so, the eternal purpose is a two-fold purpose - that we would bear the image of God, and in doing so, would have dominion over the land.

Herein lies the first revelation of a spiritual law God established at the very beginning of creation, and it is eternal. God's representative and intended counterpart acquired his rightful ownership to the land as long as he faithfully bore the image of God. When he did not, he was disqualified from his inheritance and driven out.

These two elements are inseparable. They were never intended to exist one apart from the other. All Biblical doctrine must be understood upon this premise. A right Biblical view hinges upon this very notion, directly influencing our interpretation of our worldview, ranging from the purpose of the Church and Israel, to eschatology. Scripturally, it ties all theological understanding and teaching together. It is the glue which binds, and the foundation upon which the Word of God must be interpreted.

And, although this notion may have been novel to me, I do not believe that was the case with the Early Church. On the contrary, I firmly believe that it was an integral part of apostolic teaching. Therefore, it was something to be rediscovered, not invented. Men have engaged in much doctrinal error by "trying to reinvent the wheel" out of their own imagination. But, as it is written in Ecclesiastes, "*There is nothing new under the sun.*"

General Overview

Some may disagree, but I would submit that the most pressing issue of this age is that of the Church. Why? Because, if we fail to become the Church as she was intended to be in our present days, we will be ill-prepared to be the Church required in the last days, to be God's faithful witness on earth to the Jews, the nations, and to the *"rulers and authorities in heavenly places."* Moreover, I would also submit that a proper understanding of the Mystery of the Church and the Mystery of Israel are inseparable and incomplete apart from one another.

As Israel and many of her well-intentioned supporters claim her rightful inheritance to the Land prior to and apart from Godly repentance, so too many in the Church look towards a premature taking up of the Bride unto Christ. He longs for His Bride who has made herself ready, *that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless* (Eph. 5:27). II Peter 3:11-12 exhorts us to holy conduct and godliness by which we can actually hasten the coming of the Lord.

It should be clear from Scripture that for Israel it will require a proud and self-sufficient people brought to her knees and without hope as depicted in Ezekiel 37:11b, *"Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off."* Also, Deut. 32:36, Dan. 12:7.

She will be brought to a place of true Godly repentance, leading to salvation. It may also mean that out of a true love for Israel, we will have to resist the natural response of, *"God forbid it! This shall never happen to you."* and allow God's dealings to be carried through, *"having its perfect result,"* lest we run the risk of provoking a similar reply to that which Peter received from the Lord, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."*

The lesson here is that we must not allow our soul-led good intentions to be a hindrance to God's purposes. Rather, as it is written in Heb. 4:12, we must allow the Word of God to be the *"two-edged sword,"* which is able to divide the soul from the spirit. To complete this thought, a few paragraphs later, the writer of Hebrews states the following in Heb. 5:14, *"For solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."*

It is critical to our overall understanding to note that due to the rebellion of the Children of Israel, God allowed an entire generation of Hebrews to die in the wilderness, prior to their entering "The Promised Land." It was their offspring, a relatively untainted generation, whom God would bring into the Land.

We must bear in mind that God never intended a corrupt, unredeemed people to take possession of, or even to enter the land, prior to their redemption. It is simply inconsistent with the laws and ways of God. Salvation always precedes inheritance and not before. Neither do we enter into Heaven prior to our salvation, but rather as a result

and reward of our salvation.

Along these lines, for many years I have been quite concerned over the wholesale recruitment of Jewish believers for emigration to Israel. This recruitment is based upon the false premise that regardless of cataclysmic world events directed at the Jews, Israel will be a safe haven during such times to the end of the age. Such reckless counsel is an example of ministerial malpractice at its worst.

Now, those who have been genuinely called to live and minister in Israel, knowing the potential cost of such a commitment is one thing. But, I am convinced from Scripture that, in reality, particularly during the “Great Tribulation,” those who have been sold on the belief that present-day Israel represents the Final Return, and therefore is under God’s Divine protection to the end of the age, will suddenly discover that they have unwittingly “jumped from the frying pan into the fire.”

As a consequence, there is the possibility of much spiritual shipwreck and human destruction, not the least of which being the blood of many upon the hands of misguided spokesmen, who sold these well-intentioned people on a false notion. Ironically, those who should have the most spiritual insight in “*understanding the times*” will instead, to their shock and bewilderment, find themselves in the very cauldron of the “*Time of Jacob’s Trouble*.”

And so, the original romanticism of making "aliyah" (emigrating to Israel) will be quickly and tragically extinguished, and who will be answerable for the unintended physical and spiritual carnage? “Speaking that which the Lord has not spoken” comes at a very high price!”

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The Requirement of a Suitable Wineskin

Luke 5:36-39 - Both the wine and the wineskin are equally critical for us in order to provide the delivery system, which will be required at the end of the age. Therefore, I would submit that the Church of the 21st Century is in desperate need of a restoration to be become the instrument, which was, is, and will be required by God to accomplish His purposes in the "last days."

Until then, the Church will not be able to fulfill her purpose in being what she has been called to be in character, function and calling to the world, the nation of Israel, or to the Jews currently and predestined to be scattered throughout the Diaspora. And, all the end-time teaching in the world will not be able to compensate for the lack of a proper, corporate delivery system required of a prophetic people of God, with the ability to implement that which has been taught, theoretically. This is the true preparation, without which the Church will be severely limited.

“Divine Appointment in the Wilderness: A People Prepared for These Last Days”

For me, the critical phrase is not, “Divine Appointment in the Wilderness.” That is an inevitable given as far as I am concerned. Rather, the phrase, “A People Prepared for These Last Days” is by far the more critical, simply because it is representative of what will be imperative for the latter to have its perfect result upon the former.

Apart from “A People Prepared for the Last Days” there will be no “Divine Appointment in the Wilderness.” As I see it, the notion of what we mean, or what God intends, as preparation “for such a time is this” has become a chief burden as well as a primary concern for me. It is my sense based upon what I commonly hear and see which has exponentially drawn my attention and commensurately raised my concern.

A vision is written down in order to be read, and a vision is written down and read, “so that those who read it may run.” The theoretical must translate into the practical in order to serve its intended purpose. There is what one might call, “The Nehemiah Effect,” who put action to the vision through practical means. The “What?” and the “Why?” is of little value, without the “How?” As an example, Ezra may have had the vision for the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem, but it was Nehemiah who converted that vision into the tangible fulfillment.

With regards to the more technical aspects of theology, I'd like to offer a comment for what it may be worth. We are all quite familiar with Habakkuk 2:2 which instructs the prophet to "Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, **that the one who reads it may run.**" This phrase literally translates as "one may read it fluently."

I don't believe I am taking excessive liberties by adding a slight paraphrase to its meaning, the little word, "so," Biblical instruction typically begins with a command to action leading to the desired objective. For me, the link or bridge between the two parts of the instruction is "so that."

In other words, the most critical aspect of instruction is the ability to **communicate** with your particular audience at the level where the vast majority are likely to comprehend what is being taught. Now, not everybody is wired like me, and I believe that is out of Divine mercy to the Body of Christ. What I endeavor to do, both as a giver and receiver of Biblical information is to break down the messages into their simplest forms.

Your message needs to be delivered in a way appropriate to the listeners. If you are teaching an audience of theology students, then it goes without saying that your level of communication can be in a more technically sophisticated form. However, though I believe the approach can be simplified for the appropriate audience, that does not of necessity mean that the message itself has to be watered down or made simplistic.

We read Paul's letters, such as the one to the Colossians, which is a theology as deep as any in the New Testament, especially in the opening chapter. Keep in mind that the vast

majority of saints there were illiterate. Also, keep in mind that Paul was never interested in impressing people with his "great knowledge" but in communicating spiritual truth, beginning and ending with who Christ was in them, and who they were in Christ.

Between those two end points, subsequent spiritual knowledge was filled in. I look at the depth of this letter with this background in mind and it is clear that these poor, unsophisticated, illiterate Christians had a far deeper spiritual understanding than the vast majority of Christians in our day, despite our technical sophistication.

Frankly, as a whole, we are by comparison, Barbarians. We must remember that the operative term is **communicate**, "*so that* one may read it fluently." That is always the objective. How you do it is between you and the Holy Spirit.

Yes! It is incumbent upon the Church to gain the necessary insight from the prophetic word in order to fulfill her calling as the "Day of the Lord draws near," but it is only a part of the "whole counsel of God." At some point, the time comes when we are brought to the place where we say, "OK! I get it! Now, brethren, what must we do?"

In my study of the meaning and outworking of "preparation" from recorded examples of Biblical and Church History, I see a common thread running through it all. In a nutshell, prophetic preparation was first and foremost spiritual, dealing with the inner condition of the individual, along with the corporate expression of the people of God. Eschatological knowledge was a supplement to that individual and corporate foundation, and not the reverse.

Subsequent to the widespread and concentrated persecution of the Early Church which broke out in Jerusalem, it is understandable why many of these believers, including the apostles themselves, interpreted this as sure signs that they had entered the "end of the age." And, although their eschatological timing was significantly off, their spiritual foundation was such that she was able to withstand the tidal waves which battered her, but could not overcome her.

Moreover, their spiritual lives were not only sustained, but flourished and spread throughout much of the known world at that time. Why? Because their faith was not established by their understanding of raw data focused upon signs of the end-times, but rather an indwelling Lord, because truths such as the "centrality of Christ" and the "pre-eminence of Christ" was more than a doctrine, but an everyday reality in their lives.

No matter the outward circumstances, "*Christ in them, the hope of glory*" could not be taken from them. They were "steadfast and immovable," because they were properly prepared by having "a sure foundation" laid into their lives. I have seen far more evidence than is necessary to know that so many who are drawn to end-time teachers, teachings, and conferences are deficient in their own spiritual foundations. In ignoring this fatal flaw, we are not doing these individuals, the Church in general, nor the people to which this ministry in the "wilderness" is to be directed, any favors.

Whether you meet in the sanctuary of a mega-church, the living room of a private home,

a rented hall, or a community in some rural area, unless we as a people are properly prepared in God's way, any acquired end-time knowledge will be of little benefit in that day. We will be little better than "the blind leading the blind."

"The Christ-Centered Church," regardless of what formal title may be used, must be the focal point of all doctrinal teaching, or what will be presented will most assuredly lack the chief component which qualifies any teaching as manifesting sound doctrine.

It must not be relegated to some obligatory appendage or offered out of simple courtesy, regardless of who may be called upon to teach it. If we err in this, we will be promoting the very thing that we claim to despise. We will fall into the same trap as the vast majority of end-time teachers and conferences. And, I will go so far as to say, that we will be in danger of disputing the Lordship of Christ.

End-time prophetic knowledge can and must be built upon that foundation, but never supplant it or be a supplemental afterthought to it. I have no doubt that if I would ask any of you brothers about what a proper spiritual foundation comprises, I would fully expect to receive a Biblically sound reply of one accord. But the real challenge is getting beyond the theoretical. Yet, more than a challenge, it is a sacred responsibility.

Do I have a sense of urgency? Indeed, I do! But, the urgency is not in making haste in getting this end-time knowledge out to believers as the primary means and objective of this preparation. Rather, my sense of urgency is in relation to making sure that the proper foundation is laid within the Church, both individually and corporately, so that this critical eschatological knowledge can be used to its fullest, "in due season," as it was originally intended.

The issue is not, and has never been, justifying an activity for the sake of doing "some good" in the Name of the Lord." This perpetual rationale has become no more than a convenient excuse to justify what many know in their heart of hearts that what they are engaged in is far from God's ultimate intention. It is the mentality of this "some good" that is retarding the Body of Christ and keeping her from reaching her fullness in Christ.

The Institutional Church has long since had "Ichabod" written on its doorpost. It is being sustained by artificial life support systems, and if there was ever a case to be made for "pulling the plug" for the sake of mercy, this is it.

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German Churches' Actions Based on Institutional Interests

The famous philosopher and writer, George Santayana, said, *“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”* How tragically appropriate that this quote should be found written within the walls of the Dachau Concentration Camp Museum.

Writer and historical researcher, Victoria J. Barnett, provides the following observation concerning the German Church during the Third Reich:

“Throughout the Nazi era, ardent debates took place within the German Churches about where to stand firm against Hitler's regime and where to compromise, when to speak out and when to remain silent. Ecumenical documents show that from 1933 to 1945 there were Christian leaders inside and outside Germany who agonized about what they could do to stop Nazism and help its victims. The historical complexities suggested by these factors should never lead us to condone the Churches' failures during the Thirties and Forties; they can, however, help us to understand the specific nature of those failures so that we may learn from them.

Perhaps at the heart of those failures was the fact that the Churches, especially in Nazi Germany, sought to act, as institutions tend to do, in their own best interests -- narrowly defined, short-sighted interests. There was little desire on the part of the Churches for self-sacrifice or heroism, and much emphasis on "pragmatic" and "strategic" measures that would supposedly protect these institutions' autonomy in the Third Reich. Public institutional circumspection carried to the point of near numbness; an acute lack of insight: these are the aspects of the Churches' behavior during the Nazi era that are so damning in retrospect. The minutes of German Protestant synodal meetings in 1942 reveal how oblivious the participants were to what was happening in the world around them. While innocent victims throughout Europe were being brutally murdered, Christian leaders were debating what points of doctrine and policy were tenable. This is especially haunting, of course, because the Christian clergy and laity never thought of their respective Churches as a mere institution, but as a religious body witnessing in the world to certain values, including love of neighbors, the sanctity of life and the power of moral conscience.

Reflecting on the failure of the Churches to challenge the Nazis should prompt us to ponder all the others -- individuals, governments and institutions -- that passively acquiesced to the Third Reich's tyranny. Even the wisest and most perceptive of them, it seems, failed to develop adequate moral and political responses to Nazi genocide, failed to recognize that something new was demanded of them by the barbarism of Hitler's regime. Moreover, it has become abundantly clear that their failure to respond to the horrid events in Europe in the Thirties and Forties was not due to ignorance; they knew what was happening.

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Ultimately, the Churches' lapses during the Nazi era were lapses of vision and

determination. Protestant and Catholic religious leaders loyal to creeds professing that love can withstand and conquer evil, were unable or unwilling to defy one of the great evils in human history. And so the Holocaust will continue to haunt the Christian Churches for a very, very long time to come.”

Prov. 29:18 states, “*Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained*, which, literally means “*let loose*.” And, that is precisely what happened in Nazi Germany. The Church had lost her vision and the German people became “*unrestrained*,” and were “*let loose*” upon the Jewish people.

It is doubtful whether house churches, communities, places of refuge, apart from these proper foundations, will fare any better than the more traditional structures from which they sought to free themselves. Why? Because a change in venue cannot overcome the resistance to change of heart. Of course, some will fare better than others, but unless we come to the place where we are unwilling to settle for the “good” as a more convenient substitute for a greater measure of Christ,” we should not presume to fulfill the purposes of God in our generation.”

God may desire to do a quick work, but not at the expense of us taking fleshly shortcuts. We must pay more than mere doctrinal lip service to the Biblical truth that “there is no other foundation that can be laid, which has already been laid, which is Christ Jesus.”

Many believers will come and go having served “a “*purpose of God in their generation*. Many are content to settle for that. But, for those who desire to *serve “the” purpose of God in their generation*, we must see and respond to what God has already revealed to us within the bigger picture of His eternal purposes.

The Book of Daniel is unquestionably one of eschatological emphasis, but it is a book of 12 chapters within the context of a greater message. Jesus speaks much of the events of the end of the age, but always within the context of the Kingdom of God. Paul undoubtedly taught, and also had to correct erroneous understanding concerning the “last days,” but always within the context of God’s overriding Divine purposes.

Even in John’s Book of Revelation, we err if we abbreviate the title and true intention of this Biblical record and not express it for what it is, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is no mere coincidence that this book begins by laying down the foundation of all that transpires thereafter, a revelation of the Person of the Lord, Himself, and an expose of the condition and character of the various churches represented, accompanied by the full counsel of encouragements, rebukes, warnings, and instructive correction.

A vision is written down in order to be read, and a vision is written down and read, “so that those who read it may run.” The theoretical must translate into the practical in order to serve its intended purpose. There is, what one might call, “The Nehemiah Effect,” named for the one who put flesh to the vision through practical means.

The What? Why? And How?

The “What?” and the “Why?” is of little value without the “How?” As an example, Ezra may have had the vision for the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem, but it was Nehemiah who converted that vision into the tangible fulfillment. There will, of necessity, have to be a major internal overhaul at the deepest, personal level of what most of us have had presented to us as “church.” And, secondly, it will require a courage and conviction to be willing to go “outside the camp,” to be that spiritual house comprised of “living stones,” “whose architect and builder is God.”

It is imperative that we have right spiritual thinking in order to see a true spiritual expression of the Kingdom of God through His Church. *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things (we ought to) speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”* - I Cor. 2:12-13.

For this to be accomplished we must be willing to empty ourselves, that *“He might fill all things.”* We must be willing to *“decrease that He might increase.”* We must be willing to lay down our vision that we might be taken up with Christ’s vision., which is predicated upon a vision of Christ.

This one thing will keep us from being *“led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”* For most of us, however, it is too late for that. It is more a case of repentance and restoration, and for many, quite frankly, it requires one to begin all over again, rebuilding a sound foundation.

We begin with Christ and we end with Christ. *“He is the Alpha and the Omega”* and *“in Him all things hold together.”* We hear so much and speak so much about callings; corporate callings, individual callings. However, all callings must be founded upon the preeminent calling as Paul expressed it, *“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”* (I Cor. 1:9).

As the author Gene Edwards so insightfully contends, “Before there was a Jerusalem, there was a Galilee.” Before there is church with its agendas and formal ministry, there must be a significant, qualitative time of learning to fellowship with the Son and with each other within the sphere of normal, everyday life. This took place with Jesus and His disciples for three and a half years.

Yes! Jesus told His disciples to "Go!" However, particularly in our day, there is a critical missing link to this outcome. Before Jesus tells us to "Go!," He first bids us, "Come!" Before there was a Jerusalem or even an Antioch and beyond, there was a Galilee. It was a time of preparation and discipleship. It was a time for the disciples to simply get to know their Lord, in thought and deed, learning His ways. This is why Jesus said, "Learn of Me..." They needed to learn the reality of abiding in Christ, in life as well as message.
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In America, in particular, if "Go!" were the answer, with all of our ministries and technological vehicles, the Church should have turned this nation "upside down" many

times over by now. And, before we can come up with the right answer, we first must come up with the right question. This is the critical missing link to the revival we look for, hope for, and pray for, apart from which, we shall be sorely disappointed. We must, therefore, take Jesus' admonition to heart, "For apart from me, you can do nothing."

There must be a spiritual conception followed by an embryonic stage prior to birthing. This is Galilee. Men, however, often with the best of intentions, proceed to start with building their Jerusalem, and therein lies the fatal problem.

It is not fatal in the sense that you cannot build your Jerusalem if one is bent on doing that. The real question is, are we building something for God with "the best laid plans of mice and men" or allowing God to have His own way, with and through us? Are we basing our efforts with an "ends justifies the means" mentality with what is often supported by pseudo-spiritual terms as "look at the fruit?" Are we more concerned, or rather consumed, with God's way of doing things, so readily available to the true seeker, found in Scripture and Early Church History in order that a fuller expression of Christ might be manifest? Deep down in our hearts, surely we know. Of course, we need not fear the answer if we dare not ask the question.

Men in the Church historically have a nasty habit of adapting worldly thinking, methods, techniques, and the like in order to "help" God further His Kingdom. However, the notion of "the ends justifies the means" does not work in the spiritual scheme of things. God's permissive will is truly beyond human comprehension when one considers such in light of His eternal purposes. They can be found as nuggets of gold within Scripture when revealed by His Holy Spirit to the true, desperate seeker.

In the days of Samuel, when he and his two sons were judging Israel, the elders came to Samuel, *"and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the other nations'"* (I Sam. 8:5). What they were saying was that the way in which God prescribed for Israel to be ruled was not working and neither had they had any faith or desire to see it work. Having a king seemed to work just fine for the other nations. If it was good enough for them, it should be good enough for us. *"And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, but they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them"* (I Sam. 8:7).

It is interesting to note that generations earlier God foretold of this when He said, *"When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, I will place a king over me like the other nations who are around me..."* (Deut. 17:14). In another place we have the account where the Pharisees said to Jesus, *"Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it has not been this way"* (Mat. 19:7-8).

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Three key phrases speak volumes in making a point here, *"like all the other nations," "because of the hardness of your heart,"* and, *"but from the beginning it has not been this way."* There is, in fact, a common thread. All permitted. All missing the mark. All

missing God's best, His Divine purposes. Be assured, there is more Scriptural precedent than just these examples. Human nature has a way of justifying our settling for, and under, God's permissive will, rather than seeking His perfect will. And, if that is the extent of our desire in seeing God's will manifest on earth as it is in Heaven, then as we have already seen, God may just allow us to have it.

There is another human element which greatly adds to the corruption of *"the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ"* which must be mentioned here. It is "the man who would be king" syndrome. Men who would presume leadership apart from an experience in "Galilee" and people who would demand a leader apart from the same. It has been said by some that Moses was an Old Testament foreshadowing of a type of "New Testament pastor" and so *"they have seated themselves in the seat of Moses."* However, this is quite incorrect. Rather, Moses was a type of Christ (Deut. 18:15, 18-19).

Consequently, it should be of no surprise that in accepting the former notion as justification for Reformation style leadership, that we have churches that bear little resemblance to those depicted in passages such as found in the Book of Acts, I Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4. As we shall see, the usurping of spiritual kingship can be a prelude to the usurping of the "priesthood" in the House of God. The story of Uzziah vividly illustrates the pitfalls and tragedy of exceeding one's God ordained authority. Now, Uzziah started out doing right in the sight of the Lord and was used mightily in re-establishing Judah under righteous rule and military might, reigning for fifty-two years. *"But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he had entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense (II Chron. 26:16).*

T. Austin-Sparks offers sober insight concerning this account; "The temple is the place of worship, and worship is just giving God His rights, God's rights are absolute, and in His temple God gets everything-all is unto God. In the day when the temple was not what God meant it to be... Isaiah wrote, *"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple."* It is the place where there is no room for anything else. In other words, Uzziah got into God's place, and then, when he was out of the way, Isaiah saw the Lord filling the temple."

The spirit of Diotrophes, *"who loves to be first among them"* (III John 9), lurks in the hearts of even the most sincere spiritual leaders as well as would-be leaders. Much of this problem is not only attributable to fleshly ambition or misconceptions related to Church leadership, but that we really do not trust God and His people. We all must have the attitude of being willing to decrease so that Christ and His corporate expression might increase. We must give more than doctrinal lip service to the spiritual reality of Christ having *"first place in everything."* (Col. 1:18b).

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Any individual or activity having preeminence or predominance over the Church robs Christ of His rightful place, *"both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).* The Body is not held together by one or a select few, but *"by that which every joint*

supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16b).

When the Church was young, its success came from the reality of *“the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”* Their secret to building the Church was in the knowledge that they could not build it. Only Christ can and will build His Church and He will build it His way, *“for unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it”* (Ps. 127:1a).

“And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46).

There is a natural fascination among believers with the concept of being “sent out” to do the work of the Lord. Many of us become familiar with the phrase and thinking associated with it very early on in our spiritual experience. We see others along the way being sent out and wonder if, we too, might be counted worthy to receive the heavenly call. First, it should be noted that from a biblical standpoint, those sent out were called by God to some form of itinerant ministry.

In the Old Testament, we primarily know them as the prophets. Beginning in New Testament times, they are the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, or “workers,” a generic term Watchman Nee frequently used in referring to those with this type of ministry. This should constitute a relatively small number of the Church. Why? Because an apostolic worker is more than just a great organizer and administrator, a prophet more than just a spiritual soothsayer, and an evangelist more than just an individual who goes about sharing their testimony.

Secondly, there is an intense personal process in the preparation of the vessel prior to the sending. I would submit to you that few men are called to that type ministry and fewer still truly sent of the Lord, having been prepared according to the Biblical pattern. Therefore, a clearer and more accurate understanding of the concept of “calling and sending” needs to be seen in light of the bridge that links these two terms together, the bridge called “preparation.”

The Old Testament lays the foundation of all Biblical truth, *“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction...”*(Rom. 15:4a). Concerning the issue at hand, we see in Isaiah 6, the prophet’s calling and sending, combined with that preparation process, uniquely depicted and condensed within a brief moment in time.

In rapid-fire succession, we see a scenario for the worker of such a calling. In the first verse and at the very outset, there is a death. It is a significant death in the life of Isaiah, for it is the death of King Uzziah, considered to be one of Judah’s few righteous kings, who reigned for fifty-two years.

One may draw several spiritual applications from this, but one thing is certain, the death of such a leader is a traumatic event on both a national and personal scale. There is the

sudden sense of great loss concerning the security and stability provided by the long, righteous reign of such a king. God has a way of removing our security blankets in order to establish something greater in our lives. “He takes away the first, that He might establish the second” (Heb. 10:9).

For Isaiah, the most critical event to impact his life and prepare him for ministry occurs “in the year of King Uzziah’s death,” which was: He saw the Lord! Mark this statement well. It cannot be emphasized enough. Prior to having a vision of, or for, the House of God, or of some move of God, Isaiah has a vision of the Lord. The ultimate purpose of receiving such a vision, within the context of calling, is not for the sake of attempting to recount in detail what is seen and heard to others.

Paul, in referring to a similar experience, is quite vague in his description and can only say that “I know a man in Christ...whether in the body, I do not know, or out of the body, I do not know, God knows- such a man was caught up to the third heaven... And I know how such a man... was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak (II Cor. 12:2-4).

It should be evident that the ultimate purpose for receiving such a vision is the profound impact it has upon the vessel to whom such a calling has been given. From this point on, to the end of his life, Isaiah’s entire perspective would be forever colored by this vision which gave him a fuller revelation of the Lord and His glory. Of all that he saw, what cut him to the heart most was his encounter with the utter awesomeness and holiness of God, which Paul, generations later, would also come to experience and understand.

Upon coming face to face with the glory of the Lord, what was Isaiah’s response? “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips. And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” In receiving this vision of the Lord and all it entailed, Isaiah also receives a revelation of who and what he is, and the great contrast between the two.....and it devastated him.

He was brought to ground zero, to the end of himself, resulting in a godly sorrow leading to repentance. There are numerous claims of individuals and whole churches having similarly met the Lord, however, the true litmus test may be in the initial reaction.

For Isaiah, it was complete personal devastation. For the prophet Daniel as well as the apostle John, the encounter caused them to tremble with great fear and to fall to the ground as dead men (Dan. 10:8-10, Rev. 1:17). At the Mount of Transfiguration, the immediate reaction of the three disciples upon hearing the audible voice of the Father was much the same (Mat. 17:6).

These are but a few examples out of many from the Scriptures. Yes, God, by His mercy and grace, would quickly comfort, restore, and encourage. Nevertheless, the immediate reactions were that of an instant recognition of the holiness of God which prompt an overwhelming sense of unworthiness, helplessness, fear, reverence, and awe.

Such supernatural recognition, in whatever ways it may come according to God's own choosing, must earnestly be sought after and is paramount to a man's calling. Paul expressed an unselfish desire "to go on to visions and revelations of the Lord" (II Cor. 12:1b) so that he might be a more effective minister. "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Cor. 4:5-6).

In verses 6 and 7, God faithfully responds to Isaiah's cry of contrition by bestowing forgiveness and purifying the vessel. As we come to verse 8, the Lord is ready, because the vessel has been made ready, to issue the call for Isaiah to be sent. As Paul says, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15a). Isaiah's response is one of zeal in accordance with knowledge, for he has seen the Lord and His glory and can never be the same again.

In seeing the Lord in contrast to himself and his people, he is keenly aware of man's need for God as the only means of deliverance from a wretched and hopeless condition. Furthermore, he is compelled to be sent as one who is indebted to the One who has shown such great mercy out of a deserved righteous judgment. Towards the end of Isaiah's life and ministry, he could speak with the deepest of personal understanding when he prophesied, "But to this one will I look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Is. 66:2b).

So, what significance does this have for us within a New Testament context? First of all, it must be stressed that a man has not been given the option of choosing his particular calling. "And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God..." (Heb. 5:6), nor his particular gifting, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (I Cor. 12:11). Rather, what is critical is how one responds to a call initiated by the Lord and to what extent he chooses to submit to the preparation process.

May those to whom such a calling has been given receive it in a true spirit of humility, and may the rest of us be greatly encouraged with the message of Paul in I Corinthians 12. Simply put, that God distributes to each one as He desires for the common good, that more abundant honor be given to those who seem to be most lacking, that there should be no division, or caste system, in the body, but that we should all have the same care for one another.

A word of caution is presented here. As is too often the case, we identify a particular calling in some young believer. We then, with the best of intentions, share or even act upon this knowledge prematurely, meaning only to encourage, but actually proceed to "raise up" a person into their calling. What is worse, is to inform this person that they are in the process of being "raised up into the ministry."

So, what have we done? We have inadvertently placed a stumbling block in the path of what should be normal spiritual maturity. The preparation process becomes tainted at the beginning, the most critical time for any work, and is therefore short-circuited.

Remember what great damage can be done with just a little knowledge, such as occurred in the garden of Eden.

The Scriptures teach us, “*do not stir up love*” or “*kindle a fire*” prematurely. God will accomplish what he desires in the fullness of His time and not our own. He, on occasion, will appear to do a relatively quick work in an individual’s life, but not at the expense of human shortcuts.

Timothy is an excellent example of how God can prepare a very young man who has a legitimate call on his life. The account of Timothy is popular in supporting the idea that God can and will use young men beyond their years in spiritual leadership. However, there are lessons that go far beyond this, and when ignored, the main point is all but lost.

What makes Timothy exceptional is more than just his youthfulness, but rather his extraordinary preparation. He is probably saved during Paul’s first missionary journey while still in his teens. About five years later, Paul returns to visit the church in the region of Derby, Lystra, and Iconium and hears about a young disciple named Timothy who is “well spoken of by the brethren.”

Paul then proceeds to ask this young man to go with him. Nothing else is recorded. There is no mention of prophetic words spoken, no laying on of hands, no mention of accompanying Paul for the expressed purpose of being “trained up” for some great work.

What is not mentioned may be far more telling than what is. Paul most likely had the wisdom not to share with his young disciple what he saw in the Spirit concerning Timothy’s calling. This calling was something other than local leadership, otherwise, he could have simply remained where he was. Paul recognized an apostolic call on the young man’s life, and since “apostle” means, “one sent forth,” he invested accordingly.

Thankfully, young Timothy spent the next several years serving as a baggage handler, tradesman’s assistant, and messenger boy, among other menial tasks. But above all, he spent a good deal of time living with men of apostolic stature., observing, asking, listening, and learning how these men lived and functioned, raising up and nurturing the Church. How many men can truly make claims to that kind of ministerial preparation?

Gradually, over a span of about ten years, he was given increasing responsibilities, so that by the time Timothy was in his thirties, he was beginning to move into the fullness of his calling. By that time, Paul could truly say of Timothy to the Philippian Church, “For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare... But you know his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father” (Phil. 2:20, 22).

In later years Paul, being well aware of the importance of this issue of ministerial preparation strongly admonishes Timothy on this very point. Regardless of whether one is set in or sent out, “a man must first be proven and not be a young convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil” (I Tim. 3:6).

“Also, do not lay hands upon any one too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others...” (I Tim. 5:22). “And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2).

God’s dealings with those called to be workers are tailor-made to each individual, and yet, there is a common thread which binds all those called to such a ministry. The greater the call, the greater the preparation; and the greater the preparation, the greater the anointing and fulfillment of that call.

Jesus said to His disciples, “...as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21b). Let us, therefore, endeavor to employ the heavenly blueprint of sending, for by so doing, those who are sent, along with the Church who sends them, will never be found wanting nor have cause for shame.

When the Church was young, its success came from the reality of “*the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*” Their secret to building the Church was in the knowledge that they could not build it. Only Christ can and will build His Church and He will build it His way, “*for unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it*” (Ps. 127:1a). “*And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and simplicity of heart*” (Acts 2:46).

Heb. 12: 12-13 - All the prophetic knowledge in the world, without a Scripturally functional church, will not be enough to be God's instrument on earth. It is therefore imperative that the Church be restored to its originally intended expression, that it might not be crippled, but fully operational in order to fulfill her mission during, what will be, the most perilous, yet glorious, of times.

Some will say, “Not to worry! God will see to it that His Church is prepared to fulfill her calling, regardless.” Indeed! We may be sure of that! However, we can choose to come to that place, either the easy way or the hard way. But, one way or the other, it will be done according to His word. As Paul wrote in I Cor. 10:11, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and were written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.”

In this, we have another parallel of God’s dealings with the Church as with Israel. As Israel will not enter into her full inheritance until those who remain at the end of the “Great Tribulation,” proclaim, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord,” neither will the Lord return until His Bride is “*without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.*”

II Peter 3:12 - The Church, being all she was called to be, is not only an end in itself, but also, a means to an end towards fulfilling her ministry and obligation to provoking the Jews to a Godly jealousy, and in doing so, making herself ready as the Bride of Christ, even “hastening the coming of the day of God.”

I personally find this verse to be one of the more remarkable statements in Scripture in that the spiritual condition of the Church has a direct impact upon the Lord's return. Even setting aside one's eschatological view, how can anyone honestly believe that the Lord could return at any given moment considering the condition of the Church?

II Cor. 11:2-3 - We need to pay special attention to the degree to which Paul expressed his concern about what he was already seeing, and foresaw ever-increasing, as to this issue. For him to have equated the Church's loss of the "simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" to the deception and fall of man in the Garden of Eden is quite telling - and, is telling us a great deal.

Therefore, the Church must return to that "simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." She must return to her original God-given, Biblical structure of leadership and corporate function. She must be Christ-centered, meaning, He must have preeminence, and not just in lip service. She must become less reliant on man and things. She must prepare to be able to not only adapt, but even flourish, amidst loss and devastation.

She must learn to travel light, now, before the time, for most assuredly, by the time she enters into the Seventieth Week of Daniel, she will have little choice. She will be compelled to *"lay aside every weight and the encumbrance that so easily entangles her, so that she may be able to run with endurance the race that is set before her."*

The Church must reject the popular notion of, "Hey! We can be just as good as the world!" The Church was never called to be "just as good as the world." She was called to be something, someone, totally different from this world, driven by a totally different life source. In fact, she was literally called to reflect something, or rather, Someone, out of this world. We must remember, Israel's failings had much to do with her wanting to be "like the other nations."

And, related to that, God no more wanted a religious system based upon the Babylonian approach to centralized organizational authority anymore than what would eventually become the Roman Catholic Church as ruled from its central headquarters in Rome. Where did this concept of centralized religious government originate? It was originally manifested in the Tower of Babel, which eventually gave rise to the Babylonian system of hierarchical authority, religious as well as political.

II Peter 1:3-4 - Even the purest and noblest visions and burdens from God Himself will be tainted and diminished if we do not have the proper spirit through which, and the proper framework, from which, the Life of God can be made manifest to the world, as well as to the heavenly places. It is the witness and testimony of this other life, the Divine Life, which God has called His people to reflect from the very beginning.

We find in the third verse of Jude's letter an appeal to the believers to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." From almost the very beginning, the Church has been in need of that sort of restoration, which will be required

for God to accomplish His purposes through her in the “last days.” And, never has that need been greater than now. It is a change that is even more radical than the terms we so freely throw around, such as "revival," or God forbid, another "movement."

Furthermore, what we don't have need in the Church, is another "great idea," another so-called "Divine strategy." As "The Preacher" taught, "There is nothing new under the sun." Where is the consideration or the recognition of consulting with, and being directed by, the sovereign leading of the Holy Spirit?

The Biblical phrase, "Unless the Lord builds the house....." Has almost been reduced to a mere cliché. But, it behooves us to receive this as a sober admonition and warning. Anything less reduces its intended meaning and impact to a mere nice, little extraction from a Psalm to be used to give the impression of some measure of spirituality.

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A Discontentment According to the Will of God

Now, from the standpoint of Church Leadership, the promulgation of true spiritual

contentment in both word and example is certainly to be desired. However, all too often, the brow-beating of God's people on the topic of contentment has at its root impure motives. T. Austin-Sparks has addressed, or rather exposed this problem in terms few have the insight or courage to openly address.

Something exists which fails continually to meet spiritual need. That which does meet the hunger and longing of years comes along, and from the old dead and barren connections the hungry move to the spiritual provision. Instead of Christians being glad if a genuine spiritual move is made, the cry is not long in being heard: "Dividing the Lord's people!" Are we sure that behind much of this sort of thing there are not vested interests, sentimentalities, mere traditions, or our own fears?

Sheep stealing is a common charge which needs to be looked at again in the light of Christ. Whose sheep are they? Are they His, or are they the property of a certain Christian enterprise or society? Unto what have they been stolen? Have they moved in a certain direction because they have found a larger measure of Christ there, or is it because they have really been enticed, to swell the ranks of something less of Christ?

Are we really only too anxious to let our converts or members go, if they are going after the Lord? Do we want to keep some thing together? Is the essence of division in the leaving of one association or connection because a greater measure of spiritual life has been found in other directions?

A.W. Tozer wrote, "Some men seek and find and seek no more, while others seek and find and seek still." We have some in our churches who have the attitude of, "Man, it doesn't get any better than this! Or, 'Hey! We've got the goods!' Because *there is nothing new under the sun*, Paul had this to say to the Corinthian Church who shared this same attitude;

For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. And another passage is likened to it; Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, except to enjoy more of the same.

Isaiah 58:12, I Cor. 3:9-11, Eph. 2:19-22 - The issue, misunderstood by so many, is not one of "sitting in the seat of the scornful" and lacking appreciation for what other men and women of God have accomplished, and are accomplishing on God's behalf. It is the issue of restoration; a restoration of that corporate vessel, or "wineskin," that is able to manifest a greater revelation of Christ, according to God's original intent.

Jer. 1:10, 18:1-6, Heb. 12:11 - Restoration is typically the final stage of having been disciplined by the Lord, leading to repentance. God's dealings with the Church is no different than with Israel, and the great misunderstanding is that, to varying degrees, "plucking up and tearing down, overthrowing and destroying," is a prerequisite to

“building and planting,” which is the ultimate objective.

And, what of fellowshiping and building? In recent years, on occasion, I have been warmly invited to participate in a particular work or to become a formal member of a local fellowship. However, I know in my heart that we are on somewhat of a different path, operating from a different mindset as to how God’s Kingdom is built. Because I see an eventual fork in the road, or that we would be on an inevitable collision course, with the best of intentions, I assume the burden of responsibility in making the decision as to my direct involvement.

Human nature being what it is, it is not unusual for the one doing the inviting, upon receiving a respectful decline, takes it as a personal rejection. In recent years, my reply has come down to this: “I can fellowship with you; I just can’t build with you.” There are three Biblical principles in play here. First, as Paul wrote, “I do nothing in violation of my conscience. Secondly, “Can two walk together unless they be in agreement?” And, thirdly, “I endeavor not to build upon another man’s foundation.”

Psalm 103:7 tells us that Moses knew the ways of God, while the sons of Israel merely knew His acts. We must not settle for being content with the acts of God, but to be in an unrelenting pursuit of God and His ways. This is a kind of discontentment according to the will of God.

It is so much easier to fill a vacuum than to have to purge and re-program data, or so much easier to work with wet cement, while it is still pliable and impressionable, as opposed to it long since being passed the stage of hardening. By this point, the only thing left to do is to shatter it.

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A Firm Foundation and the Whole Counsel of God

When Paul, speaking to the Ephesian elders proclaimed, “*For I did not shrink from*

declaring to you the whole purpose of God,” did his message merely consist of, “Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?” Jesus and Paul stressed the importance of having our faith built upon a right foundation - “*Christ and Him crucified.*”

A primary reason is because the foundation directly impacts our perception and expectations for our lives. A faulty or perverted foundation will ultimately lead to having our faith shaken, resulting in shipwreck, or repentance leading towards the purging of the tainted foundation so that it might be replaced with a right one. Though the latter is certainly preferable to the former, both results come at a high price, one the Lord never intended us to pay.

That is why the beginning of any work of God, whether it is individual or corporate, is the most critical part; you only get one shot to lay in a proper foundation. Otherwise, later on, the only alternative is to tear the house down in order to dig up and redo the foundation. More often than not, it is best to cut your losses, abandon the work, and start anew somewhere else.

We spend entirely too much time trying to renovate those works which, regardless of how we spruce it up and tweak it, will inevitably reveal cracks in the walls, reaching right up to the roof, and ultimately, cave in under its own weight. This principle is no less true of leadership, and pertains to them even more so in light of the added weight of responsibility. “*Unless the Lord builds the house*” you might as well be building it on sand.

Another problem is that leadership often has a tendency to want to perpetuate their name and works, sort of like a royal dynasty. These works become idols because they are, in reality, the works of man's hands. They become "idols of worship" in the Name of God. They are kept alive by artificial life support systems after the name “Ichabod” has long since been placed over their doorposts.

And, furthermore, men want to leave them as monuments unto themselves. But, God, says, "My glory I will not give to another!" A prime example is found when connecting Numbers 21:9 with II Kings 18:4 in reference to the bronze serpent during the Exodus.

Originally, God provided this instrument as a vehicle through which Divine healing could be obtained. Many generations later, we find this same bronze serpent being worshiped as an idol. It is not until Hezekiah, a man of courage and conviction arrives on the scene as Judah's new king, that this bronze serpent is “broken into pieces.”

One other example worth noting is in the case of Saul in I Samuel 15:12. As a fruit of his rapidly declining spiritual condition, it says of him, “*...and behold, he set up a monument for himself,...*” And, right up unto today, this malady still persists. We must recognize the tendency of fallen humanity which is given to self-worship, to build monuments to ourselves and to perpetuate our works on earth.

It is a human tendency, or carnal trait, if you will, that does not stop at the door of the

House of God. We, too, left unchecked, will and have aspired to build and leave for posterity our own attempted versions of "The Tower of Babel." Even great churches like that of Ephesus did not survive indefinitely. God performs His desired purpose in a given time or generation. Eventually, the cloud moves on. We pass on, and God moves on.

How often throughout church history do we see genuine "Moves" of God become commandeered by men who turn them into "Movements." If history teaches us anything, it teaches us that "isms" invariably have men's fingerprints all over them. Therefore, "they are already dead while they yet live." They can, and often do, appear to be the model of success, "but inside, they are filled with dead men's bones."

And, an additional word of caution: be wary when you hear the term "trend" within Christian circles pertaining to "moves of God." The term "trend" is often used as code for "popular," and, if anything, God's will, and what is deemed popular, are virtually always at odds with each another.

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The Church as the Key to End-Time Fulfillment, Leading to Israel's Redemption

I Peter 4:17, II Peter 3:10-12, Eph. 5:25-27. A.W. Tozer stated the following: *"The*

popular notion that the first obligation of the Church is to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth is false. Her first obligation is to be spiritually worthy to spread it... To spread an ineffective, degenerate brand of Christianity to pagan lands is not to fulfill the commandment of Christ or to discharge our obligation to the heathen."

Eph. 3:8-12 - The Church was predestined to "manifest the wisdom of God," the character of God, in the ways of God, a corporate expression of the Mind of Christ. It was not to take the best ideas the world had to offer and re-package them in Christian wrappings, buying into the mindset that "The ends justify the means" or "Hey! We can be just as good as the world" or "If they like us, maybe they'll like our Jesus, too!"

As one man remarked sometime ago, "I went out into the world to find the Church, but when I got into the Church, I found the world." I Cor. 2:10-16, II Peter 1:2-11. Brothers and sisters, the Church, as with Israel, was never intended to look or function anything like the world, but to be a faithful witness of God's Divine nature, being "a light to the nations."

Acts 8:18-24, Acts 5:1-11 - You want gimmicks for personal ambition? Look what happened to Simon the Sorcerer. You want to look good on the outside while scheming in your heart? Look what befell Ananias and Sapphira! You want a church where everyone feels welcome because, after all, we want to be popular, accepting, and relevant? Look at the warnings to the churches in Revelation.

Unless or until Jesus "be lifted up" people will be drawn into your congregations for reasons other than the right one. The fact that for some it will make no difference is an indictment in and of itself.

When Nehemiah heard that the walls had been broken down and the gates had been burned in Jerusalem, he wept and mourned. Why such a grievous reaction? It wasn't the inner city or The Temple itself, so why such grief? Nehemiah could see the bigger picture and the far-reaching implications. The walls were not intended to keep the people in, but rather, to keep those hostile to the God of Israel and His works out.

The gates offered a form of crowd control with guards posted at every entrance to make certain no one hostile to the city or the sanctuary could enter. And there were those posted on the walls who could discern from afar potential or imminent perils approaching, giving ample warning to prepare in advance. No walls meant no protection. No gates meant no control. No observation from a safe distance meant no advance warning of impending danger. The result? The city and the sanctuary are overrun by the sheer weight of numbers, and a hostile culture. No more distinction! No more testimony!

Strait-jacket analogy - Jer. 23:1-2, Ezek. 34:1-10. For the most part, the modern-day Church is contorted and restricted in form and function. The Church in America, in particular, through spiritual eyes, is in a state of disfigurement, and all the religious cosmetology, man-originated strategy and fleshly hype cannot keep it hidden indefinitely.

A thorough “washing of the water with the Word” will eventually expose the façade of superficial spirituality. As to function, she has been crippled and abused through genuine, and at times, willful ignorance, ministerial malpractice and the religiosity of men.

Men have placed the Body of Christ in a veritable straight-jacket causing the Bride’s appearance and life to become crude, restrained, and contorted. It is not only contrary to the Father’s ultimate intention, but an insult to the entire wedding party. Be assured, the Bridegroom will not consummate the marriage until His Bride has made herself ready; "a bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

There is a story about Michelangelo when he sought out that large chunk of rock suitable for the purpose of creating his David. While wandering through the quarry to seek out that perfect chunk of granite for his project he encountered a variety of sizes, shapes, and grades. He eventually would select from among the numerous varieties of rock, what was arguably the poorest of the entire bunch. He worked on that ugly piece of rock day after day for many months until his masterpiece finally began to emerge out from that rock.

Upon completion of this "labor of love," and what became one of the most beautiful and famous sculptures ever produced, a colleague asked him the following: "Of all the pieces of rock found in that quarry, how is it that you selected what appeared to be the worst piece of granite among them, and yet, were able to produce such an exquisite masterpiece?" In reply, Michelangelo simply said this: "I knew David was in that ugly piece of rock all the time. All I had to do was let him out."

Text & Prophetic parallels:

John 4:20-24, Acts 2:42-47, Eph. 2:19-22, I Cor. 3:11, Rev. 19:7-9 - Here we see the beginning of the transition away from Temple worship in Jerusalem; a fledgling church about to shed one more significant layer of the “old wineskin.”

As an integral part of this transition, we also see that home meetings were not intended to supplement the general assembly, but rather, the general assembly was intended to supplement the home meetings. A far greater understanding concerning the true House of God was being revealed - I Peter 2:4-5.

Eph. 4:7-16 - (v. 10 - “that **He** might fill all things). Building upon these principles, how does this apply to the Church and its leadership, meaning, how the Church is traditionally structured and led? For years, I have referred people, especially "leaders" to passages such as Matthew 20:25-28 and Matthew 23:1-12, and have been compelled to ask, "What part of ‘NO!’ don't you understand?" II Cor. 1:24, I Peter 5:1-3. If they ignore the instructions of Jesus on this matter, it is not surprising then, that they would do the same with Paul’s and Peter’s.

Acts 8:1-4 - Note: The apostles remained behind in Jerusalem. Churches may have been established by men of apostolic stature, but they were birthed by simple brothers and sisters in the Lord, the fruits of having had a proper foundation laid in them derived from

an authentic apostolic foundation. What fruits will be manifest in the end-times, and particularly, during the “Time of Jacob’s Trouble?” - Dan. 11:32-33, 12:3, Rev. 12:13-17.

One of the significant ironies of self-proclaimed "New Testament Churches" who boast of following the "New Testament Pattern" is that these "patterns" are not as "cut and dry" as purported to be. It is ironic that though there are undoubtedly principles to be applied across the board in every local fellowship, one ignored aspect of the pattern is that the New Testament actually lacks one.

In my study of Biblical and Church History, I do not see a "cookie cutter" approach to the establishment of churches. When Barnabas was sent to Antioch to bear witness to the grace of God among the Gentiles, unlike most men, he did not presume to turn it into a Jerusalem North, the first satellite congregation and the start of a Christian denomination. We should keep in mind that Antioch was already an established congregation of simple, primarily Gentile brethren in the Lord prior to any apostles, prophets or teachers on the scene.

Barnabas was the right man at the right time by Divine orchestration. *And they sent Barnabas off to Antioch... For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith.* Barnabas was not considered Spirit-filled merely because of his doctrinal belief. Nor was he anointed for ministry as the result of some instantaneous transfer of power through the laying on of hands. It was rather the life made manifest from his pursuit of the Lordship of Christ. He left Jerusalem as a mature, reliable, yet, simple brother in the Lord, and would eventually return as an apostle by God’s Divine choice.

We are quick to call to mind the Old Testament example of David, whom God had chosen to be the King of Israel years before the reality would be fulfilled. However, all too often, even within the Church, there is the attitude towards some akin to, *“Is this not the carpenter’s son, whom we know?”*

This is a prime example of *“A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and among his relatives, and in his own home.”* This Biblical perspective flies in the face of most of what we hear today, and we are paying a terrible price for it in the form of fleshly hype and spiritual retardation.

Yes, the Church at Antioch eventually received assistance in their spiritual maturity, first through Barnabas, and soon followed by Paul as they co-labored and “taught considerable numbers for an entire year.” But, this was even before Paul and Barnabas were confirmed by the brethren and the Holy Spirit to be sent out from Antioch as apostles or church planters. Paul and Barnabas watered the Church at Antioch, but they did not plant it.

Paul and Barnabas labored day by day in the local church at Antioch. It never entered their minds to use this fledgling, but rapidly growing, local fellowship as a stepping stone, or springboard, into a higher level of ministry. They had an understanding that they were members of that body - period!

There were no timetables and no preconditions attached. Ministry was a normal spiritual function within a corporate arena, as a family member, and not as a hireling - until the unexpected day came when THE LORD said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Thereafter, Paul and Barnabas, who was eventually replaced by Silas, did in fact plant their own churches. They did in fact plant and water these churches, and then eventually left other mature brethren (elders) to oversee and water the church. Some men of apostolic stature planted churches, and therefore, had a genuine vested stake and interest, in those churches.

They may have been adopted spiritual fathers of a work, but they did not "lord it over the flock." As with the local elders, they did not dominate the flock, and did not make use of their God-given authority unless or until it was necessary when significant issues arose and correction, in whatever form, was required.

But, on a regular daily basis, they submitted themselves to the Body, sitting and conducting themselves as just one of the brothers in the Lord. Of course, they employed their teaching gift, as was appropriate, but sooner or later, they would leave, so that the local church could learn to grow and mature independently of the apostles. *"Not that we lord it over your faith, but are co-workers with you for your joy, for in your faith you are standing firm."*

This is precisely why Paul never remained with a local church more than 3 years. In time, any apostle or church leader would eventually replace the "chief cornerstone," and Paul was not about to have any of that. Essentially, it was his objective to work himself out of a job, *"that he might present every man complete in Christ."*

As John the Baptist declared, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* It is not coincidental that it was in this spirit that John prepared the way of the Lord. He was totally consumed with the Lord having His proper place of preeminence at the expense of his own. We must ever keep before us, that as Jesus stated in John 16:14, that the ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit is not to glorify men and their ministries, but to glorify Christ.

In preparing the way, he had to ultimately get out of the way, so as not to be a hindrance to the Lord having His way in having His purposes fulfilled. As God told Jeremiah, there must be a plucking up and breaking down, destroying and overthrowing, before there can be building and planting.

I see many variations on a theme when it comes to the variety of characteristics and corporate personality of each local church. It stands to reason that if "God distributes to each one as He wills" and "sets in who He wills in the Body as He desires, the end result must be a fairly diverse corporate personality from local church to local church. When man interferes, or trespasses, with this Divine process, He is actually disputing the Lordship of Christ.

And, when he does that, which is too often the case, it is no wonder that our Christian bookstores are filled with all kinds of "How-To" books rather than relying on the direction of the Holy Spirit "to work all things after the counsel of His will."

To be sure, the Spirit will never contradict the written Word, which is why discernment and sound doctrine are so critical. But, we need to leave room, no, give preeminence, to the Holy Spirit to build the house according to His will, lest we build our own "Tower of Babel."

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Confusion Over "Anointed" Preaching

Unfortunately, the term, "anointed," has become cheapened much in the same way as "apostolic" and "prophetic" have. They have become Christian buzz words which have become far more popular and loosely used than in their correct Biblical understanding.

This misunderstanding is only exceeded by their misapplication and lack of reverential treatment.

Though you have many references to "*anointing*" in the Old Covenant, it is rarely found in the New. The work of the Cross and an indwelling Lord became both the process and the fruit of true "anointing." It is more than gifting, but is the process by which a vessel and his gifting are mutually cultivated.

It is the ongoing process of "deportation," if you will, a decreasing of the flesh and an increase of the Divine Spirit, manifesting an ever-increasing evidence of the Word becoming flesh in our personal walk, and ever moving towards the objective of the man and the message becoming as one.

What is the outcome? For example, let's say you have two individuals ministering on the same passage of Scripture. The effect of one is received as "water off a duck's back"..... sweet, innocent, and very nice. The effect of the other is with a depth, an impact, a credibility, a weight, that strikes right at the heart. What is the difference?

It isn't the eloquence, the raw theological knowledge, nothing in the human presentation. It is the reality of that word which has been Divinely filtered through that vessel, wrought by the hammer and chisel of God. One speaks the Word of God, while the other merely speaks words of God. One presents an expression of "Christianeze," while the other presents "Christ and Him crucified." One is an echo, while the other is a voice.

We can always fall back on the much-quoted passage of God's Word "not returning void," but that kind of thinking isn't too far removed from the "lesser of the two evils" rationale, and may provide something less than the proper interpretation and intention of that thought. However, the real issue is in pursuit, in teaching and in living testimony, of a fuller revelation of the Lord and His purposes. God calls us to a greater stewardship of His Word than to be relatively innocuous and polite, or even "interesting."

It is no wonder that the teaching of Scripture has become so cheap in our day. Teachers and teachings have become "a dime a dozen." Additionally, never before has any previous generation had more Bibles, study helps, media avenues, literature, CD's, conferences, etc ad nauseam, while at the same time, arguably being the most spiritually shallow to date.

XXX

Discerning Between the False and Immature

Let me just say that I believe there to be a difference between what is commonly referred to as "the false church" and an immature or carnal church. For example, the Church at Corinth, was the epitome of immaturity and carnality. Paul nevertheless related to them

as part of the true Church. I see today's Church as being very similar to the Church at Corinth, battling problems with carnality, abuse of spiritual gifts, man-centeredness, and false doctrine.

The Galatians had their own set of serious problems and yet Paul expressed to them with seeming exasperation, "*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*" But, he also followed up by expressing a father's heart when he said, "*with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.*"

There is, however, an underlying and even more grave concern beyond that of the constraints placed upon the fullness and free reign of the Spirit, and that is the danger of not seeing how the Institutional Church and its system is set up to get people to follow one man! One leader! Instead of following the one true leader, Christ Himself!

While the Institutional Church is an easy target, especially for those who are no longer a participant in it, the spirit of man-centeredness and lack of discernment extends well beyond its four walls. True, this particular wineskin is conducive to encouraging such stumbling blocks, but that tendency is not necessarily pervasive across the board, even within organized Christianity. I'm not that naive, but at the same time, not quite that cynical or simplistic.

Again, part of spiritual maturity is being able to "*extract the precious from the worthless.*" I see some pastors who are unwitting victims despite their position, sincerely doing what they think is right in light of the knowledge they have. Many are Godly men of integrity and need to be liberated from the "Old Wineskin" mindset just as much, if not more, than the people they lead.

XXX

Church Leadership in General

An issue which has burdened my heart over the years has been this matter of Church leadership, whether it be within a more traditional church setting or an "outside the camp" ministry and fellowship. But, if the Body is not functioning according to the true Biblical

pattern of leadership, along with a church that manifests mere lipservice to the principle of "that which every joint supplies," you will have the perpetual reality of a spiritual façade being run by a worldly mentality and authority structure.

Men in the Church historically have a nasty habit of adapting worldly thinking, methods, techniques, and the like in order to help God further His Kingdom. However, the notion of "the ends justifies the means" does not work in the spiritual scheme of things. God's permissive will is truly beyond human comprehension when one considers such in light of His eternal purposes. They can be found as nuggets of gold within Scripture when revealed by His Holy Spirit to the true, desperate seeker.

In the days of Samuel when he and his two sons were judging Israel, the elders came to Samuel, *"and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the other nations'"* (I Sam. 8:5). What they were saying was that the way in which God prescribed for Israel to be ruled was not working and neither had they had any faith or desire to see it work.

Having a king seemed to work just fine for the other nations. If it was good enough for them, it should be good enough for us. *"And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, but they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them'"* (I Sam. 8:7).

It is interesting to note that generations earlier God foretold of this when He said, *"When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, I will place a king over me like the other nations who are around me..."* (Deut. 17:14).

In another place we have the account where the Pharisees said to Jesus, *"Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?"* He said to them, *"Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it has not been this way"* (Mat. 19:7-8).

Three key phrases speak volumes in making a point here, *"like all the other nations," "because of the hardness of your heart,"* and, *"but from the beginning it has not been this way."* There is in fact a common thread. All permitted. All missing the mark. All missing God's best, His Divine purposes. Be assured, there is more Scriptural precedent from where these examples come from.

Human nature has a way of rationalizing our willingness to just settle for, and under, God's permissive will. And, if that is the extent of our desire in seeing God's will manifest on earth as it is in Heaven, then as we have already seen, God may just allow us to have it.

There is another human element which greatly adds to the corruption of *"the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ"* which must be mentioned here. It is "the man who would be king" syndrome. Men who would presume leadership apart from an experience

in “Galilee” and people who would demand a leader apart from the same.

It has been said by some that Moses was an Old Testament foreshadowing of a type of “New Testament pastor” and so *“they have seated themselves in the seat of Moses.”* However, this is quite incorrect. Rather, Moses was a type of Christ (Deut. 18:15, 18-19).

Consequently, it should be of no surprise that in accepting the former notion as justification for Reformation style leadership, that we have churches that bear little resemblance to those depicted in passages such as found in the Book of Acts, I Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4. As we shall see, the usurping of spiritual kingship can be a prelude to the usurping of the “priesthood” in the House of God.

An all too often overlooked foreshadowing of how the local church was to choose leadership is revealed in Exodus 18:13-27. This foundational framework is later applied to the Early Church as exemplified in I Tim. 3:7 and Titus 1:5-9. Another is found in reference to how the local church was to function when assembled together, revealed in Numbers 11:24-30.

Jer. 5:31, Matt. 18:15-17, 20:25-28, 23:1-12, I Cor. 6:1, II Cor. 1:24, Col. 4:16, I Thes. 5:27, I Tim. 5:20, I Peter 5:1-3, III John 9-10 - The principle of a clergy-laity mindset and system is consistently rebuked in Scripture. Church leadership was not intended to function as some secret society making decisions behind closed doors. There was to be no fleshly ecclesiastical distinctions within His Body; no titles, no ecclesiastical royalty, no special class of people.

Church leadership was never intended to function as some secret society making decisions behind closed doors. There was to be no fleshly ecclesiastical distinctions within His Body; no titles, no ecclesiastical royalty, no special class of people, for as Jesus taught, “You are all brothers.” The Church was to reflect the Divine nature of a heavenly kingdom, not a Jewish religious system nor a Babylonian-modeled, Gentile authority structure.

T. Austin-Sparks offers sober insight concerning this account; “The temple is the place of worship, and worship is just giving God His rights; God’s rights are absolute, and in His temple God gets everything - all is unto God. In the day when the temple was not what God meant it to be... Isaiah wrote, *“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.”* It is the place where there is no room for anything else. In other words, Uzziah got into God’s place, and then, when he was out of the way, Isaiah saw the Lord filling the temple.”

The spirit of Diotrophes, *“who loves to be first among them”* (III John 9), lurks in the hearts of even the most sincere spiritual leaders as well as would-be leaders. Much of this problem is not only attributable to fleshly ambition or misconceptions related to Church leadership, but also that we really do not trust God and His people. We all must have the attitude of being willing to decrease so that Christ and His corporate expression might increase. We must give more than doctrinal lipservice to the spiritual reality of Christ

having *“first place in everything.”* (Col. 1:18b).

Any individual or activity having preeminence or predominance over the Church robs Christ of His rightful place, *“both to will and to work for His good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13). The Body is not held together by one or a select few, but *“by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love”* (Eph. 4:16b).

Rev. 2:6 - There are two critical elements in this short verse, which speaks volumes concerning the Lord's thought on this issue. “Nicolaitans,” in the Greek translation, literally means, “to conquer the laity or the people.” This was not merely a random name, but a description of the ways of these people. And secondly, the Lord expresses his hatred for their ways. Needless to say, provoking the Lord's hatred is the ultimate indictment, and should be quite sufficient to garner our attention.

This is the weak link in the overall outworking of traditional ministry. And, unless or until repented of, it will continue to be a stumbling block to the Church as it relates to fulfilling God's purposes in the last days. We must have "a vessel fit for the Master's use," both at the corporate and individual levels.

A Cautionary Tale

The other side of the coin is where the “leader” of a work comes to believe that he is indispensable. But, “A man who thinks he is something when he is nothing, deceives himself.” Ironically, and unfortunately, it is the good and gifted man, who is particularly susceptible to being ensnared by this notion. There is much truth to the old adage, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

It is the people who quite often become unwitting accomplices to this snare, in that there is a soulish, endemic nature to demand a king. The fact of the matter is, leaders cannot lead unless they have people willing to follow. In such cases, both parties share in this adaptation of a worldly form of leadership - a form which was never intended for the Church, any more than a worldly king was for the nation of Israel.

A case in point is Ignatius, who became Bishop of Antioch. From an historical perspective, Ignatius is generally considered to be one of the Church fathers worthy of apostolic stature. He was born in Syria and had been educated within the realm of Greek philosophy and related mysticism, influences which arguably played a part in his future doctrinal beliefs.

There is even evidence to suggest that he may have been personally disciplined by the Apostle John. In the very least, he was disciplined by those who were. His significance and profound influence upon the early church and the legacy which he left for future generations is without question.

There is every indication to suggest that he was a man full of faith accompanied by an intense love for Christ and a zeal for His Church to match. He was a man who, at the end of his life when faced with imminent martyrdom, literally had to beg wealthy and influential friends in Rome not to intercede on his behalf in attempting to have his life spared. The grace and nobility Ignatius exhibited leading up to his being fed to the lions in the arena has served as an example to Christians ever since.

But, within this notable Church leader was a flaw which gave way to humanity, a common malady within the best of men, especially those who call upon the Name of the Lord. It is the fleshly, religious drive of wanting to help God, coupled with allowing personal bias and prejudice to influence belief, rather than the other way around. We see examples of this time and time again throughout the pages of the Bible and Church history, right up to the present day.

Though its roots may be subtle, the tainted fruits which are produced are not. It is a drive which, left unchecked by the Holy Spirit, compels well-intended men to extrapolate and stretch Scriptural meaning beyond the original parameters and impose extra-biblical exegesis to support personal bias in both thought and practice. If taking the law into one's own hands is considered an enemy of social order, then the ecclesiastical application of such is certainly no better.

II Sam. 6:6-7 - *“But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.”* In the tragic case of Uzzah, regardless of his intentions, he paid the ultimately price for presuming to help God, literally attempting to take the law into his own hands. *As the Scripture warns, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength.”*

In Ignatius' day, he saw the Christian Church at large fragmenting over heresy and lack of strong leadership and purposed in his heart to do something about it. With all of the good he may have done during his life and ministry, he also left us with a legacy from which the Church has yet to recover.

Here is a man who may very well have sat at the feet of the one who laid his head on the very breast of Jesus, and yet enacted and fostered teachings and practices which were contrary to what John himself taught and practiced, having sat at the feet of the Master, Himself. And, we know what John thought of Diotrophes and his practices.

From his book, The Torch of the Testimony, John W. Kennedy offers this observation, *“There can be no doubt that in Ignatius' desire to see a clerical system firmly established his motive was pure. He was concerned, above all, to protect the Church from the prevalent heresies of the day. But however worthy his aim, the method he employed to assure its success was mistaken, and played right into the hands of the forces he was seeking to counteract.”*

There are three areas in particular which Ignatius planted and set in motion in the early days of the Church. They are Communion, Church leadership, and anti-Jewish/Old Testament sentiment, and Ignatius' thumb print is quite conspicuous. In each case, it is worth noting how quickly and radically Ignatius departed from the original Apostolic fathers' teachings, supported by Jesus' words as recorded in the Gospels.

As to the concept of Communion, he wrote, *"Make certain, therefore, that you observe one common Eucharist for there is but one Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with His Blood, and one single altar of sacrifice... But, look at those men who have those perverted notions about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which has come down to us, and see how contrary to the mind of God they are... They even abstain from the Eucharist and the public prayer, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Savior Jesus Christ, which (flesh) suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His goodness raised up again. "Share in one common breaking of bread-the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Christ for evermore."*

This was at the root of the belief which eventually came to be known as Transubstantiation. But, such a view would have been foreign to the Church Paul knew. For Jews it would have been contrary to the Law which Jesus came not to abolish. For the Gentiles it would have been a perpetuation of paganism. As to church leadership, he wrote, *"Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or give Communion without the consent of the bishop..."*

This view runs blatantly contrary to all that Jesus, Paul, and Peter taught and wrote concerning church leadership and "the priesthood" of every believer. Moreover, until Ignatius' martyrdom, there is no record that there was anything but a plurality of elders at the church in Rome.

As to anti-Jewish/Old Testament sentiment, he wrote, *"Be not seduced by strange doctrines nor by antiquated fables, which are profitless. For even unto this day we live after the manner of Judaism, we avow that we have not received grace... If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing Sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord's Day, on which our life also arose through Him and through His death which some men deny...how shall we be able to live apart from Him?... It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity."*

It is no wonder that based upon such notions, doctrines such as "Spiritual Israel" along with the further spiritualization of other related Biblical passages would encourage the move towards the eradication of Biblically-based feasts and the embracing of those rooted in paganism, such as Easter and Christmas.

The seed of an Ignatius lies within each one of us. *"It is crouching at the door, but we must master it."* It is a part of our flesh which must be subjected to the Cross repeatedly.

For all the good Ignatius did during his lifetime in service to the Church, and despite the noble death he died in his martyrdom, with the best of intentions, just as Abraham and Sara presumed to humanly intervene in order help God fulfill His purposes, Ignatius did also with the Church, and the Church, as well as the world, have been paying the price for those actions, ever since.

XXX

Restoration of True Biblical Church Leadership

I believe in the four-fold or five-fold ministry, whichever your persuasion happens to be. I believe in a plurality of elders as the Biblical pattern for local church leadership. I do not believe in a one-man leader, simply because it is not Scriptural. The modern-day

concept of a pastor is a Post-Reformation carryover from the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy of the so-called "priesthood," an extension of the religious, clergy-laity mindset.

Now, let me be clear on this. There are many traditional pastors who are truly Godly men with shepherd's hearts. This church leadership structure is all they know and all the people know, and they are functioning according to their understanding of church, with utmost integrity within their frame of reference.

But, for me, it is more than merely a theological technicality. It is a matter of functioning within a wineskin which can contain a greater fullness and liberty of the Spirit and manifest a greater testimony of Christ in the way it was always intended to be.

Furthermore, for the pastor who has a shepherd's heart, I consider him as much a victim as the people themselves. Pastors in that situation are in a bondage and bear a yoke that God never intended them to have and are in need of their own deliverance as much as the people. However, there is one difference, and that is, "to whom much is given, much is required," and there is the "stricter judgment incurred by those who teach."

Let me also make one other thing clear. I know better than to presume that if a local fellowship has the prescribed New Testament pattern of church leadership that somehow you have a built-in guarantee that ensures a spiritually healthy church. Nothing could be further from the truth.

You can have the perfect structure in place, but if you don't have the vessels who meet the Biblical criteria for leadership, and I'm not speaking of professional training, but men of spiritual maturity and character, the effects could be far more disastrous than that of the traditional camp.

By the Holy Spirit with which God enables us, we must build "as a wise master builder." The Church wean itself off of the unscriptural practice of leader-dominated ecclesiastical rule.

I would submit that these issues have monumental ramifications for the Church in her fulfilling of God's purposes. That prophetic scripture found in Zech. 13:17, "Strike the shepherd that the sheep would be scattered," has the potential of being tragically fulfilled far beyond what had occurred in a specific place, in a moment in time, in the Garden of Gethsemane if Church leadership has not fulfilled its Scriptural responsibilities.

The irony is that the stronger and more dominant the leader, the weaker the so-called leadership structure and body is, especially in the midst of crisis, after the "leader" is no longer on the scene. Oh! Yes! There is one clear example of a domineering one-man ruler, which is recorded in III John 9. His name was Diotrophes, and he was soundly rebuked for his unscriptural abuse of power!

Unwittingly, it flies in the face of our rhetoric concerning the preeminence of Christ. In

theory, we preach and teach this truth, but in practice, we deny it. It is therefore incumbent upon leadership to lead according to Scripture - as to how the Body is supposed to work, how leaders are to disciple the saints to be "equipped for the work of service," how they are to be disciplined unto maturity.

Col. 1:28 - If, from the time our children are born, the goal is to wean them off of dependency upon their parents and prepare them to assume the responsibilities of adulthood, then, why in heaven's name doesn't Church leadership consistently apply that same principle and Scriptural mandate beyond lip service, in training up spiritual adults?

Along these lines, let us address a fatal flaw in the Post-Reformation concept of the "pastor," or any other "full-time" minister in the Church. First of all, "the ministry," was never intended to be approached as a secular profession. Whether it is as a full-time minister or as a part-time Bible study teacher, that is not the real issue. The issue is in the mentality of approaching the ministry as a professional pursuit, applying secular means towards a spiritual end.

And, when the ministry is approached in such a fashion, and your income is derived from the flock who perceives you as a "The Shepherd of the flock," you have an inherent conflict of interest. In following the Scriptural responsibility of Church leadership in equipping and maturing the flock, you are aspiring to work yourself out of a job. In other words, no dependent sheep? No dependent income!

Allow me to present a rather typical case in point. Some years ago, I was attending a particular church where there was a very gifted, dynamic, effective, fruitful, and much loved youth pastor, who was, of course, youthful. I might add, some of my most irksome experiences in the Church have come from dealing with youth pastors, using my children, and others, as guinea pigs to be exploited as a training ground for more senior level ministry.

Some of them are the equivalent of "Pied Pipers" who effectively steal the hearts of the children from the parents, undermining their parental authority, with the perpetual implied mantra of, "Your parents don't understand, but we do!" These ministerial novices, most barely in their twenties, with no children themselves, presume to be the "experts" on parenting. Of course, there are exceptions to this, but, whatever exceptions there are, are not because of the concept of the youth pastor, but rather, in spite of it.

Back to my original story, one Sunday, it was announced that he would be away for the entire week. Doing what? He would be out of state giving interviews at various churches within the denomination in order to land an Assistant Pastor position. And, why?" Well, you can apply whatever spiritual spin you want, but the bottom line was, it was simply time for him to make an upward career move in the ministry.

As it was soon revealed, when he first came to this present church, he had made a five-year commitment to remain until this predetermined period of time was up. To his credit, he fulfilled his commitment. As for me, when I was informed of his situation, one word

popped into my mind. “Pity!” Here is a Godly, multi-talented, young man, still in his mid-twenties, and like so many others, he “was sold a bill of goods” at a very young age.

However, the Scriptural truth is, “the work of the ministry,” as previously stated, was never intended to be approached as a profession from a secular mindset, having as your career aspirations to move up the ecclesiastical ladder.

Paul and Barnabas labored day by day in the local church at Antioch. It never entered their minds to use this fledgling, but rapidly growing, local fellowship as a stepping stone, or springboard, into a higher level of ministry. They had an understanding that they were members of that body - period!

There were no timetables and no preconditions attached. Ministry was a normal spiritual function within a corporate arena, as a family member, and not as a hireling-until the unexpected day came when THE LORD said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

XXX

Is Anyone Truly Indispensable?

To the one who is advanced enough to hear it, I would say, never let anyone become necessary to you... never attach yourself to any man as a parasite. Adopt no man as a guru... I repeat, never let any man become necessary to you. Christ alone is necessary.

Apart from Him we are completely wretched; without Him we cannot live and dare not die” - A.W. Tozer.

I would imagine that every generation of God's people, upon losing one of their most powerful voices, have wondered, outwardly or to themselves, the same thing. But, even the people of God have a natural tendency to turn our most dynamic spokesmen and their ministries into idols of worship. Paul's perspective on this issue is as follows: I Cor. 3:7 - “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.”

Each generation has its handful of unique voices who have been raised up in order to "serve the purpose of God in their generation," after which, He removes them from the scene so that the people of God can move on as God Himself moves on. As the Scripture says, "And the Lord did not leave Himself without a witness." This is why Paul gave the following exhortation to Timothy in II Tim. 2:2, “And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

God is forever preparing those in a type of back part of the desert until their public appearing in the fullness of time---His time. In Hebrews 10:9, it says, "He takes away the first in order that He might establish the second." God is forever preparing those to receive the torch of His testimony from the previous generation, in order to “serve the purpose of God in their generation,” and to pass it onto the next.

No one, not even the greatest of the saints who ever lived, is indispensable. Even for Jesus, it was necessary that He should go away that the Church might come into her fullness, and thus serve the purposes of God in each succeeding generation on earth.

Where are the voices to replace such men? Oh, they are out there---albeit, they may at the present time be men of no reputation, hidden away in the wilderness. But, it is only a matter of time before their voices are heard, to which will be the same response expressed by every other generation, "How did we ever get along without them?" "Who shall replace them now that they are gone?" It has always been thus...

Are earthly ministries intended to last forever? Who would have ever expected that mighty and fruitful Church at Ephesus to become eventually extinct within a few generations? This is one of countless examples within Church history where God does a work through an individual or corporate representation of His Kingdom on earth, and moves on.

No amount of human effort or the noblest of intentions can perpetuate the spiritual life as previously experienced. Men are not willing to let a work go, so desperate are they willing to keep it alive that they will keep it on artificial life support, indefinitely. Very often, it turns into a form of idolatry.

Another problem is that leadership often has a tendency to want to perpetuate their name

and works, sort of like a royal dynasty. These works become idols because they are, in reality, the works of man's hands. They become "idols of worship" in the Name of God. They are kept alive by artificial life support systems when "Ichabod" has been placed over their doorposts long ago. And, furthermore, men want to leave them as monuments unto themselves, but God, says, "My glory I will not give to another!"

A prime example is found when connecting Numbers 21:9 with II Kings 18:4 in reference to the bronze serpent during the Exodus. Originally, God provided this instrument as a vehicle through which Divine healing could be obtained. Many generations later, we find this same bronze serpent being worshiped as an idol. It is not until Hezekiah, a man of courage and conviction arrives on the scene as Judah's new king, that this bronze serpent is broken into pieces.

One other example worth noting is in the case of King Saul in I Samuel 15:12. As a fruit of his rapidly declining spiritual condition, it says of him, "...and behold, he set up a monument for himself,..." And, right up unto today, this malady still persists. We must recognize the tendency of fallen humanity which is given to self-worship, to building monuments to itself, and to perpetuate our works on earth.

Paul spoke of the sin of those "who worshiped the creature rather than the Creator." We are to extol the Potter, not the pottery; the Inventor, not the invention; the Builder, not the building; the Master, not the servant. As Paul wrote, "What do you have that you did not receive, but if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

We must come to the realization that it isn't about us. We are not the "Alpha and Omega" of God's purposes in the universe. So, let us be diligent to "serve the purpose of God in *our* generation," and leave its value and legacy to the judgment of God, and not be so quick to either create, or believe, our own press clippings.

XXX

A Word About Apostles:

Rev. 2: 2b - The Church at Ephesus was commended for testing those who called themselves apostles and were found to be false. It is clear from Paul's writings that this was a perpetual problem in his day and laid out the means by which apostles should be

tested. The Church must be in the habit of practicing the same, for the rise of the false will continue to increase right through to the end of the age. This will be an integral and crucial attribute to “those who have insight,” particularly, in the last days.

Much of what passes for "apostolic" these days, is quite frankly, a sham, or maybe, travesty, would be more accurate. This term has been misconstrued and misappropriated into a position of status, power, and authority, that is analogous to "giving what is holy to dogs!" You think merely being a charismatic leader with great organizational skills is apostolic? Think again!

In a nutshell, apostles are those who are called and entrusted to be stewards of the foundations of the faith. This includes ecclesiastical oversight and the authority to intervene in major disputes of doctrine and conduct. They also are often involved with church planting. And, an authentic apostle is called to suffer. He submits to that suffering, and as a result, has learned how to suffer, not only for himself, but on behalf of the Church. He will live for her, suffer for her, and die for her.

It would do well for men who would aspire to building grandiose ministries with all of the Americanized glitz and glitter, and who look to those who “have made it” in this pursuit to hearken to the words of Paul. And, how many men do you think would be "chomping at the bit" to be recognized, and addressed, as "Apostle, so and so," if he had to exhibit the following characteristics?

"For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate, we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now" (I Cor. 4:9-13).

As represented by these conditions, who in their right mind would want to seek after a calling like that? And, that is precisely the point! No one in their right natural mind would. And though this verse is taken out of its specific context, it nevertheless, is applicable in principle to the calling of an apostle; Heb. 5:14 - "And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God."

In today's sophisticated scheme of things, would they have been featured speakers at a Christian businessman's meeting? Would they be a guest or guest host on Christian television? What are the odds of them being on the cover of a leading Christian publication, or a much-sought-after speaker sharing their secrets for experiencing a successful Christian lifestyle?

Furthermore, the term, “apostle” was never intended to be used as a title for an ecclesiastical upper class, or any leadership position for that matter. It flies in the face of

the priesthood of every believer. There is not one single, solitary place in the entire New Testament where any of the apostles, at any time, either referred to themselves, are referred to, or addressed by others, with the title of "Apostle." Not once!

You will find the term phrased within the context of their ministerial function, such as "Paul, an apostle...", but never as part of a title, which is why you never see the word capitalized immediately preceding the apostle's name. Case in point: II Peter 3:15.

Apostles are not interested in building kingdoms for themselves, but rather, are more than willing, "To spend and be expended for your souls." He will not have the appearance of some distinguished cleric. He will be a simple man, and based upon mere appearance, he will not look like what you imagined him to be.

But, in his speech, his conduct, what drives him as to passions and burdens, there will be no mistake that He is totally consumed with the Lord, His Church, and God's eternal purposes. And, he will give all that He has to the welfare of the Church. It is the Church that he lives for, and that is why he will always be ready to die for her.

XXX

New Testament Prophets:

In the Old Testament, false prophets were stoned to death. In New Testament times and currently, since there is no such punishment in the temporal realm, many have exploited this grace as a license for proclaiming whatever comes into their minds with impunity.

In the New Testament, prophetic words and ministry are less about soothsaying and more about "edification and exhortation and consolation." Fundamentally, true prophetic ministry is consumed with God's interests, with an emphasis on restoration, discernment and general guidance.

Furthermore, the emphasis is on the corporate, and not the individual. Nathaniel and the Samaritan woman are the exception rather than the rule. In the New Testament, you also find very little in the way of personal predictive prophecy. True New Testament prophets, were not, and are not, Christian soothsayers.

One rare example is a New Testament prophet named Agabus. It is worth noting that over a span of some 15 years, he gives all of two recorded prophecies of this sort. In Acts 11:28, he predicts a famine all over the world, which does take place. Then, approximately 15 years later in Acts 21:10-11, he prophecies concerning Paul's impending imprisonment, which was also fulfilled.

In light of what has just been said, two things should be apparent. Authentic predictive prophecy was rare, but accurate. Is it possible that Agabus, and others like him, could have given additional predictive prophecies? Of course! But, the fact that there is very little Scriptural record along these lines reveals a great deal as to the frequency of its usage.

And, yes, a fundamental characteristic of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is predictive, but the "Alpha and Omega" of this single book out of the entire New Testament is in fact the revelation of Jesus Christ and all that that entails, which is well beyond our human comprehension.

Rev. 19:10b - We need to understand that the "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," and all that that entails. It is the essence, the "Alpha and Omega of the prophetic word. Those who are called and gifted to a prophetic ministry, and especially those who are genuine prophets, are not as some would suppose, a type of Christian mystic.

And, they don't have to preface their alleged words with "Thus sayeth the Lord." It is for the assembly to determine if it is truly the Lord who is speaking as I Cor. 14:29b instructs, "and let the others pass judgment."

Although those who function in the office of a prophet do have a tendency to be a bit different and extreme, it can be attributed to the fact that they are so consumed with the burden and passion of seeing the Church restored to God's original intentions, that eventually the man and the message become as one, almost indistinguishable from each other.

Beyond prophetic utterance, or even prophetic ministry, being a prophet is a way of life. It is not merely a function or a gifting, which is sporadically manifested in various

gatherings or is some part-time pursuit. It's not merely a part of their life. It is their life!

They are obsessed with God's eternal purposes and original intentions. In a nutshell, it is a ministry of repentance and restoration, often leading to confrontation, and making conflict unavoidable. These characteristics make those who are proponents of the religious status quo rather uncomfortable, and as history has shown, often quite violently so.

XXX

Spiritual Fathers: A Role So Critical, and Yet, So Ignored

Spiritual fathers in the Church are more, so very much more, than just teachers, for they minister not merely a gift, but a life. As Paul expressed to the Corinthians," For *if you were to have countless teachers in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in*

Christ I became your father through the gospel - I Cor. 4:15.

And how does a spiritual father minister? Paul articulates this point to the Thessalonians, where he writes, *“we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us” - I Thes. 2:7-8.*

Proceeding in our spiritual walk, we start out as *children*. From there we move on to becoming *young men*, ultimately functioning as *fathers*. This should be the normal path and process toward spiritual maturity for every man in Christ. The Scriptures teach that all in Christ have at least one gift and that these gifts are *irrevocable* once given. But spiritual fatherhood transcends gifting and calling and, by His grace, can be apprehended by those who earnestly pursue this highest form of all ministry.

To “hit the mark” we must first know where to aim. To pursue something of great worth we must first come to recognize and appreciate its eternal worth. If we can be faithful to this call, the next generation may yet say to us, “Thank you for thinking beyond yourselves, for allowing the Lord to invest in you in such a way that you now have much to deposit in us,” and thereby, *servicing the purpose of God* in your generation, as well as theirs.

Ps. 78:5-7 - *“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children; that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”*

XXX

Additional Thoughts on Present-Day Apostles and Prophets

I Tim. 4:16a - *“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching...”* First of all, we should know that the Church, herself, is called to a corporate apostolic and prophetic calling, and unless “that which every joint supplies” is functioning according to the

measure of grace given to each one, the Church will not be able to fulfill its prophetic calling, which will culminate at the end of the age.

I also believe that God purposely raises up "extremists," prophetic men in every generation to address some lack of particular need in the Church. Though, in a very real sense, the man and the message is genuinely extreme, the intent is to help pull the Church, who has drifted off course to some other extreme, back to the center---not in mathematical terms or some "middle of the road" compromise, but back to the plumb-line of God's intent.

And, as is often the case with such men, it can be a bit of a mixed bag simply by nature of that extremism, for what is also often accompanying such men is an extreme zeal, conviction, will, and passion to see these burdens through. These passions and burdens are non-negotiable, and therefore, there is a natural tendency to being ruthless in seeing these things accomplished. Therefore, it is not unusual to recognize symptoms of the Scriptural principle, "*Zeal for Thy house has consumed me!*"

Is. 41:6-7 - An even greater ramification is that others may also be consumed in the process. This is a major reason why such men need to be complemented, tempered, and joined together by ministerial co-laborers and other mature brothers to "strengthen that which is lacking." We all have our blind spots and weaknesses, and if we will allow the Cross to do its proper work, the needed humility derived will desire such contributing factors, not for our good only, but more importantly, "*for the common good.*"

My personal sense is that we now must bring a Scriptural and spiritual balance to this issue, not in the sense of compromise, but of accuracy and clarity to the apostolic and prophetic function. Those who are called to such a ministry must not view themselves beyond measure. "For a man who believes he is something when he is nothing deceives himself." But, also in the process, others are deceived as well, and therefore, it becomes a mutual deception.

The notion, from both parties, that they are "God's man on the scene" must be eradicated from a tainted understanding of such roles. False and fleshly notions and attitudes of what we believe the prophet to be based upon soulish ideas, and not according to Spirit and truth, will prove to be not only unprofitable, but a stumbling block to the Body of Christ, in function and fulfillment of calling.

I have always been struck by Paul's comments concerning his journey from Antioch to Jerusalem to address the controversy over whether the Gentile converts were required to keep the Law. Now, I might comment here, that technically speaking, according to these Judaizers' reading of the Mosaic Law, they were technically correct in this. But, in looking forward with respect to God's unfolding revelation of His Kingdom, as revealed in the New Testament, they were quite shortsighted in their understanding.

Now, Paul, in recounting his visit to Jerusalem to address this issue, and who by this time had already been called to his own apostolic ministry, surprisingly seemed to express

himself with a rather cynical attitude to the churches in Galatia. Apparently, he was not particularly impressed with these apostles being referred to as the “pillars of the faith,” with the qualifying term, being “*purported*,” and had no reservations in making his sentiments known among the brethren throughout Galatia. Paul was not one to mince or waste words, so he was clearly making a point here, having used the phrase, “*purported to be the pillars of the faith*,” twice, Gal. 2:1-21 (*6, 9).

Like many of you, I encounter these “end-time” websites and receive e-mails from the these so-called "Prophets" and "Prophetesses." (If I didn't know any better, I would think "Prophet" or "Prophetess" were their first names!) Their ministries are unscriptural, in both word and function. They waste no time in sharing with you just how important they are to the Kingdom. Right on the heels of that (and the scenario is not coincidental), they let you know how expensive is to operate their ministry, but how essential that is, to fulfill their calling, and especially, when they are about to embark on their next "God-sent" journey. As if they were doing you a big favor, as sort of a "public service announcement,” they let you know just how expensive the transportation costs, hotel accommodations, the renting of meeting rooms are going to be, and if you don't "partner" with them, it may prove to be detrimental to God's outpouring.

True apostles and prophets do not operate this way! They do not think this way! They do not live this way! In light of Scriptural and historical precedent, this type of ministry is not only foreign, but abhorrent to the ways of God. Whatever these "popular" self-appointed apostles and prophets may think of themselves, and what their adoring followers may think of them, they are not apostles, and they are not prophets.

I have a rather short fuse when it comes to such things, but I believe this is one of the few exceptional issues with which this is acceptable, and I have a clear conscience. In fact, it would do the Church well for many to have a short fuse along these lines in stemming the tide of such nonsense. Much of the so-called “prophetic” movement in recent years has become the equivalent of a "good ole boys” (and girls) club, of self-proclaimed apostles and prophets, who are rarely challenged in a Scriptural and orderly way. So many of our prophetic words, dreams and visions are delivered with impunity, sort of "hit and run" tactics, with no sense of responsibility to the Word or the people to which it is directed.. This lack of personal accountability to these “words” gives rise to ministerial malpractice. This ever-growing phenomenon must be called to account and be addressed for the sake of discernment and accurately knowing the Mind of Christ.

With the myriads of prophetic words, dreams and visions posted on various websites, it is high time to examine these so-called “prophetic words” which are quickly compiling a track record of being scripturally unsound, or a “one size fits all” form of soothsaying, and which rarely coming to pass. “For God is not a God of confusion,” offering scores of contradictory “words,” heavy on power and blessing, and lacking in “Christ and Him crucified.”

Employing the Old Testament criteria for judging true prophets and their words would result in greatly reducing all of this free-wheeling prophetic hype we are currently being

inundated with. In truth, it would almost be comical if it weren't so tragic. Not everyone who calls themselves a prophet, is a prophet. Based upon Scripture, it is therefore incumbent upon us to hold these messengers accountable and examine their words carefully, now more than ever.

A line by line exhortation of Jeremiah 23 might work wonders in helping to eradicate the artificial and misappropriated prophetic words so commonplace in our day. It has become arguably a scourge of epidemic proportions, of the "prophetic word" made cheap. These things ought not to be.

Can the explanation for this ongoing "Mars Hill" prophetic circus, which continues to grow in popularity, be attributable to a true lack of the fear of God, an over active sense of self-importance or need to garner attention, and a lack of discernment by many who receive these words? Is it worth the risk of being found naked before God and men? You be the judge!

Sooner or later, someone in the crowd will speak up and declare what should have been obvious to the multitude. "The king isn't wearing any clothes!" Going along with the crowd in order to gain tacit approval or knuckling under to peer pressure simply will not fly. There is no escaping personal responsibility as it always comes down to, "Who do YOU say that I am?"

Allow me to offer this analogy. Terrorists are cowards at heart; bomb throwers, who use hit and run tactics, who avoid facing their targets directly, do not discriminate between combatants and innocents, and don't consider themselves accountable for their actions. This is what much of the so-called "prophetic ministry" has become, in word and practice. But, it is even more than that. It is a character issue. It is an integrity issue. It is a heart issue. It is time to come to grips with this matter. It is time to clean house. It is time to repent. It is time to treat this ministry as holy before the Lord.

Are we jealous enough to desire to see the reality and purity of the Lord's testimony? It would serve us well to be restored to a healthy fear lest we "speak that which the Lord has not spoken." What would be the result? It is quite likely that today's glut of "prophetic words" would be significantly reduced and its scarcity would once again cause it be restored to its rightful preciousness. What should it be worth to us? No less than everything!

XXX

The Spirit of Prophecy

Rev. 19:10c - *"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."* There is much misunderstanding in the Church concerning those expressions considered to be of a prophetic nature. We have prophetic conferences with prophetic teachers, presenting us

with an array of prophetic teachings. We have “prophets” involved in prophetic ministry, individuals gifted in prophetic utterance, and those who on rare occasions may give some prophetic word.

In addressing this thought, we must first nail down the definition of prophecy. According to Vine’s Dictionary, it is the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God. Another way of expressing this might be the revelation of the mind of Christ and God’s purposes.

It is argued here that with rare exception, prophetic ministry will not differ greatly from mere heathenistic soothsaying apart from a revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ contained therein. For after all, *His name is called The word of God* (Rev. 19:13b). When the unsaved speak of the future or “the end of the world,” they normally speak in terms of events rather than “*the One with whom we have to do.*”

Have we in the Church also adopted this mindset of focusing on current and futuristic events rather than the One “*who works all things after the counsel of His will?*” As we shall see, The Book of Revelation, better referred to as The Revelation of Jesus Christ, may provide the best example of true, God-given prophecy, rooted in that Person who must have preeminence in all things.

Let us, for the sake of theology, briefly acknowledge the four basic schools of interpretation of this book. Specifically, in regard to the seven churches we have the following views: (1) it is not predictive prophecy, but rather symbolic of the various spiritual conflicts which exist (2) a symbolic overview of past Roman persecution upon the church and of Divine judgment upon Rome (3) a symbolic history of the Church from the First Century to the Second Coming of Christ (4) a futuristic view which acknowledges the historical conflict between Rome and the Church, but with an emphasis on events immediately preceding the Second Coming.

Now, we are free to adopt any line of interpretation that we so choose, but what is most critical is this, that any interpretation must be held up to this overriding principle; that a truly prophetic word must be in the right spirit, and that spirit must bear *the testimony of Jesus*. Let us also keep in mind that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever*. In keeping this as our foundation in view, let us take a brief look at the messages to each of these seven churches.

Will we see the Person of Jesus *come to have first place in everything?* Is this book merely a prophetic storehouse of events to be drawn upon for stimulating subject matter in the form of syllabi and the meticulous construction and display of time-line charts and maps? Or, has the Divine purpose always been to present a revelation of Jesus Christ?

It is significant to note that before the great message is revealed to John, Christ Himself is revealed (Rev. 1:8-18). This is fundamental in our consideration of receiving a true word from God. Our ability to speak accurately on His behalf is in direct proportion to how much we know and have seen of Christ. This is why John in another writing has declared, *What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you.*

Likewise, when Paul says, *that I may know Him*, he is not only speaking of his own personal spiritual welfare, but also of his role as an ambassador of Christ, that he might present his Lord more fully and accurately. Therefore, *the things which we also speak, (are) not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words* (I Cor. 2:13).

In referring back to Christ's revelation of Himself to John, we see His many attributes made manifest. Christ then proceeds to exhort the seven churches and begins each message with a particular attribute ascribed to Himself in the previous chapter. Is this done because these churches are not yet ready to receive a fuller revelation of Christ?

Perhaps an attribute is given to each church in order to address a relevant need for that particular church. Regardless of whether it be one of these reasons or some other not mentioned here, the pattern should become clear. The genesis of true prophecy emanates from the Person of Christ, and from that perspective only can we rightly discern the purposes of God in the affairs of men.

The message to the Church in Ephesus begins, *The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands...* Immediately preceding this verse, Christ has already provided the interpretation of these symbols. *As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

For the angels are "*ministering spirits, sent to render service for the sake of all those who will inherit salvation.*" Christ has given His angels charge over us to administer His authority over His Church. It is His Church. It belongs to no man. It is His to establish and His to remove. It is His to do according to His will. Christ will have preeminence and "*His glory he will not give to another.*"

To the Church in Smyrna the message begins, *The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life.* It is Christ's desire that we grow in the knowledge and understanding of who He is. *He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.* He is the resurrection and the life, *for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.*

To the Church in Pergamum it begins, *The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.* The Word of God is not an it, but a person - The Person; *and the Word was God. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

To the Church in Thyatira it begins, *The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished bronze.* The relationship of Christ to God the Father is reaffirmed. He is not only Savior, but the very Son of God who has been appointed the heir of all things and through whom the world was made. The eyes of Christ penetrate the

heart of every person, for He is omniscient.

He has been granted all authority and he rules with perfect judgment. He is the foundation of the world and the cornerstone of the Church. His feet are burnished, for *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things.* He is the fullness of Deity as Son, Savior, Judge, and King.

To the Church in Sardis it begins, *He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.* Christ has at His disposal the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in order to reveal His mind and the angels at His command to carry out His will.

To the Church in Philadelphia it begins, *He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one will open.* We are called to be holy for He is holy. We are made holy by the sacrifice of the Son, *who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* Christ is the door to the Kingdom of God, for He says, *I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved... No one comes to the Father, but through Me.*

To the Church in Laodicea it begins, *The Amen, the faithful and true witness, The Beginning of the creation of God.* The purposes of God are established through Christ. *And since it is impossible for God to lie... this hope we have as an anchor of the soul.* He is the Beginning of everything for *All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

As we have seen, or should see, there is a definitive pattern and principle established in The Book of Revelation. The Book itself begins with a full and powerful description of the Person of Christ. Then each message to the seven churches begins with one or more of those attributes in reference to Christ. Christ *“is the Alpha and Omega.” “He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.”* God has most certainly given us much prophecy in His word concerning past and futuristic events. It is most certainly His will that we understand the times in which we live and of those that lie ahead.

However, as we have stated before, prophecy was never intended to be an end in itself, a topic to be examined and discussed with only token mention of Christ. Prophecy is not an “it.” It is an extension of the revelation of the Person of Christ and the purposes of God fulfilled in Christ. We need to get this down in the very core of our spiritual being and would to God that many of our most “eminent” Bible teachers would do the same.

Now, if *“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”*, then it is reasonable to define the spirit of prophecy as the testimony of Jesus. The testimony of Jesus must not be lacking or placed as a mere footnote in reference to prophecy. We are not simply looking towards the consummation of this age from the standpoint of events, but we are looking towards an ongoing increase in the knowledge of Christ, leading us to the day when *“we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”* (I John 3:3).

Any "prophet" worth his weight in salt and, who has any integrity about them, will

welcome spiritual examination of their words. Moreover, they should be at the forefront of teaching and encouraging such discernment. It is God's reputation and interests that should consume them, and not their own.

If they shy away from such accountability, it is a sure sign that it is they who “need to get right with God.” In reality, it is they who have exposed themselves as not being true prophets of God and “you are not to fear them.” They may try to hide behind their pulpits and their titles, but as the saying goes, "You can run, but you can't hide!"

The time is long since past that so-called "prophets" and/or "prophetic words" be held to account. I would expect no less from others in the Church as it pertains to my words presented for public consumption. For the record, I believe in prophetic calling and prophetic utterance, which is precisely why I am so concerned about what so much of it has become, either contrary to, or apart from, the Scriptural definition of such.

We have become too cavalier with our "Thus sayeth the Lords," primarily due to the general lack of a sense of accountability. It is not surprising then, that much of the Church has failed for one reason or another (and none of them good) to hold these individuals accountable. In other words, it continues because the Church allows it to continue. These things ought not to be!

Who is at fault? We all are! Even within the economy of God, you have "the law of supply and demand" in operation. If you would cut off the support and supply to these pretenders, they would soon fade from the scene. It is not altogether coincidental that this is a common approach to treating a cancer, by cutting off the blood supply to the area.

This lack of diligence to ministerial accountability has resulted in the prophetic word being made cheap, along with cultivating a breeding ground for confusion and error. Discernment is at an all-time low as we accept virtually everything that "comes down the pike" if it looks good and sounds good, and shirking our Scripturally mandated responsibility of "*passing judgment*" and to "*examine everything carefully*." We need to be as the Bereans, who were referred to as being "*noble-minded*," because "*they examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*."

XXX

Danger of Being Conditioned to Corporate Manipulation

I John 4:1a - It has been documented that Hitler had a fascination with the occult. To win the masses over to blind, fanatical devotion to himself and Nazi ideology, he meshed occultism with Christianity, along with its terminology. Thus, it promoted a Nazism which was both respectable and justifiable.

Hitler also took advantage of professional theatrical coaching, learning how to accentuate gestures and voice inflections in order to excite the crowds and to maximize the ability to manipulate an audience as one. These massive and spectacular events were designed and orchestrated to focus on one man, with a heavy emphasis on symbolism.

So powerful was the effect, that an elderly Jewish man recalled that as a youth in 1930's Germany, he sneaked out of his home one night to see one of these grand Nazi rallies. According to his personal account, in the midst of the crowd and the atmosphere, he also found himself being caught up in the energy and excitement of the moment; everyone raising their arms in unison and shouting the same things. It was an explosion of emotion apart from reason. It was mass humanity reacting to commands and a response brought on by an appeal to their emotions.

In the beginning of I Cor. 2, Paul warns of the dangers of being captivated and influenced by men based upon eloquent speech and charismatic personalities....."that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but the power of God." Or, in the very next chapter, 3:1-9, Paul, with all he can muster, tries to drive home the point that the vessel through whom God ministers, whether it be the "one who plants or the one who waters" is relatively nothing, but "God who causes the growth."

And, that "*there is no foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" This was certainly one of the myriad of aspects which concerned Paul when he expressed later in his second letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 11:3 (and I can almost hear a subtle groan from Paul whenever I read this), "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

Do I expect this to happen to any significant degree? No! In fact, the Scriptures tell us of growing apostasy and the pervasiveness of false teachers. And yet, the Scriptures are also quite clear that to the extent that we have influence, we are mandated to employ the Scriptural "check and balance system" of the "testing" and "examination" of the soundness of both men and doctrine.

The admonishment of "*rightly dividing*" or "*handling accurately the word of truth*" has not as its focus the end result, but rather, the process which leads to a clear apprehension of God's thought to man. For if the process is sound, it is more than likely that the end result will also be sound. Conversely, if the process is faulty, we can expect a result which will be equally as faulty.

Statements such as, "I don't get into doctrine" or "Doctrine doesn't matter," has the sound of spirituality to it, but it is a pseudo-spirituality. In fact, this rather "nice" sounding attitude flies in the face of Scripture. This is not the sort of peace and unity about which the Scripture speaks. "For there must also be factions among you so that those who are approved of God may become manifest."

Frankly, it smacks of ecumenicalism, which produces a false peace and a false unity because it is not held together by the Spirit of truth. We are exhorted to "speak the truth in love," meaning, you cannot have one without the other. Nowhere does the Scripture teach the notion of unity at any cost. As one man has said, "It is better to be divided by truth than united in error."

Scripture clearly forewarns that one of the major signs of the "last days" will be that many will no longer adhere to sound doctrine. It cannot be stressed enough simply because God stresses this imperative from cover to cover throughout the Scriptures, that the authenticity of ministry is in direct proportion to the authenticity of the oral or written words with which the vessel represents the "Mind of Christ."

These days, in particular, there is a strong and irreverent tendency for those who would presume to speak for God to be far too glib and to take license with "the holy things of God." Consequently, it would serve us well, having a healthy fear and trembling, to avoid at all cost, the presumptuous sin of "speaking that which the Lord has not spoken."

I Peter 2:2 - In Peter's letter, he uses the term, "*the pure milk of the word.*" What does he mean by this? Let us begin by eliminating what he does not mean. He is not referring to the early stages of spiritual maturity as it relates to the context of I Cor. 3:1-2 and Heb. 5:13. Rather, he is speaking of the quality of what they spiritually consume.

The familiar adage, "You are what you eat," has been a Biblical principle long before its more modern popular usage. And yet, in today's society, we hear so much about the negative impact of processed foods to our bodies. Depending upon your personal persuasion, those claims can be justified or extreme.

But, in the spiritual realm, and more specifically, as it relates to Biblical teaching, the negative impact of processed spiritual food cannot be overemphasized. With what goes for much of this so-called "Biblical" teaching so popular these days should be accompanied by a warning label: "Beware: This is Processed Spiritual Food."

The problem is certainly not with the God-given processing ministry of the Holy Spirit, but rather of the man-made process which lends itself to corrupting the Word of God. The word "pure" as defined in Peter's letter means, "pure from defilement, not contaminated, unadulterated." The intended meaning becomes even more clear when defining the word, "adulterate," which means, "to make impure, illegitimate, false or inferior by adding extraneous or improper ingredients."

The Psalmist says, "*The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times*" (Ps. 12:6). Herein, lies the key to understanding how God's Word can be turned from "pure milk" into sour milk, from a source of nourishment into a source of disease, from a source of growth into a source of retardation, from a source of life into a source of death, from a pure representation of Christ and His Kingdom into a source of a perverted gospel.

The key of which we speak is all in the process, and this process is all about the vessel through which the Word of God is filtered. Will the vessel employ his natural mind and fleshly nature as that filter and thereby become guilty of “adding extraneous or improper ingredients” to his teaching? Or, will that vessel endeavor to lay his mind and nature down at the Cross with the hope that nothing but the Holy Spirit might function as the Divine Filter?

It is this spiritual process which seeks to remove the human ingredients which inhibits our ability and desire “to rightly divide the word of truth.” And, in this way, through such a prepared “earthen vessel,” God and His purposes might be more accurately presented in spirit and truth.

This malady in the Church should not surprise us in the least, and not just because of the many prophetic words concerning false teachers in the “last days.” Since the beginning of time, the enemy has sought to corrupt the Word of God. It was in the Garden of Eden where the serpent perverted God’s words to Eve which opened the door to sin entering the world.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, Satan again perverted the word of God by taking Scripture out of context and misappropriating its meaning to somehow, if it were possible, compel the Son of God to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. Bits and pieces of truth and Scripture being used to tickle the ears of the masses is placing a stumbling block before the Church, as Balaam was warned by the donkey in reference to Israel. Deep down, I believe these false teachers know what they are doing.

Over the years, there have been many men and women who have truly ministered to me, and though I may disagree with some of their teachings and general views of how the Church should be, I nevertheless believe that they are preaching the Word of God. However, there are many who are not. It is not mere “wrangling about words” or what I consider relatively minor points of doctrine. We are speaking of “another gospel,” “another Jesus.” What we are speaking of is the willful perversion of God’s word, coupled with the deceit and exploitation of God’s people. What we are speaking of is heresy.

What is heresy? According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, it is defined as an expressed opinion varying from the true exposition of the scriptures; of men separating themselves from others and following their own tenets causing dissensions arising from diversity of opinions. A heretic is one who is a teacher or a follower of false doctrine that is contrary to the Bible.

It comes down to a misrepresentation of Jesus, Himself. Paul not only used the term, “another gospel,” but also interchangeably with, “another Jesus.” That is the crux, or the Cross, of the matter for me. Peter referred to these false teachers as “having eyes full of adultery.” Those “adulterating the word of God” were problematic in the Early Church, and so it has been to this very day. It is worth noting that “*craftiness*” and “*adulterating*” seem to go hand in hand when exposing this issue.

As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...”* (Eph. 4:14). In other words, we are not merely speaking of honest differences in Scriptural interpretation of relatively minor doctrinal points. We are speaking of “another gospel,” another Jesus.” We must come to understand that speaking the Word of God and merely speaking words of God are not necessarily the same thing, and we must be discerning enough to know the difference.

Now, to Paul’s credit, while he sat in prison, he could still rejoice that the gospel was being preached, even by those with impure motives. But, what Paul could never rejoice in was the fact that there were those who preached a false gospel, to the extent that he declared, "let them be accursed!" You don't get any stronger language than that. Notice he didn't say, "Pray for them." To the Ephesian elders, he referred to them as “savage wolves.”

Make no mistake! All through the Scriptures you will find that when it comes to the deceptive misrepresentation of the Kingdom of God, and the King of that Kingdom, resulting from the perversion of God’s word, God has a “zero tolerance policy” in place. It is non-negotiable. “Behold, then, the kindness **and severity** of God.”

Therefore, sound doctrine does matter, not from a legalistic standpoint where *“the letter kills,”* but as it relates to a clear and accurate understanding of God's character, ways, and purposes. It matters as to how Christ is represented, in Heart, in Mind, and how that directly correlates into how His Body functions, and the type of witness she portrays to the world. It matters because, *“... out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.”* It matters because, *“... as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”* It matters because of the great influence it has upon our world view. It matters because how we think about the Church's place and purposes for the "last days" and her relationship and obligation as it pertains to Israel will ultimately determine as to whether the *“limb”* which we represent will be *“put out of joint”* or *“strengthened, resulting in the “proper functioning of the Body of Christ.”*

Case in point: Jesus asked, *“Who do men say that I am? Some say that you are Jeremiah, or Elijah, or John the Baptist raised from the dead. Then Jesus asked, “But, who do **you** say that I am?”* In other words, there comes a point in our spiritual maturity, where we are expected to “be fully convinced in our own minds,” where we are able “to give an account for the hope that is within us,” that we should become much less of an echo and more of a voice---our own voice.

Like many, I have read many books and heard many teachings over the years, and it is important to always maintain a teachable spirit in order to continue to benefit from the spiritual deposits in others. But, there comes a point where it is time to be able to give an account for what we believe and why we believe it. As it says in Ecclesiastes, "Be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body." Today, we can just as easily apply that principle to websites. But,

regardless of the means through which we receive the seemingly never-ending glut of teachings, it is high time for many of us to grow up and not be so easily "driven by waves, and by every wind of doctrine." Why? Because doctrine does matter!

XXX

Local Church Leadership

These are the “**pastors and teachers,**” which is synonymous with **elders, bishops and presbyters**. These designations are one and the same, and always functioned as a plurality. In time, elders who are elders, indeed, will become evident, derived out of daily life, fellowship, and personal familiarity and reputation, within and without the congregation.

As was Paul's practice, being a man of apostolic authority, he formally set in elders who had already been recognized by the congregation as such. Essentially, all he did was publicly recognize and confirm what the consensus already knew, and we have recorded that he instructed men of comparable authority to do the same, as with Timothy and Titus.

The local leadership was neither humanly imposed, nor imported from the outside. They were local men who were known, and known well, by the community. They had long since earned credibility and respect, having been simple brothers living among the people in community life. And, the more significant consideration is that they remained simple brothers within the congregation.

As elders, did they have more responsibility? Indeed, they did! But, they did not suddenly become part of an exclusive hierarchy, or some ecclesiastical upper class. More than anything else, they were spiritual fathers in attitude and practice. A dominant, one-man rule, in the fleshly spirit of a Diotrophes or even a well-intended and Godly man as Ignatius, will not be able to contribute positively to the type of "wineskin" necessary in providing the proper witness and service required of the Church in the days ahead.

I would submit that these issues have monumental ramifications for the Church in her fulfilling of God's purposes. That prophetic scripture found in Zech. 13:17, "Strike the shepherd that the sheep would be scattered," has the potential of being tragically fulfilled far beyond what had occurred in a specific place, in a moment in time, in the Garden of Gethsemane, if Church leadership has not fulfilled its Scriptural responsibilities. It has been said,

"Crisis reveals character." Satan loves to employ the tactic of "Strike the shepherd that the sheep might be scattered." Why? Because, all too often, a work will have a man who for all intents and purposes is THE LEADER and driving force of the ministry and community.

Herein lies an important lesson: Scattering can either have a positive or a negative result depending upon the spiritual foundation invested in the people, exemplified either by the scattering of the Early Church, resulting in the Gospel being spread and new churches being birthed, contrasted with the scattering of the disciples, in fear and confusion, upon Jesus' arrest in the Garden at Gethsemane, a result as different as night and day.

I Cor. 12 describes the theoretical church. I Cor. 14 describes the applied church, with I Cor. 13 acting as the bridge between the two, leading to the principle of "speaking the truth in love." I Cor. 13, popularly known as the "love chapter," is the glue holding I Cor. 12 and I Cor. 14 together. But, glue by itself isn't much good. It must be applied to something in order to fulfill its purpose.

"As for me and my house," we finally grew weary of playing "Simon Says" in church services. "Stand up!" "Sit down!" "Greet your neighbor!" "Repeat after me!" Ever hear of the term "pulpiteer?" That's not worship leading! That's worship lording! The Body of Christ was never intended to be manipulated like puppets by leadership exercising

authority beyond Scriptural measure. Neither was the congregation obligated to “swallow, hook, line and sinker” every teaching and prophetic word, apart from proper examination in light of Scripture and the “testing of the spirit.”

If our Church meetings resemble the previous characteristics and account, in light of the Biblical description and guidelines written by Paul in I Corinthians 12 and 14 as to how the Church should assemble, what does that say about us? Or, what should that say to us? Or, for fear of the possibility of “rocking the boat,” do we even care to know?

The answers could prove to be more dangerous than the questions, but then, that would only apply to those who manage to retain their reason. For the rest, it won't matter anyway. After all, playing “Simon Says” is harmless, isn't it? That may be the most dangerous assumption of all.

Now, if there were some Scriptural basis for such practice, then it would be **my** problem. But, if there is no Scriptural basis for such practice, then it becomes **our** problem, and if it is truly our problem, then it becomes a legitimate problem for God to fulfill His purposes through His people as His Divine corporate expression on earth.

Hear me, brothers and sisters! This is not a question of personal preference, or petty nit-picking from the “seat of the scornful,” but of seeing a greater and purer revelation of Christ through His Body, that we might fulfill the eternal purpose of “manifesting the wisdom of God.”

XXX

The Church as Community in the “Last Days”

One of the most quoted passages we hear makes reference to the tribe of Issachar; “*Men who understood the times and knew what Israel was to do.*” It is not enough to “understand the times,” but we must also know what we are “to do.” We must not react to what we see, but respond according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, under the Lordship of Christ, established upon His Word, “as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.”

But, be forewarned, that unless checked by a serious work of the Holy Spirit, communities with the noblest of intentions, even those truly called by God, have the greatest potential for harm as well as for good. Unwitting as well as unscrupulous men love to throw dirt down Jacob's wells. Satan loves to poison these wells so that what should be fresh springs of living water are tainted with such things as legalism, elitism, human dominance, and a form of idolatry towards the work itself, never taking the preeminence of the Lordship of Christ beyond mere lip service. For what a man can build with his giftings, can just as easily be destroyed by his character.

Tragic accounts have caused me to become increasingly aware and concerned for other "close-knit" communities. Whether it be in the form of a farm-like, rural property environment, or in a more urban area which meets primarily in private homes, I am sensing a need greater than ever before of the Scriptural imperative of establishing a proper foundation in such envisioned communities--- a foundation which must be laid at the very beginning. After all, you get only one chance to lay in a proper foundation for a first time. There is a vital, maybe even a desperate, need to minister spiritual health to these places. Of course, one can only lay in the proper foundations at the very beginning, before the damage is done.

Now, I am not so naive as to believe that any work with the most sound foundations will not have various problems despite the skill of a "wise master builder," as they undoubtedly will. But, with a sound foundation laid at the very beginning, the likelihood of damage is lessened.

That said, as long as there is flesh to deal with, the potential is always there for error and destructive forces. But, the ongoing safeguards will be there. The foundational moorings will be there. And so, there is the conscious choice either to cling or to reject those spiritual moorings.

As with much of the House Church Movement these days, the move and vision towards a present-day Messianic community and preparation for end-time ministry requires so much more than a technically correct vision and external form. If the spirit is not right, is not healthy, and if great care is not taken in laying in those most critical foundation stones, then we will be confronted with a more sobering and possibly heartbreaking reality of *"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."*

Sooner or later, the cracks in the walls will begin to show themselves, and all of the artificial band-aid jobs will not be able to hold it together and prevent its fall. The reality is, it is far easier to take the people out of the "old wineskin" church, than to take the *"old wineskin"* church out of the people.

Having said that, on the positive side, it would appear that God has begun to step up the process in establishing not only a work, but a network, of an "underground" nature, for the present day purpose of training, equipping, discipling, and refreshing. Some of these works will also function as viable communities capable of engaging in many, if not all of the functions needed.

But, in the future, they will also serve as a "last days" ministry, where the characteristic of functioning as an "underground church" will take on a more pronounced significance and sober reality. Although the functions of these works will continue to be vital, the emphasis and priorities will begin to transition. They will know in the spirit of the Tribe of Issachar, "men who understood the times, and knew what Israel was to do." In being faithful to the present foundational aspects, it will allow that transition to be a very natural and seamless one by virtue of being led by the Holy Spirit, and not by human agenda.

And what will these works be transitioning into as it relates to the "last days?" The times will dictate that they be more demonstrative in being places of refuge, and especially for the Jewish People. It will be as when they sought to flee what became the European Holocaust, which rapidly intensified into an unparalleled Jewish slaughter the likes of which the world had never seen.

But, according to Scripture, another holocaust is on the horizon. Only this time, it will be on a universal scale. These places of refuge will fulfill their ultimate purpose during the "*Great Tribulation*," also known as the "*Time of Jacob's Trouble*." They will function very much in the spirit of the Corrie Ten-Boom family, who, at the risk of their own lives, hid and saved many Jews from Nazi-occupied Holland. Others, with the tangible assistance of these places of refuge and various networks, will be enabled to survive to the end as those who will "enter into judgment" with God "in the wilderness" and who will ultimately be prepared for that day when "They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him as one who mourns for an only Son."

Rev. 12:13-17 - In the "end of days," as the Roman centurion was converted through a revelation of who Christ truly was as He subjected Himself to the Cross, so too, will the Jews (Israel who is truly Israel) be converted (circumcised in heart) as they see the Church manifest Christ through their willful subjection to the Cross.

Dan. 11:33-35 - As a result, many will manifest Christ through the bearing of their own personal cross, and also, a corporate Cross leading to salvation of the Jews, many at the expense of their own lives. In that day, sentimental love for the Jewish people will no longer suffice, and we will all be sifted and "smoked out" as to the authenticity of that love.

Prov. 24:10-12 - God will not allow the Church to be let off the hook in that day. It also brings to mind Mordecai's admonition to Esther, *Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews."* - Esther 4:13, which I find quite analogous to much of the Church, who has little or no concept concerning her God-mandated calling in the end-times, because she does not understand that the Church's and Israel's destinies are intertwined.

Heb. 11:39-40 - The Household of God, from the Divine perspective is both an earthly continuum in time and a heavenly state of being. Israel and the Church are destined to

converge, the process destined to be the same, and are destined to enter their inheritance together.

The Body of Christ cannot be amputated, spiritually, and must not be amputated, theologically, and this is precisely what those of the Dispensational/Pre-Tribulation Rapture persuasion do. This not only exhibits eschatological error, but a lack of understanding of the fundamentals of God's overall purposes. On occasion, the words come to mind, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?"

So, what is most critical in the investment of time and teaching? It is the "whole counsel of God" as it pertains to His purposes for the Church and Israel; it is the fundamental soundness of such communities who are called upon to be present-day examples of corporate spiritual life, equipping-teaching and training centers, places of refreshment and restoration, and potential places of refuge, corporately forming a type of underground network, and a place where "those of understanding can give insight to the many," particularly Jews, leading to salvation - Dan. 12:3, 10.

And, I believe that there will be one other significant aspect to this "wilderness experience." It will be a time of remembrance, where the Holy Spirit will bring to remembrance and understanding, prophetic words spoken to these unsaved Jewish refugees, "at such a time as this." - Deut. 30:1-6, Ezek. 6:8-10, 20:41-43, Matt. 26:69-75, Rev. 2:1-5.

The implications are not merely philosophical, doctrinal, a personal opinion, or preference on how "church" should be done, or simply trying to recapture a nostalgic past. It is a matter of the Church's ability to finish her course in fulfilling God's purposes on earth.

XXX

Communities: Exported as Opposed to Home-Grown

I have come to believe that even the best of "models," regardless of how Biblical and technically correct they may be, must be birthed and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The foundation must be Christ, not merely in doctrine, but in reality. The work cannot supersede the Giver of the work. It cannot be driven by "artificial life support," by way of human personality nor held together by human vision.

Of course, in a sense, it can perpetuate itself for quite some time, but it will have been built upon a faulty foundation, whereby, sooner or later, the cracks in the walls will begin to show, and not long after that, it will collapse under its own weight. Also, though there is some benefit to traveling, experiencing, and learning in a location far outside your home region, it does have its limitations, and is actually counter to the approach most often depicted in the New Testament.

Though there are exceptions, for the most part, I have seen minimal returns from the practice of going to another location to learn of end-time events and its corresponding Scriptural basis within the context of "community." But, if that community, although Biblically and technically correct, and according to a vision for the last days, is humanly contrived and held together, there will be little chance of producing significant fruit that remains, the purpose for which a ministry exists.

Closely associated with the previous observation is the view that this so-called "living in community" experience, in both teaching and practice, is by nature limited in its desired impact. As was most exemplified in the New Testament, these things were primarily birthed and cultivated in the various churches at the local level. You saw workers come to them - to disciple, equip, and train in that church's natural habitat.

The likelihood of taking root and flourishing was far greater under these more natural circumstances in its native soil, rather than attempting to transport, plant, and cultivate these principles in hopes of converting them into a reality. In principle, it is not unlike "the natural branches" being far easier to be reconnected to its natural root.

The other challenge is in having one or two brethren having returned from such an experience, no matter how intensive and comprehensive, attempt to convey this vision beyond the theoretical. Of course, teaching has an important role in this process, but even more importantly, it must be seen. It must be personally experienced. It must be applied and lived out right where they live.

And, as a general rule, it should be pursued in each local fellowship's natural habitat, not only for the reasons already mentioned, but also appreciating that each of these fellowships has its own unique character to which these principles should be adapted.

XXX

The Process and Fulfillment of God's Eternal Purpose:

God's ultimate process, purpose, and fulfillment - I Cor. 15:20-28

God's purposes having come full circle - Rev. 21:22, 22:3-5

It is my view, in light of my understanding of Scripture, that another Holocaust looms on the horizon. The Jews will once again be subjected to a persecution of demonic proportions, but this time, the Church will not be spared from a similar fate. And,

although, the vast majority of Jews reside in other nations, there will yet be another dispersion of Jews from the Land of Israel. Deut. 32:36, Dan. 12:7, Ezek. 37:11, Is. 66:20 - They will be brought to a spiritual place where they will no longer be able to have confidence in their own natural abilities, "making the arm of flesh their strength." But, they will be brought to a place of utter human despair and hopelessness.

We know that many have asked, "Well, what about Israel becoming a nation after the Holocaust of World War II? Is this not the "Final Return" spoken of in the Scriptures?" The correct reply to this assertion should be, in so many words, "According to God's criteria as revealed in those same Scriptures, it is not! Now, what we see today in Israel is most definitely part of that process. But, I cannot stress enough that this is part of God's preordained process towards national redemption, and not as many suppose, "The Final Return." What many well-intentioned people, including evangelicals fail to understand is, this current possession of the Land is only temporary. Only a redeemed people will be able to enter the Land and dwell permanently in peace. In light of Scripture, this will mark "The Final Return."

Ezek. 20:34-38, Amos 9:8-10, Zech 10:8-10 - God will not establish an unrepentant people to take permanent inheritance and possession of His Land. God's preconditions for this fulfillment is consistent from Genesis onward. You bear the image of God, you possess the Land. You lose the image of God, you lose possession of the Land. Acquire the image of God, you are restored to possession of the Land.

Those who survived the Holocaust in Europe and helped to establish the nation of Israel in 1948, were broke, but not broken, in the Scriptural sense. Two-thirds of European Jewry had been wiped out. The remnant, or the one-third, that remained were, understandably, left with physical and emotional scars few of us could ever imagine. But, in general, there was one all-important response to their experiences in which they sadly and tragically, failed to exhibit "a godly repentance."

II Cor. 7:10 - Jer. 17:5-6 - We must not confuse "worldly sorrow" with "godly sorrow. "The Jews, having come through the Holocaust, pumping their fists in the air while declaring "never again" by relying on their own devices does not express the godly repentance spoken of in Scripture. Not until they are ready to declare, "our strength is dried up," will God be able to truly deliver them by "His might and power."

XXX

For Fear of the..... Arabs?

We are familiar with the phrase found in the Gospel of John,..."*for fear of the Jews.*" This referred to those Jews, many of whom were religious leaders, who secretly and silently believed in the claims of Jesus. Today, we have a similar situation amongst the Arabs. Not only do we have so-called "moderate" Arabs who are reluctant to publicly confront their more radical brethren as to their ideology and tactics, but Arab Christians, and

Christians in general, with few exceptions, share in that same fear.

Granted, there is much reason to fear the most severe acts of retribution..... virtually, a certain one-way ticket to ostracism, persecution, and probable martyrdom. We must pray for God to raise up fearless voices having the spirit of Stephen, who by the power of the Holy Spirit, will confront, expose, and present the Gospel to an Arab culture predominantly ruled by its own harsh legalism and brand of scribes and Pharisees.

To this day, the descendants of Ishmael still mock the sons of Abraham and the descendants of Esau, having voluntarily sold their birthright, still bear a grudge towards the descendants of Jacob. Only the power and miracle of the Holy Spirit can break the bonds of this relational curse. Let us take a page out of the "anti-terrorist manual," and take the spiritual war to the "spiritual terrorists" who keep their people in spiritual bondage.

Many years ago, there was a book entitled, The Difficult Sayings of Jesus by John MacArthur. No doubt, there are verses in the Bible that our humanity would have preferred our Lord had left out. If there are verses hard for our flesh to swallow, then this Scriptural passage is sure to make many of us gag. Isaiah 19:18-25 ends with this prophetic promise, *"In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."*

How amazing to think that God will not only fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to Ishmael and Esau as well! Truly, *"it is not His will that any should perish, but that **all** should come to repentance."* It's one thing to recognize that the Church and Israel's destinies are intertwined, but to think that this would apply to Israel's historic foes, the Arabs, well, talk about a test of soul and spirit..... *"Does this cause you to stumble?"* As a Jew, I confess to tripping a time or two over this, but I could claim no more theological integrity glossing over Romans 9, than a religious Jew doing the same with Isaiah 53.

XXX

End Time Holocaust

Zech. 13:8-9 - How is it possible that an even greater Holocaust can occur than that of the horrors of the Holocaust of World War II? The answer is not in the degree of persecution, as it is difficult to imagine anything more terrible than what they suffered. But rather, it is in the scope of these persecutions. The first Holocaust destroyed two-thirds of European Jewry. The future Holocaust will destroy two-thirds of world Jewry.

Now, whether the loss of two-thirds of the Jewish people during the “Great Tribulation” pertains to Jews living in the Land of Israel or universally may be open to debate, but in no way should we diminish the human tragedy of a future holocaust by referring to it in mere terms of mathematical equations. As a Jew, and a Christian, that would be unconscionable.

But, I do have my suspicions that if the world is given the ultimatum to either “turn in the Jews” or suffer and starve, predicting the response should not prove to be too difficult for most. I would also hasten to add that this is one personal view that I would eagerly welcome being proven wrong about.

This will be the final chapter of God's dealings with the Jewish people which will produce a Godly repentance for those who survive, and thus, the nation of Israel, "those according to the promise," will finally qualify to possess the Land of Israel, permanently. And, it will be during these most turbulent days of world history that the Church will shine its brightest and fulfill her obligation to the Jews in appreciation and recognition of her debt to the Jews.

XXX

Is Practical Preparation a Mere Exercise in Futility?

Not in the least! We must be clear, that the underlying motivation for such practical preparation and other actions related to hiding or fleeing is not for the Church to save its own hide, Although, for some, the proverb, “*The prudent sees the evil day approaching, and hides himself,*” will be applicable. However, contrary to the extreme “survivalist” mentality, the focus of this issue must not be upon Christian survival, but rather the survival of the Jews as it relates to Israel's ultimate redemption through the Church’s

witness, both practically and theologically. But, in both aspects, the Church will be God's vehicle in revealing Christ in word and deed.

Prov. 24:27, 27:12 - The True Church, who has prepared herself "for such a time as this" will also be dispersed throughout the world, having prepared for the final great dispersion of the Jews. They will be a God-made net intended to catch fish of a Jewish sort. And, it will be a net employed for spiritual and physical deliverance, preceding and leading up to the "Day of the Lord."

Rev. 12:6 - "*And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there they may nourish her for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.*" I believe there is a correlation, with the key term being "*they,*" the more accurate, literal translation of "*she,*" and all that that implies. For the "equipping of the saints" will have already taken place, and the Church will have been well-prepared to do the "*work of the ministry*" at the end of the age, "giving insight" and "leading many to righteousness."

So, where does the Spirit's leading enter in? Those with the greater maturity, insight, and gifting, will especially be required to know the Spirit's leading, and as a whole, I believe they will. No doubt, there are general principles revealed in Scripture, but for some, and quite possibly a relative few, it will be a matter of the principle applied at the individual level. As Jesus said, "*What is that to you? You follow Me!*"

There will be a very small remnant called to remain in the city for greater purposes outside of themselves. During the great persecution following Stephen's martyrdom, though much, if not the majority of believers fled Jerusalem and Judea and scattered to other regions, bringing the gospel with them, the apostles, nevertheless, remained in Jerusalem. At that particular time in the history of the Early Church, and quite likely unbeknownst to the vast majority, though the common thought was in fleeing for their lives, it was God's sovereign plan to use this persecution as a "practical" impetus to spread the gospel far and wide, to extend the witness and testimony to all peoples of all nations.

These were the same men who not long before had fled in fear when Jesus was arrested. Among them was Peter who had denied the Lord three times. They had every justifiable reason to flee, and no one would have begrudged them of that. In fact, it was quite likely that were exhorted to flee by other well-meaning believers. It may even be that Peter recalled how he tried, to no avail, to convince Jesus that He should not go to Jerusalem to die. And, we all know the sharp rebuke Peter received in return, to his shock and hurt.

Needless to say, there is so much more. There is always so much more as men "looking through a glass darkly." But, it is also imperative to first lay a sound foundation from which to build upon as it relates to God's purposes, in both perspective and practical preparation. These two factors are inextricably linked as illustrated by the description of the Tribe of Issachar as "Men who understood the times and knew what Israel was to do."

The principle is clear. *They "understood the times"* which resulted in prudent action in

"*knowing* what Israel was to do." Revelation demands a response, which always begins and ends with God's Divine purposes. "For it is God who is at work in us, both to will and to do, for His good pleasure. In this way, we can assure our hearts that, by God's grace and Spirit, we will be able to *"serve the purpose of God in our generation."*

Heb. 5:14 - Maturing into Sonship will be of utmost importance, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God shall be called the sons of God." They will need not only to "discern the times" for others, but also as it relates to themselves in sensing where they are to be strategically placed as the Holy Spirit may orchestrate.

Most of us are familiar with the tragedy of the ill-fated voyage of that great ocean liner, Titanic, in April of 1912. For the most part, what the American Church in its present state exhibits in spirit is not unlike the builder's boast of that great ship - that Titanic was "unsinkable." It brings to mind, the passage in I Thes. 5:3, which warns, "*While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*"

Brothers and sisters, merely rearranging the deck chairs on that doomed ship will neither prevent its demise, nor buy it the slightest bit of time. Her fate is sealed, and the flaws in her structural integrity will be exposed, and prove to be fatal in that ultimate "*time of testing.*" For those who have the "*insight*" to see through the fog, who can foresee that cataclysmic iceberg on the horizon, who "understand the times and know what Israel is to do," and are willing to respond, according to God's grace and specific leading, and know what is at stake, it is time to prepare!

Yes! There are seasons and times for every purpose, but make no mistake as to the future demise of the Institutional Church. It is not a matter of "If," but "When?" But, for those who do "earnestly desire to contend for the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints, sooner or later, one way or the other, you will eventually have to depart to go "outside the camp." As Heb. 13:13 states, it is the place we must go in order to bear the Lord's reproach, "*that we might know the fellowship of His sufferings*" in order to more fully "*know the power of his resurrection.*"

We claim we will sacrifice all in order to know Him, until we enter into the crucible of "*the fellowship of His sufferings,*" but, for the most part, we in America have "not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood." And, therefore, as for myself, I am very reluctant to be so loose in speaking about "martyrdom," and laying a trip on God's people in a way that comes across as a challenge to prove our spiritual machismo.

According to Bible Scholar and Editor, Richard M. Davis, "the word *martyr* was a poor translation of the original Greek word, *martys*—wrongly influenced by popular usage in the Church, the Latin Vulgate, and men's perception of martyrdom. It obscured the important concept of truth's testimony, and added meanings that were not in the original Greek. The original meaning of the Greek word *martys* was 'witness'; in this sense it is often used in the New Testament."

Since the most striking witness which Christians could bear to their faith was to die rather than deny it, the word soon began to be used in reference to one who was not only a witness but specifically one who died for their faith. Of course, being a faithful witness to the Lord's testimony will often lead to martyrdom. But, that is a by-product of being a faithful witness, and not an end in itself.

Davis continues, "But, there are other problems with the substitution of 'martyr' for 'witness'. For one, 'witness' is a neutral, secular word, but 'martyr' is emotionally charged in religious context, where martyrs are honored heroes. We can speculate that the authors of the Geneva, Rheims and KJV Bibles were partly moved to alter the Scriptures as they did to honor martyred witnesses. The 1936 *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of 'martyr' reflects such a spirit:

Martyr: Eccl: A designation of honor (connoting the highest degree of saintship) for: One who voluntarily undergoes the penalty of death for refusing to renounce the Christian faith or for obedience to any law or command of the Church.

But, this describes how 'martyr' came to be used in English, not how *martys* was used in the Greek, which bestowed no such designation of honor. Men therefore ought not to do so of their own accord, for this is to add to the Scriptures. Time has shown that the glorification of martyrdom can lead to tragic error. Some individuals get caught up in the apparent glories of martyrdom, and others can be manipulated to ruinous ends.

Because 'martyr' is ecumenical, error occurs across other faiths, and we now see tragic consequences in terrorist Islam with its suicide bombers. In fact, many religions have made martyrs among their own members, and have made martyrs of others. This is not to blame the English translators for terrorism, not at all. We just point out that the glorification of death by martyrdom is problematic. Let God reward His martyrs: but let not men seek or glorify death!"

Now, the Scripture does say, "*Do not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.*" So, do we have to go out of our way looking for martyrdom? No! It simply means that, to some degree or another, "*all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" *For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*"

Jesus said, "*in this world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*" But, being prepared for martyrdom and making martyrdom your aim are two very different mindsets. In the meantime, we may, with a clear conscience, earnestly pray for governing authorities, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "*that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all Godliness and dignity.*"

Although we are called to be willing to lay down our lives for the faith, it should be quite clear what Jesus' sentiments were concerning the prospects of submitting to the horrific death on the Cross. "*Father, if it be possible, I pray that You would take this cup from*

me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Your will be done.”

And, what is the ultimate definition of the Cross? “*Not my will, but Your will, be done,*” whether it be death on a cross,” as in the prophetic case of Peter, or living a long life, culminating in a natural death, as in the case of John. But, in either, and all cases, as Jesus admonished, “*What is that to you? You follow me!*”

Now, any honest Christian knows that some measure of persecution, if not the ultimate price of martyrdom, is always lurking at the door. “*Indeed, all those who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*” It is part of the reality of the “cost of discipleship. But, I for one, “have no confidence in my flesh,” and can rely no less on the same grace to see me through, if called upon, than other martyred saints - past, present, and future.

Peter found out the hard way at the Garden of Gethsemane the futility of a well-intentioned, albeit, empty boast. We can only boast in the Lord. Anything beyond that is mere presumption. J.R.R. Tolkien gave the following advice, “*Let him not vow to walk in the dark, who has not seen the darkness fall.*”

A poignant analogy of those who may be called upon to give the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish People, in that day, should take special note of the account of the eight musicians who chose to remain on board *Titanic* to the very last. These men nobly and selflessly played their instruments on the deck of that sinking ship in order to provide some measure of comfort to those about to enter a watery grave. Only the day before, they were playing at the Sunday worship service. Many witness have testified that the last song performed was “Nearer, My God, To Thee.”

In a very real sense, these musicians chose to minister to the people up to the very end, taking no thought for their own welfare. None of the eight band members survived. “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*” In this account, it can truly be said “*...and they loved not their lives unto death.*” What an example of a shepherd-servant heart! What would we do given a similar crisis? How would we conduct ourselves? Some of us just may have the opportunity to find out!

Eyewitness accounts report that in *Titanic's* final moments, as it began to sink beneath the waves, the immense pressures upon the ship caused it to break in two. The front half of the ship sank immediately while the back half remained afloat, virtually bobbing in the water, providing those still clinging to that portion of the ship a glimmer of hope. Moments later, that portion of the ship would also slip into its watery grave. As Jesus said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

So, why did 1,500 souls perish on the *Titanic*? Ultimately, it wasn't because that great ship went down, or that no one could survive long in those frigid North Atlantic waters. The reason why 1,500 souls lost their lives that fateful night was because **there weren't enough lifeboats!** May history not repeat itself!

God will give each member of His body Divine revelation for the kind of lifeboat he or she should construct. Each will contribute their part to what God will orchestrate in the last days. They will be as varied as the assortment of callings and giftings in the Church.

Each one of us will be called upon to be as “that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part,” because the end-time calling will be the ultimate corporate calling of the Church. It will be a “life and death” ministry, both in the spiritual and physical sense, and messages will be delivered in the spirit of one giving their “Last Will and Testament.”

Eph. 5:10, 16-17 - Brothers and sisters, we cannot afford to wait until that day arrives to put these things into practice, whether it comes about in our generation or a future generation. Whoever, and whenever, “this generation” is, who “shall not pass away until all has been fulfilled,” must learn to be the Church, “while it is yet, day.”

For, in that day, the Church will need to be able to “hit the floor running” having long been accustomed to being the Church as God originally intended her to be. And, just as a serious athlete must prepare diligently beforehand to compete at a high level when called upon, so, too, must the Body of Christ be sufficiently conditioned **before** that day, to be able to “run with endurance the race that is set before *her*.”

Along these same lines, A.W. Tozer had this to say, *"The tree that is blown down in the storm is rotten in its heart or it wouldn't be blown down. And the church that falls because of persecution is a church that was dead before it fell."*

And, how will this be prophetically played out during the “*Time of Jacob’s Trouble?*”

XXX

The Church and the Jews Intersect on the “Road to Emmaus”

Luke 24:13-39 - What will be the ultimate message of the “End-Time Church” and how will it be made manifest to the Jew in that day known as the “*Time of Jacob’s Trouble?*” Not unlike the Lord, Himself, we will be the corporate expression of Jesus walking along a metaphorical “*road to Emmaus.*” It will be the same road the Jews will be compelled to travel down as they “*flee into the wilderness,*” and in which the Church will be equally compelled to walk alongside in order to fulfill her end-time mandate.

I have taken a bit of license in making a slight alteration to a portion of the preceding text in order to illustrate the consummation of all that has been said, but which, I do not believe, violates either the principle or spirit of the message:

”And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, the Church explained to the Jews who had fled into the wilderness the things concerning Christ in all the Scriptures.” And it came about that when the Church had reclined at table with the Jews, they took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, they began giving it to them. And the eyes of the Jews were opened and they recognized Jesus as their Messiah. And they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while they were speaking to us on the road, while they were opening the Scriptures to us?”

The following words in the Book of Isaiah have always had something of a haunting quality for me. It is my belief that this passage reflects the essence of the question which will be asked by the Jews in the midst of their darkest hour known as the “*Time of Jacob’s Trouble*,” followed by the essence of the prophetic reply of the Church:

Isaiah 21:11-12 - *“Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night? The watchman says, ‘Morning comes but also night. If you would inquire, inquire. Come back again.’”*

And, when they do, “*Come back again*,” the Church must be ready.

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