

Biblical Pictures Of the Church



By
Dr. J.L. Williams
Biblical Principles for Living Series

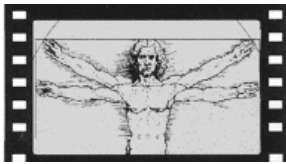
BIBLICAL PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

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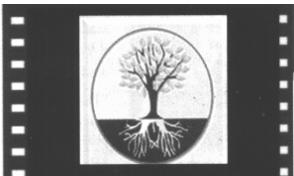
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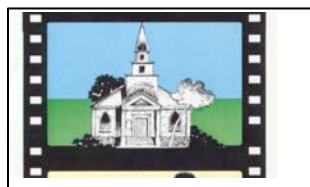
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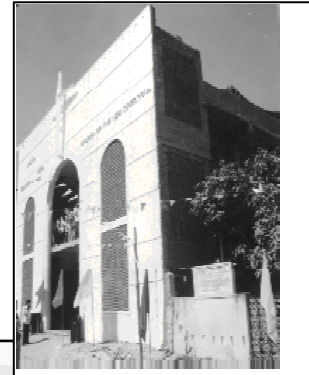
Churches built through partnership with NDI.





Worshippers in Santhal Church, Nepal

Lubimbi Church,
Zimbabwe, Africa



NDI Alumni
Church in India

“ . . .to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! AMEN”

BIBLICAL PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone in the world likes to look at pictures. All of us are especially drawn to photographs if we are in them! When you look at a group snap shot that you are in, who do you look for first? *Yourself* of course! Your eyes quickly search the picture for your own image. Your visual focus is quite naturally drawn from other people or objects in the picture, to *yourself*. We naturally want to see how we look in the picture.

In doing this, we are unconsciously motivated either by *egotism* or *insecurity*. Few of us see ourselves in a positive light. Studies of movie stars, models and the so-called “beautiful people” of the media reveal that they too do not see themselves in a positive light. They all have some blemish - realized or imagined - that they tend to focus in on when they see themselves in pictures. So when it comes to photographs, most all of us are haunted by a sense of *inferiority* and *insecurity*. As we look at pictures of ourselves, we tend to think: “*You look terrible! You always take bad pictures! You are not at all photogenic! You are just plain ugly!*”

Whereas my wife Patt is very beautiful and photogenic, I have always struggled with the kind of low self-esteem produced by the “ugly duckling”

mentality! I generally hate having to have pictures taken of me - especially the posed kind. In conversations with hundreds of people through counseling, I often hear echoes of the same aversion to personal photographs.

But if we don't like how we look on the outside - how would we feel if a picture could be taken of what we look like on the inside? How would we like to have a photograph made and developed of our *thoughts...our emotions...our motives*? How devastating!

Fortunately then, one of the limitations of photographs is that they can only reproduce what we look like on the outside. Pictures can only portray the *physical* person - but not the *spiritual* person. True, X-ray and CAT scan machines can take pictures of the skeleton and internal organs of the human body and brain. But man has never yet devised a machine that can take pictures of the *spirit* and *soul*. We can photograph the *brain* - but not the *mind*. We can X-ray the *physical heart*, but not the *spiritual heart*!

God on the other hand, has provided us with a "spiritual camera" that can both photograph and reveal the human heart. What is this wonderful spiritual device that can look into the deepest recesses of the human spirit? What is this *spiritual X-ray machine* that can reveal *your thoughts*? What is this marvelous tool that can even reveal *your motives*? It is the *BIBLE*!

The Bible photographs and reveals us far differently than a physical camera. It has very little, if any concern, about how we look on the *outside*. The spiritual film that the Holy Spirit uses in the camera of His revelation reveals exactly how you look on the *inside*. It does not reveal *how you look to man*. The Bible portrays *how you look to God*!

Therefore, *the Bible is God's photograph album*. It is a rather large album. In fact, it contains pictures of the *whole human race*! It has photographs of every person who has ever lived - or will ever live. It has very clear and vivid pictures of people under every condition and circumstance. We can watch them in *happiness* and *sorrow...in obedience* and *rebellion...in victory* and *defeat...in life* and *death...in heaven* and *hell*!

But the Bible is not just a photo album filled with lifeless historic *still snapshots* of people from the past. It is one filled with *living pictures...animated pictures...motion pictures*! Even though many of the pictures are hundreds -

even thousands of years old - if you look at them intently, they *come alive!* Through your own experiences, the Biblical pictures begin to *breathe... live... move...act!* As you look at them carefully and honestly, you become aware that many of them become *animated by your own life!* Many of the people portrayed on the pages of the Bible begin to *think with your thoughts...feel with your emotions...act out your motives...express your fears...demonstrate your rebellion...reveal your sin!* That's one of the great reasons why so many people fear the Bible - *it is far too disclosing!* It reveals to them absolutely accurate pictures of themselves they do not want to look at!

Therefore, the eternally advanced technology of God's *Biblical camera* is far more accurate than man's most sophisticated and expensive imaging devices. Through the precise and exacting lenses of the Bible, we see a revelation of detail not seen through any of the other photographic or scientific instruments produced by man. *God's camera never lies.* It always produces absolutely accurate pictures of each one of us!

God's camera also has an incredibly wide-angle lens! In fact, it literally shows us a photograph that is so wide and long that it covers human history from the *beginning of time* to the *end of time.* The first photographs of the book of *Genesis* gives us snap shots of *creation.* The last few photographs in the book of *Revelation* give us pictures of the coming *new creation.* The best books of science have yet to give us an accurate and trustworthy picture of *creation.* The best books of religion and mythology have not been able to give us a true and believable picture of *heaven.* However, the Biblical photograph album gives us vivid snap shots that cover both the *beginning* and *ending* of history - and *everything* in between.

Even more wonderful, God's camera gives us a few snap shots from *before time began.* It also gives us other eternal pictures *after time ends.* It is a camera with *pre-history* and *post-history* capabilities! So our man-made cameras can only photograph the *present.* They cannot make pictures of either the *past* or *future.* God's camera, on the other hand, literally gives us a photograph that stretches from *eternity to eternity!* Now that my friend, is a *real* wide-angle lens worth looking through!

Tragically however, most of the human race have never looked through God's camera. They have never taken the time to examine the fascinating photographs in His Old and New Testament picture albums. They have been

unwilling to look at the *BIG PICTURE* of *divine revelation!* Therefore, most people live with a very limited, skewed, myopic, restricted view of life here on planet earth. Because of the travels of our astronauts, we have been able to see many pictures of our planet from *outer space*. However, it is only through the Bible that we can see accurately into *inner space*. All other photographs reveal only a *temporal* perspective. Only in the Bible can we see the *eternal* perspective.

The Bible then, is *God's photograph album*. It clearly reveals what we can see in no other book. Its pictures are absolutely accurate. They have not been "touched up" or tampered with. They have not been "air brushed" to take out the flaws. Quite the contrary. The people and events are portrayed with candid accuracy. In fact, you can *stake your life* on the things revealed in these Biblical pictures!

Even though the Bible contains thousands of *individual photographs*, the most important pictures are the *family pictures*. In the front of my Bible, I have several pictures of my own family. If you look at them, you will see my wife Patt, our four children, Trish, April, Joseph, and Jonathan. Now two sons-in-law and two daughters-in-law have been added – also my 3 grandchildren. One family picture is now several years old, and it shows us when we were all much younger. The latest one is always our annual family picture that we take around Christmas time to share with friends. I keep those family pictures in my Bible as a reminder that they are my most important congregation! As I open my Bible daily for my own quiet time and study, they help remind me to pray regularly for Patt, my children, and grandchildren. In addition, as I open my Bible to preach and teach to others, I am also reminded that I am never to become so involved with my ministry to others *outside the home* - that I neglect my primary ministry to those *inside my home!*

So my family pictures in the inside front of my Bible are very important reminders for me. I look at them often - especially when I have to be out of the country for extended times of ministry. When I am overseas, I especially take delight in opening my Bible and showing off my family to my National friends. They love to look at the pictures, and have me pronounce the names of my wife and children for them. After doing that, I am then homesick! I want to jump on the next available plane, or means of transportation, and quickly fly back home to be with them.

Just as I enjoy showing off my wife and family, God also loves to show off the pictures of His Bride and Family! In a very real sense, the Bible is *God's Family Album*. It has beautiful pictures that tenderly portray His love and courtship of His Bride. We see the beautiful pictures of the very first man and woman God created - and the Edenic home they lived in. We see the very earliest *family picture* in His Old Testament album with the photograph of two senior citizens - Abraham and Sarah. He was the first patriarch of God's people. Under this early snap shot, God's Spirit wrote this amazing promise He made to Abraham:

“I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; and make your name great, and so you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you *all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen. 12:1-3; 28:14).

From that moment on - after God entered into His covenant with Abraham, He has continually added more and more people to His *spiritual family*. Admittedly, there is something of a mystery in God's sovereign choice of Abraham that we cannot fully understand. We must reverently bow before it in humility and thanksgiving. But the *miracle* that exceeds the *mystery of election* is not that God chose Abraham - but that *He chose anyone!* All mankind had sinned and rebelled against God as their Creator. There were absolutely *none* in the human family that deserved *choosing!* No one deserved *election!* None were worthy of *adoption!* The entire human race deserved nothing but *death, destruction, and damnation!* However, God in *love, mercy, and grace*, chose a particular man, and from that man, He *began a new family*. That unique family is known as the *Church*.

The word *church* comes from the Greek root, *ekklesia*, and means: “*an assembly of people who have been called out.*” When God first “*called out*” Abraham, He said: **“Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you”** (Gen. 12:1). So God “*called out*” Abraham from his father...relatives...country. He asked him to leave his *people*, his *place*, his *possessions*. God called Abraham *from them, for Himself*. It was a “*calling out*” from *someone to Someone...from somewhere to somewhere...from his old family to begin a new family*. So membership in God's family was not based upon *human choice*, but on *divine choice*. It would be God's doing from beginning to ending.

Thousands of years later, God sent His only begotten Son into the world to *continue* and *consummate* His redemption of a people unto Himself. (Interestingly, the word *redemption* means, “to buy back.”). Jesus had affirmed His oneness with His Father’s purposes of *redeeming* and “*calling out a people unto Himself.*” He said: “**I will build My Church...**” (Matt. 16:18). He was going to *buy* and *build* His Church through His own *body* and *blood*. He would be both the “**foundation**” and the “**chief corner stone**” (I Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20) of *God’s Church...God’s Family*.

When Jesus came, there was a group of religious people who were related to Abraham *racially*. By virtue of their *race* and *religion*, they assumed that they were also related to Abraham *spiritually*. They were wrong. Jesus challenged their spiritual arrogance and presumption. They confidently and pridefully opposed Jesus in the blindness of their racial and religious self-deception: “**We are Abraham’s descendants,**” they boasted! However, in response to their false confidence, Jesus verbally tore away their masks of deceit and delusion. Shockingly He said to them: “**You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires**” (Jn. 8:33, 44).

It is therefore sobering to realize that not all people - even *good religious people* - are members of *God’s family*. Regardless of your social and religious standing through *natural birth*, we are only members of God’s family through *spiritual birth*. Just as God has His spiritual family, so too Satan has his spiritual offspring. We are either related to one or the other. We either serve *God as our Father*, or we serve *Satan as our father*. We are either seeking to carry out *God’s desires*, or knowingly or unknowingly, we are carrying out *Satan’s desires*. We are all in one family or the other!

Whose family are you in?

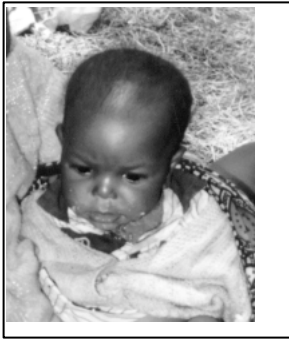
As you read and study through the chapters of this book, I feel sure that your spiritual lineage will become very clear to you. In the following pages, you will see many *pictures of the Church*. I did not take these pictures - *God did!* (However, the physical pictures in this book were taken by me on my various mission trips around the world). Therefore, I believe that this study will greatly enrich your understanding of the true *origin* and *nature* of the Church. You will increasingly see that the *true Church of Jesus Christ* is not a *building...a denomination...a particular theology...an organization*. It does not belong to any *person...priest...or pope*. *The Church belongs exclusively*

to Jesus Christ! That spiritual ownership is based upon the fact that God **“...appointed Him to be *head* over everything for the Church, which is His body...”** (Eph. 1:22).

A final important introductory note. In this study, you will quickly see that every Biblical picture of the Church is a picture of a *relationship*. That's what sets Christianity eternally apart from other world religions. Those are all based in one form or another upon *rules...rituals...regulations*. Christianity on the other hand, is a *living, dynamic relationship* with God through Jesus Christ - by His indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, if you are just involved in *religion* - whether *pagan, Protestant, Catholic* or *Jewish* - I pray that you will *repent of your religion* and *receive Jesus Christ* as your personal Savior and Lord! As you begin this study, my prayer for you is the one Paul prayed for the Christians at Ephesus:

“...I bow my knees before the Father, from whom *every family in heaven and on earth* derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your *inner being*, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that *you*, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:14-20).

AMEN!



THE

A BABY

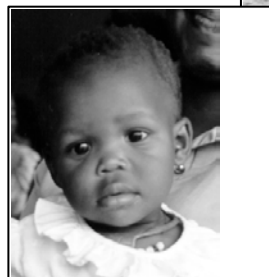
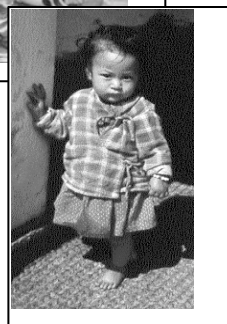
CHURCH AS

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them”
(Mark 10:13-15).

When it comes to pictures, we all love to look at pictures of babies! As I write this chapter, I am anxiously awaiting the birth of my third grandbaby – which is a girl! I can hardly wait! Babies look so new...soft...fresh... innocent...pure! Babies are also so helpless and dependent. They are so trusting and responsive. *Physical babies* are to remind us *spiritual babies*. One is a living parable of the other. It is little wonder then, that the first pictures of the church are that of a baby! There are *4 truths* I want you to see here about the church as a Baby. The spiritual Baby is. . .



- 1. BORN**
- 2. BATHED**
- 3. BELOVED**
- 4. BLESSED**



GOD'S BABY IS BORN

Churches, like individual Christians, do not come into the world fully grown...fully developed... completely mature. None of us arrived into this life as full-grown adults. We all started out as infants - newborn babies. The same thing is true of churches. They too begin as babies. Let me therefore state an obvious - but crucial - spiritual point: *Babies do not come into the world by their own choice or action.* They are the result of their parent's action. They are conceived through love. In the same way, new Churches and new Christians, are not created by man. They are sovereignly created by God - conceived through His love and Grace!



“...To all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of a husband's will, but born of God”

(Jn.1:13).

The Bible then teaches that every Christian is **“born of God”** or **“born of the Spirit.”** (1 Jn. 3:9; 4:7; 5:1; 4:18). Jesus reminded Nicodemus of this principle of spiritual conception and birth when He said:

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is *born again* (*born from above*) ... *flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to the spirit.* You should not be surprised at my saying: *'You must be born again'*” (Jn. 3:3-8).

Using similar language, the Apostle Peter wrote:

“In His great mercy He has given us *new birth* into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept shielded by God's power ... For you have been *born again*, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God” (1 Pet. 1:3-5, 23).

So first and foremost, churches – like people, are *born*. Physical children are conceived and born through the action – loving action we hope - of their parents. In like manner, churches are lovingly conceived by the Heavenly Father, and *born of His Spirit*.

Jesus said:

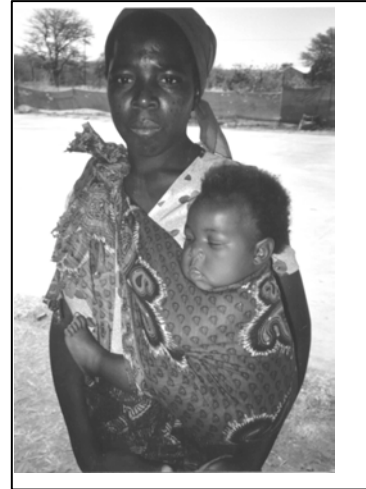
“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world”

(John 16:21).



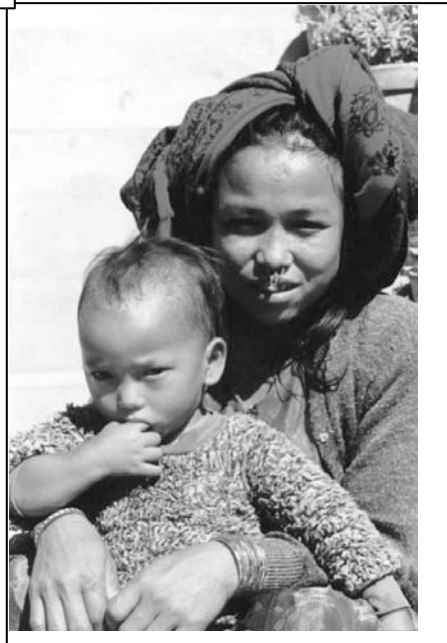
“...but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you”

(I Thess. 2:7-9).



“My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life”

(Prov. 6:20-23).



“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”

(II Tim. 3:14,15).

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you”

(Gal. 4:19).

GOD'S BABY IS BATHED

When a new baby has been born, it needs to be immediately *washed*. When the newborn infant comes into this world, it is covered with blood and the amniotic fluid from the mother's womb. As a result, the baby needs to be immediately *washed...bathed...cleansed*. God said He did the same thing for Israel when she was a helpless newborn infant:

“On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you *washed with water to make you clean*, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, ‘Live!’ I made you grow up and develop ...” (Ezek. 16: 4-7).

In the same way, you and I were *washed by the Holy Spirit* through faith in Christ - symbolized by our *water baptism*. Oftentimes Satan tries to make the unregenerate person feel that they must first *clean up their lives before they come to Christ*. They wrongly believe that they must first wash themselves clean from their bad thoughts...bad behavior...bad habits...and *then* come to Christ. But that is impossible! We can't wash ourselves spiritually and make ourselves morally clean anymore than a newly born infant can wash itself! That is a cleansing work that *only Christ can do through His Holy Spirit!*

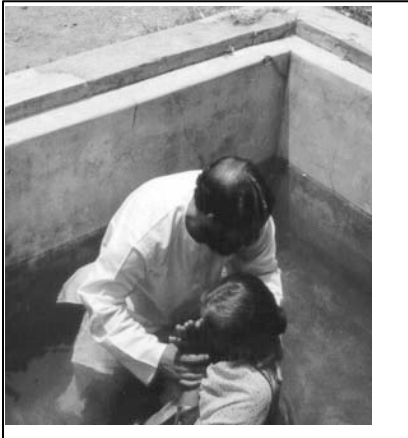
So we must first of all be **“born of the Spirit,”** and then we can be **“washed by the Spirit.”** It is the **‘Baptism of the Holy Spirit’** that produces this new birth that places us into the Body of Christ. As Paul said:

“For we were all *baptized by one Spirit* into one body...we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13).

After we have been **“born of the Spirit”** and **“baptized by the Spirit”** into the **“One Body,”** or into the Church; we then demonstrate this *Spirit baptism* through *water baptism*. We are first **“born of the Spirit,”** and then we are **“washed by the Spirit.”** The first is the work of *regeneration*; the second is the ongoing work of *sanctification*. Regeneration results in our *spiritual justification* before God. The process of *sanctification* results in our *moral maturation* before *man!* There are therefore 3 *washings* talked about in the Bible. The *washing of regeneration*, the *washing of sanctification*, and the *washing of edification*. We will only take time to quickly look at the first one, the *washing of regeneration*.

After his conversion on the Damascus Road, God said to Paul:

“Get up, be *baptized* and wash your sins away, calling on His Name” (Acts 22:16).



Much later Paul himself wrote:



“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the *washing of rebirth* and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6).

To the Corinthian Church Paul wrote:

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But *you were washed*, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Likewise the writer to the Hebrews said:



“...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies *washed with pure water*” (Heb. 10:22).

Concerning the salvation of Noah and his family, Peter wrote:

“...God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were *saved through water*, and *this water symbolizes baptism* that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20-21).

Finally, the Bible speaks of the multitude in heaven saved out of the Great Tribulation:

“...they have *washed their robes* and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14; c.f. 22:12-15).

Therefore, after God's baby is *born of His Spirit*, she is then *baptized - washed clean - by His Spirit!*

GOD'S BABY IS *BELOVED*

Not only is every **"babe in Christ"** *born* and *bathed*, they are also *beloved* by God. God said to Israel:

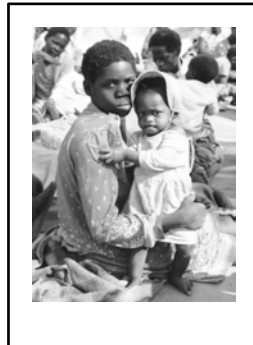
"When Israel was a child, I *loved* him...I led them with cords of human kindness, with *ties of love*" (Hosea 11:1).

In the Bible God speaks about His relationship with His people using the picture of a mother and her nursing baby:



Ethiopian Mother nursing her baby.

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has given birth to? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands...you are ever before Me"
(Isa. 49:15).

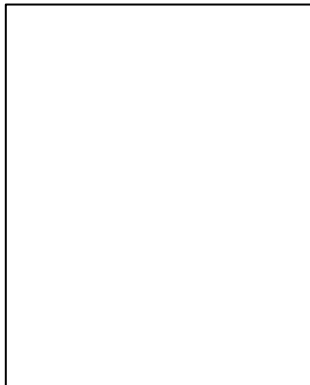


I have seen mothers in some Eastern Countries do the same thing. To this day in some tribal groups, mothers will have the names of their children tattooed on their hands so their children's names will be **"ever before them."**

But why did God love Israel - or for that matter, love us? Is it because there is some merit...some virtue...some innate value in us that motivated His love? Absolutely not! Listen to what He said of His love and choice of Israel:

"The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord *loved you*...that He...redeemed you... Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His *covenant of love* to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands"

(Deut. 7:7-9; c.f. 10:15; 23:5; 33:3; I Kings 10:9; Ps. 44:3; Mal. 1:2).



What is the duration of God's love? Is it *temporal* and *temperamental* like our love? Listen to these loving words of assurance:

"I have loved you with an *everlasting* love; I have drawn you with lovingkindness" (Jer. 31:3).

Likewise the Apostle John wrote:

"This is love; not that we loved God, but that He *loved us* and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins...We love because *He first loved us*" (1 Jn. 4:10,19).



So my friend, if you are His child, *He loves you with an everlasting love!* God's love for you is unconditional! And since there is nothing you can do to *earn His love*, there is nothing you can do to *lose His love!* His love for you is *perfect* and *eternal!*

Remember, therefore, *your salvation is not based upon your love for God – but upon His love for you!* It is always God who loves us *first* (1 Jn. 4:10) – and that love is to the *utmost* (Heb. 7:25).

However, while your *justification* is based upon His love for you; your *sanctification* is based upon the degree of your *obedient love* for Him! As Jesus said: **“If you love Me, you will obey what I command”** (Jn. 14:15). Love and obedience are therefore inseparable! Love is the motivation for obedience. The greater our love, the greater our obedience!



So the church is beloved by God! That is why Scripture refers to us as **“Beloved Children”** (Eph. 5:1) who are **“Beloved in God the Father”** (Jude 1). As a child of God, therefore, you are no longer an enemy...an alien...a slave – but a *son*, and a **“joint heir with Christ.”** By virtue of His adoption of you, and your filial relationship with Him, you can lovingly cry out to God: **“Abba! Father”** (Rom. 8:15-16)! I would also remind you of the words of King

David: **“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him...”** (Ps. 103-13).

Did you know that is how God sees you? Did you know that He loves you like that? Have you realized – and rested in - His Fatherly love and compassion for you? The only way to be *freed from sin* and *freed from self* is to be liberated through love! Only as you allow yourself to be sanctified in His love will you be totally free. That’s why John reminds us:

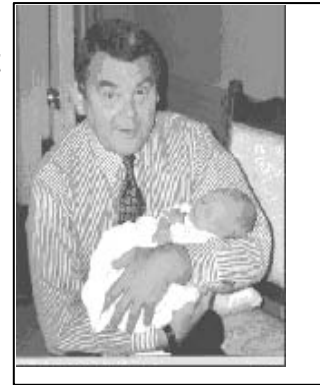
“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 Jn. 4:18).



GOD'S BABY IS *BLESSED*

God is a Father who delights in *blessing His people!* The first thing God did after creating Adam and Eve was that He **“*blessed them...*”** (Gen. 1:22, 28). Likewise when He called Abraham He said: **“*I will bless you and make you a blessing*”** (Gen. 12:2).

We can also see how Abraham's son, Isaac blessed His son Jacob: **“*Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him...saying, ‘May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful...’*”** (Gen. 28:1-3). Tragically though, Esau - like many Christians today - rejected his fatherly blessing and birthright! And he did so only for momentary temporal pleasure! He satisfied his physical appetite - but forfeited the patriarchal blessing that was coming to him through his father. (Gen. 25:29-34; Heb. 12:16-17).



J.L. with his first grandson, Matthew Thomas Atkins

Concerning God's blessing, Moses said to the Children of Israel:

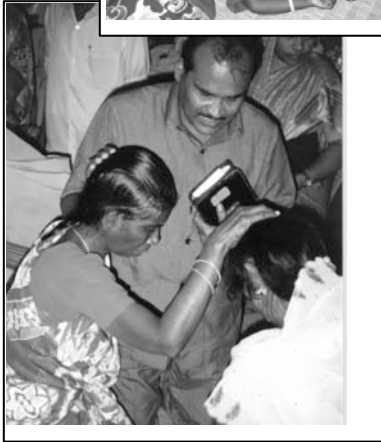
“*If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep His covenant of love with you...He will love you and bless you...You will be blessed more than any other people...*” (Deut. 7:12-14).

Therefore, through Moses, God set before His people two choices: the *Blessings of Mt. Gerizim* or the *Curses of Mt. Ebal*:

“*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse...the blessings if you obey the commands of the Lord your God...the curses if you disobey...*” (Deut. 7:11, 26).

Once again the Lord drew a clear line before them concerning the results of their choices to obey or disobey Him:

“*See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life...*” (Deut. 30:15, 19-20).



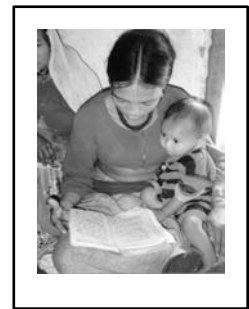
The oldest recorded Biblical Blessing is found in Numbers 6. As Moses and Aaron stood between God and His people as their priests, God gave them this priestly blessing. He carefully instructed Moses and Aaron about how they were to bless His people:

“This is how you are to bless them. Say to them: ‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you; and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace; so that they will put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them’
(Num. 6:23-27).

Parents laying on hands and blessing their children.

Christians today, just like the Israelites of old, have the privilege of living under the “*Lord’s blessing.*” Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, our sins are *fully forgiven* and we are *fully loved!* God’s face is no longer turned away from us, nor set against us. He turned His face away from Jesus on the cross as He was made sin for us. As a result, God will never turn His face away from us - or set His face against us! For all of our lives, “**His face shines upon us!**” That’s because “**His name**” has been eternally given to us! Therefore, we have **God’s blessing!**

God also said: “**Blessed is the man who listens to Me...blessings crown the head of the righteous**” (Prov. 8:31; 10:6). Remember then my friend, that *the message of the Gospel* is a message of blessing!



- “...The Lord...richly *blesses* all who call on Him” (Rom.10:12).
- “He redeemed us in order that *the blessing given to Abraham might come to us* through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Gal.3:14).

- **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has *blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3).**

Every time we celebrate the Lord’s Table we are to be reminded of God’s desire to bless us. That is why the Communion cup is called the “...**Cup of blessing**” (1 Cor. 10:16).

During His earthly life and ministry, the Lord Jesus also demonstrated this by *blessing people* - especially *children*:

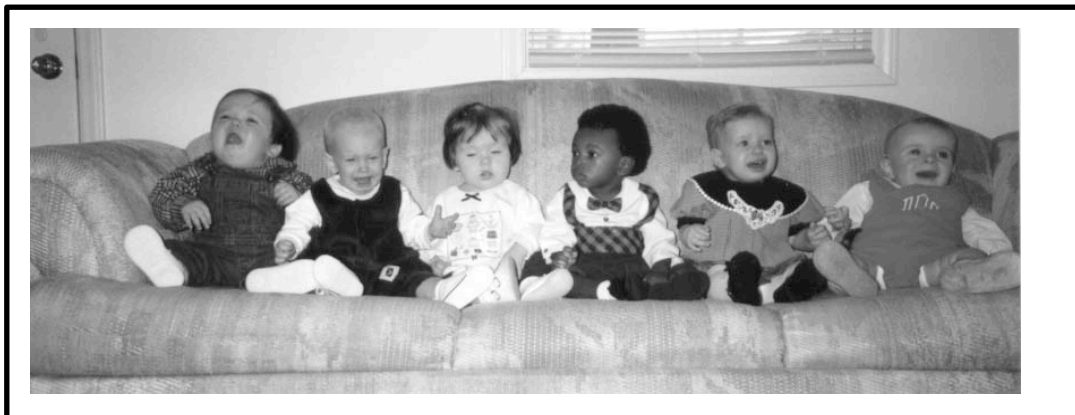
“He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and *blessed them*” (Mk. 10:16).

Just as Jesus blessed children, we as parents should bless our children. If we do so, what will be the result? Listen to God’s promise: **“All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and *great will be your children’s peace*” (Isa. 54:13).** So *spiritual and emotional peace* are the result of *parental blessing*.

In closing, let me challenge you – especially if you are a parent, to frequently *bless your children*. Pray over them...lay your hands upon them...*bless them*. This is **especially** appropriate when they are small and you are putting them to bed for the night. By blessing them in the name of Jesus, you will guard and guide them in both their sleeping and waking. As a result, **“...great will be your children’s peace!”**



Patt Williams with baby Matthew Thomas, our first grandchild.



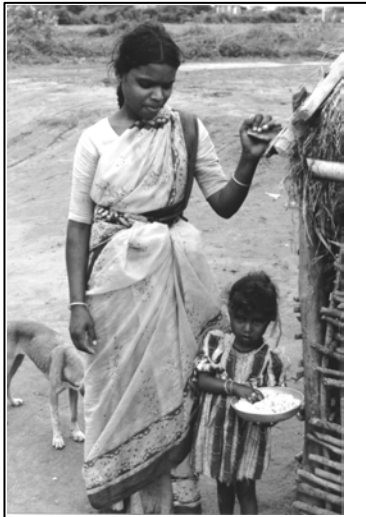
CONCLUSIONS

- The true Church begins as a ***Baby born of God.***
- It is a Baby that has been ***bathed*** by the blood of Christ through *regeneration*; and bathed through the *waters of baptism* into the Body of Christ.
- She is a Baby that is ***beloved*** by the Father who “...**begat her and loves her with an everlasting love!**”
- She is a Baby that has been ***blessed*** with a spiritual birthright through the Holy Spirit. It is therefore the role of the spiritual parent or pastor, to help that spiritual baby grow and claim his spiritual birthright in Christ Jesus!

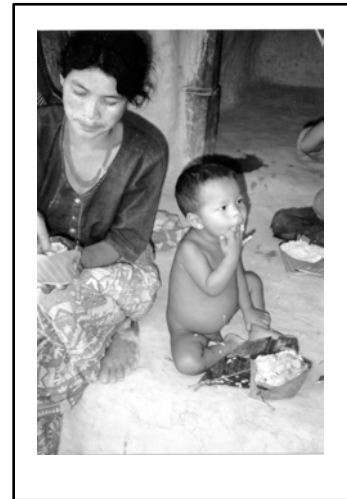
Our own children therefore remind us of several important things:

1. The necessity of the "New Birth": “**I tell you the truth, unless you change and *become like little children*, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 18:3).
2. The necessity of being *humble and teachable*: “**I praise you, Father...because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and *revealed them to little children***” (Matt. 11:25). “**Whoever *humbles himself like this child* is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven**” (Matt 18:4).
3. The necessity of spiritual growth: “**As *new born babies*, desire the pure *milk of the Word* so that you may *grow up in your salvation***” (I Pet. 2:2).

We will look more at these concluding principles in the following chapter...

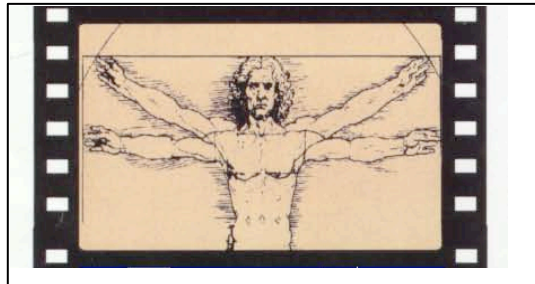


Hungry Street Children in Kenya, Africa being fed through New Directions International Child Sponsorship Program. Other NDI feeding programs are in India and Nepal.



THE CHURCH AS A *BODY*

***“You created my inmost being;
You knit me together in my
mother’s womb...I am fearfully
and wonderfully made...My
frame was not hidden from You
when I was made in the secret
place. When I was woven
together... Your eyes saw my
unformed body”***
(Ps. 139:13-16).



A second beautiful and instructive Biblical picture of the Church is that of a *Body*. The Bible tells us that our physical body is “...**fearfully and wonderfully made**” by God.

Every part of our body was created by God to fulfill a specific purpose. Truly our physical body is the most marvelous organism God ever created! And God created our physical body to demonstrate...incarnate...flesh out, the spiritual Body - or the Church. If the physical body is wondrous to behold, the Body of Christ is even more wonderful! The Church as a Body is one of the Apostle Paul’s favorite pictures of this divine organism. Listen to these words of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul:

“God placed all things under His (Christ’s) feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the Church which is *His Body*...” (Eph. 1:23).

Likewise Paul said:

“We are members of *His Body*” (Eph. 4:25; 5:30).

To the Colossian Christians, Paul says that we are...

“...*His body, which is the Church*” (Col. 1:24).

He further reminds the saints at Corinth:

“ We are all baptized by one Spirit into *one Body*” (I Cor. 12:13).

Therefore, if the Church is a *Body* - the “**Body of Christ,**” we must analyze and define exactly what a “*body*” is. Your body is the *physical “house”* that your *spirit* dwells in. It is the physical, visible part of you. The Bible calls this exterior part of you a “**tent**” (II Cor. 5:4), or the “**outer man,**” or woman. Likewise, it refers to the non-visible part of you as the “**inner man**” (II Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16). As I said earlier, we can take a picture

of the *outer man* - but not the *inner man*. Therefore, you are a *spirit* and *soul* that lives in a physical *body*.

In the same way, the true Church is a *spiritual Body* - a *spiritual gathering* of people that takes place in a *physical setting*. That physical gathering may or may not include a building. As we will see, buildings are not necessary in order for the true Church to exist and meet.

There are at least 5 *Marks* of the Church as the Body of Christ that I want us to give careful attention to in this chapter. The Bible teaches that the church is a...

1. **GOVERNED BODY**
2. **GIFTED BODY**
3. **GIVING BODY**
4. **GLORIFYING BODY**
5. **GROWING BODY**

THE CHURCH AS A GOVERNED BODY

Here again there is a perfect parallel between the *physical body* and the *spiritual body*. Neither the physical body, nor the Church, is a Body where every member is free to be independent and “*do his or her own thing*.” God is a God of *government* - a God of *order*. In the natural world He has established physical laws that govern our existence. In the human world, God has established governing authorities to regulate our existence (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1, etc.). Likewise, in the Church He has ordained *spiritual authorities* to govern our gathering and our growth.

In I Cor. 11:3, Paul gives us this general structure of government:

“I want you to understand that Christ is the *Head* of every man, and the man is *head* of the woman, and God is the *Head* of Christ.”

Paul further applies this principle of government, or *principle of Headship*, to the Church:

“When He (God) raised Him (Christ) from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as *Head over all things to the Church, which is His body...*” (Eph. 1:20-23).

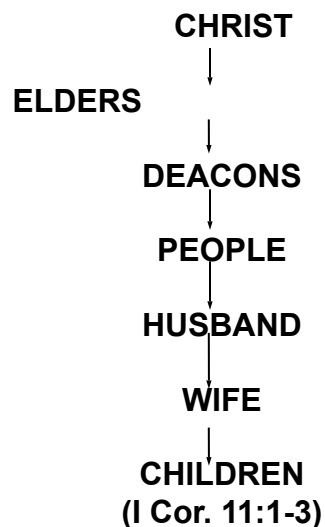
As we saw earlier, no one but Jesus is the Head of the Church - not some *Pope, Bishop, Elder, or Pastor*. However, Christ has



delegated His governmental power in the Church to *elders*. These elders are to exercise *loving authority* in the Body:

- **“Obey your leaders, submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account”** (Heb. 13:17).
- **“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who diligently labor among you, who are *over you in the Lord*, and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard because of their work”** (I Thess. 5:12).
- **“...be in *subjection* to such men and to everyone who helps in the work...”** (I Cor. 16:16).

So *government* and *order* is to be the norm in the Church - not unruliness... spiritual anarchy...or spiritual individualism! In the church then, the governmental lines of authority are as follows:



Bishop Ezra Sargunam of The Evangelical Church of India.

Are these lines of authority understood in your church? Are they clearly taught and obeyed? What about *you* personally? Are you living under spiritual authority? Or, are you a *“Lone Ranger Christian?”* Are you under the care of spiritual elders; or are you trying to live your Christian life through rugged *individualism*? Are you in fellowship - or in *isolation*? Are you outside spiritual authority, or *under authority*? Remember: *Authentic Christianity is always lived out under the government of God through His local Church.*

THE CHURCH AS A *GIFTED* BODY

“Now to *each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (I Cor. 12:7).

The moment we begin to speak about the fact that *every Christian is a gifted Christian*, we tend to automatically think about the various spiritual gifts referred to in the New Testament (Rom. 12; I Cor. 12; Eph. 4; I Peter 4). We can also read about the various manifestations of these many spiritual gifts in the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. There we can read about them as they are demonstrated in the lives of people like Peter, James, John, Paul - and all of the other early Christian leaders. However, most Christians do not feel that they can personally identify with these great men and women of faith! They feel insecure and insignificant in comparison to them. Their own *natural talents* and *supernatural talents* seem paltry by comparison with those demonstrated by these “spiritual giants” in the Bible!

Therefore, a very helpful background study on *New Testament spiritual gifts* - are *Old Testament spiritual gifts*. But once again, we have little problem identifying God’s *supernatural* and *spiritual endowment* in the lives of people like Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Isaiah - and the other patriarchs and prophets we read about from Genesis to Malachi. That’s why I want to take a few minutes to encourage you from a brief study of the natural and supernatural giftedness of two often overlooked men in the Old Testament. Their names are *Bezalel* and *Oholiab*. We first discover them when God is giving Moses instructions concerning the construction of the Tabernacle while the Israelites are in the wilderness:

“Then the Lord said to Moses: ‘See, I have chosen *Bezalel*, son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts - to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. Moreover, I have appointed *Oholiab*, son of Shisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you: the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent - the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand - and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. *They are to make them just as I commanded you*” (Ex. 31:1-11; c.f. 35:30 - 36:7).

Pages could be written about these two men of God - along with all of those who worked alongside them. Let me just highlight 8 key principles from this passage about the natural and supernatural giftedness of these two very special Old Testament saints.

1. First, they were *submitted*: These men were not just “doing their own thing” as they lived their lives. When it came to their occupations - their work - they were not independent workers. They were *submitted to God*. They were an *active part of* the Old Testament Church, or people of God. They had left Egypt - which is a picture of the world, along with all of the rest of the Israelites. They were no longer *slaves* in bondage to Pharaoh. They were *sons* who were submitted to the One true living God.

These two men were not only *submitted to God*, they were also *submitted to Moses*. It is important to note that it was through Moses that God gave them their instruction and assignment. This passage begins with these words: **“Then the Lord said to Moses...”** (v. 1). We see in Moses an Old Testament picture of New Testament Church leadership. Along with his brother Aaron, Moses was the *elder* of the people. He was the *pastor*, the *shepherd* of the flock of God. Bezalel and Oholiab were under the *spiritual authority* of Moses. They were not like so many “spiritual drifters” or “church hoppers” we see today - always floating and moving around from church to church. They never settle down to any local church body, or submit to any church leadership. But Bezalel and Oholiab were both submitted to the *spiritual leadership* that God had established for His people. Are you?

These two Old Testament saints were not only *submitted to God*, and *submitted to Moses*; they were also *submitted to their families*. As the stories of these two men unfold, God referred to the *families* and *tribes* of both Bezalel and Oholiab: **“...Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah...Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan...”** One of the distinguishing marks of being a Jew then - or now - was the sense of being inseparably connected to your immediate family and extended tribe. They never thought of themselves apart from their family and relatives. They had a strong sense of connectedness and interrelatedness to their families. Whereas we in the West glory in rugged individualism; the Jews valued family above everything but God!

Finally, these men were *submitted to each other*. They both were mutually submitted to Moses as their spiritual elder. Then Oholiab was submitted to Bezalel as the “boss” or “foreman” of the Tabernacle project. He was instructed by God **“...to help him”** (v. 6). Therefore, their natural talents were totally available to *God...to Moses...to their families...to the Israelites...to each other*. As a result, they were **“...God’s fellow workers”** (I Cor. 3:9). They had the joy of partnering with God to fulfill His purposes on earth. They were given the unique privilege of constructing here on earth God’s **“Tent of Meeting.”** This would be the “holy place” where God would abide with His people, just like He did through Christ in the New Testament when Jesus **“...tabernacled among them”** (Jn. 1:14). This would be the place where God would have fellowship with His people.

In the same way, God wants *your vocation...your business...your work...your job* to become *His vocation...His business...His work...His job* - His *place of meeting and fellowship* with you! Let me ask you a crucial question: “Do you see your

vocation...your work...your business... your occupation as God's "**Tent of Meeting**" with you and with others? If not, you should! That's what this brief study is all about.

2. Secondly, they were *separated*: These men were not *secular men* - they were *sanctified men*! That's what the word *sanctification* means: "*separated unto God.*" Please note specifically what God said to Moses about these two men: "**I have chosen Bezalel...I have appointed Oholiab...**" (vs. 2, 6). In our workday world of today, we would refer to these two men as "common laborers," or "blue color workers." But God didn't see them as "common." He said that they were both "**chosen...appointed.**" When you are *chosen* and *appointed by God*, then the *common* is made *uncommon*; a *blue color worker* becomes a *true blue* worker! Therefore, they were just as much *sanctified...separated* unto God for His work, as Moses was! What a wonderful truth for every Christian worker to know - that there is no Biblical separation between *secular gifts* and *spiritual gifts*! All good gifts are given by God (Ja. 1:17).

Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as the "common"... "ordinary"... "everyday"... "routine"... "mundane" when a work is done unto the Lord (I Cor. 10:31). Through the empowerment and creativity of His indwelling Holy Spirit, God transforms the "common" into the *ceremonial*...the "ordinary" into the *ordained*...the "everyday" into a *holy day*...the temporal into the *eternal*...the "routine" into the *religious*...the "mundane" into the *miraculous*! He can do that for your work also - but you must let Him!

3. Thirdly, they were *spiritual*: God said of Bezalel: "**I have filled him with the Spirit of God...**" (vs. 3). These men were not what the Bible calls *natural men* (I Cor. 2:14) - or men who were only born once (Jn. 3:3). They were twice born, or what the Bible calls *spiritual men* (I Cor. 2:15). They were not "*filled with the things of the world*" - those things that the Bible refers to as the "**spirit of the world**" (Eph. 2:1-3). They were both "**...filled with the Spirit of God.**" So these men were just as much "*spirit filled*" as Moses was! They were not *secular men* but rather *spiritual men*. Because of the fact that they were working for God, the *secular* was *sanctified into the spiritual*!

We can see in this story an important principle of Judaism that has largely been lost by the Church today. This life principle teaches that for the child of God, *the whole of life is sacred*! The Jew had a *holistic view of life* rather than a *dualistic view of life*. Life was *unitary* rather than *bifurcated* - which meant that *everything was sacred*! In Judaism, there is no division between the *sacred* and *secular*...between *man's work* and *God's work*. This *dualistic world-view* was an alien idea that later infiltrated Judaism - and the church, from Greek and Roman *paganism*. We are still living with this tragic segmented and compartmentalized world view where the "sacred" has been divorced from the "secular." This dualistic world-view is one where the "City of God" is seen as transcendent...eternal... ethereal...*heavenly*, while the "city of man" is seen as physical... temporal...tangible...*earthly*. God's Kingdom has been evicted from man's kingdom. Tragically, in our world today, these two kingdoms are to

remain strictly separated. No integration is allowed between them. A *dualistic world-view* always results in a *dualistic work view*. As a result, you see one day as “sacred,” and the rest of the week as “secular.” Therefore, God at best gets one day a week - and less and less of that. Satan, on the other hand, gets the other 6 days! What a tragedy! God created every day for His glory. He is to be *Lord of every day* - not just the *Sabbath Day*!

Therefore, the true Biblical Christian is to take off his dualistic glasses with its distorted world-view that divides life into the *sacred* and *secular*. He is to have a *unitary vision*. We Christians are to see all of life as *one* because Christ has **“...broken down the dividing wall of hostility...to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility”** (Eph. 2:14, 16). That’s the vocational agenda of the Christian - to merge the *sacred* with the *secular*. Therefore, if you can’t *sanctify your work*, then you need to change jobs! If you cannot do it **“...as unto the Lord”** (I Cor. 10:31), then either your *attitude* must change, or your *vocation* must change!

So God wants you to see your work as *spiritual* - and not as *secular*. He wants you to conduct *your work* as *His work*. And He wants you to do it for *His glory*, rather than for *your gain*. But this transformation will only take place as you allow Him on a daily and hourly basis to **“...fill you with His Spirit”** (Eph. 5:18). Then your work - like that of Bezalel and Oholiab - will be transformed from the *secular* to the *spiritual*!

4. Fourthly, they were *skillful*: God also says of them: **“...I have filled him with...skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts...I have given skill to all the craftsmen...”** (vs. 3, 5). Again please notice that there is no separation between the *spiritual* and the *skillful*. To the Jew, every *skill* was *spiritual*. If the source of the skill was man rather than God, then it could be referred to as a *“secular skill.”* However, *God is the Creator of all skills*, and the *Giver of all good gifts*. **“Every good and perfect gift,”** wrote Peter, **“is from above, coming down from the Father...”** (Ja. 1:17). We may *prostitute* and *pervert* our God-given skills for ourselves - but they still came from God! Therefore, we need to be freshly reminded of what God said to Moses about the *source* of all human skills: **“...I have filled him with skill...I have given skill to all the craftsmen...”**

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul expressed the same thing when he asked: **“What do you have that you did not receive?”** (I Cor. 4:7). If every *spiritual gift* and *natural skill* comes from God, then we never have any basis for *boasting* and *pride*! **“Therefore...let him who boasts boast in the Lord”** (I Cor. 1:31)!

The primary thing that lifts a work from the *secular* to the *spiritual* is not *WHAT* you do, but rather *WHY* you do it! Do you work for *yourself*, or for *God*? Are you working for *your glory*, or for *God’s glory*? Are you seeking to magnify *your name*, or *His Name*? Are you building *your kingdom*, or *His Kingdom*? Are you *laying up treasures on earth*, or are you *laying up treasures in Heaven*? It’s your choice! You can either use your skill for *self*; or you can use it for *Christ*. It is only as you use it

for Him that the *skill* becomes *spiritual*...the *secular* becomes *sacred*...the *natural* become *supernatural*!

So God is the one who *invents* and *invests* every *skill* and all *spiritual gifts*. It is He, and He alone, who causes the *natural skill* to become a *supernatural gift*! But just because God has invested a *skill* in us - does not mean that we are automatically *skillful* with it! Every person has some *skills* - but that does not mean that they are *skillful in the use of those skills*. In this story of Bezalel and Oholiab we see a wonderful spiritual principle and proverb being demonstrated: **“Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men”** (Prov. 22:29; c.f. I Kings 11:27-28).

Therefore, whether it is a *natural talent* (skill), or a *supernatural talent* (spiritual gift); it is our responsibility to *discover, develop, and deploy* it for God’s glory. It is only as a person becomes **“...skilled in his work”** that he or she will **“...serve before kings”** rather than spending their lives **“...before obscure men.”**

5. Fifthly, they were *specialized*. Please notice here the variety and diversity of *skills* that God created and sanctified in this story: **“...to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”** So to construct the Tabernacle, there was a need for *designers, artists, jewelers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, masons, carpenters, sculptors, weavers, embroi-derers, perfumers, etc.* Here is the *Creator* giving a portion of His own *creativity* to man so that he can work alongside Him in the accomplishment of His will. These workers were all creative people called by God to do **“...all kinds of craftsmanship”** (31:5). Each was a *specialist* in his or her work.

That reminds us that every person who has ever been born is totally unique. There are no two of us who are perfectly alike - not even identical twins. No set of fingerprints are exactly the same. In the billions of people that God has created throughout history, He has never made a duplicate! God is so creative that every creature...every plant...every blade of grass...every tree...every flower...every star is different from every other one! In the same way, no two human beings have the exact same set of natural talents, skills, or spiritual giftedness.

Therefore, whether we are speaking of *natural skills* or *spiritual gifts*, each of us is to be a *specialist*. In the New Testament the Apostle Paul expressed our uniqueness by asking a series of rhetorical questions: **“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”** (I Cor. 12:29-30). The obvious answer to each of these questions is a resounding **“No!”** In the Body of Christ we are all different and unique. No two of us have the exact same mix of *natural talents* and *spiritual gifts*.

These verses also remind us that each of us has the potential to be *specialists* before God...before the church...before the world. There is a special work that God

created each of us to do. It is one that no other person can accomplish but us. As the New Testament says: **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”** (Eph. 2:10). The work that God had prepared before the creation of the world for Bezalel and Oholiab was that they would have the unique privilege of building His Tabernacle here on earth! Note their “job description”:

“So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the Lord has commanded” (36:1).

What an incredible privilege! What a “job contract!” To be assigned the task of building God’s *Tent of Meeting* here on earth! And just like God had no substitutes for Bezalel and Oholiab; *God has no duplicate or substitute for you!* You are absolutely unique! If you do not **“...do the good works which God prepared in advance”** for you - then you will not fulfill the highest purposes for which you were created. But that does not mean that God’s work will not ultimately be accomplished. The Bible assures us that God’s will and God’s work *will be done* - with or without us! Consider these verses:

- **“The plans of the Lord stand firm forever”** (Ps. 33:11);
- **“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails”** (Prov. 19:21);
- **“The Lord Almighty has sworn, Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, as I have purposed, so it will stand”** (Isa. 14:24; 46:11);
- **“For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth”** (II Cor. 13:8);

So the plans and purposes that God foreordained before the creation of the world - *will ultimately be accomplished!* In finality, no one can frustrate God’s will. We can only forfeit the privilege and joy of playing our strategic part in fulfilling His plan. However, none of us need to miss out on the joy and fulfillment of God’s perfect will and perfect work for our lives. We do not have to selfishly “do our own thing” - which is so petty in comparison to God’s glorious will! We must each use our own unique God-given skills to “do His thing,” just as these workers were doing.

I want you to also note that this was not a *suggestion* from God that they use their skills for Him; it was a *command!* **“I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you...they are to make them just as I have commanded you.”** Whenever God issues a command, we have only two options:

obedience or disobedience... submission or suppression...reformation or rebellion. Which is true of your own life and work?

6. Sixthly, they were *stewards*. Simply put, “a *steward is someone who has been entrusted with someone else’s possessions.*” Bezalel, Oholiab, and their co-workers had been entrusted with many very costly possessions donated by the children of Israel. All of this was part of God’s plan being carefully worked out in advance. He obviously knew what He was going to do after He liberated His people from slavery in Egypt. He was not freeing them to “do their own thing.” They were being called out of Egypt to “**...worship God**” (Ex. 3:12). For this to happen there must be a *meeting place...a place of worship.* Therefore, God instructed them to construct a *Tent of Meeting* for worship and fellowship. However, this meeting place between God and man would be very costly to build. It would be like no other dwelling place ever built on earth. But how were they to afford to build such a unique and costly dwelling? For several generations they had been slaves in Egypt - and slaves own nothing! God had a perfect plan. He allowed them to “sacked Egypt” before their Exodus!

“The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of *silver* and *gold* and for *clothing*. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorable disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they *plundered the Egyptians*” (Ex. 12:35-36).

So even though God had entrusted Bezalel, Oholiab and their fellow workers with diverse and complimentary skills for “**...the work of constructing the sanctuary**” - they still had to have *building material!* Unlike God, they could not create *ex nihilo*, or *out of nothing!* They had to have a wide variety of materials to work with. So Moses called for a “*freewill offering.*” They were to freely give back to God what God had freely given to them - through the Egyptians. This is what the Lord has *commanded*, Moses said:

“From what you have, *take an offering for the Lord.* Everyone who is *willing* is to bring to the Lord an offering of gold, silver... bronze; blue, purple ... scarlet yarn...fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded” (Ex. 35:4-10).



Woman weaving in Nepal in an NDI Self-Support project

That was the *command* from God through Moses to the people. Now, what was their response?

“Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses’ presence, and everyone who was *willing* and whose *heart moved him* came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work of the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were *willing*, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds; brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. *They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord.* Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or hides of sea cows brought them. Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the Lord and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun - blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. And all the women who were *willing* and had the skill spun the goat hair. The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. All the Israelite men and women who were *willing* brought to the Lord *freewill offerings* for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do” (Ex. 35:20 - 29).

As a result of this *freewill offering*, Bezalel, Oholiab and their fellow workers had everything necessary to build the Tabernacle - and all of its contents. They were now *stewards* who were being entrusted with someone else’s possessions. **“They received from Moses *all the offerings* the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary” (36:3).** God had given them the *responsibility*; now He gave them the *resources*. This demonstrates what Paul later wrote in the New Testament: **“The one who calls you is faithful and *He will bring it to pass*”** (I Thess. 5:24).

We also know that these workers were *faithful stewards* because they did not hoard, or waste the resources that were entrusted to them by the people of God. The Israelites were so *willing* and *eager* in their giving - that they gave far more than was needed to complete the job! At that point many less spiritual workers would have begun to either *waste*, or *hoard*, the overflow of materials! But not these stewards! As the people “...continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning,” the workers were having to stop their jobs to “count and sort the offerings!”

“So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, ‘The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.’ Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: ‘No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.’ And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work” (36:3 - 7).

What an incredible stewardship opportunity! Imagine having more money and material resources given than you need or can use! That’s not a problem in most churches today!

So first of all these men and women were people to whom God had entrusted diverse *skills*. One of our very first stewardships we must learn in life is the *stewardship of our skills*, or our *natural talents*. Secondly, we must learn the *stewardship of our spiritual gifts*. These usually are built upon our natural talents. Thirdly, we have to learn to be *stewards of money* and *materialism*. That starts when we are young children because we come into the world owning or possessing nothing. As Job said: “**Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart**” (Job. 1:21). So all of us come into this world owning nothing. We are always the recipients of what others have given to us - starting with what God has deposited in our lives.

First of all, God has entrusted *life* to us - which is a sacred gift with both *temporal* and *eternal* ramifications. We are not to waste or abuse our own lives. Neither are we to abuse or take the life of another (Gen. 9:6). Secondly, in order to be able to live our lives purposefully and productively, God entrusts us with certain *natural talents*, or *skills*; and *supernatural talents*, or *gifts of the Holy Spirit*. We gradually discover our *skills* in the growth process after *natural birth*. Likewise, we discover our *gifts* as we grow and mature after our *spiritual birth*. Therefore, one of our earliest and most important lesson needs to be the lesson of *stewardship*. Each of us need to learn the stewardship of what has been entrusted to us from others. This starts with the stewardship of what our *Heavenly Parent*, or God entrusts to us.

Along with that we must learn the stewardship of what our *human parents* entrust to us. The “learning laboratory” for *stewardship of the spiritual* is *stewardship of the physical*. If we are not good stewards in the *natural realm*; we will not be good stewards in the *spiritual realm*.

Jesus clearly taught His disciples this principle when He summarized His parable of the “Shrewd Servant”:

“Whoever can be trusted with very *little* can also be trusted with *much*, and whoever is *dishonest with very little* will also be *dishonest with much*. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling *worldly wealth*, who will trust you with *true riches*? And if you have not been trustworthy with *someone else’s property*, who will give you *property of your own*?” (Lk. 16:10-12)

So tragically most people forfeit their *stewardship of true riches by their poor stewardship of money and material things!* Can God trust you with money? What kind of steward have you been of material things?

7. Seventhly, they were *supported*. Even though each of the men and women in this story were *specialists*, they did not work independent of each other. They were not what we would call “*independent contractors*.” They were a “*co-op*.” They did not work in isolation from each other - they cooperated. Each one *supported* all of the other workers. To support others means that you have to have to be a *servant*. Only people with a *servant’s heart* will support others and help them succeed. Even though each one had a unique role to play, everyone was working toward the accomplishment of a larger goal than their own individual part. They had received a collective vision that was bigger than any of them individually. God gave the vision of the Tabernacle to *Moses* (Heb. 3:4; 8:5-5). He then called *Bezalel* to help Moses fulfill the vision. Then He gave Bezalel the support of *Oholiab* - who had a special ability to “**...teach others**” (Ex. 35:34). He is an Old Testament example of the *faithful man* that Paul instructed Timothy to seek out for leadership in the Church:

“The things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will also be *qualified to teach others also*” (II Tim. 2:2).

So when God entrusts a skill to us, He wants us to *teach* and *mentor* others in finding their natural skills and spiritual gifts. Just like Jesus mentored men into ministry; we are to also disciple and mentor people to the degree that they *discover, develop* and *deploy* their skills and gifts for the Kingdom of God.

Finally, God gave diverse skills to “...all the craftsmen” to support these two “foremen.” Bezalel and Oholiab were surrounded and supported by “...every skilled person to whom the Lord has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary...” (36:1).

This same spirit of *support* and *cooperation* is demonstrated in the words of Paul as he wrote to the Church at Corinth. Some childish divisions had taken place around which Apostle was the “most important” - Paul or Apollos? And whose work was the “most spiritual.” So Paul writes:

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers” (I Cor. 3:5-9).

So what a joy it is to be in *partnership with God!* What a privilege it is to be in *partnership with each other!* One thing for sure: if you are living and working for the fulfillment of a plan that you can accomplish by yourself - it is too small! God-size purposes and plans require cooperation. They are too BIG for any of us to accomplish alone! We must have the *internal support* of the Holy Spirit, and the *external support* of other Christians. One is too small a number for true greatness. To accomplish something really GREAT requires the *partnership* of many people!

Question: “*Who are you supporting in the work of God - and who is supporting you?*”

8. Lastly, they were *successful*. Because it was *God’s work* done *God’s way*, it was *successful*. They were *successful* because they were in partnership with God and with each other. As we saw above, God’s purposes ultimately cannot be thwarted or defeated. So because they supported each other, they were *successful*. The Bible records this account:

“The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded them. So Moses blessed them...And so Moses finished the work” (Ex. 39:42-43; 33).

In finality, *success in life* is only measured by one thing: “*Did I succeed in the good works that God ordained for me before the foundations of the world?*” It is quite possible to be a *success in the eyes of the world*, and a *failure in the eyes of God!* Conversely, it is possible to be a *failure in the eyes of the world*, and a *success in the eyes of God!*

Does *spiritual success* mean that we will always do God's work perfectly? Absolutely not! We will fumble, falter and fail more times than we will succeed. But none of that surprises God, or catches Him off guard! *Successfulness* is determined by *faithfulness* - not by perfect performance. It is far better to *fail at a plan that will ultimately succeed; than to succeed at a plan that will ultimately fail!* So it is only as we keep allowing God to pick us up, dust us off, and put us back on that path of obedience - that we will *succeed in life*. Only then will we *complete the work...finish the job...run the race...complete the course*.

In addition to Moses, Bezalel and Oholiab in this story, there are several other examples of those who *succeeded in life* by completing the work God assigned them to do: Nehemiah (6:16), Paul (II Tim. 4:7), Of course the greatest example of all is Jesus Christ (Jn. 17:4)!

CONCLUSIONS

God wants you to succeed in the plans and purposes for which He created you. However, the church is the practical spiritual and relational context for you to *discover, develop, and deploy* your natural talents and spiritual gifts. Like Bezalel and Oholiab, you are to be *submitted ...separated ...spiritual... skillful...specialized...stewards...supported* - and then you will be *successful!* Then you will one day hear God say to you: **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”** (Matt. 25:21).

God has *"gifted"* or *"graced"* both the physical and spiritual body with many different parts - each with a different function.

“...to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it” (Eph. 4:7).

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (I Cor. 12:7).

Giftedness comes with grace. Every *Christian* in the Body of Christ has spiritual gifts. There is no such thing as a child of God without spiritual gifts. Listen to these instructive words:

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. *We have different gifts according to the grace given us*” (Rom. 12:4-6).

“The body is a unity, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many; they form one body...God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be...there are many parts, but one body...God has arranged the members of the body...so that there should be no division in the body...Now you are the *Body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it*” (I Cor. 12:12,18,25-27).

Every true Christian then is a *gifted Christian!* However, spiritual gifts are not immediately evident to a new Christian. Once again there is a logical and helpful analogy between being a *physical baby* and being a *spiritual baby*. A newly born baby does not immediately manifest his or her *natural talents*. Likewise, a newly born “babe in Christ” does not immediately manifest his or her *spiritual talents* - or *gifts of the Spirit*. It is through time...growth...observation...education...guidance...trial and error, that a parent helps his child *discover* and *develop* their natural talents. It is in the same way that a new Christian discovers his or her spiritual talents. It is under the nurture of the elders in the church - our *spiritual parents*, that we *discover...develop...deploy*, our spiritual gifts. Therefore, it is only within the context of the teaching, nurture, and fellowship of the church that our spiritual gifts can be matured and expressed “**...for the common good.**” (I Cor. 12:7).

THE CHURCH AS A GIVING BODY

“...Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35).

God is a *giving God*. Therefore, Christianity is a *giving faith*. It’s that simple! Because God gives to us, we in turn are motivated to give to others. Remember this basic principle: “*Gifts are for giving* - not for *keeping!*”

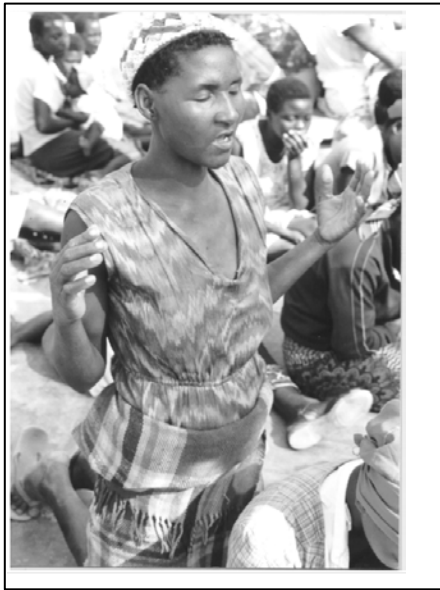
“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to *serve others*, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (I Pet. 4:10).

So our spiritual gifts are for *serving others* - not for *self-service* or *self-glory*. They are not to be kept secret...hidden from others...or used for ourselves. Spiritual gifts are first of all *for the church*.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the *common good*. (Wisdom...knowledge...faith...healing... miracles... prophecy...tongues...interpretation...discernment, etc.) **All of these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He chooses” (I Cor. 12:7-11).**

So each of us is a *gifted Christian*. As a result we are to be a *giving Christian*! Our spiritual gifts are what we express our giving through to others in need - first in the *church*, and then in the *world*.

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to *all people*, especially to those who belong to the family of *believers*” (Gal. 6:10).



My own spiritual gifts are primarily those of a teacher and encourager in the Body of Christ. What are your gifts? If you do not clearly know your gifts, your most urgent spiritual assignment is to *discover, develop and deploy* your gifts for the *good of others*. But above all else, our spiritual gifts are for the *glory of God* - which brings us to our next mark of the church...

praying and
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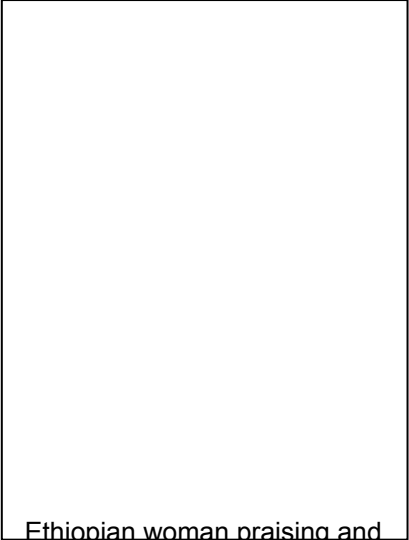
THE CHURCH AS A GLORIFYING BODY

When we use our gifts as God intended, then we are *glorifying* Him. As I already stated, *spiritual gifts are to glorify God and never to glorify ourselves*. Since our physical body is a part of the Body of Christ – the place where God dwells – we are to glorify God in our *bodies*. Listen to these timely words of exhortation from the Apostle Paul:

“And do you not know that your *body* is a temple of the Holy Spirit? ...And that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore *glorify God in your bodies*” (I Cor. 6:19-20; c.f. 7:23).

So the totality of your being - your *spirit, soul* and *body* - have been bought with the blood of Christ (2 Pet. 1:18-19). He bought you at such a great price so He could manifest and glorify Himself through you!

That is what Jesus meant when He said: **“This is My body given for you...”** (Matt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19). Therefore, since He gave His body for you - you are to give your body for Him! You are to **“Glorify God in your body!”** That’s what Paul meant when he said:



Ethiopian woman praising and glorifying God in a crusade that Dr. Williams preached.

“...offer your *bodies* as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

“Do not let sin reign (be in control) of your mortal body to obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body (mind, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet, sexual organs, etc.) to sin, as instruments of wickedness; but rather offer your body to Him as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13).

The saints in Corinth were living in a very sinful, licentious city. Therefore, with strong and stern words of exhortation, Paul challenged them:

“Do you know that your *bodies* are members of Christ Himself? Shall I take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? NEVER!” (I Cor. 6:15).

In the same way we can ask:

“Can I unite the members of Christ - my body - with...

- *...tobacco?*
- *...alcohol?*
- *...drugs?*
- *...sexual perversion?*
- *...idolatry?*
- *...witchcraft?*
- *...pagan music?*
- *...Lustful movies?*
- *...Pornography?*
- *...etc. NO!*

As Paul said to the Christians at Colossia:

“Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion and evil desires...” (Col. 3:4).

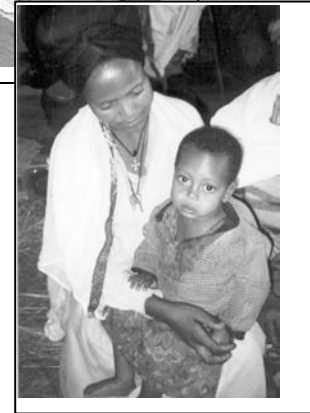
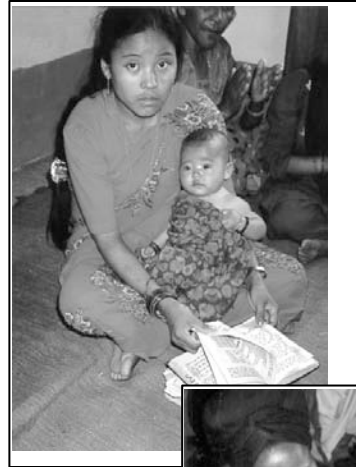
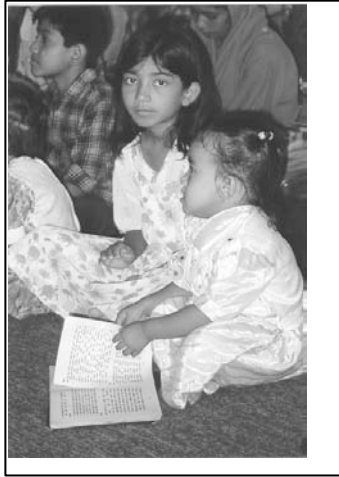
Do you see the relevance of this picture of the Church? Do you see how important it is because of what it teaches us about Christ's Body - and about our body? When God wants to show a picture of His Church to the world...to angels...or to demons, He points to the body of the Christian! He in essence says:

“That is My Church! There it is! That is where My Spirit dwells! That's my continued Incarnation in the world! Their body is My Body!”

Let me ask you a question: *“Are you glorifying Christ with your body?”* Are you using your body as an instrument of righteousness? Or, are you using it as an instrument for unrighteousness and wickedness?

If you have never received Christ, you are a slave to the *desires* and *drives* of your body! You are controlled by your bodily appetites. That's why the Bible says that every non-Christian is ***“...gratifying the cravings of their sinful nature and following its desires and lusts”*** (Eph. 2:3). Therefore, it is only when you receive Christ as your personal Savior and Lord that you are set free! Only then can you use your body for His glory! Only then do you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you to give you the power to ***“glorify God in your body!”*** Only then does your body become a part of Christ's Church!

Finally...



Mothers and children at the
Women's Conference in
Africa and Asia.

THE CHURCH AS A GROWING BODY

If our *spiritual body* and *physical body* is to glorify God through the giving of the gifts we have received, then we must be a *growing* body. Just as a baby has to grow to maturity to be able to fully function as an adult; so we too as Christians must *grow up in Christ*. We must not remain “**babes in Christ.**” The Church starts out as a Baby - but it must not remain one! Paul wrote:

“...no longer be *infants*, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching...we must *grow up* into Him who is the Head, that is Christ. From Him the whole body is joined and held together...and *grows* and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:14-16).

So God's will for every “**babe in Christ**” is that he “**...become *mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ**” (Eph. 4:13). Paul had to exhort the Corinthian Christians because they were still spiritually immature...babes...spiritually retarded:

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere *infants in Christ*. I gave you milk, not solid food” (I Cor. 3:1-2).

He said that he could only “**...speak a message of wisdom among the mature...**” He could only instruct spiritual wisdom to those who were **spiritual men** - rather than

“natural men” or “carnal men” (I Cor. 2:6,14-15). He further said: “**Brothers, stop thinking like children...but in your thinking be adults**” (I Cor. 14:20).

Too many of us within the Body of Christ have remained “**babes in Christ**” far longer than necessary! As the writer of Hebrews said:

“By this time you ought to be teachers, but you still need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk is an *infant*...solid food is for the *mature*...” (Heb. 5:12-13).

It is high time that many in the church “**put away childish things**” (I Cor. 13:11)! There is a great spiritual paradox here! We are always to remain *child-like* in our faith and trust (Matt. 11:25); but we are not to be *childish* in our spiritual life! We are always to be *infant-like* in our faith, but never *infantile* in our understanding! We are to “**...grow up unto Him...to *mature manhood***” (Eph. 4:13-15).

So the Church begins as a baby - but it must not remain a baby! *We must grow up in Christ.* It is the role of the spiritual parents in the church to bring this about. Listen to Paul's instruction about the ministries of the various church leaders:

“And God gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the *perfecting of the saints*, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13).



“For this reason I remind you to fan into the flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline” (II Tim. 1:6-7).

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter of our spiritual family album we have looked at another important and beautiful picture of the Church! It is the picture of the Church as the **Body of Christ**. As the Body of Christ, the local Church is to be a...

1. **GOVERNED CHURCH**
2. **GIFTED CHURCH**
3. **GIVING CHURCH**
4. **GLORIFYING CHURCH**
5. **GROWING CHURCH**



Nepali woman praising and glorifying the Lord at the dedication of her church.



Pastor Trevor Manhanga and new bride, Charmaine, Zimbabwe, Africa.



Pastor John Lokoroch
Nambair and his bride,
Gladys, in Amaya, Kenya.

Patt and I on our
wedding day
Dec. 27, 1964!

Prince and
Moonlight Sundar ,
Madras, India

THE CHURCH AS A BRIDE

“As a Bridegroom rejoices over His bride, so your God rejoices over you” (Isa. 62:5).

Thus far we have seen the Church as a *Baby* and as a *Body*. Now we will turn another page in our spiritual family album and see the Church as a *Bride*.

One of our most favorite times to take pictures is at a wedding. Everyone loves a wedding! My wife and I have had four weddings as our two daughters and two sons have gotten married - and we took lots of pictures at each wedding. And if you come to visit us we will proudly show you the wedding albums - even if you don't ask to see them!

A wedding is a time of celebration, anticipation, rejoicing! Therefore, one of God's favorite pictures of the Church in His Biblical family album is that of a *Bride*. The spiritual *Baby* has grown up...her *Body* has matured...now she is ready to be a *Bride*.

The analogy of God's people as His Bride is both an Old Testament and New Testament photograph. Through the prophet Isaiah God said:

“As a Bridegroom rejoices over His bride, so your God rejoices over you” (Isa. 62:5).

There are at least 5 *Biblical principles* about the Church as a *Bride*. I want you to label under these wedding pictures that the church is a...

1. Beloved Bride
2. Bought Bride
3. Betrothed Bride
4. Beautiful Bride
5. Blameless Bride



A BELOVED BRIDE

Joe and Trish Glover, with Bishop Ezra Sargunam from India, who participated in their wedding and presented them with wedding leis.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God wrote this in His love letter to His Bride:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness” (Jer. 31:3).

The Song of Solomon is a beautiful, Hebrew poetic love song between a man and his wife. Though very graphic and erotic in language, it is no less a revelation from God than the rest of the Bible. *It elevates and sanctifies marital love to the highest and most holy place of ecstasy!* Listen to a few of their words of passionate love for each other:

“...Your love is better than wine...” (1:2).

“He has taken me to His banquet table and his banner over me is love” (2:4).

“I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me” (7:10).

In the same way that Solomon loved his Shulammitte bride, God also passionately loves His Bride the Church! With similar words, Paul describes the self-sacrificing love that Christ demonstrated for His bride: **“Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her...”** (Eph. 5:25).

For all of us who are husbands, we can see here how Jesus has set us a model of *sacrificial love* - rather than *selfish love*. We are to demonstrate *self-giving love* rather than *self-serving love*.

It is encouraging and assuring to note how often in *God’s love letter* - the Bible - the Church and the saints are spoken of as **“Beloved”** (Eph. 1:6; 5:1; Jude 1, etc.).

A BOUGHT BRIDE

Jesus came to earth to search out and save a Bride for Himself. In keeping with the Jewish customs of the day, Jesus paid the price for His Bride. This is still a practice in much of the Eastern world today. In parts of Africa where I travel and minister, the *“bride price”* is called *“labola.”* A man does not just go out and pick a wife. He has to *“redeem her”*...buy her...pay for her. Peter reminds us of the same thing:

“You were redeemed (“purchased...brought back”) **not with silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ...**” (I Pet. 1:18-19).

With similar words, Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that they are a purchased bride:

“...you are not your own, you have been bought with a price...” (I Cor. 6:19-20).

There is an important principle here. *Price determines value!* Since the price that you and I were bought with was the **blood of Christ**, then we are highly valued and esteemed by God. Because of our sinfulness and rebellion, we were totally unworthy to be purchased off the slave block of sin. We could not have merited the death of an angel - much less the Son of God! That's *grace!* God's totally unmerited favor. Since the Bride has been bought by Christ, She is to be exclusively His.

A BETROTHED BRIDE

God said to His bride:

“I will betroth you to Me forever; yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness” (Hosea 2:19-20).

In Jewish culture, the moment that the *“bride price”* was paid, the bride was considered **“betrothed.”** Their marriage customs were not exactly like ours in the West. We generally have a *courtship...an engagement...then a marriage.* But for the Jew, courtship took place after the marriage - rather than before. (We could take lessons from this!) There was first the *bride price...the betrothal...then the marriage.* In keeping with their custom, a young man would go to the bride's house and negotiate the *“bride price”* with her father. After the agreement had been reached, they would seal the covenant with a glass of wine, known as the *“betrothal cup.”* The groom would then go back to his father's house to prepare their home. When it was completed, he would return for her, and the marriage would then be physically consummated.*

However, from the time they both drank the *“betrothal cup,”* they were considered to be *“married.”* From that moment on, each was considered **“sanctified”** or **“set apart”** for the other.

It was during this period of *“sanctified separation”* that Mary became pregnant with Jesus by the intervention of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). That was why Joseph was going to **“...divorce her privately”** (Matt. 1:19).

The Church as the **“Bride of Christ”** is now living in that period of *“sanctified separation.”* Jesus has gone back to His Father's house, *heaven,* to prepare our

eternal dwelling. During this time of separation, we are therefore to be faithful to our Heavenly Bridegroom. Tragically, the Bride today, like the Old Testament Bride, is too often guilty of *spiritual adultery* with the world!

How often God's Old Testament Bride was guilty of *spiritual infidelity*!

Over and over again, He had to write in His love letter to them that they had gone “...**a whoring after other gods,**” and had “...**played the harlot.**” Their spiritual unfaithfulness broke His holy heart of love! How the church today so often breaks the heart of Christ because we too have “...**lost our first love**” (Rev. 2:4; c.f. Ex. 34:15-16; Num. 15:39; Deut. 31:16; Jug. 2:17; 8:27; I Chron. 5:25; II Chron 21:13; Ps. 73:27; 106:39; Ezek. 6:9; 16:28; 23:30; 43:9; Jer. 3:2,9; 13:27; Hosea 2:2; 4:12; 5:3-4; 9:1, etc.).

Paul had to exhort the Church at Corinth with similar words as he saw her being wooed by the world. Rather than living in the Spirit, she was being seduced by the spirit of the age.

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I *betrothed* you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches *another Jesus* than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a *different spirit* from the one you received, or a *different gospel* from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough” (II Cor. 11:2-4).

How often those same words of exhortation to spiritual faithfulness could be directed to the American Church! She is constantly being seduced by *spiritual counterfeits*! So much of American Christianity has “fallen in love” with “**another Jesus**” other than the historical Jesus of the Bible. They have followed a “**different spirit**” from the Holy Spirit. In short, they have believed a “**different gospel**” from the one recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Through humanism...secularism...materialism...liberalism...denominationalism - they have been drawn away from a “**sincere and pure devotion to Christ!**” The church can never be truly *happy* or *holy* until she returns with her whole heart to her betrothed Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ!

A BEAUTIFUL BRIDE

Because of the imputed and imparted righteousness of grace, God's Bride is no longer seen as sinful and ugly. Now she has the “**beauty of holiness**” imputed to her. (I Chron. 16:29; II Chron. 20:21; Ps. 29:2; 96:9) Through grace, God has “**exchanged beauty for ashes**” (Isa. 61:3). Listen to these words through the prophet Ezekiel:

“I bathed you with water...I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewelry; I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. *You became very beautiful* and rose to be a queen. And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, the splendor I had given you made your *beauty perfect*, declares the Sovereign Lord” (Ezek. 16:9-14).

Tragically though, she prostituted her beauty! She was seduced away from God by the world. As a result, Israel often played the harlot. And yet, God still loved her and portrayed her as beautiful. Listen to how her beauty is extolled in Song of Solomon:

- **“How *beautiful* you are my beloved...”**
- **“You are altogether *beautiful*, my darling...”**
- **“You are most *beautiful* among women” (4:7; 7:1).**

In his Revelation, John saw this same beauty of the glorified Bride:

“The wedding of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear...The bride has made herself ready...*the bride adorned for her husband...the bride, the wife of the Lamb...*” (Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2,9).

A BLAMELESS BRIDE

In spite of the shame and disgrace of our unfaithfulness to God, grace ultimately triumphs! Both the *beauty* and *blamelessness* of the Heavenly Bridegroom are imputed to the earthly Bride! Listen to these words of love describing how God’s grace redeems and transforms us:

“You are altogether *beautiful* my darling, and there is *no blemish* in you” (Song 4:7).

“Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, to present her to Himself as a radiant Church, *without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (Eph. 5:26).

Here we see the on-going **“washing of sanctification”** as opposed to the once-for-all **“washing of justification.”** *Justification* is the **“washing by the *blood*,”** while *sanctification* is the **“...washing of the *water through the word.*”**

So remember! Before Christ finishes with you and me, we will be *perfect*...we will be *blameless*...we will be *holy*!

CONCLUSIONS

As the **“Bride of Christ”** you and I are now *betrothed*, but we are not yet *married*. We are still living in that period of *“sanctified separation”* that began when Jesus ascended, and will continue until He returns at His second coming. Until Christ does return, we are to be a *faithful bride* - busily *waiting* and *working* for our soon-coming Bridegroom. We are to be busy preparing our wedding garments, which John tells us are the **“...righteous acts of the saints”** (Rev. 19:8). Therefore, as we wait, we are not to be *seduced by the world*. We are to be a *faithful* and *chaste bride*!

The Williams’ Weddings

Jonathan, J.L.'s younger son and Julie on their wedding day.

Joseph, J.L.'s eldest son and Susannah on their wedding day.



Joe and Trish Glover
Trish is J.L. and Patt's oldest daughter.

Mark and April Atkins
April is J.L. and Patt's youngest daughter.



Joseph and Susannah Morris
Williams
Joseph is J.L. and Patt's oldest son.

Jonathan and Julie Hambright Williams
Jonathan is J.L. and Patt's youngest son.

To help us be faithful, Christ has given us His *Holy Spirit*. We have been **"...sealed by the Holy Spirit. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership**



on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come" (II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14; Rev. 7:2). The Greek word here for "**sealed**" is *arrabon*. The KJV version translates it as "**earnest of the Spirit.**" The NASV renders this word "pledge," while the TEV translates it "**stamp of ownership.**" In modern Greek, they use a very similar word, *arrabona*, for an engagement ring. So we can say that the *Holy Spirit is God's engagement ring* that seals us for the coming great "**Marriage Supper of the Lamb**" (Rev. 19:7)! Just like a physical engagement ring reminds the couple that each is pledged to the other in love; the Holy Spirit does the same for the Christian. God does not give us a physical ring to wear on our finger. He does something more wonderful. He puts a ring of love around our hearts to remind us that we are set apart and sealed by the Holy Spirit as the Bride of Christ! He therefore keeps us faithful and chaste to the Lord Jesus until He returns to take His Bride home for the great Eternal Wedding Banquet!

The Holy Spirit then is "*God's engagement Ring!*" The Spirit of God is given to remind us that we are " **betrothed**" and that "**the marriage of the Lamb**" is coming! He has been given to keep us faithful so we will not commit *spiritual adultery* with the gods and goddesses of this present age. That is why we are not to "**...grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption**" (Eph. 4:30).

Therefore, as the **Bride of Christ**, we are **Beloved by Christ**; we have been **Bought** with His blood; we are now **Betrothed** to Him in love; we are **Beautiful** in His sight. Let us therefore be **Blameless** through His sanctifying Holy Spirit for the coming Day of Redemption - the "**Marriage Supper of the Lamb**" (Rev. 19:7-8)!

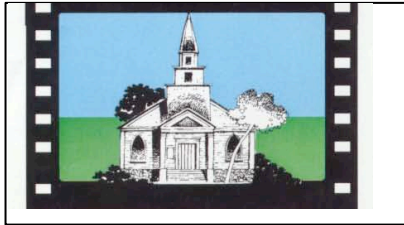


J.L. and Patt had the joy of participating in the wedding of Tila Singh Thapa and Sumitra Sapkota. Tila supervises our church building projects in Nepal through our Unreached People Project. There were nearly 2,000 people at the wedding and many were Hindus and Buddhists who were seeing and experiencing their first Christian wedding. So this wedding was also a great evangelistic event!

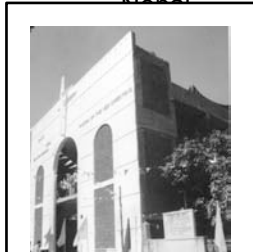




Thatched Roof Church in Rural Nepal



Mud and tin church in the bush of Zimbabwe.



The Ernavoor Church, Madras, India.



Zinnjikalai Church, India

Stone and mud church in Nepal.

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, *God’s building*” (1 Cor. 3:9).

Perhaps the most familiar picture of the Church in people’s mind today is that of the Church as a *building*. This is especially true in America and Europe where there has been a long history of erecting magnificent church buildings. As a result, we have developed an “*edifice complex*” - a preoccupation with buildings. Therefore, when most people think of “*the Church*,” they usually think of a particular *building* - usually their home church where they attend.

The Bible does say: “**You are...God’s *building*...**” (1 Cor. 3:9). However, we must be very careful when it comes to our thinking of the church as a *building*. The Bible does not say that a *building is God’s Church!* God’s Church may meet in a building - but it may not. Many places in the world - especially in the underdeveloped countries - the

Christians have no “church buildings” to meet in. They meet out in the open...under trees...under brush arbors...in homes...in rented buildings...in school buildings...“underground” -- wherever they can. One of my dear pastor friends in Africa is Simon Mkolo. At this writing he has planted over 300 churches - and many other preaching points. However, he did not have a single “church building” until NDI began helping him build some. And yet, without buildings, he has over 10,000 people organized and meeting regularly as churches! Therefore, *church buildings may be helpful tools for the true church - but they are not necessary for the church to spiritually grow*

per. ding e of centuries of church history, the Christians built no “d and no out the times. What build did u their ov were rented halls (See 20:



Remember therefore: *A building is not a necessary prerequisite for the existence of a Church!* That’s why in the Book of Acts, we read of the “**Church gathered**” and the “**Church scattered**” (Acts 8:4).

As you read through the book of Acts, you find the church meeting, worshipping and fellowshiping in different places. First in the “*Upper Room*” (Acts 1:13), then in the *Temple* (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42); at other times in *homes* (Acts 12:12); sometimes in *rented halls* (Acts 19:9); on *river banks* (Acts 16:13) - even in *jail* (Acts 16:25)! So when the Body gathered, they did so in different and diverse *times* and *places*. The important thing was *why* they were meeting - not *where* they were meeting. Most importantly though was, the fact of *who* was meeting with them! They knew that when they gathered in His Name, He was in their midst. He had promised: “**Whenever two or three of you are gathered together in My Name, there I will be in the midst of you**” (Matt. 18: 20). So whenever they gathered to “**worship Him in Spirit and truth,**” (Jn. 4:24), He was always in their midst - with or without a church building!

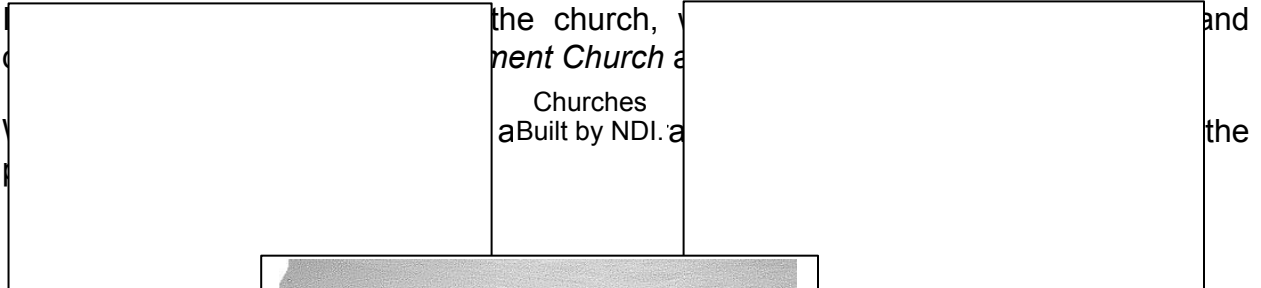
Again we need to remember that *the church is the family of God*. A house does not make a family. A home is not necessary in order for a family to exist as a social unit. However, some kind of a dwelling is a helpful residence and shelter for a family. It may be a tent...a cave...a mud hut...a tree house or a penthouse - but mankind has almost always built some kind of dwelling for his family. That’s why the word “homeless” is so poignant and descriptive for those who are destitute and live on the street!

Understandably then, both the physical family and *spiritual family* usually build some kind of a building to gather in and settle into. It becomes the fixed point of their going and coming. It may be simple or elaborate, permanent or portable - but it is “*home*” to

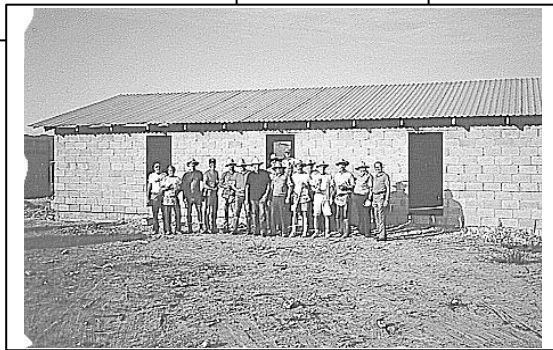
those who reside there! Every place else is “away from home!” That is why Paul described his true home as in heaven - not on earth (Phil 1:21 and II Cor. 5:8).

Physical Family
Spiritual Family

Home (tent, hut, palace, etc.)
House (home, church, brush arbor, etc.)



Manou Church
 Irian Jaya



Nazon Church, Haiti.

Church in
 Chihuahua City,
 Mexico

THE C

During
 places



people to build two different
 as the *Temple*.

TABERNACLE

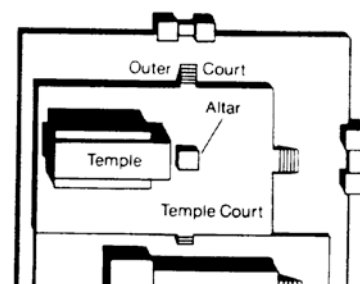
The first physical dwelling that God instructed His people to build was the “*tabernacle*.” He instructed Moses:

“Have them make a *sanctuary* for Me, and I will dwell among them. Make this *tabernacle* and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” (Ex. 25:8-9).

It had to be exact in every detail because this *earthly tabernacle* was to be a reflection of the *heavenly tabernacle*. As the writer of Hebrews said: **“It was a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven”** (8:5).

He therefore called this *tabernacle* the **“Tent of Meeting”** (Ex. 27:21; 40:2). It was a physical place where the people could go and meet with God and **“inquire of the Lord”** through Moses (Ex. 33:7). God said: **“I will dwell among them...and be their God”** (Ex. 29:44-46). But God had Moses design the Tabernacle in such a way that it was *portable*. Everything could be moved to a new location (Num. 4:24-25; 10:17;21). This was to remind the people that the true and living God is not a static, stationary God. He is a God who is “on the move!” He is a God who can always *move with His people* and be where they are - always out in front *leading* and *guiding* them!

John said of Jesus: **“The Word became flesh and dwelt (*tabernacled*) among us, and we beheld His glory...”** (Jn. 1:14). So God, in the Person of Jesus, is the God who **“tabernacles among us.”** He cannot be imprisoned in *one location...in one building...in one place!* He is a God who leads and moves with His people. Tragically, however, the children of Israel did not move with God - but rather moved away from Him. They moved back toward *Egypt* rather than toward the *Promised Land*. As a result, Stephen rightly referred to them as the **“Church of Wilderness”** (Acts 7:38)! Unfortunately, it is still one of the largest denominations in Christendom today! And, we now have many seminaries that specialize in training and equipping men to *pastor wilderness churches!* They feed their people each week on the **manna** of *liberalism, humanism, formalism* and *dead orthodoxy* - rather than off the **“milk and honey”** of Promised Land living revealed in the Word of God by the Spirit of God!



TEMPLE

Later however, God did allow His people to build a permanent *Temple* in one place - Jerusalem, the City of His choosing (Ex. 15:13, 17; Ps. 44:2; 132:13-14; 135:4, etc.). The preparations for it were made by David, while his son, Solomon actually built it.

Just like the tabernacle, everything was prescribed in detail. In reality, the Temple was a *permanent Tabernacle*. It was very much like the Tabernacle in furnishings - with the major difference being its *non-portability*. However, when Solomon finished building it and dedicated it, he said:

“Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built” (I Kings 8:27).

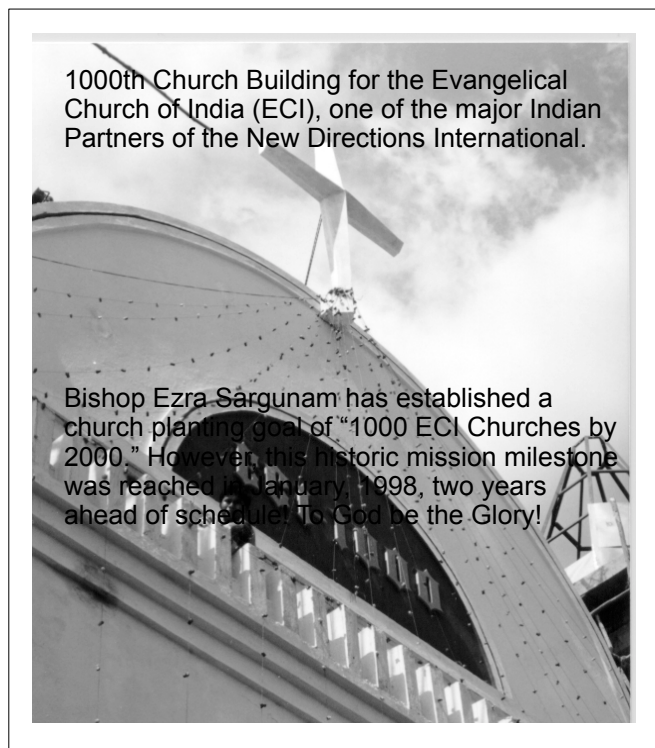
Solomon rightly proclaimed:

“...*heaven is your dwelling place...*” (I Kings 8:30).

In the New Testament, Stephen preached the same truth:

“...David, who enjoyed God's favor...asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for Him. However, *the Most High does not live in houses made by men*. As the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? Or, where will My resting place be? Has not My hands made all these things?’” (Acts 7:45-50; 17:24).

So if God does not dwell in tents...temples...buildings...shrines - then where does He dwell? To answer that question, we must look at the New Testament Church...



THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

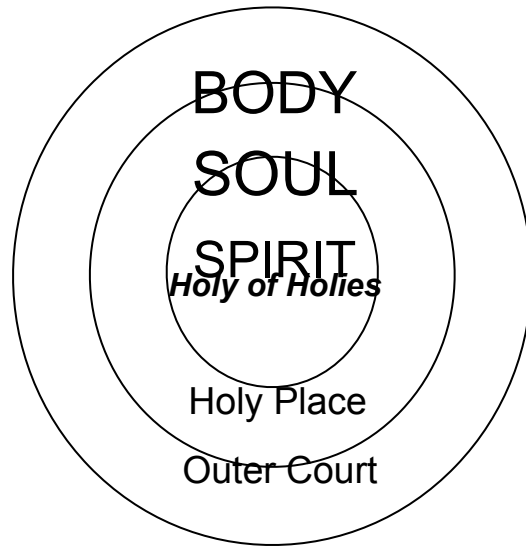
As we have already seen, **"God is Spirit"** (Jn 4:4). Since He is a Spirit, He must have a *spiritual temple* - not a physical temple to dwell in. That's why Paul said:

"Don't you know that *you yourselves are God's temple*, and that *God's Spirit lives in you*? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (I Cor. 3:16-17).

"Do you not know that *your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit*, who is in you...You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."
(I Cor. 6:19)

"...we are the *temple of the living God*" (II Cor. 6:16).

So God does not dwell in a *physical temple* or *Church building*. His *Holy Spirit* dwells in the *human spirit* of His people - which resides in a physical organism called the *body*. Therefore, your own person-hood is a parable of the Old Testament Temple. Just like the physical Temple was composed of three interconnected parts, your own nature is likewise composed of three interrelated parts.



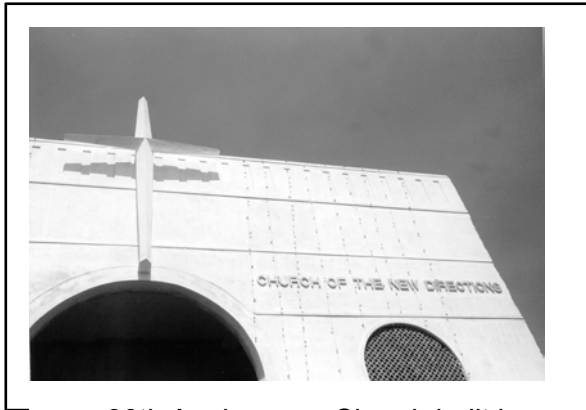
That's why Jesus said of His own Body:

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days...the temple He had spoken of was *His body*.” (Jn. 2:19-21)

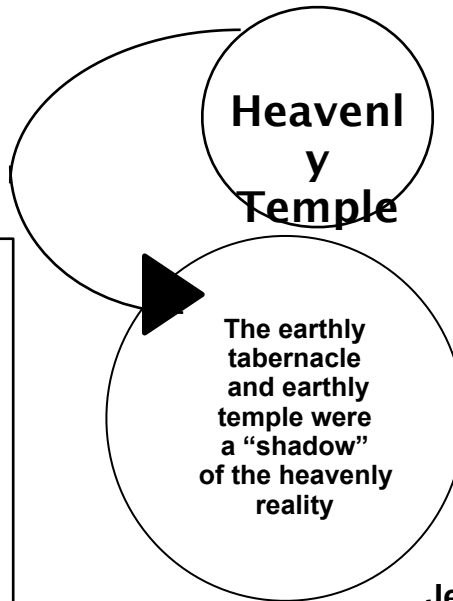
When they did destroy His Body through crucifixion on the cross, the “...**veil of the Temple was split in two from top to bottom**” (Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38). Hebrews reminds us that the “**new and living way**” into God's presence was then “...**opened for us through the curtain, that is, *His body*...**” (Heb. 10:19-20). Therefore, *Jesus is God's temple!*

When John had his vision of the “**heavenly Jerusalem,**” he said: “**I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the *Lamb are its Temple***” (Rev. 21:22).

**A
MIRROR
REFLECTIO
N**



30th Anniversary Church built by New Directions International through the Evangelical Church of India. (ECI)



Jesus' Body



Christian's Body

Now we no
us as His



...go into a Temple to find God. He dwells in
T. **"You are...God's household...built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the**



Remember: In any building, *the cornerstone is the most important stone!* It is the stone that every other stone is fitted to and measured by. If the cornerstone is not right, the rest of the building will be wrong. So the cornerstone must be chosen very carefully. The Bible says that Jesus is that One, perfect, Cornerstone! He is the...

"...living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him..." (1 Peter. 2:4).



God said:

"I lay in Zion a *choice corner stone*, a precious *corner stone*, and the one who trusts in Him will never be disappointed. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone...A stone that caused men to stumble and a Rock that makes them fall'" (I Pet. 2:6-8; c.f. Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11).

God then, is the Builder of this spiritual temple. He said: **"I lay in Zion a Choice corner stone..."** That's why Hebrews says:

"Every house is built by someone, but *the builder of all things is God...Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house...Christ was faithful as a Son over God's house. And we are His house...*" (Heb. 3:4-6).

As God's House, we are not a temple built out of physical stones like the Old Testament Temple. As Peter said:

"You...are *living stones* being built into a *spiritual house* for a holy priesthood through Christ Jesus" (I Pet. 2:5)



Nepali women carrying stone for the building of their new church building. They are the "living stones" carrying the physical stones!



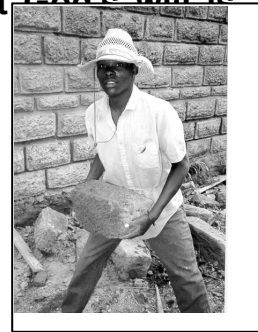
Paul expressed the same truth this way:

"...the whole building is being fitted together, and is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22).

So God is the *Builder*...Jesus is the living Chief *Cornerstone*...the Apostles and Prophets were the first to be joined to Him - and you and I are "**living stones**" that God is building into a *spiritual temple*!

Now do you understand more fully what Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 12:1-2?

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Then



Builders on the Kibera Church Nairobi, Kenya, Africa built in partnership with NDI.

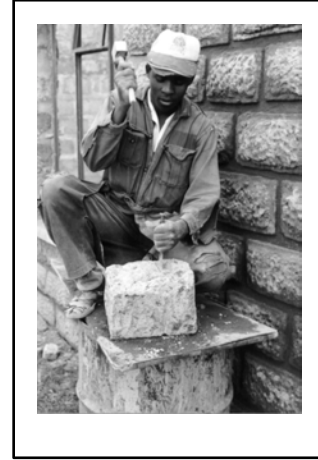
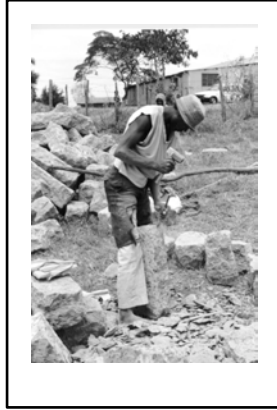
God gave His best to join you to Christ and build you into a spiritual temple. But the searching question must be asked: *“What are you building out of?”* Listen to these words by the Apostle Paul:

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using silver, gold, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Cor. 3:10-15)

In this passage Paul talks about six types of building material. The first three are worthy to build with. The next three are basically worthless to build with. One is temporal, the

| | | | |
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| <p>WORTHY BUILDING MATERIALS</p> | <p>and our live iod’s judgn</p> | <p>WORTHLESS BUILDING MATERIALS</p> | <p>al, the ding in als we</p> |
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- | | |
|--------------------|----------|
| ...Gold | ...Wood |
| ...Silver | ...Hay |
| ...Precious Stones | ...Straw |



Builders cutting and shaping the stones for the Church.

Without being dogmatic, we might summarize the eternal building materials as follows:

GOLD

Represents our *relationship* to God through Jesus Christ. (Ex. 25)

SILVER

Represents our *fellowship* with Christ through Spirit & Word
(Ps. 12:6; Num. 10:1-10)

PRECIOUS STONES

Represents others we win to Christ and disciple.

In conclusion then, you are the real church! Your body is the temple of the living God. If you are a believer, you have been joined to Christ, Who is the Cornerstone. Now I challenge you to be gold, silver, and precious stones.



The newly completed Kibera AIC Church, Nairobi, Kenya
built by NDI partners



Rev. Clarence and
Edith Williams,
pictured in Madras,
India, in 1939.

One of the first churches in India built by NDI. This church was built in memory of J.L.'s parents, Rev. Clarence and Edith Williams, who were short-term missionaries in India before J.L. was born. There is also a school and "Happy Home" orphanage associated with this church.

"O Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."



INTRODUCTION:

A “*brood*” is the “*offspring of animals.*” It usually refers to “*animals of the same kind.*” Therefore, we speak of: “Brood hens”, “Brood Mares,” etc. Most often the word *brood* refers to birds or fowl.

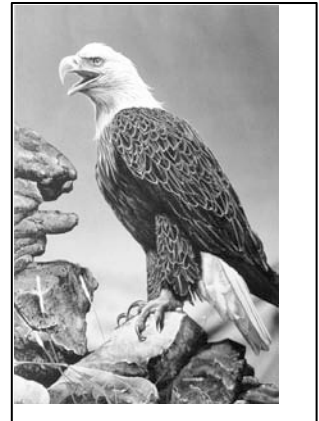
However, it can also refer to the *children in a family.* In its verb form it means “*to hover over; to hang low over; to protect with wings.*” The picture or metaphor of God as a Bird is a familiar one in the Bible – especially in the Old Testament.

GOD AS AN EAGLE

In both the Old and New Testament we see God referring to Himself as an Eagle. Quite fittingly, the eagle is often referred to as the “*Lord of birds.*” As a *carrion*, the eagle is a flesh-eating bird of prey. It is also known for its sharp vision, powerful wings, and high flying ability. Many of these same attributes of the eagle are found in God's discourse with Job:

“Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high? He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold. From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar. His young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there is he” (Job 39:27-30).

As we read the many Bible verses about God as an Eagle, we can see several attributes...



1. **PROVISION**
2. **PROTECTION**
3. **PUNISHMENT**

THE PROVISION OF GOD:

In the Bible there are many parables and pictures of God's gracious provision for His people. Few are more graphic and personal than that of an eagle's provision for its young. For pastoral people like the children of Israel, it was a very familiar metaphor from the world of nature they were so familiar with. Listen to these words from Moses - who no doubt had often watched the behavior of eagles as he tended his flocks in the wilderness. He describes God's care of His people like a protective eagle:

"He shielded him and carried him; He guarded him like an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions" (Deut. 32:11).

As you read this verse, note carefully how the eagle makes provision for every need of his young! **"...stirs up its nest...hovers over its young... spreads its wings to catch them...carries them on its pinions."** What total provision! With the mother eagle's strong wings under the young eagle, they could fly high and securely. In the same way Isaiah says that those who **"...wait (hope) in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles..."** (Isa. 40:30).

THE PROTECTION OF GOD:

Through the analogy of an eagle God reminded the children of Israel how He had delivered them from Egypt:

"I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself" (Ex. 19:4; c.f. Rev. 12:14).

In the Psalms, David often spoke of **"...dwelling under the shadow and shelter of God's wings"** (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7). David further assures us: **"He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge"** (Ps. 91:4).

Boaz said to Ruth **"May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly regarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge"** (Ruth 2:12). It was prophesied that the Messiah would come and be the **"sun of righteousness,"** who would **"...rise with healing in His wings"** (Mal. 4:2). However, when Jesus came as the Messiah to the Jews, they largely rejected Him. Therefore, Jesus used this same imagery of a bird when he cried out to unrepentant Israel:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a *hen gathers her chicks under her wings*, but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37; Lk. 13:24)



THE *PUNISHMENT* OF GOD:

When God’s people are stubborn, resistant, and unrepentant, God had to discipline them - sometimes with severity! Even though God is patient and long-suffering, He said that His judgment and punishment would surely come against His disobedient people. That punishment would be sudden and swift - like an eagle swooping down upon its prey!

“The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away... like an *eagle swooping down*” (Deut. 28:49).

“An *eagle* is over the house of the Lord because the people have broken My covenant and have rebelled against My law” (Hosea 8:1).

So God warned rebellious, covenant-breaking Israel that judgment was surely coming upon them. When it did come, it would be like an eagle’s attack upon its unsuspecting prey. God would arouse enemy nations against Israel who would attack them like “...*eagles swooping down on their prey*” (Jer. 4:13; Lam. 4:19; Job 9:26).

SUMMARY

Now we can certainly understand why the writer of Proverbs marveled at “...**the way of an eagle in the air**” (Prov. 30:18-19)!

From all these Bible verses we can see that this stately winged creature - this “**lord of birds,**” gives us a beautiful picture of our mighty God! We see the mother and father eagle’s careful **provision** for their brood; their strong **protection** of their young; and when necessary, their severe **punishment** of disobedience! It is only through obedience that we can dwell safely and securely “**under His wings!**” When we disobey or become too comfortable and content in our safe and secure *religious roosts* - God has to “...**stir up the nest!**” Too often young Christians are little baby eaglets that want to forever stay in the safety and security of their nest. In that place their every need is met - food, warmth, protection. Mother and father eagle do everything for them - build and repair the nest...search for the food...tear it into little easily digestible pieces...stick it in their mouths...groom their downy feathers...clean their nest...cover them from the rain...protect them from the cold. What a life! Predictable...comfortable...easy...secure. Why learn to fly? Why learn to hunt? Why strengthen your wings? Why sharpen your talons? Let mom and dad eagle do it all! Enjoy the “good life” in the nest!

Sound familiar? It is an inclination that both children and young eagles have in common. But they are not the only ones who suffer from this *dis-ease*. Both *baby Christians* and *carnal Christians* are inclined toward “*nest Christianity.*” But whereas the baby Christian clings to the spiritual nest through *immaturity* and *insecurity*, the carnal Christian clings to the nest through *disobedience* and *dispassion*. Then out of love and “severe mercy,” as C. S. Lewis called it, God has to “...**stir up our nest!**” He has to bring things into our lives that unsettle us...make us uncomfortable...prods and provokes out of the nest - out of our *spiritual comfort zones!* Often, like in the Book of Acts, God has to use *persecution* to provoke us to obedience and righteousness. The early Christians would still be in their “holy huddles” in Jerusalem - disobeying their Lord’s Great Commission, if it was not for persecution. Listen to these words from historian Luke: as he describes the persecution that broke out against the early church after the stoning of Stephen.

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”...“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:1,4).

GOD AS A SHEPHERD

Another aspect of this metaphor of the Church as a “**brood**,” is the very familiar picture of the **Shepherd** and his **sheep**. This is perhaps the most familiar and best loved of the Biblical pictures of the relationship between God and His people. This beautiful picture is found throughout the entire Bible - literally from Genesis to Revelation! In the Bible, God is often portrayed as the **Shepherd**, the individual Christian as a **sheep**, and appropriately, the church is collectively seen as the **flock**.

GOD **SHEPHERD**
CHRISTIAN **SHEEP**
CHURCH **FLOCK**

In this study of the Church we will focus on the relationship between the **Shepherd and His sheep**. We will do so under the following outline:

THE *PASSION* OF THE SHEPHERD;
THE *POSSESSION* OF THE SHEPHERD;
THE *PASTURING* OF THE SHEPHERD;
THE *PROTECTION* OF THE SHEPHERD;
THE *PROVISION* OF THE SHEPHERD;
THE *PROSPERITY* OF THE SHEPHERD.



Shepherd and sheep in Israel.



Samburu Shepherd boy in Kenya, Africa.

THE *PASSION* OF THE SHEPHERD:

The *passion* of the Good Shepherd is seen in His *love for the lost sheep*. The Bible clearly refers to all of us as *straying* and *lost sheep*:

- “I have *strayed* like a *lost sheep*...” (Ps. 119:176);
- “My people have been *lost sheep*; their shepherds have led them *astray*” (Jer. 50:6);
- “We all, like sheep, have *gone astray*, each of us has turned to his *own way*” (Isa. 53:6; c.f. I Pet.2:25);

The passion of the Good Shepherd is also seen in His love and compassion for all of His sheep - especially the spiritual, emotional and physically needy ones.

“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were *harassed* and *helpless*, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36).

The Good Shepherd also had a passion for the *separated sheep* that were not yet in His fold:

“I have *other sheep* that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also...and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (Jn. 10:16)

Supremely, the shepherd demonstrates His love for His sheep by *dying for them*.

- “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd *lays down His life for the sheep*” (Jn. 10:14-15);
- “Keep watch over...all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God, *which He bought with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28)

Jesus’ death dramatically demonstrated the truth of His own words: “**Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for His friends**” (Jn. 15:13).



THE *POSSESSION* OF THE SHEPHERD:

The Bible makes it clear that the Lord is both the “**Creator**” and the “**Possessor of heaven and earth**” (Gen. 14:19; Ps. 2:8). As a result of His sovereign creation, David could assert:

“The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1).

But whereas God sovereignly possesses and controls the entire world, He has a very particular and personal possession of His own people. He refers to Israel as “**My flock**” (Jer. 23:2). He calls them “**His inheritance**” (Ps. 28:9; Mic. 7:14), “**His possession**” (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; Ps. 135:4; Eph. 1:14). The Psalmist understood this and wrote: “**...we are His people, the sheep of His pasture**” (Ps. 100:3; c.f. 74:1; II Sam. 24:17);

So God has “**bought His people with His own blood**” (Acts 20:28; I Pet 1:19-19) in order that they would be “**His possession...His flock.**”

THE PASTURING OF THE SHEPHERD:

Through the Prophet Ezekiel, God said:

“I will rescue My flock...I myself will search for My Sheep...I will *pasture them*...I will tend them in a *good pasture*, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in *good grazing land*, and there they will feed in a *rich pasture* on the mountains of Israel. I Myself will tend My sheep...” (Ezek. 34:11-14).



A Shepherd in Bethlehem, Israel.

In the Great Shepherd's Psalm, David affirms: “**...He makes me lie down in *green pastures*...**” (Ps. 23:2). In other Psalms David echoes this same theme:

- “**Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy *safe pasture***” (Ps. 37:3);
- “**...we are the people of *His Pasture*, the flock under His care**” (Ps. 95:7);
- “**We are His people, the sheep of *His pasture***” (Ps. 100:3).

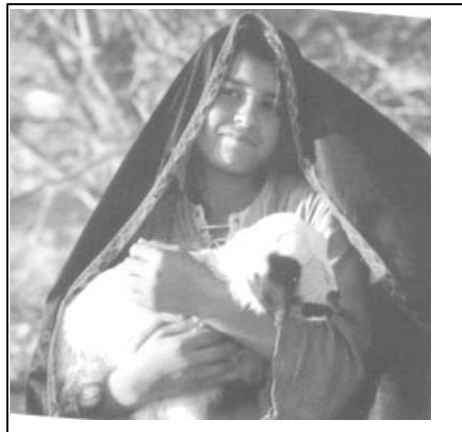
The prophet Jeremiah refers to God as the **“true pasture”** of Israel (Jer. 50:7). As the **“Good Shepherd,”** and **“Chief Shepherd,”** Jesus promised the same to all who followed Him:

“I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find *pasture*” (Jn. 10:9).

Therefore only as the **sheep of God** closely follow their **Good Shepherd** will they find the **“good pastures”** that will feed and nourish them unto eternal life! Our **Good Shepherd** has not only promised us **green pastures** in this life - He has also promised us His Kingdom:

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to *give you the Kingdom*” (Lk. 12:32).

Because the Good Shepherd will **“save His people”** and **“carry them forever”** (Ps. 28:9); one day all of His sheep will **“dwell in the house of the Lord forever”** (Ps. 23:6)!



Young shepherd boy with sheep.

THE *PROTECTION* OF THE SHEPHERD:

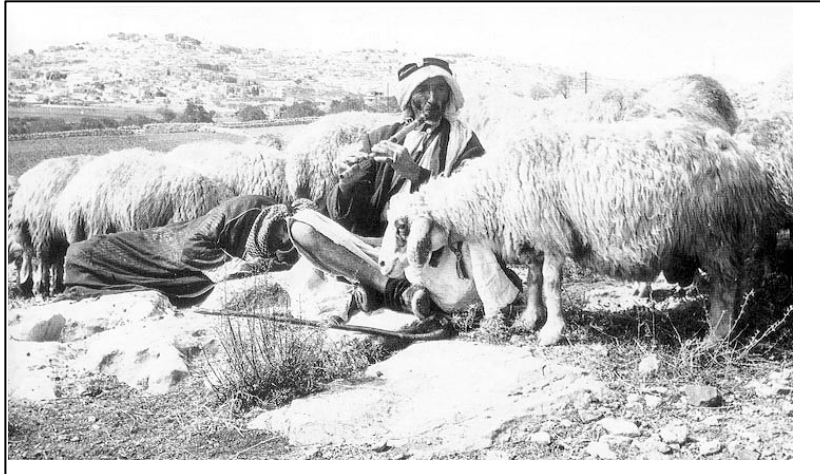
A good shepherd always carried a **“rod and staff.”** They were primarily for the protection of the sheep. The shepherd would use them to ward off the wild animals that would constantly be looking for an opportunity to attack and kill the sheep. That is why the metaphor of **“sheep among wolves”** is a common one in Scripture (Matt. 10:16; Acts 20:29, etc.).

The shepherd David, understood this and sang out:

“I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your *rod* and Your *staff*, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4);

In the same way, the Prophet Micah prayed: **“Shepherd your people with your staff...”** (Mic. 7:14).

Through the prophet Zechariah God said: **“I took two staves, one ‘Favor’ and the other one ‘Union,’ and I pastured the flock”** (Zech. 11:7). [Note: The word **“Favor”** literally means **“beauty, grace, pleasantness;”** and the word **“Union”** means **“bands, ties.”** These two words are beautiful expressions of the love and grace that God has bestowed on His people! He has bound them to Himself in grace.]



Shepherd caring for his sheep.

THE PROVISION OF THE SHEPHERD:

The shepherd not only **protected** His sheep, he made **provision** for His sheep's every need. In meeting their needs, he would never *drive* His sheep - but always lovingly *lead* them.

Remember this important spiritual principle: **The Good Shepherd leads the sheep; Satan drives and divides the sheep!** As a reflection of God's sovereign protection of Israel, David said:

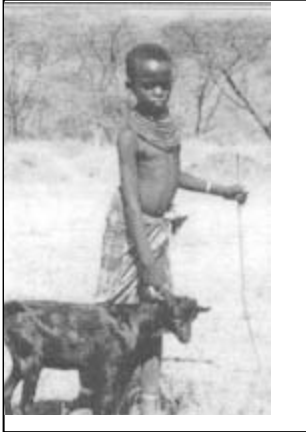
- **“You led your people like a flock”** (Ps. 77:20),
- **“He brought His people out like a flock; He led them like a sheep through the desert”** (Ps. 78:52);

Likewise, the psalmist Asaph sang: **“Hear us O Shepherd of Israel, you who led Joseph like a flock”** (Ps. 80:1).

Perhaps one of the most beautiful and tender pictures of the Good Shepherd's care for His sheep is found in Isa. 40:11:

“He tends His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to his heart; He *gently leads* those that have young.”

God demonstrated this tender love and care for His lost and hurting sheep when He said:



“...because *My flock lacks a shepherd*...I will rescue *My flock*...I Myself will search for *My sheep* and look after them...I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered...I will bring them out from the nations...I myself will tend *My sheep*...I will search for the lost and bring back the strays...I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak...I will shepherd the flock with justice...” (Ezek. 34:6-16).

Young Samburu shepherd boy.

As the prophets looked forward to the coming of Messiah, they would compare Him to King David who was the greatest human shepherd of the Nation of Israel. The Scriptures record:

“And David *shepherded them with integrity of heart, with skillful hands he led them*” (Ps. 78:72).

Note here how there is an inseparable relationship between the “**heart and hands.**” It is only when we have “**integrity of heart**” that God gives us “**skillful hands.**”

That's why God said:

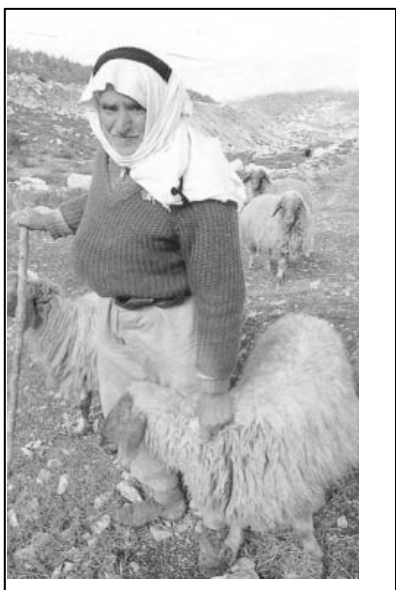
“I will place over them *one shepherd, My Servant David, and He will tend them; He will tend them and be their Shepherd*” (Ezek. 34:24).

Therefore, when Jesus came, He referred to Himself as the “**Good Shepherd**” (Jn. 10:11, 14). He said that as the true Shepherd of the sheep, “**He calls His own sheep by *name* and leads them out...His sheep follow Him because they know His voice**” (Jn. 10:3-4).

Note how *personal* and *intimate* the Good Shepherd is with His sheep! He “**calls**” and “**leads**” and they “**follow Him because they know His voice.**” What an intimacy of relationship!

Even though there may be some human confusion in this life as to the identity of the true flock of God, Jesus said that there would be a final and eternal separation of His sheep from Satan's goats. One would receive *eternal glorification*; and the other *eternal condemnation*:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory...He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd *separates the sheep from the goats*. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, *'Come, you are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world...Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life' (Matt. 25:31-46).*



Arab shepherd.



Shepherd in the hills of Hebron in Israel.

THE *PROSPERITY* OF THE SHEPHERD:

Psalm 95:7 says:

“The Lord our Maker...is our God and we are the people of His pasture, *the flock under His care.*”

David said that because

“The Lord is my shepherd, *I shall not want...*” (Ps. 23:1).

The prophets grieved over how God had punished and scattered Israel because of their disobedience. However, God assured them that through the prophets that He would one day bring them back to their Promised Land, and there He would prosper them.

Through Jeremiah the prophet, God further said:

“I have loved you with an *everlasting love*; I have drawn you with *loving-kindness*...I will build you up again...I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth...a great throng will return...I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father...He who scattered Israel will gather them and *watch over His flock like a shepherd*” (Jer. 31:3-10).

So *God is a God of prosperity* - He delights in prospering His sheep for His honor and glory! A healthy, prosperous, reproducing sheep makes the Shepherd look good – and confirms his effectiveness as a shepherd.

CONCLUSIONS

In the second part of this chapter, we have seen the **passion** of the Good Shepherd in **“laying down His life for His sheep.”** He died to purchase the sheep for His own **possession**. They are exclusively *His inheritance*.

After **purchasing** the sheep, the Good Shepherd then **pastures** His sheep and thereby makes provision for their every need.

But the Good Shepherd also has to **protect** His sheep from the **“thieves, robbers, and wolves”** who would destroy the sheep. He does this with His **rod** and **staff** - which comforts the sheep.

Under the wise and faithful shepherding of that **“Great Shepherd of the sheep,”** God's flock experiences **prosperity** for their souls.

As God's "under shepherds," let's model our ministries after the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ!

Because of Christ great Shepherd's heart of love and compassion for His sheep, one of His last commissions to Peter was: "**Feed my lambs...Take care of My sheep...Feed My sheep**" (Jn. 21:15-17).

Likewise the Holy Spirit instructed Peter to remind Church leaders:

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (I Pet. 5:2-4).



THE CHURCH AS A *BUSINESS*

**“So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘*Put this money to work,*’ he said, ‘until I come back’”
(Luke 19:13).**

There are many principles and truths in the Bible concerning the Church as a business. (Matt. 21:33-43; Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19).

However, the Church is not a business in the worldly sense - and should not be *in business!* The "business" of the Church is *evangelism* and *discipleship* (Matt. 28:19-20). Yet, there are many principles and parallels that the Lord drew between a business and His Church.

A successful business just does not happen accidentally. It must follow the “**laws of business**” that God has set down in His universe. We might call this the *Universal Law of Growth*. It is repeated several times in the New Testament:

- “...with the *measure you use*, it will be measured to you” (Matt. 7:2);
- “...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more. *Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him*” (Mk. 4:24-25);
- “For everyone who has will be *given more*, and he will have an *abundance*. *Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him*” (Matt. 25:29);
- “Whoever can be trusted with *very little* can also be trusted with *much*, and whoever is dishonest with *very little* will also be dishonest with *much*” (Lk. 16:10);

- **“I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away” (Lk. 19:26).**

We can succinctly summarize this principle of growth in both business and life into these 5 words: **"USE IT, OR LOSE IT!"**

In other words, *whatever we use is increased; whatever we do not use is decreased - and ultimately lost.*

Here then are a 10 key words concerning success in life – whether in business or in ministry:

- 1. PURCHASE**
- 2. POSSESSION**
- 3. PARTNERSHIP**
- 4. PREPARATION**
- 5. PLANTING**
- 6. PATIENCE**
- 7. PROFIT**
- 8. PROVISION**
- 9. PLUNDER**
- 10. PRESERVATION**

Since most of the Jews of Christ's day lived by agriculture, we would expect that most of Jesus' parables about business would relate to the business of farming. If a man is going to go into farming or any form of agricultural enterprise, there are certain things he must do in order to be successful.



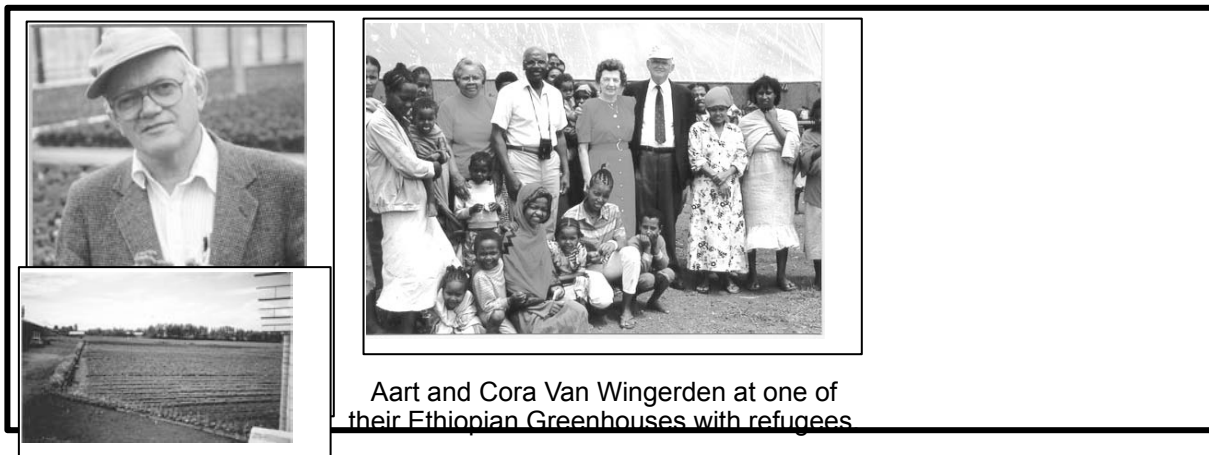
Dick Chapin, the “Father of Drip Irrigation, stands here in Ethiopia with a drip bucket that has been assembled for irrigation.



J.L. presenting a plaque to Dick Chapin at the annual New Directions International Thanksgiving Banquet.

PURCHASE:

Since you must have land in order to farm, the very first thing a farmer has to do is to *purchase or procure some land*. As I write this chapter, I am flying back from ministry in Ethiopia. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. In addition to preaching at crusades and conducting pastoral conferences, I was there to look for land to buy. I am on the Board of “*Double Harvest Ministry*,” started by my friend, Aart Van Wingerden - who is now with the Lord. As an agricultural ministry, we are seeking to buy a large track of land that will become the *Genesis Farm*. This farm will be a model for others to copy in Ethiopia - and will generate jobs and produce food. But we can’t do anything until we can *buy some land!* That’s always the very first step in farming. If you have no land, you cannot farm! Therefore, you must first buy a track of land. Likewise, the Bible tells us that God, through the death of Jesus Christ, “...bought the field” (Matt. 13:44).



- “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matt. 13:44).
- “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).
- “And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and top open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tri be and language and people and nation’” (Rev. 5:9).

As Peter reminds us:

“You were not *redeemed* (Note: the word means “to buy”) with perishable things like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (I Pet.1:18-19).

Likewise Paul wrote:

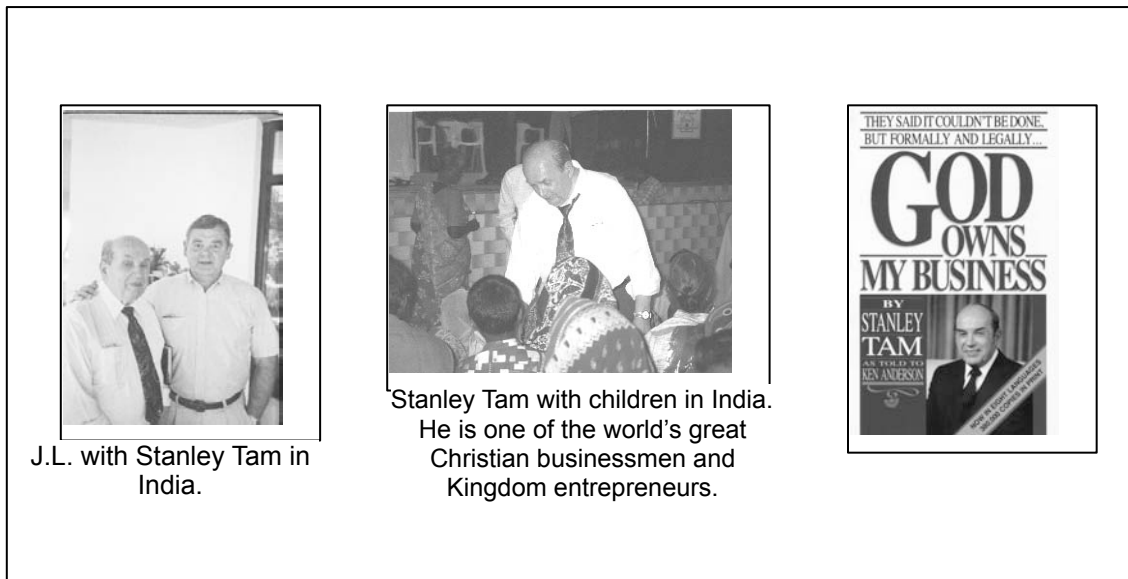
"You have been *bought* with a price..." (I Cor. 6:20; 7:23).

As a result of God's purchase, *we no longer belong to ourselves*. We belong to God. We are His...

POSSESSION:

In the Old Testament God spoke of Israel as **"...His vineyard"** (Isa. 5:1). In the New Testament, Jesus said:

"...the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in His field..." (Matt. 13:24).



J.L. with Stanley Tam in India.

Stanley Tam with children in India. He is one of the world's great Christian businessmen and Kingdom entrepreneurs.

Likewise Jesus said:

"There was a *landowner* who planted a vineyard..." (Matt. 21:33).

Jesus further likened the Kingdom of Heaven to

"...a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted His property to them..." (Matt. 25:14).

Using similar language, Paul wrote: **"...you are *God's field*"** (I Cor. 3:9b). Likewise he writes:

“You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God with your body” (I Cor. 6:19; c.f. Rom. 12:1-2).

Therefore,

“None of us lives to himself...or dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord: and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Rom. 14:7-8; c.f. Phil. 1:20).

Through these several verses, we can clearly see the words denoting God’s possession: **“His vineyard...His field...His property.”** God alone is the **“Landowner”** who is the **Possessor of heaven and earth!** And yet, even though *God possesses everything and we possess nothing*; God has graciously called us into...

PARTNERSHIP:

Jesus spoke of this divine-human partnership when He said:

“There was a landowner who planted a vineyard...Then he *rented the vineyard to some farmers* and went away on a journey...” (Matt. 21:33).

Luke's Gospel gives this account:

“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed King and then to return. So he called ten of *his servants* and gave them ten minas (Note: 1 mina = 3 month's wages). *Put this money to work,* he said, **“Do business with this until I come back” (Luke 19:12-13).**

After the resurrection, this partnership with Jesus continued through the Holy Spirit:

“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and *the Lord worked with them* and confirmed His word by signs that accompanied it” (Mk. 16:20).

Likewise, Paul said: **“...we are *God's fellow workers*...”** (I Cor. 3:9; II Cor. 6.1; c.f. I Thess. 3:2). But not only do we have a partnership with God – we also have a partnership with each other. That's why Paul wrote to thank the Philippian Christians for their **“...*partnership in the Gospel* from the first day until now...”** (Phil. 1:4; 4:15).

Therefore, every Christian worker must see himself in *partnership with God* and in *partnership with others* who are in the Body of Christ! And if we are wise co-partners with God, then we will make good...

PREPARATION:

Success in life, business or ministry requires careful, thoughtful, prayerful preparation. That's why the Bible says:



Plowing with oxen in Rural Nepal.

“Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts...”
(Jer. 4:3-4).



“Break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord” (Hosea 10:12).

Nepali Farmer carrying his yoke to the fields for plowing

In preparation for the coming of Jesus, John the Baptist preached: **“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”** (Lk. 3:8; c.f. Matt. 3:8).

The Apostle Paul preached to both the Jews and Gentiles: **“...repent and turn to God and prove your repentance by your deeds”** (Acts 26:20; c.f. Jer. 18:11; 35:15).

So the first and only spiritual preparations we can make are **repentance** and **restitution!** The next act of preparation is to **purify** the land. Jesus spoke about the purging and *purifying* of His disciples when He said to them: **“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you”** (Jn. 15:3).

Paul spoke of this same ministry of Christ to the Church when he said that:

“...Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, *cleansing her* by the washing with water through the word...” (Eph. 5:25).

After the land is **purified**, it must then be **protected**. Listen to these words from the prophet Isaiah about this divine protection of His vineyard - words which were quoted by Jesus in Matthew 21:33.

“I will sing for the One I love a song about his vineyard: ‘My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He *dug it up* and *cleared it of stones*...He *built a watchtower* in it and *cut out a winepress as well*’” (Isa. 5:1-2).

The country of Palestine is generally very rocky. I have personally watched farmers there do what I have seen farmers do in other countries where the land is covered with rocks - spend weeks clearing the stones! It literally takes a lifetime to create a good track of farmland where there are tons of stones! The stones are laboriously dug up...carried off...built into walls and watchtowers. Then every rainy season more stones surface - so the clearing process is not once-for-all - but yearly! That kind of *perpetual preparation* is marked by *perpetual perspiration*! But without it, there is no successful farming.

Then after the *preparation* stage has been completed, the land is then ready for...

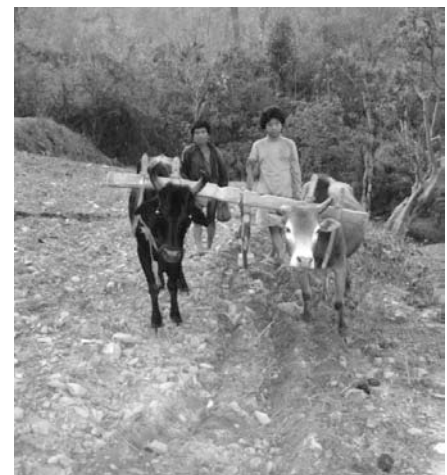
PLANTING:

Moses sang of this divine planting of the Nation of Israel when he said:

“In Your un failing love You will lead the people You have redeemed...You will bring them in and *plant them* on the mountain of Your inheritance - the place, O Lord, You made for Your dwelling...” (Ex. 15:13, 17; c.f. Ps. 44:2).

Speaking of the transplanting of Israel, the psalmist wrote:

“You brought a vine out of Egypt; You drove out the nations and *planted it*. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the lands” (Ps. 80:8-9).



Likewise, Isaiah said that God

“...had a vineyard on a fertile hillside...and planted it with the choicest vines...” (Isa. 5:1-2).

Using similar language, Jesus said: **“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in His field...”** (Matt.13:3; c.f. 13:3). God is therefore the wise farmer who only plants **“good seed”** in His field.

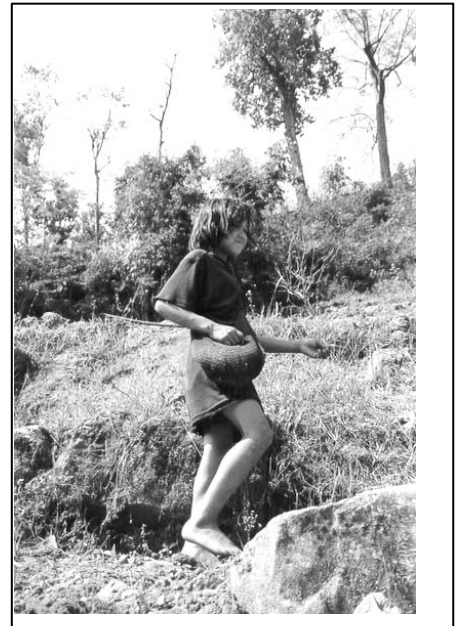
Further in His Kingdom Parables recorded in Matthew 13, Jesus said: **“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his fields”** (Matt. 13:31).

Then, after the planting of the crop, there must be...

PATIENCE:

No planting is immediately followed by a harvest! Therefore, every successful farmer must learn *patience*.

There is always a time lapse between the *planting* and *produce*. The farmer cannot rush the harvest. He must let nature take her course - and she has her own clock! The farmer must patiently wait for his harvest. There is an act of faith in the *mystery of germination and growth*.



Young girl scattering seeds in Nepal behind her father as he plows.

This principle of *germination* and life is given by Jesus, and is found in Mark 4:26-29:



“This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scattered seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. *All by itself the soil produces grain – first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.* As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Young boy planting seeds in Nepal.



Therefore, to bring either a crop of grain – or a crop of people, to

maturity and fruitfulness, requires great patience. The Bible refers to that virtue as **“patient endurance”** (II Cor. 1:6). God has promised fruitfulness (Jn. 15:16), but *fruit takes time to produce!*

Abraham had to first learn this as the **“father of faith.”** When God made His promise to Abraham...He swore by Himself, saying, **“I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”** And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was **“promised”** (Heb. 6:13)

So a necessary virtue for every *farmer, parent, or pastor* is **patience!** (See: Rom. 8:25; Eph. 4:2; I Thess. 5:14; Ja. 5:7; II Pet. 3:9; Rev. 1:9; 3:10; 14:12, etc).

If the farmer has made *proper preparation*, and done *wise planting*, followed by *patience*, then there will eventually be...

PROFIT:

We must never forget that God wants to bring *profit* and *prosperity* into your life and ministry! We can see this prosperity in many of the Old Testament patriarchs - beginning with Abraham. Because of the sovereign blessing of the Lord, **“Abraham had become very wealthy...”** (Gen. 13:2).



Likewise God prospered Isaac:

“Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a *hundredfold*, because the Lord blessed him. The *man became rich*, and *his wealth continued to grow* until he became very wealthy” (Gen. 26:12-13).

Women gathering their produce for market from the Double Harvest Farm in Ethiopia.

So God does want to prosper His people. However, we must beware of the false theology of the “Prosperity Theology” that wrongly teaches that God is always going to prosper us *financially!* He is first and foremost interested in bringing about *spiritual prosperity* in our lives - which is true wealth! The *riches of righteousness* are eternal; while the *riches of resources* are only temporal!

But God definitely does expect to reap profit from His investment in our lives. In one of His “Parable of the Tenants,” Jesus said **“When the *harvest time* approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to *collect his fruits*”** (Matt. 21:34). Listen again to these familiar words of Jesus:

“A man...called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money to another two talents, and to

another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on a journey.”

“The man who had received the five talents went at once and *put his money to work* and gained five more. So also the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and *hid his master's money*. After a long time the master of those servants returned and *settled accounts* with them.”

(Note: Luke's account says “...he sent for his servants to whom he had given the money in order to find out what they had *gained* with it”)

“The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’”

“His master replied, ‘*Well done, good and faithful servant!* You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’”

(The same accounting and reckoning was required of the servant who received the two talents);

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. So here is what belongs to you.’”

“His master replied, ‘*You wicked, lazy servant!*...You should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned *I would have received it back with interest.*’”

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For *everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.* And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:14-30; c.f. Lk. 19:11-26).

When there is no **fruit...increase...profit**, then we are in grave danger of losing what God has entrusted to us. When there is *no profit* we prove ourselves to be *poor stewards!*

“The Kingdom of God will be *taken away from you* and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matt. 21:43).

And we need to remember that one of the purposes of *profit* is our own...

PROVISION:

In the Old Testament, God set aside a special tribe - the Tribe of Levi - to serve him as priests. Unlike the other Tribes of Israel, the Levites were to receive no inheritance of land in the Promised Land that God was giving His chosen people. The people would receive their provision from the Land - while the priests would receive their provision from the Lord! God was going to be their **Provider...Portion** and **Provision**.

“The priests, who are Levites - indeed the whole tribe of Levi - are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. *They shall live on the offerings made to the Lord by fire*, for that is their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; *the Lord is their inheritance*, as He promised them” (Deut. 18.1-2).

Principle:

“If you do not know the Lord well enough to fully trust Him for your provision – then you do not yet know Him well enough to serve Him full time in the ministry!”

So the Bible clearly teaches that just as a *hard working farmer* receives some of the produce of his farm, the *hard working pastor* is likewise to receive some fruit from his labors.

When Jesus was sending out the seventy-two, he encouraged and comforted them with these words: **“...the worker deserves his wages”** (Matt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7).

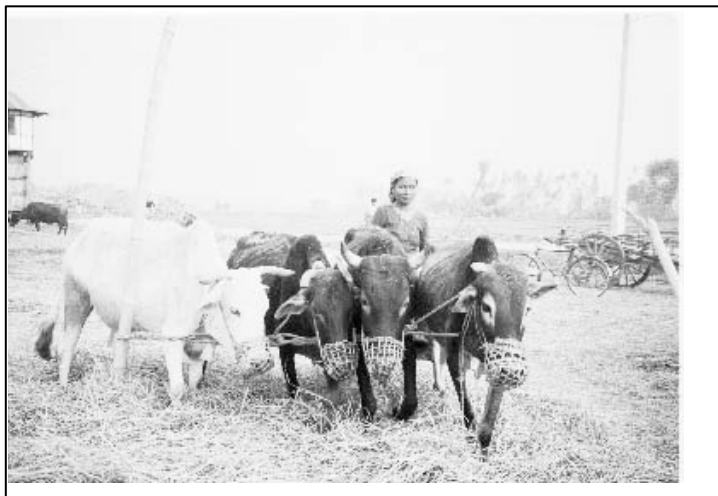
In one of His Kingdom Parables, Jesus spoke of workers receiving wages:

“For the Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day (which was a normal day’s wages) and sent them into his vineyards” (Matt. 20:1-2).

Even though the landowner hired other workers throughout the day - and ultimately paid them all the same wages - they still all were paid some wage for their work! *None were expected to work for nothing!* They all received some wage for their work.

Using similar words, the Apostle Paul wrote these words of instruction to Timothy, who was both his son in the faith, and a young pastor:

“The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share in the crops...The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’” (II Tim. 2:6; 5: 17-18; c.f. Deut. 24:14-15; 25:4; Lev. 19:13).



Muzzled Oxen threshing grain in Nepal

Paul gave these further words of instruction concerning *pastoral support* to the Church at Corinth:

“Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes...when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so *in the hope of sharing in the harvest*. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you. If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, *the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel*” (I Cor. 9:7-14; Lev. 6:16, 26).

To the Church at Galatia, Paul wrote:

“Anyone who receives instruction in the word must *share all good things with his instructor*” (Gal. 6:6).

And the Bible assures us that one day God will fully *repay* and *reward* all service rendered for Him. A Christian worker may not be fairly or fully paid in this life - but in heaven God will fully repay Him a thousand fold - and do so for all eternity! In heaven we will hear Him say:

“*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness!*” (Matt. 25:21-23; Lk. 19:17-19).

It is in God's Kingdom that we have **“...an *inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you*” (I Pet. 1:4-5).**

But as Christian workers, we must never work for profit, or pillage the tithes and offerings of God's people! We must never be guilty of...

PLUNDER:

There have always been those false *prophets* and *false preachers* who use the Gospel ministry for their own gains. Paul acknowledged that **“...some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry...some preach Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives...”** Phil. 1:15, 17; c.f. Phil. 2:3). In Paul's day, just as in ours, there were those **“...men of corrupt mind...who think that *godliness is a means to financial gain*” (I Tim. 6:6).**

In His *“Parable of the Shrewd Manager”* (Lk. 16:1-15), Jesus warned about the steward who was reported to his master for **“wasting his possessions.”** He ultimately used his master's possessions to build up his own security and future. He used what had been entrusted to him for self-interest rather than for God's glory! He used it to build his own Kingdom - rather than his Master's kingdom.



African Cult leader.

In His prophetic *“Parable of the Landowner and Tenants,”* Jesus told about the selfish workers who, when seeing the Son and heir of everything, said:

“This is the heir, come, let's kill him and take his *inheritance*. So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him” (Matt. 21:38-39).

And finally in fulfillment of this prophetic parable, Judas went to the hostile religious leaders, and asked: **“What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you? So they counted out for him thirty silver coins”** (Matt. 26:15).

So just like Jesus was ultimately betrayed for money, *many of his modern followers likewise betray Him for money!* They prove to be a *hireling* rather than a true *shepherd*. Like a hired hand they go through the motions of tending the sheep - but it *is just for their pay!* They don't *love the sheep* - they *love the money!* They are not *really committed to the sheep* - they are *committed to themselves*. They do not look out for the *sheep's interest*, they look out for their *own selfish interests*. They will not *sacrifice for the sheep*, but rather *sacrifice the sheep for themselves*:

“He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and not concerned about the sheep” (Jn. 10:12-13).

The prophet Ezekiel had denounced the false religious leaders of his day for the same self-interest:

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only *take care of themselves!* Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but *you do not take care of the flock*. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd...”
(Ezek. 34:1-5).

So God calls us to be like Jesus, who was the **“Good Shepherd...who laid down His life for the sheep”** (Jn. 10:14-15). He **purchases** the sheep with His own life's blood, so that they would **“...dwell in the house of the Lord forever”** (Ps. 23:6).

Which brings us to our final point on Business, the principle of...
PRESERVATION:

What the Lord Jesus **purchases**, He ultimately **preserves** forever! Even though the weeds and chaff are



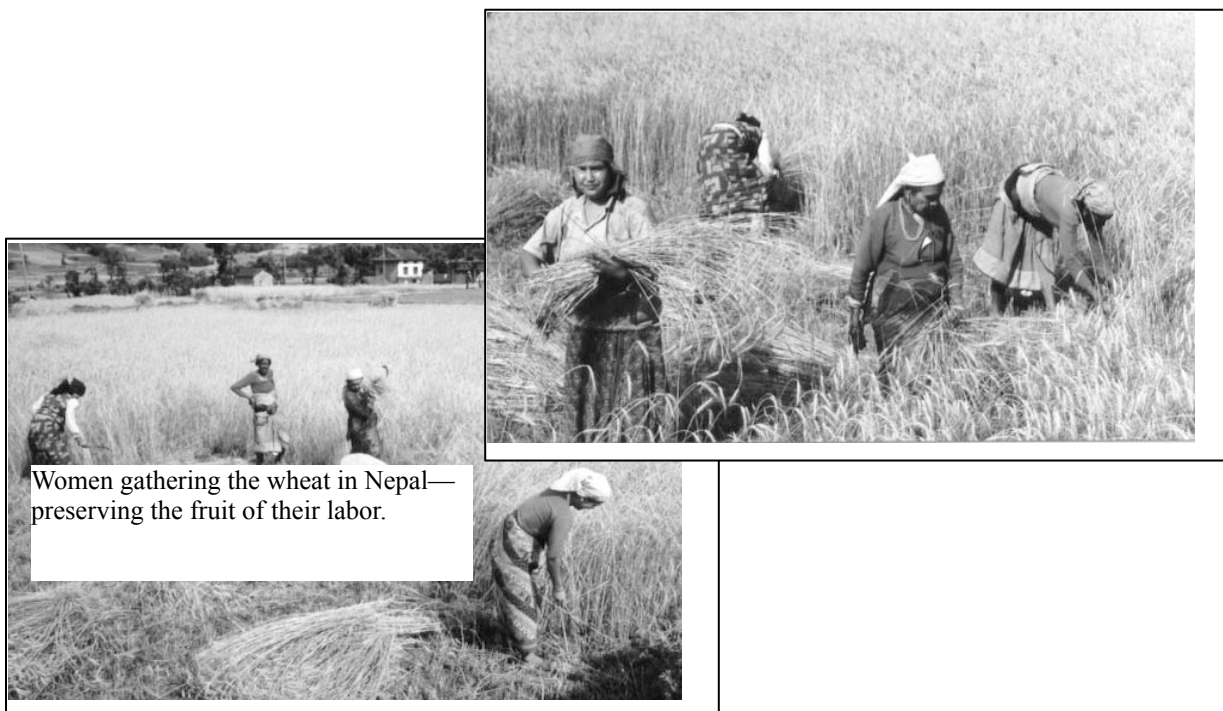
ultimately “...burned with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12); God instructs His angels to “...gather the wheat and *bring into My barn*” (Matt. 13:30).

It was because of that confident assurance that Paul could write:

“...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to *completion* until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Likewise, David affirmed: **“The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your love, O Lord, endures forever” (Ps. 138:8).** Woman winnowing grain in Nepal.

So our God is not only the *God of Salvation*, He is also the *God of Preservation!*



CONCLUSIONS

There are then many *parallels* and *principles* between running a *successful Church* and running a *successful business!*

Again, the Church is not a business, and the church should not be in business. But if it is going to be *spiritually successful* - like a commercial enterprise that is *financially successful* - then it must be run like a business. In both there is a **purchase** - there is a price to be paid. When the purchase has been made, the result is the **possession** of that which was bought. So we have been purchased by God and we are exclusively His

possession. But God purchases us so that He might bring us into **partnership** with Himself. This gives our life purpose and focus.

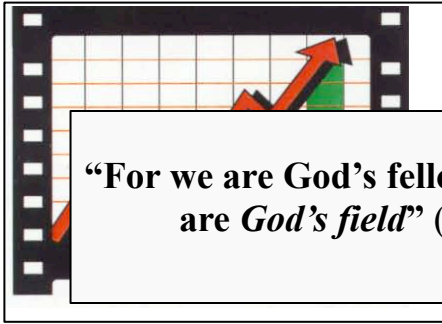
However, like unworked land that is unfit for use, God has to first do great **preparation** in our lives so that He can use us. After His **preparation** by the Holy Spirit, God then does the **planting**. He first “**sows the good seed**” in our lives, and then sows us somewhere in “**His field**,” which is the world (Matt. 13:24, 38).

In order to bring forth “**good fruit in our lives**” (Jn.15: 16), God exercises great patience toward us. Likewise, we must exercise “**patient endurance**” in bringing forth the “**fruit of the Spirit**” (Gal. 5:22-23) in other people's lives. This divine patience ultimately brings forth additions in our lives. God always brings about an “**increase**” (I Cor. 3:6).

Then from that increase, God graciously makes **provision** for our own material and financial needs. But therein lurks a great danger! It is always a great temptation to begin to **pillage the profits** - to become guilty of **plunder**! Then we prove ourselves to be “**hirelings**” rather than true **shepherds**, and disqualify ourselves from spiritual ministry.

Like our Master, we too must have the eternal perspective on our earthly lives and ministries. We must be committed to eternal **preservation** rather than to *temporal profit!*

By carefully studying and applying these biblical principles, we too can conduct our ministries like a *divine enterprise* that will produce *eternal dividends!*



THE CHURCH AS A *BRANCH*

“For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are *God’s field*” (I Cor. 3:9).

INTRODUCTION:

The Bible clearly teaches that the world is “**God’s field**,” and that He plants “**His vineyard**” in it. Jesus Christ is the “**Vine**,” and individual Christians are the “**branches**.”

Some of the most beautiful and telling pictures of God’s relationship with Israel - and Jesus’ relationship with the Church - is revealed in the imagery of the “**Vine and the branches**.”

In the Old Testament, we will look at the prophetic background of the “**Vine and branches**” under the following headings:

**THE *BUDDING* OF THE BRANCH;
THE *BEAUTY* OF THE BRANCH;
THE *BLAMELESSNESS* OF THE BRANCH;
THE *BOUNTY* OF THE BRANCH;
THE *BLASPHEMY* OF THE BRANCH;
THE *BREAKING* OF THE BRANCH;**

THE *BUDDING* OF THE BRANCH:

In several prophetic verses, we read of God’s promise to one day cause new life to spring forth and bud from the seeming lifeless stump of the Jewish Nation. But it would not be just any branch that would bud out of the dead, lifeless stump - but God’s very own Messiah. In this extended prophetic passage, we see Isaiah bring together imagery of both the *first advent* and the *second advent* of Christ:

“A *shoot* will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his *roots* a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord - and He will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the

breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

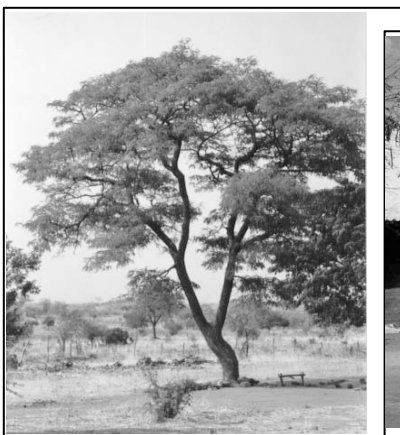
Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the *root of Jesse*, who will stand as a standard for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious” (Isa 11:1-10).

Again Isaiah speaks of this coming *Messianic Branch* when he writes:

“He grew up before Him like a *tender shoot*, and like a *root out of dry ground*” (Isa. 53:2).

In similar imagery, the prophet Jeremiah also spoke of the coming *Messianic Branch* in (Jer. 33:15-16):

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a *righteous Branch* sprout from David's line. He will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the Name by which it will be called: *the Lord Our Righteousness.*”



A tree in the bush of Zimbabwe where the *Messianic Branch* was born. They met here for many years until NDI helped them build a permanent church building.

In the eyes of God, this *Messianic Branch* that would spring forth from the dead, lifeless, helpless, ugly “**stump of Jesse**,” would be the *most beautiful of all Branches!* Because it flowed with the *divine sap of God*,

it would be no ordinary Branch. This Branch would be *ugly to mankind* but *beautiful to God!*

“In that day the *Branch of the Lord* will be *beautiful and glorious*, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel” (Isa. 4:2).

In similar words, Isaiah wrote that the faithful who would spring forth from that Messianic Branch would also be *beautiful* and *glorious*:

“They will be called *oaks of righteousness*, a planting of the Lord for the display of His *splendor*” (Isa. 61: 3).

Tragically, most of us as Christians do not really believe that we have been *engrafted* into the *Messianic Branch*, and *infused* with the divine sap of His Holy Spirit! We still see ourselves as *dead...lifeless...hopeless... unrighteous...ugly!* We need to see ourselves through the *eyes of faith* as God sees us. He sees us through His *Messianic Branch*, and therefore as *beautiful* and *glorious*.



An Ethiopian woman plants tree seedlings in the “Winstrip” system developed by Aart Van Wingerden.

THE *BLAMELESSNESS* OF THE BRANCH:

Because this Branch is divinely infused with the very life of God, it is not a *polluted branch* but rather a *pure Branch*. This *Messianic Branch* has the very life of God within it, and it therefore infused with the very *righteousness of God*:

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up to David a *righteous Branch*, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the Name by

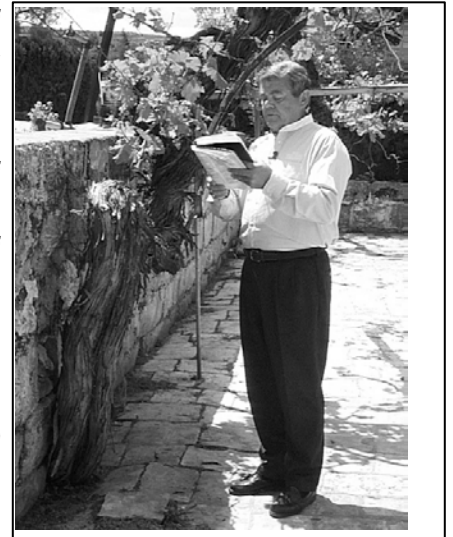
which He will be called: *the Lord our righteousness*” (Jer. 23:5-6).

THE BOUNTY OF THE BRANCH:

Because it is God’s *Messianic Branch*, infused with the *purity* and *power* of His Holy Spirit, this Branch is exceedingly *bountiful*. Since there is *no unrighteousness* in this Branch, the life of God can flow and multiply through Him. So *fruitfulness* and *bounty* are demonstrated through this *Messianic Branch*.

Many Old Testament verses speak of the *bounty* of God:

- “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a *shoot* from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will *produce branches* and *bear fruit* and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall trees and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make *the dry tree flourish*” (Ezek. 17: 22-24).
- “...this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Here is the Man whose name is the *Branch*, and He will *branch out* from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne” (Zech. 6:12).



Not only will the *Messianic Branch* be exceedingly fruitful, but he will also infuse His people with that same *fruitfulness* and *bounty*:

- “You brought a *vine* out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and *it took root and filled the land*” (Ps. 80:8-9).
- “The *righteous* will *thrive* like a branch” (KJV: Prov. 11:28) green leaf” (NASV/NIV).

- **“Listen, I am going to bring My Servant, the *Branch*...in that day each of you will invite his neighbor to *sit under his own vine and fig tree*” (Zech. 3:8-10).**

Note: This phrase: **“to sit under his *vine and fig tree*”** is a Hebrew expression for *peace and prosperity*. During times of *war*, the vines were either ignored or destroyed; and during times of *drought* they did not grow and bear fruit. So when there is both *peace* and *prosperity*, every man can **“sit under his *vine and fig tree*.”** To us this would be sort of like saying there is a *car in every garage...a chicken in every pot...bread on every table...and money in the bank!*

So the Second Coming of the Messiah will usher in that time of *peace and prosperity!* That time will not be brought in through *education...politics ...economics* - or by any of the other programs and schemes of man - as well intentioned as they may be. Only the return of Christ will bring in this wonderful time of *peace and prosperity* for the world!

THE BLASPHEMY OF THE BRANCH:

In spite of the gracious *grafting* of Israel into the life of God as His chosen people, they habitually rebelled and sinned against Him. Rather than *abiding in Him* and being supported and sustained by the life of the Vine, the *human branches* cut themselves off from the divine sap of God. They began to be infused with the *poisonous sap* of their pagan neighbors. As a result, the nation of Israel prostituted their spiritual blessings and turned their *peace and prosperity* inward. Rather than being a **“light to the nations”** (Isa. 42:6; 60:1-3), they hid their light and became *selfish* and *self-sufficient*. As a result, God judged them for their *apostasy, idolatry* and *blasphemy*:



A deadly vine gaining a death grip on a tree!

“Israel was a *spreading vine*; he brought forth *fruit for himself*. As his *fruit increased*, he *built more altars*; as his *land prospered*, he *adorned his sacred stones*” (Hosea 10:1).

We can see here the very direct association in the Bible between *financial prosperity* and *spiritual apostasy*. Tragically our *blessings* and *bounty* too often become a curse to us. That is why *physical poverty* is usually a greater impetus to *spiritual fidelity* and *spiritual revival* than material prosperity! It is a sad commentary on our *sin* and *selfishness* that our *affluence* so often results in *apostasy*...our *blessings* so often result in our *blasphemy!*

This is one of the great Biblical warnings from the story of the Children of Israel! Speaking of them, the Apostle Paul wrote and warned the Corinthian Christians:

“Now these things happened as *examples for us*, that we should not *crave evil things* as they also craved. And do not be *idolaters*, as some of them were; as it is written: ‘The people sat down to *eat*, and *drink*, and stood up to *play*” (I Cor. 10:6-7).

When *spiritual blasphemy* becomes habitual by God’s people - whether then or now, He has to *severely discipline* us through His *severe mercy!*

That brings us to our final introductory point about the *branch*...

THE *BREAKING* OF THE BRANCH:

When ancient Israel became apostate and blasphemous, God severely disciplined them. He said that they had become a *useless vine*. They were no longer producing good *fruit*. They were useless for *building material* and not even good for *fire wood!*

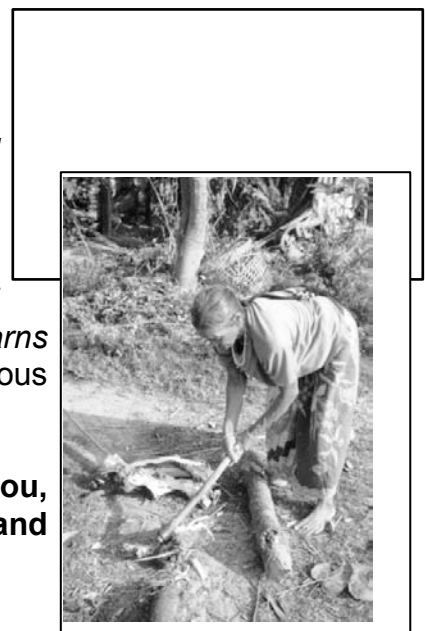
“Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?...Is it useful for anything?... Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I set My face against them...the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the Lord when I set My face against them. Thus I will make the land desolate, *because they have acted unfaithfully,*’ declares the Lord God” (Ezek. 15:1-8).

Likewise in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote of the *breaking off* of the Nation of Israel - and in doing so *warns* the Christians in Rome not to make the same grievous spiritual errors:

“...some of the *branches were broken off*, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and



Woman gathering wood from the forest to use for fuel for cooking and heating.



Cutting wood for fire

became partakers with them of the rich root of the olive tree...they were *broken off for their unbelief*, and you stand only by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for *if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you*. Behold then the *kindness and severity of God*; to those who fell, *severity*, but to you, *God's kindness*, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise, *you also will be cut off*" (Rom. 11:17-22).

So all of us *Gentile Christians* are that *wild olive tree* that has been "**grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree**" (Rom. 11:24). We are now "**partakers with them of the rich root of the olive tree,**" and the *Jewish branches* were "**broken off so that we might be grafted in**" (Rom. 11:17-19).

And just as the Jews were *broken off* for a time so that we Gentiles might be engrafted, we know that one day "**God will graft them in again...and thus all Israel will be saved**" (Rom. 11:23, 26).

Paul also expectantly writes:

"Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ...for if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11: 12, 15).

So a glorious day of *repentance, reconciliation, and restoration* is coming for the Jewish Nation!

With that wonderful thought in mind, let's now turn to a study of the most famous teaching in the New Testament about the *Vine* and the *branches*.

THE NEW TESTAMENT BRANCH

"I am the *Vine*, and My Father is the *Gardener*..."
(John 15:1).



In this section of our study we will consider this passage in more detail under the following outline:

THE PRUNING OF THE BRANCH
THE PURIFYING OF THE BRANCH
THE PREOCCUPATION OF THE BRANCH
THE PRODUCT OF THE BRANCH
THE POWERLESSNESS OF THE BRANCH
THE PETITION OF THE BRANCH
THE PRAISE OF THE BRANCH
THE PROOF OF THE BRANCH

Now let's begin to look at each of these in more detail...

THE PRUNING OF THE BRANCH:

“He (the *Father/Gardener*) *cuts off* every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, He *prunes* so that it will be even more fruitful” (Jn. 15:2).

Here we see the *Divine Gardener* doing *two kinds of pruning*. First, He completely *cuts off* all of the *fruitless branches*. Secondly, He *cuts back* all of the *fruitful branches*. As painful as the *pruning* is to the branches, we must always remember that it is being done by our *Father* - not by some enemy who hates us! The Father's pruning of us is always based upon His *perfect knowledge* of the branches as the One who *created it*; and upon His *perfect love* for the branches as the one who *redeemed it*.

When we remember that the hands that are holding and wielding the pruning shears have been pierced and are *nail scarred* for us - then the pruning is much more bearable! We can always trust both the *heart* and *hands* of a Father who loves us like that. Since He was *pierced for us*, we can be *pruned for Him!*

THE PURIFYING OF THE BRANCHES:

**“You are already *clean* because of the word I have spoken to you”
(John 15:3).**

It is significant to note here that the word that the Lord Jesus used for “**clean**” is the word ***katharos***. It means: “*to purge, to purify; to be free from impure admixture; without blemish; spotless.*” We often speak about a person having a “*catharsis experience,*” meaning that they experienced a *purifying* or *cleansing* experience. This *catharsis experience* is often accompanied by *tears* and *crying*, resulting in great *spiritual* and *emotional release*.

A good gardener knows that periodically he needs to *wash* his plants in order to *cleanse away* any germs and bacteria that if left unchecked and unwashed, will result in *disease* and even *death*. These germs and bacteria - if not cleansed, will certainly adversely affect the *fruitfulness* of the plant. So it must be cleansed.

The natural cleansing agent that God has provided for plants is the washing that comes through *rain*. Sometimes it comes in light sprinkles; at other times in torrential downpours - cleansing the plants in the process.

It is both interesting and instructive that Paul calls this process *sanctification*, and relates this *washing through love* to the attention Christ gives to His Bride, the Church:

“...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:25-26).

Here again, the word that Paul used for “**cleansed**” is the word **katharos**, the very same word Jesus used in John 15:3. So we see that it is the constant *bathing* and “**...washing with water through the word**” that *sanctifies us* and keeps us *spiritually* and *emotionally clean* as Christians.



Orthodox Jews reading and praying God's word at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.



It is only as we regularly *wash our minds* and *morals* with the “**water of the word**” that we can stay clean as Christians. This takes place as we regularly *read*, *memorize*, and *meditate* upon God's Word! Only through that daily process can we be “**transformed by the renewing of our minds.**” (Rom. 12:2; c.f. Phil. 4:4-8)

Therefore, just like we have to *physically bathe* each day to keep our *body clean*; in like manner we must *spiritually bathe* each day to keep our *spirits* clean. We use man made soap to clean the outer man. We use the spiritual soap and water of the Word to cleanse the inner man. So just as Jesus assured His disciples then that they were “**clean because of the word**” He had taught them; in like manner we are *cleaned* by that same Word! Our first *initial spiritual bath* is called the “**washing of regeneration**” (Titus 3:5; c.f. I Cor. 6:10-11). The ongoing *daily bath* is known as the “**washing of sanctification**” that Jesus demonstrated at the Last Supper when He *washed the disciples' feet*. There He reminded Peter, and the rest of the disciples:

“He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean...” (Jn. 13:10).

Jesus then reminded them that they were already *spiritually clean* through their belief in Him. Now it was only their *feet that were dirty* - not their whole bodies!

So when we sin or fall, *we do not need to “get saved again!”* A *second justification*, or a *second washing of regeneration* is impossible! All we need to do is to *read...believe...confess...obey His Word*, and go to the Lord in *repentance*. He then *forgives us* and *bathes us afresh at that point of sin or disobedience*. And so the *sanctification process* continues in our lives.

Praise God for His *double washing!* The once-for-all-time washing that results in our *regeneration*, and the ongoing washing that results in our *sanctification!*

That’s why Jesus next reminds us about...

THE PREOCCUPATION OF THE BRANCH:

“Remain in Me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain/abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me” (Jn. 15:4).

Here is a wonderful reminder of one of the great principles of the Christian life: **“abiding in Christ.”** Note that Jesus said **“remain in Me.”** That clearly reminds us that we are either **“in Christ”** or **“outside of Christ.”**

That little phrase was Paul’s favorite one to describe the true nature of the Christian life. He never used the word “Christian” to describe himself or other Believers. The word is used only 3 times in the Bible - and never by either Jesus or Paul (see: Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). The word “Christian” is certainly not a bad word. It was just not Paul’s favorite word to describe who Believers really are. 48 times he used the phrase **“in Christ Jesus”**; 34 times he used the phrase **“In Christ”**; 50 times he used the phrase **“in the Lord”**; and 32 times he used the phrase **“in Him”** - for a total of *164 times!* So those telling prepositional phrases really denote our *engrafted relationship with Christ!* Through the *new birth*, we are **“in Him.”** The moment God sovereignly places us **“in Christ,”** we are *regenerated*. We are infused with *spiritual life* - the very *life of God*. Where there once was only *spiritual death*, there is now *new life in Christ Jesus!*

Now that we are **“in Christ”** through *faith*, we must **“abide in Him”** through *obedience*. The former results in *justification*, while the later results in *sanctification*.

So the overriding *preoccupation of the branch* is to faithfully **“abide in the Vine.”** As we do, there will be a logical result, which is...

THE *PRODUCT* OF THE BRANCH:

“I am the *Vine*, you are the *branches*. If a man *remains in Me* and I in him, *he will bear much fruit...*” (Jn.15:5a).

Here we can clearly see that the *product* of the branches is a *by-product* of our *abiding*. Our ability to **“bear much fruit”** is in direct proportion to our **“abiding in Him.”** As Christians we either *bear* or become *barren!* We are either *fruitful*, or *fruitless*. We either **“bear much fruit”** or we **“bear little fruit!”**

But why did Jesus place so much emphasis upon *bearing fruit*? Good question! The answer however, is simple: **fruit contains seeds, and the seeds reproduce life.** In other words, without fruit, there is *no reproduction!* It is a principle in both the *physical world* and *spiritual world*. **No fruit, no seed; no seed, no reproduction.**

So Christ is clearly saying that He wants to *reproduce His life through us!* He can only reproduce His life through us as we **“abide in Him.”** Therefore, *remaining* produces *results* in our Christian life. It is a sure spiritual principle that *abiding* always results in *abundance!* The more we **“abide in Him,”** the more He is able to **“abide in us,”** with the certain results that we will **“bear much fruit.”**

Question:

“What is the fruit yield of your spiritual life?”
Is there much fruit or little fruit?

Also, we need to remember that the *fruit* here that is being talked about is first and foremost the **“fruit of the Spirit,”** which is **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** (Gal. 5:22-23). In other words, the **“fruit of the Spirit”** is simply the *character of Jesus* being increasingly manifest *in* and *through* our lives.

If you **“abide in Him,”** then it is both *natural* and *supernatural* that He will live His life in and through you. Just as the branches have no capacity to bear fruit apart from the vine, so you and I have absolutely no capacity to bear fruit apart from Him! Which logically brings us to our next point...

THE *POWERLESSNESS* OF THE BRANCH:

“...apart from Me you can do *nothing*. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is *thrown away and withers*; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and *burned*” (Jn. 15:5-6).

What is Jesus saying here? Is He saying that man cannot do *anything* apart from Him? No! What He is saying here is that neither the *unregenerate man*, nor the *carnal Christian*, can do *anything spiritual* without Him. Just like the branches cannot produce fruit *apart from the vine*; so the Christian cannot reproduce the *life of Christ* without *abiding in Christ*. Just like a *fruitless branch* is a *useless branch*, the *fruitless Christian* is basically a *worthless Christian*!

Remember! It is quite possible to be a *saved* person - and live a *lost* life!

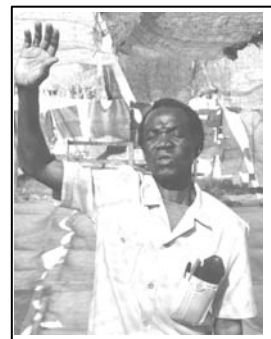
Therefore, as far as *time* and *eternity* is concerned, we can basically live a *worthless life*! Even though we are Christians, we can still waste our lives in the *wilderness of carnality* - just like one whole generation of the Israelites did. We can live in the *desert of disobedience* rather than in the *Promised Land of obedience*. We can have a *saved life* but a *wasted life*! We can be like those *worthless branches* that are good for nothing but to be *burned*.

The Judgment Seat of Christ will reveal that life as one of “**wood, hay and straw**,” rather than a life of “**gold, silver and precious stones**” (I Cor. 3:11-12). That kind of life will result in spiritual loss - both in *time* and *eternity*! As Paul soberly warned:

“If any man’s work...remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer *loss*; but *he himself shall be saved, yet as through fire*” (I Cor. 3:14-15).

My challenge then, is to “**abide in Him**” to the end that you “**bear much fruit**,” and prove to be a *worthy Christian* rather than a *worthless Christian*!

So in terms of the things that have value for *time* and *eternity*, “**...we can do *nothing* without Christ!**” On the other hand, Paul said: “**I can do *all things* through Christ who strengthens me**” (Phil. 4:13). So it is either “**nothing**,” or “**all things!**” And it all depends upon how faithfully the *branch abides in the Vine*!



THE PETITION OF THE BRANCH:

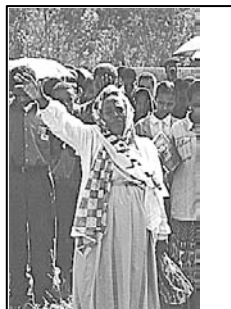
“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you” (Jn. 15:7).

Please notice that this wonderful *promise* is preceded by a *condition* - “*If...*” This is not an all inclusive blanket promise that covers every prayer we might pray. No! Jesus specifically preferences His promise concerning our *prayers* and *petitions* with these conditions: “***If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.***” That means at least two important things:

- (1). First, if we are not “**remaining...abiding...continuing**” *in Christ*, then our prayers will not be answered. When we are faithfully *abiding* in Christ, then that means that we will *pray according to His nature*. In other words, “*Would Christ pray the prayer I am praying?*” If He would not pray it, then I should not pray it! So to pray confidently, is to pray in accordance with who Christ is.
- (2). Secondly, it means that “**His words**” must also be abiding in us. Not only must we be abiding in the *Incarnate Word*, we must also have the *Inscripturated Word* abiding in us! Otherwise, we will not know how to pray in accordance with God’s revealed will. Many Christians are so ignorant of God’s Word that they often specifically pray for things against God’s Will.

So our *petitions* must be solidly based on “**abiding in Christ**” and having “**His Word abide in us.**” Then and only then will what we “**...wish...be given.**” That is because we will be so in tune with the *person of Christ* and the *promises of Christ*, that *our will - will be His will...our desires will be His desires...our wishes will represent His wishes*. Through His indwelling Holy Spirit, we will be so in accord with our heavenly High Priest, that our prayers and intercession here on earth will be in harmony with His intercession at the Father’s right hand (Heb. 7:25). Then we can pray with confidence!

But there is no confidence and assurance in prayer when we lack *fellowship with Christ*, or *familiarity with His Word*! Either *disobedience toward Christ*, or *ignorance of His Word*, will short-circuit the effectiveness of our prayers and petitions! But if we will “**abide in Him,**” and “**let His Word abide in us,**” then we will be able to “**ask whatever we wish and it will be given to us!**”



Nepali children praising God.

Children praising God at the Dorcas
Children's Home in Nepal.

Ethiopian woman praising God at
conference.

THE PRAISE OF THE BRANCH:

“This is to My Father’s *glory*, that you bear much fruit...”

How does a branch bring glory to the gardener? By *bearing much fruit!* A *fruitful branch* is a positive testimony and good advertisement to the ability of the gardener. In other words, the *more fruitful the branch, the more glory the gardener receives!* Conversely, a weak...sickly...puny...fruitless branch makes the gardener look bad. The *lack of fruit* would seem to indicate either his ignorance of gardening, or his neglect of the vine and branches.

So Jesus said that the Father would receive *glory in proportion to the fruitfulness of the branches.* Therefore, *the greater the fruit, the greater the glory!* The word here for “**glory**” is the word *doxaso* and means: “*dignity, honor, praise, worship, glory.*”

Therefore, when people see the spiritual fruit increasingly maturing in and through our lives, it speaks well about our Divine Gardener! People attribute to Him the *honor... praise...worship...and glory* that He alone deserves. Our highest calling in life as *branches* is to *bring glory to God!*

Question:

“What do people think about God when they look at the quality and quantity of fruit in your life?”

- (1). Do they know that He is a wise, attentive, patient Gardener by looking at the fruit emerging from your life?
- (2). Is your life *telling the truth* about the nature and character of God; or is it *telling a lie* about Him?
- (3). Is He receiving *glory...praise...worship* because of the fruit of your life? Or, are the “**works of the flesh**” (Gal. 5:19-21) so evident that the “**fruit of the Spirit**” is hardly able to ripen and mature in you?

- (4). God said of His Old Testament people that **“His name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you”** (Rom. 2:24; Isa. 52:5; Ezek. 36:20, etc.). It is indeed sobering for us to realize that how we live as professing Christians either brings *blessings* or *blasphemies* to the Name of God!

So if you will **“abide in Him”** and let **“His Word abide in you,”** then you will **“bear much fruit”** and bring *ever-increasing glory to God!*

THE PROOF OF THE BRANCH:

“This is to My Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (Jn. 15:8).

The *quality* and *quantity* of our spiritual fruit not only bring *glory* or *dishonor* to God; it also **“proves”** to the watching world that we are really **“His disciples.”**

Concerning *false prophets*, Jesus said:

“By their fruit you will know them. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes...Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit...So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16-20).

So the *proof is in the fruit!* The *nature of the fruit* confirms the *nature of the root*. Each kind of tree reproduces *after its own kind*. It is a firm principle of reproduction: *like begets like*. The nature of a *good tree* is confirmed by the *good fruit* it produces. Likewise, a *true Christian* and *true disciple* of Jesus Christ will be a person that increasingly *produces the characteristic fruit of Jesus!* The Lord Jesus cannot do anything but *reproduce Himself* in our lives. So as the *fruit of His nature* is reproduced in us, then it *verifies to us*, and *proves to the world*, that we are truly **“His disciples.”**

THE PASSION OF THE BRANCH:

“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command” (Jn. 15:9-14).

The abiding *passion* of the branch is *love!* Just as the *Father loves the Son* and the *Son loves the Father*, so are we as His disciples to **“abide in His love.”** Once again we see the theme of **“abiding”** being emphasized - which is the primary function and preoccupation of the branches:

- (1). We are to **“abide in Christ”** as He **“abides in us”** (15:4-5,7) so we can bear fruit;
- (2). His **“word is to abide in us”** (15:7) so that our prayers can be answered, and we will prove to be His disciples;
- (3). We are to **“abide in His love”** just as He abode in the Father’s love; and, we are to **“love one another, just as He loves us”** (15:12).

It is incredible to realize that *Jesus loves us with the same love and intensity that the Father loves Him!* Most of us as Christians have real difficulty in realizing and accepting that kind of undeserved and unconditional love. And, the great *proof* that we really love Him is that we **“...obey His commandments”** just as He kept His Father’s commandments. So *love* and *obedience* are synonymous! Jesus pointed this out one day as He asked a crucial question to some of His would-be followers:

“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Lk. 6:46).

If we profess to be Christians, then we must live under His *Lordship* - which implies *obedience*. The moment we call someone **“Lord,”** the very word implies that we are *submitted* to them. And in this situation the people were saying unto Him **“Lord, Lord”** - a double emphasis to indicate their submission! And at the same time, they were not *doing* what He had told them to do! That is like a private in the army saluting his general and thereby acknowledging his superior rank over him - and yet not obeying his commands! How many Christians are guilty of the same thing today? They profess to be His disciples, but openly live in disobedience to His revealed will as contained in His Word!

So Jesus said here that if we *truly love Him*, then we will seek to *fully obey Him!* Our abiding *passion* then as Christians, is to *abide* and *obey*. We are to **“abide in His love,”** and **“obey His commands.”**

The beloved disciple John, expressed it this way:

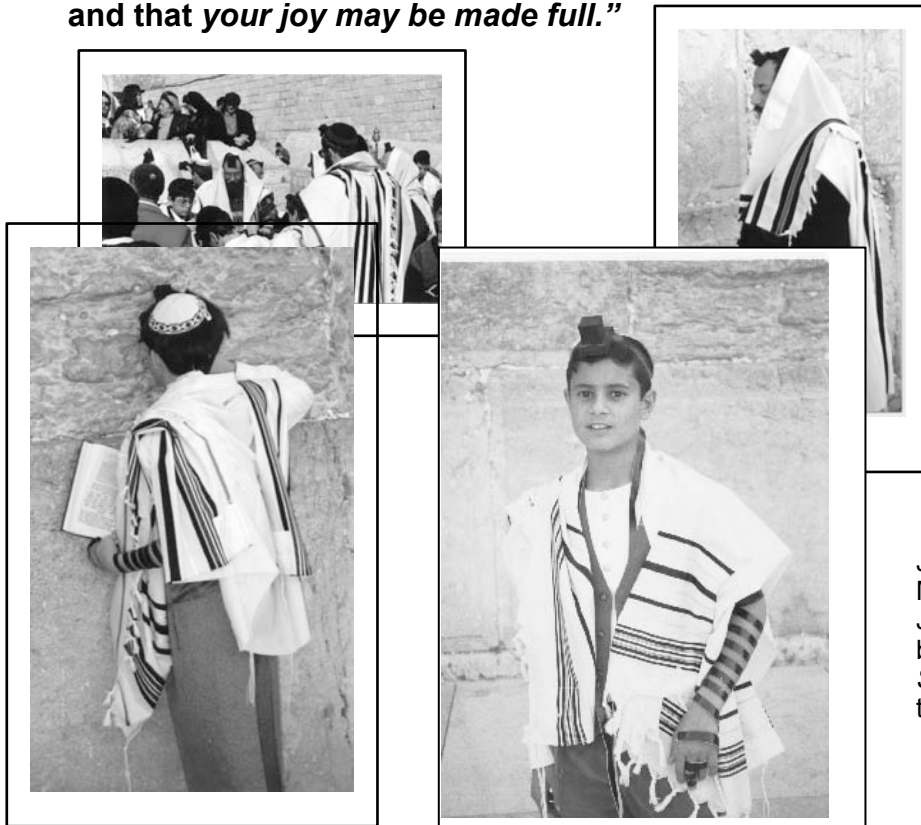
“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (I Jn. 5:3).

It is Satan’s lie that *obedience to God’s law results in bondage*; and *disobedience leads to liberty*. Quite the opposite is true! Anything and everything *other than*

obedience leads to bondage. *Only obedience leads to liberty!* And, *only love causes us to obey.* Like a little child toward his parents, we may obey God for a while out of *fear* - but not for long! It is a slave who *obeys out of fear.* A true child or son, will continue to obey his parents as he grows *only* when he is convinced that his parents truly love him, and therefore want what is best for him. Then and only then will their love for him - and his love for them, produce *obedience.* That's why Jesus said: **“You are My friends, if you do what I command you”** (Jn. 15:14).

Jesus then, did not call us to *obedience* to make our lives miserable. He called us to *obedience* to make our lives full and free! He said:

“I have spoken these things to you that *My joy may be in you,* and that *your joy may be made full.*”



Jewish boy at his Bar Mitspha in Jerusalem. He now becomes a *Son of Torah*, Son of the Law of God.

Principle

Love produces obedience, and obedience produces joy! And the GREATER OUR OBEDIENCE; the GREATER OUR JOY!

We must always remember that *joy is not an emotion...a feeling...an experience*. Joy is one of the *fruit of the Holy Spirit* (Gal. 5:22). *Happiness*, on the other hand, is more of a *feeling* and is generally experienced when everything is going well and we are getting our own way. Those emotions are generally derived from our circumstances, and therefore come from *without*. Joy however, is not from without - but rather from *within*. It is not primarily a *feeling* - but rather a *fruit!* It is therefore not something we conjure up or contrive.

Question:

*“What is the degree of joy in your life right now?
Is it partial or is it full?”*

If your *joy is partial*, then probably your *obedience is partial!* If your *obedience to Christ is partial*, then probably your *love for Christ is partial*. Perhaps you, like the Church at Ephesus, “...**have left your first love**” (Rev. 2:4).

So love is like the life-giving sap flowing through a vine to its branches - producing the fruit of *joy!*

THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE BRANCH:

“I no longer call you *servants*, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but *I chose you* and *appointed you* to go and *bear fruit* - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you *ask in My name*. This is My command: *love each other*” (Jn.15:15-17).

As we have already seen in this study, the BIG difference between *Christianity* and *religion* is summed up in one word - **RELATIONSHIP!** Jesus Christ did not come to this world to begin *another religion*. He came to make possible a *living, dynamic relationship* with God the Father. Perhaps no passage in the New Testament more personally describes the *intimacy* of our *relationship* with God through Christ, than these verses. We are not worthy to even be the *slaves* or *servants* of Christ - much less His *brethren* (Heb. 2:11) and *friends* (Jn. 15:15).

However, just like Abraham was called the “**friend of God**” (II Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Ja. 2:23); we are likewise God’s *personal friend* through our *friendship with Christ*. And, the *better we know Christ*, the *better we will know God the Father!* We can only have an *intimate friendship with God* through an *intimate friendship with Jesus Christ* - through His indwelling *Holy Spirit*.

We can therefore see here that one of the chief characteristics of true friendship is *intimacy of knowing* and *intimacy of communication* - and the two go together. Jesus said that through Him we would:

- (1). **“...know the Master’s business...”** Therefore, on the basis of our knowledge of the Father’s business, we are to make *His business our business!* God does not give us this intimate insight into *His business in the world* just so we can continue to live “*business as usual.*” No! Once we know the true nature of *God’s business*, we are to go “*out of business!*” From that moment on, we are to go “*out of business*” for self, and “*into business for God!*” We now have the unique privilege of being in a life changing *divine-human* partnership...a *Father-and-son business relationship!*

Question:

**“Who are you in business for - you or God?
Is He the Owner and you the steward?
Is He Chairman of the Board, or are you?
Is He the chief Stockholder,
or do you live and work as if it all belongs to you?”**

- (2). Jesus also said: **“...everything I learned from My Father I have made known to you.”** On the basis of Christ’s revelation of that *intimate knowledge*, we cannot ever again plead *ignorance* concerning God’s Will! Jesus did not say that He told us a “**few things...**” - but rather **“...everything.”** That does not mean that our knowledge of God is as total and complete as Christ’s knowledge of God is as the Second Member of the Trinity. In this life we will always know some things only “**...in part**” (I Cor. 13:12). But it does mean that through the revelation of Christ and the Bible, God has fully revealed *everything we need to know* in order to be in the center of His Will in this life - and eternally present with Him in the next life! Since we are God’s *personal friends*, He has assured us that we are going to be together with Him for all eternity!

We also see here that it was Jesus Christ - not us - who *took the initiative* in establishing this life-changing *relationship* and *friendship*. **“You did not chose Me,”** Jesus said, **“but I chose you...”** So in this relationship, God is always the *Initiator*, and we are always the *responder*. Since we were “**...dead in our trespasses and sins**” (Eph. 2:1), we had no capacity to initiate or seek a relationship with God. A dead person cannot initiate ANYTHING! He can only *receive the new life* the Father graciously grants through the *regeneration* of His

Holy Spirit. So because of His mercy and grace, God *calls* us out of death into new life, and then *chooses* us to be friends.

But we must also see that there is a *purpose* in Christ's choosing. **"I chose you and appointed you,"** Jesus said, **"to go and bear fruit, fruit that will remain."** So Jesus **"chose us"** and **"appointed us"** that we should **"...go...bear fruit."** We were chosen and appointed - not so we would *stay*, but so we would **"Go...and make disciples of all nations..."** (Matt. 28:19; Lk. 24:47).

Again we see the constant emphasis of this passage upon **"bearing fruit"** (Jn. 15:2,4,5,8,16). And Jesus said that the fruit that the Holy Spirit bears through us would be fruit that **"...will remain."** God's true fruit never spoils or rots! It is both *temporal* and *eternal*. Why? Because the fruit was produced, **"...not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God"** (1 Pet. 1:23).

Therefore, on the basis of this *relationship as friends...our knowledge of the Father's business...Christ's choice and appointment of us...our obedience to going and bearing fruit* – **"Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name."**

Once again Jesus emphasizes the necessity of *love*: **"This I command you, that you love one another"** (Jn. 15:17). It is highly significant that this *command to love one another* is right after Christ's promise concerning prayer. So *loving* and *praying* go together! In other words, if we are not **"walking in love"** (Eph. 5:2), then we are not **"walking in the Spirit"** (Gal. 5:16, 25) - because the **"fruit of the Spirit is love..."** (Gal. 5:22)! And if that is the case, most of our praying will be amiss. We will be *praying in the flesh* rather than **"praying in the Holy Spirit"** (Eph.; 6:18; Jude 20). As James warned:

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (Ja. 4:3).

So **"walking in the Spirit"** and **"walking in love"** are necessary prerequisites for effectual praying!



John expressed it this way: **"The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness..."** (1 Jn.

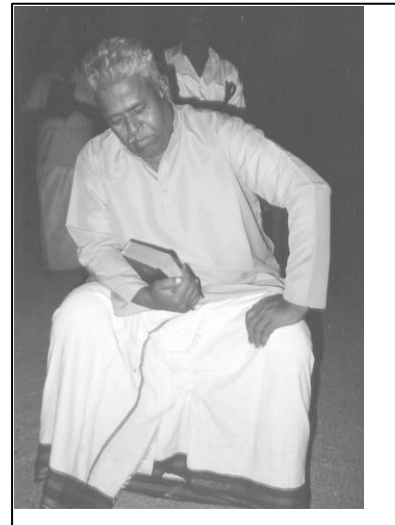
2:10-11). A little further John again stresses this point: **“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death”** (1 Jn. 3:14).

ote the
13.

Echoing the words of Christ, John summarizes:

“We know love by this, He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren...Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth....and whatever we ask we receive from Him,because we KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS and DO the things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us...Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for GOD IS LOVE...In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us...Beloved, if God so loves us, we also ought to love one another...if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit....GOD IS LOVE, and the one who abides in love, abides in God, and God abides in him...We love because He first loved us. If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this command we have from Him that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (1 Jn. 3:16-4:21).

So once again we hear Jesus repeating the promise He made earlier: **“...ask whatever you wish and it will be given you”** (15:7). But again note the words **“if”** and **“then.”** Both of those words introduce a *conditional* promise, not an *unconditional* one. *Answered prayer* comes as a result of **“abiding in Christ”** and having **“... His words abide in us”**...obediently **“going”** where He sends us in order that we may **“...bear fruit”**...and **“walking in love”** - especially toward the *brethren*. When we are obedient to those conditions Jesus clearly laid down - then and only then can we pray with confidence! **“Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in Christ’s Name.”**





Persecuted Christians in Nepal who spent time in prison for their faith.



This is *Remembrance*, so named because she was born in prison. Her mother entreated the officials to let her be born outside the prison to no



hated Me first. If as its own. As it e chosen you out

“If the world hates you, you do not belong to the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also...they will treat you this way because of My Name, for they do not know the One who sent me...He who hates Me hates My Father as well’” (Jn. 15:13-23).

Because of the fact that the *branch* is connected to the *Vine* - the Lord Jesus - we are *spiritually one with Him*. As a result of that union, whatever happens to one happens to the other. Therefore, since the *world hates the Vine*, it will also *hate the branches!* But as Jesus said, the world’s hatred of us is a result of its hatred of Him. *The world hates Christ because of His claims of exclusive Lordship.* People of the world do not want to surrender control of their lives to God. Instead, they want to be their own gods. Since the world hates Christ - it has to hate us. *Our surrender* to Him is a reflection and reminder of *their rebellion.* As a result, they hate us just like they hate Christ!

So when the world persecutes us, it often proves who we belong to. However, we Christians can also be *persecuted for foolishness* rather than righteousness! But hopefully that will be more the experience of young Christians - although I have spent untold hours counseling with adults who are facing and reaping the results of foolishness...disobedience...wrong decisions! But the mature Christian wants to make sure any persecution he may receive is for *living righteously* - not *living foolishly*. Remember then: *“Persecution is a proof of possession!”* Jesus clearly said:

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but...you are not of the world...I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Peter expressed this same *principle of possession* when he wrote:

“You are a *chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Therefore, *since the world does not possess us - it persecutes us!*

We can clearly see then that Jesus paints a very realistic picture of the *cost of discipleship* for His followers - and He did so even before He went to the cross to suffer and die. Jesus is not issuing a call here to *peaceful...problem-free...persecutionless...Pollyanna discipleship*. No! Jesus wants to portray a clear and honest picture of what it means to be engrafted to Him in a sinful, rebellious world. He says that if we are disciples who are *worth our salt and worthy of our light* - then we will be persecuted in this world!

Jesus then, wants all of His disciples to get their thinking right about the true nature of discipleship. To do so, He again reminds them of the principle of *rank in relationships*: **“A slave is no greater than his master.”** So if the world *hates the Master*; it will also have to *hate the master’s servants!*

We need to be prepared then as Christians for the fact that the *world hates Christ* - and they hate everything His name stands for! Both the *person of Christ* and the *program of Christ* are anathema to the world. They equally hate the *King* and His *Kingdom*. **“All of these things they will do to you,”** Jesus said, **“for My name’s sake.”** Therefore, if you are faithful to the Name of Christ - and in the Bible, *name represents nature* - then the world will hate us as it hates Him! Our name represents His name. The word **Christian** comes from the Greek word, *Christianos* meaning *“one belonging to Christ.”* Therefore, since we no longer *belong to the world*, but now *belong to Christ* - then we will be hated and persecuted.

That’s why in America many politicians, judges, lawyers, educators, humanists, secularists, and atheists are doing all they can to completely remove the name of Christ and God from every public forum! The very mention of His name threatens the illusion of their power, authority and control. Therefore, the world does all it can to curse...blaspheme...malign... and belittle the very Name of Jesus! So the world hates the very name of Jesus Christ because of all it represents: *truth...love...justice...mercy... holiness...righteousness...judgment...Lordship!*

Tragically, too many Christians do not have this mind-set of expecting persecution as a part of the *normal Christian life*. Many have the mistaken idea that Christ calls them to a perpetual *spiritual picnic* - a life of *heaven on earth!* However, the New Testament is filled with military and warfare images:



Bhutanese Christians expelled from their homeland because of their faith.



J.L. with Samburu warriors in Kenya.



Joseph, J.L.'s son in Kenya with a young Samburu warrior.



Left:
J.L. with Moses Abebe,
a Maasai warrior.



Right:
J.L. with Pokot warriors
with machine guns.

- **“Put on the full armor of God...”** (Eph. 6:11-18);
- **“The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful...”** (II Cor. 10:4);
- **“Fight the good fight”** (I Tim. 1:18; 6:12);
- **“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”** (II Tim. 2:3);
- **“I have fought the good fight...”** (II Tim. 4:7).



So Jesus clearly taught that because the world hated Him, it would also hate us. Because it fought against Him, it would also fight against us. Because it persecuted Him - it would also persecute us. Because it killed Him, it may also kill us! This means that the Body of Christ must be the *Church militant* until it becomes the *church triumphant!* The hymn writer echoed this refrain when he penned the words:

“Onward Christian soldiers, marching on to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before!”

So Christian, get your thinking straight about following Christ! Rid your mind that He has called you to a spiritual vacation! Return to the battlefield! Get back into the front-line trenches! Dust off your equipment...sharpen your sword...gird yourself for battle! **“Put on the full armor of God” and “fight the good fight of faith!”**

a Pokot spear by Pastor
ng him an honorary Pokot
warrior!

Jesus said that this hatred and persecution His followers would face is because the world does not *know Him*. The word **“know”** in the New Testament denotes intimate personal *relationship* - like a *husband knows his wife*. So Jesus said that the world not only did not know Him, they also do not **“...know the One who sent Me.”**

Not only does the world not know God - because you can *only know God through Jesus Christ*; it **“...hates the Father also.”** So the world is neither passive toward Jesus or God! It *hates* both the Father and the Son! You cannot know one without knowing the other. You cannot love One without loving the Other (Jn. 8:19; I Jn. 2:23). To reject One is to reject the Other. To hate One is to hate the Other. And if the world *hated Jesus* because it *hated God* - then it will likewise *hate us!*

But in spite of the world’s *hatred of God*, and *rejection of Christ*, and *persecution of us*, Jesus assured His disciples:

“These things I have spoken to you that *in Me* you may have peace. In the world you have *tribulation*, but take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

THE PRESERVATION OF THE BRANCH:

“When the *Helper* comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the *Spirit of truth*, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me” (Jn. 15:26-27).

Because we are the *possession of God*, we can be assured that we will be *preserved by God*. Regardless of how much the world might hate...reject...or persecute us - *it cannot cut us off from Christ!* On the cross Jesus was *cut off*

from the Father so we would never be cut off from Him! Our relationship is eternally secure! The branches are inseparably joined to the Vine - for both time and eternity.

As spiritual branches, we have divine sap surging through us - the very life of God! And that energy within us is not some impersonal life force - He is the very Holy Spirit of God! Jesus calls Him the “Helper...the Spirit of truth.”

The 15th chapter of John, which is the focus of this study, is a part of Jesus’ *Upper Room Discourse* with His disciples the night He was betrayed. It actually begins in Chapter 13, and concludes in Chapter 17. What He says here in Chapter 15, is a further amplification of what He taught His disciples earlier about the Holy Spirit, who would shortly be given to them:

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another *Helper* that He may be *with you forever* - the Spirit of truth...He abides *with you* and will be *in you*. I will not leave you as orphans...In that day you shall know that *I am in the Father*, and *you are in Me*, and *I in you*...I will come to you...the *Helper*, the *Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in My name, He will *teach you all things*, and *bring to your remembrance all that I said to you*” (Jn. 14:16-18, 26).

It was because of the coming of the Holy Spirit to *replace* and *reproduce* Jesus in their lives, that it was necessary for Christ to return to the Father:

“Now I am going to Him who sent Me...But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the *Helper* shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. But when He, the *Spirit of truth*, comes, He will *guide you into all truth*. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will *bring glory to Me* by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the *Spirit* will take from what is Mine and *make it known to you*” (Jn. 16:5,7,13-15).

The word that Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit is the Greek word *parakletos*. It is a very rich word in its meanings, and can be variously translated: *intercessor, counselor, comforter, consoler, advocate, strengthener, one who stands by*. So the Holy Spirit is not just one who *comes to our aid* and *stands beside us* - He *stands within us!*

And we can see from these verses that the Holy Spirit's presence within us is not *temporary* - as was the case during the Old Testament dispensation. Now His *presence and power are permanent!* He is "**...with us forever!**"

Jesus also reminds us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us is not one of *passivity*. His primary role is to "**...lead us into truth**" and "**...glorify Christ.**" *Obviously the two go together. As we are led into truth about Jesus - and then live that truth through our daily lives, then Jesus is glorified through us.*

Therefore, the Holy Spirit *preserves* the branch by *perpetrating* the life of the Vine through them. If it were not for the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit in continuing to "**...lead us into truth,**" then the Church would have ceased to exist before the end of the First Century. It has continuously faced *persecution from without, and perversion from within* (See: Matt. 13:24-30; Acts 20:29-30; II Cor. 11:2-15; Gal. 1:6-9; Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:18-23; I Tim. 4:1-5; 6:3-10; I Jn. 2:19-24; 4:1-6; Jude 3;11-16; Rev. 2:12-16, etc.).

Theological error is to the Church what *poison* is to a vine - *deadly!* Conversely, *truth* is to the Church what *healthy sap* is to a vine - *LIFE!* It is none other than the *Holy Spirit...the Second Person of the Godhead...the "Spirit of truth,"* that keeps the Church *healthy...disease-free...growing... multiplying...bearing fruit!*

As the "**Spirit of truth,**" the Holy Spirit has led the Church for almost 2,000 years through *heresy, confusion, division, carnality, immaturity* - and *preserved* it until this very hour. And we can be absolutely sure that He will continue to *preserve the Church* until the Lord Jesus raptures her out of the world!

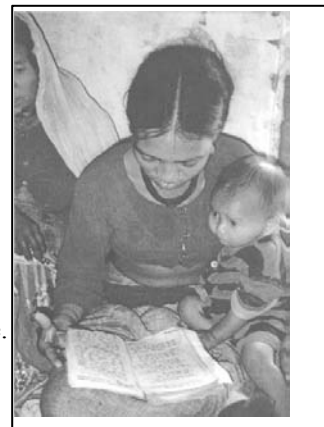
Concerning His true Church, Jesus said:

"I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18).

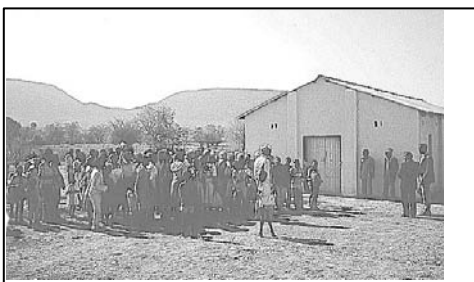
Therefore, Jesus has promised to *preserve* His true Church until He returns for her. Until that time, she is *led...empowered...kept...sealed* by the Holy Spirit of God - the "**Spirit of truth!**"



Worshippers in Nepal.



Nepali woman studying the Bible.



Worshippers at
Victoria Falls Church,
Zimbabwe, Africa

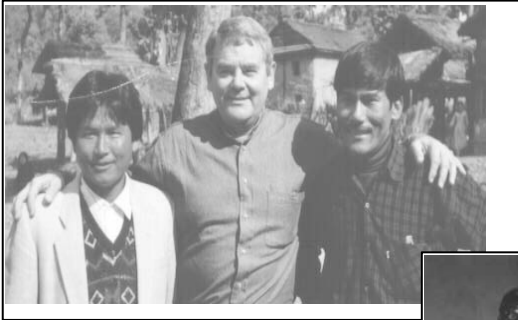


Chishingwe Church, Zimbabwe, Africa.

ONCLUSIONS

In this study of the “**Church as a Branch,**” we have seen some thrilling truths about the Lord Jesus and our relationship with Him. It is another *dynamic picture...a living photograph* of the Church. I trust that the truths from this particular study will grip your life!

More than anything else, I pray that you have been freshly challenged to “**abide in Him**” and let “**His word abide in you**” to the degree that you will **bear much fruit.**” Then as the character of Jesus - which is the “**fruit of the Spirit**” - is increasingly manifest in and through your life, you will “**glorify Christ**” as His life “**glorified the Father!**” There can be no higher or holier motivation for living than that. Nor, none more exciting and fulfilling!



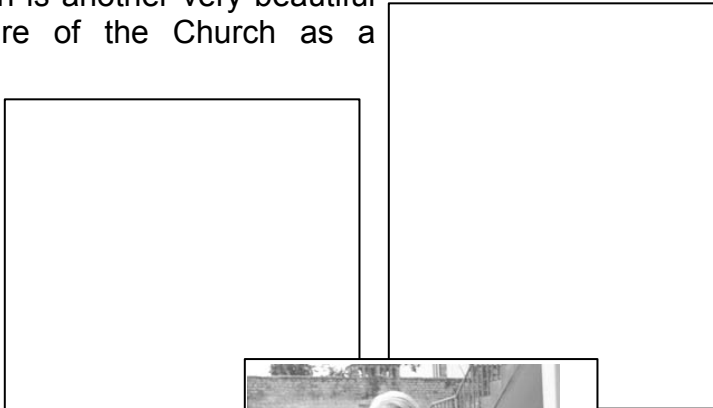
J.L. with some of his ministry partners around the world.

CHURCH AS A BROTHERHOOD

**“Whoever does God’s will is *My brother and sister and mother.*”
(Mk. 3:35)**

Our final Biblical picture of the church is another very beautiful and personal one. It is the picture of the Church as a *Brotherhood*. Like the others we have seen in this study, the Church as a *brotherhood* is another very *relational* picture. The very word *brotherhood* denotes *relationship... plurality... community... togetherness...fellowship*. This is also a very active, dynamic moving picture of the church.

As we examine this picture, we see the members of the church in action and interaction with each other. This moving picture features the many faceted relationships among Christians. In one sense, this picture is a summation of all of the rest of the pictures of the church we have looked at in our study. Just because the words *brother* and *brotherhood* are used, this is not just



Patt and women at a conference.

about *male relationships!* Here we are talking about the all-inclusive relationships within the Body of Christ summed up by the generic word, *brethren* – which includes both *male* and *female*. So this chapter is directed to both *brethren* and *sisteren!*

Together we will study and summarize this Biblical picture of the church under the following headings:

1. **THE PURCHASE OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
2. **THE PREDESTINATION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
3. **THE PASSION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
4. **THE PROVISION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
5. **THE PEACE OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
6. **THE PROCLAMATION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
7. **THE PRAYERS OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
8. **THE PERSECUTION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
9. **THE PROTECTION OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
10. **THE PERFECTING OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
11. **THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE BROTHERHOOD**
12. **THE PERVERSIONS OF THE BROTHERHOOD**

With that outline in mind, let's get started...

Every honest child of God is acutely aware that he or she has absolutely no right to be numbered among the *brotherhood of Christ!* Each of us can identify with the Apostle Paul who considered himself “*untimely*” or “*abnormally born*” (I Cor. 15:8). Through our natural birth, we were all born into sin as members of a fallen and rebellious race. What King David honestly confessed of himself is true of us all: “***Surely I was sinful at birth***” (Ps. 51:5). Having been born in such a sinful spiritual state, we are all “***...dead in our transgressions and sins***” (Eph. 2:1). As we have seen throughout this study, it is only through the “*new birth*” that we can be “*born again*” into the family of God - and thereby be a part of Christ's “*Brotherhood.*”

The Good News of the Bible is that Jesus was *born* into our world so that we could be *reborn* into His world! He was born into the *human family* so we could be reborn into the *family of God*. That's the great mystery and wonder of the *Incarnation - God taking upon Himself humanity through Jesus Christ*. However, when Christ was Incarnate in human flesh, the vast majority of people living at that time did not receive Him. Nor did they accept His free gift of new life. The Apostle John's words about the rejection of Christ seem almost incredulous to a rational mind: “***He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him***” (Jn. 1:12). The Bible further says that “***...even His own brothers did not believe in Him***” (Jn. 7:5). Many however, did believe in Him, and receive

His gift of new life. John summarized this spiritual transformation with these incredible words:

“...all who *received Him*, to those who *believed in His Name*, He gave the right to become *Children of God* - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but *born of God*” (Jn. 1:12-13).

The moment then that we are “**born of God**,” we are *eternal members of the Family of God*. And in that Family, there is only *one Elder Brother* - the Lord Jesus! Henry Van Dyke poetically expressed this spiritual relationship we have with the Lord Jesus in his hymn, “*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.*” Note the words of the third stanza:

“Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest, Well-spring of the joy of living, Ocean depth of happy rest! Thou our Father, Christ our Brother - All who live in love are Thine; Teach us how to love each other, Lift us to the joy divine.”

Let’s look now at some key verses that portray our brotherly relationship with Jesus Christ.

THE PURCHASE OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

First of all we can see that membership in this *brotherhood* did not come at a cheap price. It cost the Lord Jesus everything to make us His *brothers*. He became who we are so that we could become who He is. The Apostle Paul expressed the mystery of this great spiritual exchange this way: “**God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God**” (II Cor. 5:21). A few verses later Paul expressed the same truth in different words: “**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich**” (II Cor. 8:9).

So through His passion and agony on the cross, Christ suffered and fully paid the penalty for all our sins. It was therefore only through His suffering that we were changed from *slaves* to *sons*...from *bastards* to *brothers*...from *hirelings* to *heirs*! Listen to these poignant words of the writer of Hebrews:

“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the Author of our salvation *perfect through suffering*. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same *family*. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them *brothers*.

He says, 'I will declare Your Name to *My brothers...*' (Heb. 2:10-12).

It was only after Jesus had suffered, died, been buried and raised from the dead, that He could call His disciples "**My brothers.**" Therefore, He told the women who had come seeking His body - but found only an empty tomb: "**Go to My brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God'**" (Jn. 20:17). Before the cross, Jesus had often referred to God with the intimate terms of "**My Father.**" Now through His atoning work on the cross, His disciples had been brought into this *divine family*. For the first time Jesus could now say to them that God was also "**...your Father!**" So at His first resurrection appearance at the empty tomb, Jesus commissioned the women to "**Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will meet Me**" (Matt. 28:10). By sending them back to Galilee, Christ was taking them back to where He had first met them and called them. It was at Galilee that the "**Author of their salvation**" had first called them *His disciples*. Now He called them *His brothers!*

Are you also a part of *His family*? Have you too become one of *His brothers*? If you are not now in that living relationship with the Lord Jesus - you too can be *His brother*. However, it cannot and will not happen through *religion...church attendance...good intentions...obeying the 'Golden Rule'...* or by *being good* - but only by being *born again!*

THE PREDESTINATION OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

"For those God foreknew He also *predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the *firstborn among many brothers*" (Rom. 8:29).

This crucial verse reminds us both of the *foreknowledge of God* and the *predestination of God*. Since God is the "**...Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End**" (Rev. 1:8; 22:13), only He can know all things in advance. The prophet Isaiah reminds us of God's *omniscience*, or *all knowing*, when he wrote that only God can "**...make known the end from the beginning**" (Isa. 40:10). Therefore, before God created the world, He *foreknew* those among the human race who would be redeemed. Whether His *foreknowledge* was *causal*, *elective*, and *determinative* is not the focus of this study. That's a debate that has been going on for generations among theologians - and will probably not be satisfactorily resolved for everyone this side of eternity! But the mystery and wonder is not that God might have *chosen*, or *elected* some unto salvation - and not others. The wonder is that He would have saved *any!* According to God's holy justice, *none* deserve salvation! All humanity deserve the *wrath of God* rather than the *love of God*. Because of our sin, all of us merit only *eternal condemnation*. As a result of our sin and rebellion against God, all of

the human race deserves to live, die - and eternally exist in the state of *spiritual death* and *separation* we were all born into (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1; I Tim. 5:6, etc.). **“But because of His great love for us, God, who is *rich in mercy*, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...”** (Eph. 2:4). So God’s salvation is always a matter of *grace* from beginning to end! As Paul reminds us again and again: **“It is by *grace* that you have been saved”** (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:5-8). What a mind-boggling truth to contemplate that God **“...chose us in Him before the creation of the world...In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will - to the praise of His glorious grace which He has freely given us in the One He loves”** (Eph. 1:4-6).

So the Apostle Paul here assures us that God’s *foreknowledge* of His elect is perfect. As he wrote and assured young Timothy: **“God’s solid foundation stand firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’”** (II Tim. 2:19).

Since God is a God of *perfect purpose*, He accomplishes everything in this universe **“...in accordance with His pleasure and will”** (Eph. 1:5; Isa. 40:13; Rom. 11:34). *Christ’s passion* was therefore not without a very *personal purpose*. He suffered for us so that we could be **“...predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”**

This verse then reminds us that we are both *foreknown* and *predestined* by God to *be like Jesus Christ*. His purpose is nothing short of our being **“...conformed to the likeness of His Son.”** During His Incarnation, Jesus took on *our likeness* so that we could take on *His likeness*. Even though He had eternally existed with the **“...very nature of God,”** He took upon Himself **“...the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...”** (Phil. 2:6-8). All of this was to the end that through regeneration we might take upon ourselves His *divine likeness*. And all of this was made possible through Christ’s *life, death, and resurrection* as **“...the firstborn among many brothers.”** Through His resurrection from the grave, Jesus Christ was the *firstborn* or *firstfruit* of every Believer who would also be resurrected. All who believe in Him will one day be a part of the *full harvest*. To echo the words of Paul to the Corinthians: **“Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven”** (I Cor. 15:49). That means that when we are resurrected from the dead, we will receive a *glorious body* just like His resurrection body - all because we are *His brothers!*

So the glorious Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ is **“...the firstborn among many brothers!” HALLELUJAH!**

THE PASSION OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

The growing passion of the brethren is to be the very same passion that characterized the life of our Elder Brother, the Lord Jesus. The predominant passion that characterized His life was *love*. Not the human kind of love, but a different kind of love altogether. His was a *divine love...an eternal love...a holy love*. So unique is this God-kind-of-love, that the word used to describe it is unique to Biblical revelation. All previous human dictionaries were too earth-bound in their definitions to describe God's love as expressed in Christ! Through the Incarnation, a new *quality of love* had invaded man's existence. This new love pulsed from the *heart of God* - not from the *heart of man*. It was a *heavenly love*, rather than an *earthly love*. It drew its character from the *nature of God* rather than the *nature of man*. This love expressed the *perfect passion of God* rather than the *perverted passion of man*. This love was not victimized by selfishness and self-centeredness - this love was totally self-effacing and self-giving. The word that describes this divine love is *agape*. It is the characteristic and defining word of Christianity.

Agape can be defined this way: "It is the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same" (Vines Expository Dictionary, p. 703). Even though this kind of love comes from *above* - it has its expressions here *below*. It flows vertically from God to us, and then is expressed horizontally from us to our brothers. We therefore can only receive this love as a gift from God. As such it is a noun, *agape*. When we express it to our Christian brothers, it becomes an active verb, *agapao*.

There is another kind of love talked about in the New Testament. It has to do with our affection for our brothers. The Greek word for this brotherly kind of love is *phileo*, and generally means: "*tender affection*." The normative New Testament word for brother is *adelphos*. When these two words are used together to express "*brotherly love*," the word is *philadelphos* or *philadelphia*. Thus, the American City of Philadelphia is known as the "City of Brotherly Love." In one real sense therefore, Philadelphia is where every Christian is supposed to live - in the "City of Brotherly Love!" At the very least, *philadelphos* should describe the relationships within the Christian Church - a community where loving brotherly relationships are to be incarnated and demonstrated!

Look with me at some of the primary verses that exhort us as Christians to live with a passionate love for God, and a corresponding passionate love for our brothers:



- **“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not *love [agape] his brother*” (I Jn. 3:10).**
- **“Let love [agape] be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Be devoted to one another in *brotherly love*” [phileo] (Rom. 12:10).**
- **“Now about *brotherly love [phileo]* we do not need to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love [agape] each other. In fact, you do *love [phileo] all the brothers throughout Macedonia*. Yet we urge you, brothers, do so more and more” (I Thess. 4:9-10).**
- **“Show proper respect to everyone: *love [agape] the brotherhood of believers ...*” (I Pet. 2:17).**
- **“Keep on *loving [phileo] each others as brothers*” (Heb. 13:1).**
- **“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have *sincere love [phileo] for your brothers*, love one another deeply, from the heart” (I Pet. 1:22).**
- **“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, *love [phileo] as brothers*, be compassionate and humble” (I Pet. 3:8).**
- **“...add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, *brotherly kindness*; and to *brotherly kindness [philadelphia]*, *love [agape]*. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:6-8).**

It is also crucial to note that *agape* is not primarily an *emotion* or a *feeling* - it is a matter of the *will*. It is not *visceral*, it is *volitional*. Therefore, *agape* does not take its directive from the *senses* - but rather from the *Spirit*. It is only because *agape* is a matter of the *will* - rather than the *emotions*, that it can be *commanded* in

Scripture. That is why Jesus put His directive of brotherly love to His disciples in the imperative tense:

“My command is this: Love [agape] each other as I have loved [agapao] you. Greater love [agape] has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you”
(Jn. 15:12-15).



Patt with a Nepali friend,
Shanta Sapkota.

Since *phileo* is more feeling based, it cannot be commanded. But since *agape* is a matter of the will, it can be commanded. You cannot command a *change of feelings or emotions* - but you can command a *change of will!* In counseling I have often stressed this principle: “You cannot feel yourself into a way of acting - but you can act yourself into a way of feeling!” Too often people say that they cannot *act* a certain way because they do not *feel* that way. They think they have to wait and experience a *change of feelings* before they can *change their behavior*. But I emphasize to them that if they will *change their mind* - which is what *repentance* means; and then *change their will* - which is what *obedience* means – after that their feelings will also change over time. So the principle of maturity that we must all learn to live by is this: “We do not *feel ourselves into a way of acting*; but rather we *act ourselves into a way of feeling!*” Too often we allow our *will to succumb to our feelings*, rather than force our *feelings to submit to our will*.

So Jesus commanded that His brothers love each other in the same way that He had loved them as their Elder Brother! And that had little to do with *feelings* or *emotions*. It was a *willful relationship* based upon *agape*, not upon *phileo*. They were even to “...**lay down their lives**” for each other, just as He would do for them. That’s how *brothers* and *friends* act toward each other when they are motivated by *agape!*

We can see this same spirit of *agape* motivating the Apostle Paul in his passion to see his fellow Jews converted to Jesus Christ:

“I could wish that I myself were *cursed* and *cut off from Christ* for the sake of *my brothers*, those of *my own race*, the people of *Israel*” (Rom. 9:3).

As Jews, they were still his *brethren* according to *race* and *culture* - but they were no longer his *brothers* spiritually. He had received a new circumcision of the heart

that superseded his circumcision of the flesh. He had a new relationship that was greater than the one based on *race* and *religion*. It was based upon *regeneration*. However, Paul still so longed for his *religious brethren* to become his *spiritual brethren* through faith in Christ - that he was willing to be **“...cursed and cut off from Christ...”** for their sake! That’s exactly what Christ did for us to make us *His spiritual brothers*. He took upon Himself the *curse* we were under. Paul expressed it this way to the Galatian Christians: **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’”** (Gal. 3:13). That’s the *agape* of Christ in action in our behalf. Now Paul says that if it were spiritually possible, he would be willing to do for his fellow Jews what Christ had done for him - *be cursed for their sake!* If it were possible, he was willing to *lose his own salvation* in order for them to *gain their salvation!* However, there is only one person who had the qualifications to make that kind of spiritual exchange - and that is the Lord Jesus! **“...He appeared so that He might take away our sins,”** wrote the Apostle John. **“And in Him is no sin”** (I Jn. 3:5). That’s why it was possible for God to **“...make Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”** (I Cor. 5:21). On the cross Christ took our *curse* and gave us His *cure!* His *condemnation* resulted in our *transformation*. He exchanged *His heaven* for *our hell...His riches* for *our poverty...His righteousness* for *our ruin* - *His all* for *our all!*

So regardless of Paul’s desire to exchange his salvation for theirs, the only hope for the salvation for his Jewish contemporaries was for them to put their faith in Christ’s atoning death on the cross - just as he had done on the Damascus Road. The same is true for us today. Whatever the ‘Damascus Road’ of religion...rebellion...searching...or procrastination we might be traveling, Christ still has a *loving passion* to bring us to Himself! In Him alone is salvation full and free! Christ has fully borne the curse of sin, hell, death, and the grave for all who will believe in Him! And, just as He has demonstrated His *agape passion* for us - we are to demonstrate that same passion toward all of our Christian brethren, just as Paul did after his Damascus Road experience with the Lord Jesus!

THE PROVISION OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

Whenever a person is *born again* into the *brotherhood of Christ*, he or she comes into the Kingdom of God with many unmet *needs*. Those *needs* are as individual and unique as the people they represent. For some, the driving and dictating need of their lives at the time of conversion is *spiritual*. For others, the need is *emotional*. For still others, the need is more *relational*. For so many the driving need of their life is *physical*. In reality, it is always a combination of all of these needs. For someone who has been involved in spiritism and the occult, there is need for spiritual *deliverance*. For someone recently divorced or widowed, there are great *emotional needs*. For a person who has been abused growing up, there are great *relational needs*. For a person experiencing hunger and thirst amidst a

national crisis or disaster, the driving felt need is a *physical need* for safety, food, and water.

In reality, all of these needs are a tangled and intertwined mess on the inside of us - crying out for some permanent solution and lasting resolution! God has so created us that we are a *whole...a unity*. As such, that simply means that whatever touches one part of our nature, soon manifests itself in every other part of our nature. What happens in the *inner man* soon manifests itself in the *outer man*; and whatever touches the *outer man* penetrates and reverberates throughout the *inner man*. Therefore, needs in the *body* are felt in the *soul* and *spirit*; and needs in the *soul* and *spirit* are ultimately manifest in the *body*.

Few people however, come into the Kingdom of God with a clear understanding of the true nature of their need. There is usually some *surface felt need* that evidences itself - *loneliness...fear...anger...unforgiveness...bitterness...depression*, etc. That is the *perceived need*, or the one you experience through your *senses*. You may seek to silence those unmet needs through things like *materialism...alcohol...drugs...medication...over-eating...pornography...psychotherapy...Zen...yogi...meditation...good works*, etc. But through such methods, the real need is never lastingly met. That is because we are ignoring the only *permanent solution* - a *new birth* and a *new nature* through the Lord Jesus!

Our needs then, are in reality *multi-leveled*. They are like an iceberg - 10% is above the surface, while 90% is beneath the surface. Through our *conscious mind* we perceive the *surface need* - while through our *subconscious mind* we perceive our *submerged need*. But our great frustration is that we are never able to really surface it and 'melt it down!' It remains *frozen...hidden...hard...suppressed...repressed...out of sight*. However, it keeps 'pushing itself up' and manifesting itself through our behavior! Those deep frozen unseen icebergs of our lives ultimately create great disaster - just like the giant iceberg did to the *Titanic Ocean Liner!* Those *submerged needs*, then are the real *precipitating motivators* of our lives. These are the ones you can only experience through your *spirit*. The *felt need* is the *fruit*, while the *foundational need* is the *root*. One is the *cause* while the other is the *effect*. Without the discernment of the *Word of God*, we do not have the ability to *perceive* - nor the *power* to deal with, this submerged, subconscious part of our lives. But that's where the dynamic of the *Spirit of God* - working through the *Son of God*, and the *Word of God*, take action:

“For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to *dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart*” (Heb. 4:12).

Please note those words: “...dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.” That simply means that only the Word has the capacity to work deeply in the *inner man*. Only the Spirit of God has the capacity to do surgery on our soul and spirit. That’s why Paul prayed:

“For this reason I kneel before the Father...I pray that out of His glorious riches He may *strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being*, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:14-17).

Therefore, outside of a personal relationship with Christ, we spend our lives trying to deal with the *surface need* while ignoring the *suppressed need* - the one below the surface. We put our attention on the “**outer man**” while ignoring the “**inner man**.” We therefore have a perpetual itch that we cannot scratch...a sickness we cannot cure...a personality disorder we cannot change! All the while we secretly cry out with Jeremiah: “**The heart (inner man) is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?**” (Jer. 17:9). So as long as our spirits are “...**dead in our trespasses and sin**” (Eph. 2:1), we have no capacity or discernment to distinguish our *real need* from the *felt need* - the *root* from the *fruit*. Try as we may, we just cannot heal our own *heart problem!*

The Bible clearly teaches us that man’s *root problem* is *spiritual*. Jesus confirmed the diagnosis of Jeremiah when He said that we are all born with an incurable *heart problem!* Even the Jewish religious leaders of His day were desperately confused about the matter. They too spent their lives focused on the *externals*, as though they could solve the *internal* problems. They thought and taught that spiritual cleanliness was determined by what went *into* a person’s mouth. Jesus said that it was really determined by what came *out of* his mouth - because that revealed the content of a person’s heart. Listen to His words:

“Don’t you see that...the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’...”(Matt. 15:18-20).

That’s why I have preached and taught for years that *Jesus Christ is the world’s greatest radical!* You see, the word *radical* comes from a Latin word meaning *root*. While other religious leaders dealt with the *fruit* of man’s condition, Jesus was more *radical* - He dealt with the *root* of man’s condition! Through various forms of ‘good works,’ the other religious leaders and philosophers of history try to teach man to ‘*pick off the bad fruit*’ of their lives. Some prescribe *discipline*, while others teach *denial*. Some teach *asceticism* while others ascribe to *agnosticism*. However, the more their followers ‘picked the fruit,’ the more it grows! Every passing year brings a new crop of ‘rotten fruit!’ But then Jesus came - the *world’s greatest radical!* He by-passed the *fruit* of our *conduct*, and

went straight to the *root* of our *character*. He went to the *heart of the problem* by going to the *heart of man!* He said: “*Change the root and you will change the fruit!*” Or as He expressed it to Nicodemus:

“No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and *spirit*. *Flesh gives birth to flesh*, but the *Spirit gives birth to spirit*. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘*You must be born again*’” (Jn. 3:5-7).

The uniqueness of the Church of Jesus Christ, is that it deals with the *total needs* of a person. Just like Jesus did, we start ministering to people at the point of their *felt need* - whatever it may be. But we do not stop there. We go on and seek to minister the *whole Gospel* to the *whole man*. As *perfect God* and *perfect Man*, only Jesus Christ is sufficient enough to meet the totality of man’s needs. He alone has made perfect provision for the needs of our *past...present...future!* Only the Lord Jesus can meet the needs of our *spirit...soul...body* - our *mind...emotion...and will*. That’s why Paul prayed this for the brethren at Thessalonica:

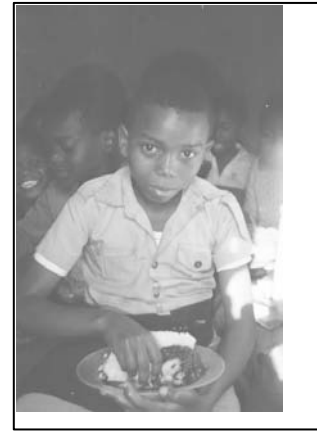
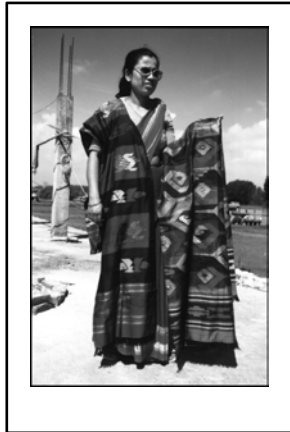
“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole *spirit, soul* and *body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it” (I Thess. 5:23-24).

Do you hear the confidence that Paul expresses in the *faithfulness of God* in doing this? “**The One who calls you,**” Paul says, “**is faithful and He will do it!**” Even though we are *fickle* - God is *faithful!* That’s why he could confidently proclaim: “**And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus**” (Phil. 4:19). He further reminds the Corinthian Church, that God *meets our needs* so that we can in turn *meet the needs of others*:

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, *having all that you need*, you will abound in every good work” (II Cor. 9:8)

In the New Testament, we not only see Jesus Christ reaching out and meeting the physical, spiritual, emotional and relational needs of people around Him; we see His Body, the Church, doing the same thing. *He clearly commissioned His disciples to continue to meet needs at all levels, just as He had done*. Through precept and example, they clearly got the message that there is a direct link between our *love for Christ*, and our *love for the brethren* (Matt. 22:34-40). We cannot express one without following through and expressing the other. Just as Jesus met our needs, we must seek to meet the *needs of our brethren*. Listen to the words of one of His most beloved disciples, John:

“This is how we know what *love* is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to *lay down our lives for our brothers*. If anyone has material possessions and sees his *brother in need* but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, *let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth*” (1 Jn. 3:16-18).



Self Support Sewing Project supported by the Dorcas Fellowship.

Self Support Weave Project.

Slum Children in Nairobi, Kenya, being fed daily through the support of NDI Partners.



Pastors in Africa with their new suits provided

Water Mill Project, Nepal supported by the Barnabas Fellowship.

“What good is it, my **brothers, if a man claims have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a *brother or sister is without clothes and daily food*. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed.’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by *action*, is dead” (James 2:14-17).**



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So Jesus’ disciples learned by His clear example that *love is an action word!* Agape is not an abstract philosophical concept to contemplate! It is something that must be practically applied. It is not enough to just *talk love*, we must *do love!* We must not just *talk about needs*, we must *meet needs*. We see many beautiful examples of this in the First Century Church as recorded in the Book of Acts. Jesus had given them a new understanding of *koinonia*, or *community*. He re-defined their sense of *togetherness* within the brotherhood of His Body.

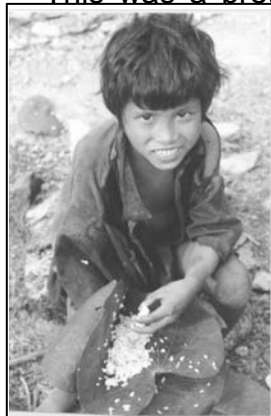
Individualism was to be superseded by *community*. Note these words describing life within the early Church immediately after Pentecost:

“All the believers were *together* and *had everything in common*. Selling their possessions and goods, *they gave to anyone as he had need*” (Acts 2:44-45).

As converted Jews, they were thoroughly familiar with God’s instruction to His people through Moses about meeting the needs of the *poorer brethren* who lived among them:

“If there is a *poor man among your brothers*... do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your *poor brother*. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs... Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be *poor people* in the land. Therefore *I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and towards the poor and needy* in your land” (Deut. 15:7-11).

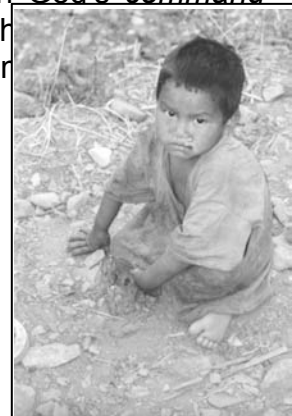
This was a pretty daunting command to obey! However, with God’s *command*



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Hungry children in Nepal.

would *meet the needs of the poor*, He would *meet their needs* by “**...blessing you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to**” (Deu. 15:10). They would therefore have the necessary resources to meet the needs of the “**...poor in the land.**” As Jesus reminded them, this would be necessary because “**...the poor you will always have with you...**” (Matt. 26:11). However, God promised to *bless them* as they *blessed the poor*. That promise and still stands for Christ’s brethren today!



Destitute people from the
Chepang Ureached People
Group in Nepal.



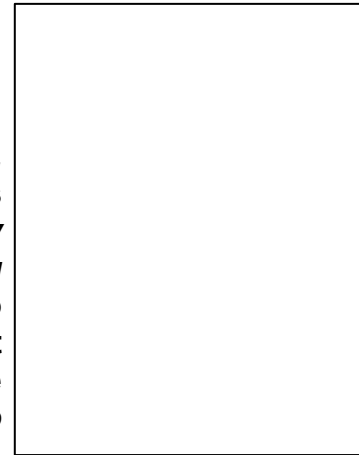
Look further at the early Church as they seek to apply this *principle of koinonia*. At Pentecost, their Church had quickly grown from 120 people to over 3,000! Very soon the number grew to over 5,000 (Acts 4:4) - and the growth continued on a daily basis (Acts 2:47; 5:14). Obviously, this incredible numerical growth represented a lot of new and pressing needs that had to be met. Among the Believers, there was no thought of looking to the Roman Government for some kind of Social Welfare assistance. Nor could they turn to their former religion of Judaism, because it had largely rejected them. The Temple treasure was closed and sealed to the needs represented among them. They must somehow meet the many needs of their *brethren* through their faith in God's promises to them - both through Moses and the Lord Jesus. They knew how God miraculously provided for the needs of His children in the wilderness. They had also watched Christ multiply the loaves and fishes to feed a multitude (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:29-38). Now they would have to look to Him by faith to continue to miraculously meet the needs represented among them. The Holy Spirit did in fact meet that need by giving the brethren a growing sense of *koinonia*, or *togetherness*. Through this new sense of *community*, each member of the Church felt a growing sense of responsibility for their *needy brethren*. The love of Christ compelled them to do so. Just as He had meet their every need, they must meet the needs of their new brethren. The historian, Doctor Luke, gives us a telling and compelling account of their sense of responsibility to each other:



The Chepang people of Nepal receive
sweaters and blankets.



“All the believers were *one in heart and mind*. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, *but they shared everything they had...There was no needy persons among them*. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and *it was distributed to anyone as he had need*” (Acts 4:32-35).



Indians from the ministry of T.I. Dorairaj receive blankets.

So serious were they about meeting the needs in their fellowship, that they set up a special group of men to oversee the “**...daily distribution of food**” to the widows living among them (Acts 6:1-6). These seven men that were chosen for this task are probably the forerunners of the office of *deacon* that we read about later in the New Testament Church (I Tim. 3:1-15; Titus 1:5-9). Evangelism then, was a natural result of this practical expression of love for the needy brethren. Jesus had told them: “**By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another**” (Jn. 13:34). There was no thought or division in their minds between *evangelism* and *social action*! Evangelism of those *outside the church* was a direct result of ministry *inside the church*. One was inseparably linked to the other. Just as Jesus had prophesied, the watching world said of the early Church: “**Behold how they love one another!**” In his narrative, Doctor Luke further records that there was a direct link between *meeting physical needs* and *evangelism*, or *meeting spiritual needs*:

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem *increased rapidly*, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

As the early Church grew and spread from Jerusalem to other towns and provinces, they too were taught to remember the poor. As a zealous young convert to Christ, Paul was instructed to “**...remember the poor,**” as he traveled and ministered (Gal. 2:10). As a result, everywhere he went establishing new churches, he collected money for the needy saints in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30; 24:17; Rom. 15:25-28, 31; I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8:1-4, etc.). And even though they felt a responsibility to meet the needs of the poor wherever and wherever they encountered them (Acts 3:1-10), they were particularly concerned about first meeting those of their *needy brethren*. “**As we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people,**” Paul instructed. However, they were to do so “**...especially to those who belong to the family of believers**” (Gal. 6:10). So



just like “...**judgment must begin with the family of God**” (I Pet. 4:17); *meeting needs* must also begin with the *family of God!*

We can clearly see that meeting the *needs of the brethren* was a high priority in the life of the early church. And down through the centuries, whenever the church has been at her best, it is also said of her: “...**there were no needy persons among them**” (Acts 4:34). Jesus made it clear to His disciples then - and now:

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me” (Mtt. 25:40).

The *uniqueness of Christianity* is the *uniqueness of Christ*. In all other religions of the world, the disciples wash the feet of their guru. It is the role of the devotees to serve their master, and meet his every need. It is their calling when necessary to even die for their master. *But only in Christianity do we find a Christ who washes the feet of His disciples!* Only in the Christian faith do we see a Master who girds Himself with a towel and *serves His disciples* - and meets their every need! Only from the lips of Christ do we hear the words: “**I am among you as one who serves**” (Lk. 22:27). So only in Christ do we see the *Savior serving!* Only in Christianity do we see the Master dying for His servants! *What an incredible reversal of roles!* The Master *serves...the Master gives...the Master dies!*

Therefore, it is only as the Church continues to mirror that humble role of a *servant*, that she will have her greatest witness to the watching world! Therefore, may what was said of the First Century Church also be said of the Church at the end of the Twentieth Century: “...**there were no needy persons among them.**”

THE PEACE OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

“How good and pleasant it is when *brothers live together in unity*”
(Ps. 133:1).

The thing that usually typifies relationships in the world is *disunity...division ...divorce*. This relational divisiveness comes from our sinful and insecure motivations - like *ego...selfishness...individualism...competition...pride*. But within the *Brotherhood of Christ*, our relationships are to be characterized by *peace...unity... fellowship...communion...togetherness - koinonia!*

This *peace* and *unity* within the Body of Christ is not made possible because all of the *brethren* are just alike in personality and temperament. Quite the contrary! There is a rich *diversity* within the brotherhood. In fact, Christ often brings people together *“in the Church”* who would never have associated with each other *“in the world.”* Outside of Jesus Christ, they have little or nothing in common. By nature, they are as diverse and divisive as His first disciples - who were always seeking **“first place”** (Matt. 20:24; Mk. 9:34; Lk. 22:24).

At yet another point, we see how Christianity is unique among the other religions of the world. Religion seeks to change a person by working from *outside in*. Christianity on the other hand - through the indwelling Holy Spirit, works from *inside out*. Therefore, through the sanctification process, the Holy Spirit decreases our *individualism*, while intensifying our *individuality*. As a result, we are never more *unique* and *individual* than when we are *“in Christ.”* As we grow and mature *“in the Lord,”* increasingly that old selfish, self-seeking, ‘me-first,’ rugged *individualism* dies away. As our *false identity* dies, our *true identity* is born! The Apostle Paul’s life is a graphic example of this spiritual paradox. So radical was the transformation of his *nature*, that he received a change of *name* to match his change in *nature*. As a result, his name was changed from *Saul of Tarsus* to *Paul the Apostle!* He described his spiritual and personality transformation this way:

“I have been crucified with Christ and *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.* The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Therefore, it is only through the transformation of the sanctification process that we can have relationships of *peace* and *unity* within the Body of Christ. The moment a person is *born again*, there is an *instant* and *eternal spiritual oneness* with every other member of the Body of Christ. All of the *natural, racial, sexual,* and *cultural* divisions *“in Adam”* are done away with *“in Christ.”* Listen to how the Bible describes this new *spiritual oneness*:



“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”

(Gal. 3:26-28).



Baptisms in Nepal and India.

Paul expressed the same truth with very similar words to the brethren at Colossae:

“Here [in the Church] there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11).

Look with me at an example of how this principle of *oneness in Christ* was practically worked out in the early Church. A close friend of Paul by the name of Philemon, had one of his slaves to run away. In his flight from slavery, he went to Rome to lose himself in the anonymity of the masses of people there. The slave's name was Onesimus. However, the Lord Jesus had other plans for both Philemon and Onesimus. He was working out His plan to demonstrate the power of reconciliation between a slave owner and his slave. He was going to give practical demonstration to the spiritual truth that **“...in Christ Jesus...there is neither...slave nor free.”** So God sovereignly arranged to have Paul in Rome at the very same time that Onesimus was there seeking to lose himself. By God's providence, Paul somehow met Onesimus while he himself was under house arrest in Rome. During that time, Onesimus was converted. Though he was still a *slave* before the Roman Law, he was now a *brother in Christ* to Philemon. Paul then writes to his friend Philemon on Onesimus' behalf:

“...have him back...no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord” (Philemon. 15 -16).

Nothing but the power and transformation of the Gospel can make a *slave into a brother!* This new relationship within the Body of Christ brought about through conversion, would ultimately change the slave system in both the Jewish Religion and Roman world! A Christian slave owner could no longer consider one of his slaves as less than himself. No longer could his slave be seen as an *inferior individual*. He was now his equal before God, though still his subordinate before man. He must now see him as a *brother in Christ*, and relate to him accordingly. And conversely, the slave must now have a new respect for the one he serves. Both would now have to submit to their common Master, the Lord Jesus.

“All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better

because those who benefit from their service are *believers*, and *dear to them*” (I Tim. 6:1-2).

Because of these transformed relationships, the term “*Christian slave owner*” very quickly became a contradiction of terms! By becoming a “**bond slave of Jesus Christ**” (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1), every one became *freemen*. They became *brethren!* That understanding would ultimately destroy the slave system altogether among the Community of Christ.



Some National Partners and their wives
who are NDI partners.



In several of his letters, the Apostle Paul gave clear instruction about how the *peace* and *unity* within the family of God is to be maintained - through an attitude of *loving submission*. Whether it was the relationship between a *husband and wife*, *parent and children*, or *master and slave*, that relationship must be characterized by *loving submission*. Note how Paul lumps all of these primary relationships together in one practical exhortation:

“*Wives*, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. *Husbands*, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. *Children*, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. *Fathers*, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. *Slaves*, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to

win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. *Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven*" (Col. 3:18-4:1).

It is hard for us today to realize how *revolutionary* and *evolutionary* those words were to the world of Paul's day! Even after almost 2,000 years - they are still just as *radical* to our world! Those spiritual concepts set in motion a whole new dynamic that had the power to *transform all social relationships!* And, everything began with a *transformed relationship with God through the Lord Jesus.* When our relationship with God is changed through *redemption* and *reconciliation*, then all other relationships must increasingly be characterized by *love, reconciliation, submission, peace.* As those kinds of *redeemed* and *reconciled relationships* are demonstrated by the *brethren*, it becomes our greatest witness to a watching world of the power of the Gospel. Therefore, the brotherhood of Christ must strive to demonstrate the principle of *unity within diversity!*

Since there is such diversity within the Body of Christ, it understandably takes *work* to keep the unity current among the brethren! To *perpetuate the peace*, there must be *humility* rather than *haughtiness...self-effacing* rather than *self-seeking...purity* rather than *pride.* That's why Paul exhorted the brethren to **"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"** (Eph. 4:3). He further instructed the brethren at the Church at Philippi about how to *perpetuate the peace* in their fellowship:

"If you have any *encouragement* from being united with Christ. If any *comfort* from His *love*, if any *fellowship with the Spirit*, if any *tenderness* and *compassion*, then make my joy complete by being *like-minded*, having the *same love*, being *one in spirit and purpose.* Do nothing out of *selfish ambition* or *vain conceit*, but in *humility consider others better than yourselves.* Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others" (Phil. 2:1-4).

Note carefully here Paul's *prescription for peace:* **"...encouragement ...comfort...love...fellowship...tenderness...compassion...like minded...one in spirit and purpose...humility."** Again, it takes *work* to keep those attitudes dominant within the Body of Christ - beginning with ourselves! Those attitudes are the direct opposite of **"selfish ambition"** and **"vain conceit."** These latter attitudes are what we do *naturally.* The former list is the mind-set that we can only have *supernaturally!* One attitude comes from the *flesh* - the other through the *Spirit.*

Tragically, the Body of Christ is too often typified by *division* and *disunity* rather than by the “...**unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**” Too many of His brethren become a divisive force within the Church rather than a uniting force. Some Christians act as if they have a spiritual gift of division! Their specialty is stirring up trouble and breaking the unity of the Spirit! Through pride and pettiness, they continuously stir up dissension in the Body of Christ. Wherever there are two Christians in fellowship - they can create division! Every Christian therefore, needs to be reminded how serious of an offense this is to God. Listen to His words through the wisdom of Solomon:

“There are six things the *Lord hates*, seven that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a *man who stirs up dissension among brothers*” (Prov. 6:16-19).

So if the Lord *hates dissension among the brethren*, then we too should also hate it! Through His Spirit and His love, we should do all we can to “...**maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**” Then and only then will we experience the reality of the words of the Psalmist:

“How good and pleasant it is when *brothers live together in unity*” (Ps. 133:1).



J.L. and Tila Singh Thapa of Nepal, our church building supervisor in Nepal.



J.L. and Hanok Tamang of Nepal, pastor of the Aradhana Church and President of the Nepal Churches Fellowship (NCFN)

THE PERSECUTION OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

It is rather ironic and paradoxical that the *peace of the brethren* so often leads to the *persecution of the brethren!* Our spiritual *unity in Christ* is both the thing that *attracts* some to Christ, while it *detracts* others from Christ. At the very time that we are most *fragrant* to God, we are often most *odious* to the pagan world! Paul

expressed this spiritual and social paradox this way: **“We are to God the *aroma of Christ* among those who are being saved and to those who are perishing. To the one we are the *smell of death*; to the other, the *fragrance of life*”** (II Cor. 2:15-16). To those who are **“being saved,”** the love and grace of the Lord Jesus is the **“fragrance of life.”** But to those who want to keep people locked into their sin and bondage, the message of the Gospel is the **“smell of death”** - death to their monopoly... death to their control...death to their domination...death to their injustice!

I see this tension demonstrated in many parts of the world where I travel and minister. When the Gospel begins to impact a society, the new *reconciled relationships* are often a threat to the existing *religious, cultural, political, economic, and social systems*. Whether to the *apartheid* system of South Africa...the *racism and segregation* of America...the *tribalism* of Africa...the *caste system* of Asia - the Gospel is always a threat! That's because the Gospel alone has the power of God in it to **“...destroy the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”** Only Jesus Christ can **“...create in Himself *one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility*”** (Eph. 2:14-16). So in countries where the Gospel penetrates, the Church becomes the only place where diverse people groups can meet on common ground. In the Church, worship and fellowship takes place between people who previously could have little or no contact or relationships with each other. But through *redemption*, Jesus has **“destroyed the barrier”** of sin that separated God from man. Through *reconciliation* He has broken down the **“dividing wall of hostility”** that existed between people. Now *“in Christ”* and *“in Church”* there is **“one new man out of the two.”** As a result, Christians of different *races... classes...cultures... tribes...caste*, can all meet together with unity and equality. They have a new commonality *“in Christ”* that supersedes all of the divisions that previously existed *“in the world.”* They now have a *oneness in Christ*. Paul expressed this seven-fold spiritual oneness that every Christian has in common with every other Christian this way: **“There is *one body and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...one God and Father of all*”** (Eph. 3:3-6).

Again, it is this new *spiritual and social oneness* that Christ brings that makes Him and His Church such a threat to the *sin and segregation* that exists in the world between people groups. That's why Jesus Christ will always be the most *dangerous Revolutionary* the world has ever experienced! He comes into our world that is socially 'upside down,' and 'turns it right side up!' Neither the world of the First Century, nor the world of the Twentieth Century is ready for the spiritual and social changes He brings. That's why He was rejected and crucified! That's also why His faithful followers to this day so often experience *persecution*.

Whether in Christ's day, or our day, it is usually the people at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder who most eagerly respond to the Gospel. As they are

liberated through Jesus Christ, they become a part of His Body, the Church. In this new fellowship of the redeemed, they find *new peace...new personhood...new power...new purpose...new prosperity*. As a part of the Family of God, they have a *new identity* and a *new dignity*. Before becoming Christians, they may have been *slaves...peasants...low caste...outcast...no caste...untouchables*. Now they are a “...**chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.**” Through conversion they are instantaneously changed from man’s *nobody* to God’s *somebody!* As Peter reminds them: “**Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God**” (I Pet. 2:9-10). That new identity becomes a powerful threat to the vested religious and political structures of fallen society. That’s why Jesus said that His Church should expect *opposition* and *persecution*. He also said that sometimes the *persecution of the brethren* would come from one’s own family - perhaps the most difficult persecution of all to face!



Norbu Tamang, a Bhutan brother, whose family is being persecuted because he is a Christian.



Thulimaya and Dil Tamang were beaten. As a result she miscarried her baby. Dil died several weeks later from injuries he received through the beating.

Pastor Prem Singh Magar was



- **“You will be betrayed even by parents, *brothers*, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. *All men will hate you because of Me*” (Lk. 21:16-17).**
- **“*Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of Me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved*” (Matt. 10:21-22).**

Ultimately, all persecution of Christians is in reality *a persecution of Christ Himself*. As He said, the persecution His brethren face is really “**...because of Me.**” He further reminded His disciples: **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first”** (Jn. 15:18). Part of His teaching in the *Sermon on the Mount*, was to prepare His disciples for rejection and persecution. **“Blessed are you,”** Jesus said, **“when men shall revile you and persecute you falsely... because of Me”** (Matt. 5:11).

Jesus is never closer to His brethren than when they are being persecuted for His Name’s sake. That’s why this kind of persecution is called the **“fellowship of sharing in His suffering”** (Phil. 3:10). This was one of the very first lessons Jesus taught the Jewish zealot, Saul, who was violently persecuting the early Church. After assisting in the stoning of Stephen, he lead an all out assault upon the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. He blasphemed Christ as an impostor, and blasted Christians as heretics! As he was traveling on his journey to the City of Damascus to seek out Christians for arrest and persecution, he was **“...breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.”** The resurrected Christ accosted him on his journey and said: **“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”** (Acts 9:4). He learned that to touch a Christian is to touch Christ first. To persecute one of the *brethren* was to persecute their *Elder Brother!*

Jesus promised that He would never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5) - and that is especially so when His *brethren are being persecuted!* That great promise of assurance brings us to our next principle about being a part of Christ’s *brethren*. Whatever our circumstances, Jesus has promised spiritual protection...



Aciek Deng, a persecuted brother from Sudan. All of his family were killed because of their Christian faith.



THE PROTECTION OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

As Christ's *brethren*, we have Satan as the arch enemy of our souls. Jesus likened Satan to a plundering "**thief**" who comes only to "**...steal and kill and destroy**" (Jn. 10:10). Because the Apostle Peter had personally experienced the assault of Satan, he wrote to warn and exhorted his brethren to always be spiritually prepared:

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (I Pet. 5:8-9).

Satan primarily has three weapons in his spiritual arsenal that he uses against Christ's brethren: *temptation*, *accusation*, and *deception*. Obviously, the Lord Jesus has provided *protection* for His brethren from each of these assaults. Let

me just share a few verses of spiritual protection for each. Concerning *temptation*, the Bible says:

“No *temptation* has seized you except what is *common to man*. And God is faithful; He will not let you be *tempted* beyond what you can bear. But when you are *tempted*, He will *provide a way out so that you can stand up under it*” (I Cor. 10:13).

One of the primary reasons that our Elder Brother became one of us, was to give us victory over *temptation*. Note carefully these words from Hebrews:

“Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death...For this reason He had to be made like *His brothers* in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 2:14-18).

So Christ has provided *protection from temptation* by defeating Satan, sin and death. But Christ did not stop there. He has also provided *protection from accusation*. Listen to these words of assurance from the Apostle John in the Revelation:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the *accuser of our brothers*, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been cast down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:10-11; c.f. Zech. 3:1-5).

So just as Christ has provided His brethren a **“way of escape”** from *temptation*; He has also provided a *protection from accusation*. John reminds us that our protection is through the **“blood of the Lamb,”** and the **“word of our testimony.”**

As you study the three-fold assault of your adversary, it is crucial that you understand the unique subtleties of each mode of spiritual attack. When you are being *tempted*, you know it. When you are being *accused*, you know it. But when you are being *deceived*, you don't know it! If you knew you were being *deceived* - then you would not be *deceived!*

During His earthly ministry, Jesus sought to protect His disciples from the various assaults of Satan. Like a good military leader, He gave His brethren an “Advance Warning System” to alert them to the many forms of *spiritual deception* that would take place after His departure (Matt. 24:5-24; Mk. 13:5; Lk. 21:8, etc.). In like manner, the Apostle Paul warned the early Churches about the many subtle forms of *Satanic deception* and *self-deception* (Rom. 16:18; I Cor. 3:18; Gal. 6:3, 7; Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:4; II Thess. 2:3, 10; Titus 3:3, etc.). Paul further warned that *spiritual deception* would greatly increase in the “*Last Days*.” That’s why he was so careful to warn his young son in the faith, Timothy, about how “**...evil men and impostors,**” would “**...go from bad to worse, *deceiving and being deceived.***” Paul reminded Timothy that the greatest protection from *deception* was for him to stay *strong in the Word*.

“...continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the *holy Scriptures*, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:13-15).

The obvious emphasis here is on *learning* and *obeying* the Word of God! Just *hearing it*, and *intellectually knowing it*, is not enough. That’s why James warned:

“Don’t be *deceived*, my dear brothers...He chose to give us birth through the word of *truth*...Do not merely *listen to the word*, and so *deceive yourselves*. Do what it says” (Ja. 1:16-18,22).

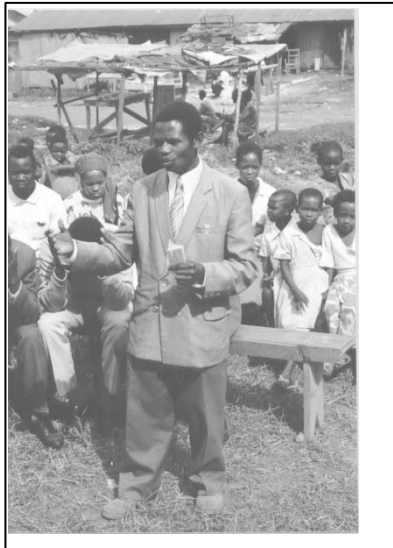
So Jesus protects His brethren from every assault of the evil one - but only if they would obey Him and His Word! And as we have seen in these few selective verses, that the *Incarnate Word*, the Lord Jesus; and the *Inscripturated Word*, the Bible, are our greatest *offenses* and *defenses* against the attacks and assaults of Satan! Our testimony about the “**blood of the Lamb**” is our greatest weapon against Satan! That’s why Satan does everything he can to destroy people’s faith in the *Person* and *Work of Christ*. That is why Paul warned and exhorted the brethren at Corinth:

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to *Christ*, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was *deceived* by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your *sincere and pure devotion to Christ*” (II Cor. 11:2-3).

So Satan’s constant allurements is to *deceive the brethren*, and draw them away from a “**...sincere and pure devotion to Christ.**” The Apostle John gave a similar warning to that of Paul, when he wrote:

“Many *deceivers*, who do not *acknowledge Jesus Christ* as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the *deceiver* and the *antichrist*” (II Jn. 7).

Therefore, if you compromise on *Jesus* or the *Word* - you have lost your greatest protection against the evil one! But as you live “*in Christ*,” and “*abide in His Word*,” then you will have *perfect protection* from Satan - the *tempter... accuser...and deceiver* of the brethren!



J.L. preaching to the Samburu Tribe in northern Kenya.

Cyprian Wanzala, Nairobi, Kenya.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

As we have seen in the previous section, our single greatest source of spiritual *protection* from the evil one is the Lord Jesus. It is His Name, and His Name alone that causes the devil to flee. It is the Name of the Lord Jesus that sets every demon to *fright* and *flight*. His Name is superior to every other name (Heb. 1:4). Because of His life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, God has highly exalted Him and given Him that “...**Name that is above every other name**” (Phil. 2:9). That’s why the Bible reminds us: “**The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe**” (Prov. 18:10; c.f. Ps. 61:3).

So there is *salvation...sanctification...security...and safety* in the Name of Jesus! That’s why among His *brethren*, there is no sweeter name than the Name of *Jesus*, our victorious Elder Brother! One of the primary reasons we study the Bible is to *know Him*. And we can only know Him as we better understand all that His Name represents. That’s why a study of the meaning of the Names of God is one of the richest studies one can undertake. In the Bible, *name represents nature*. So the better we understand the *Names of God*, the better we will understand the *nature of God*. And, we must never forget that we are able to *love* and *trust* a person in direct proportion to our *knowledge* of them. Therefore, the better we know and understand the *nature of God*, the more we will give Him our *unconditional love* and our *unreserved faith*.

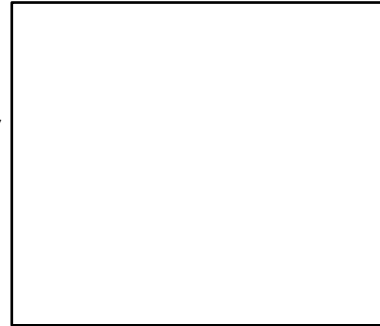
As Christians then, our love and faith are strengthened as we *hear His Name...believe His Name...pray His Name...share His Name...preach His Name...sing His Name...love His Name!* Truly there is *power in the proclamation of the Name of Jesus!* That’s why King David proclaimed:

“I will declare Your Name to the brothers; in the congregation I will praise You” (Ps. 22:22).

Over and over again, it was the Name of God that had become His “**strong tower.**” Time and time again, it was only because he knew the *Name* and *nature* of his God - that David found *safety* and *success* in times of personal struggle or national crisis. That’s why he extolled the Name of God in so many of his Psalms (Ps. 8:1; 9:10; 29:2; 34:3; 44:20; 66:2; 68:4; 79:9; 96:8; 115:1; 138:2; 145:1, etc.).

The prophet Isaiah said that it would be the *proclamation* about the Lord that would bring His Jewish brethren back to Jerusalem from the farthest corners of the earth - to Mount Zion where He has caused His Name to dwell:

“They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers from all the nations, to My holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord...” (Isa. 66:20).



It is understandable therefore, that those first disciples of the Lord Jesus *proclaimed His Name* everywhere as they traveled and preached (Acts 3:6; 4:7-8, 17,30; 5:28,41; 8:15; 9:27-28, etc.). The *proclamation* of that Name was the very heart of their message - because it is the heart of the Gospel! As Peter preached:

Hanok Tamang of Nepal.

“Salvation is found in no one else, for *there is no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Since *salvation* is found in no other Name, the *proclamation* that ‘*Jesus is Lord,*’ became the earliest creed, and baptismal confession of the Church. Some believers - like Paul before his conversion, had blasphemed the Name of Jesus. Others outside of Judaism did the same thing through pagan idolatry. But whether through Judaism or paganism, any and all blaspheming, cursing, or maligning of the Name of Christ is from the *unholy spirits* - who fear and hate the Name of Jesus! That’s why Paul wrote to remind the brethren at Corinth:

“You know that when you were pagans...you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘*Jesus be cursed,*’ and no one can say, ‘*Jesus is Lord,*’ except by the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:2-3).

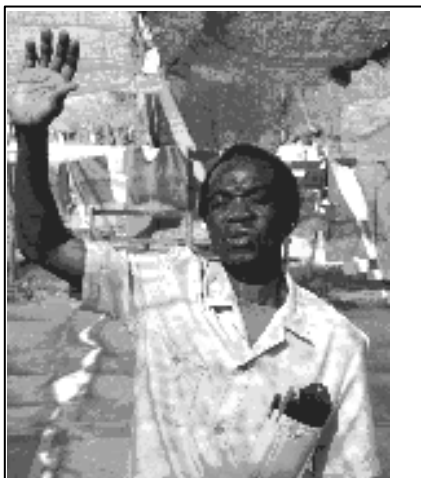
So the Name of Jesus was to be the heart of their *proclamation*. And as they exercised the gift of *prophecy* - whether in *fore-telling* or in *forth-telling* the Word of God, they were to proclaim the Name of Jesus Christ. **“Therefore, *my***

brothers,” exhorted Paul, **“be eager to prophesy...”** (I Cor. 14:39). He then reminds them what was the heart of his *proclamation* to them:

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the *Gospel I preached to you*, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are *saved*, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you...For what I received I passed on to you as of *first importance*: that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures, that *He was buried*, that *He was raised on the third day* according to Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the *brothers* at the same time...Then He appeared to James, then to all the Apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also...”
(I Cor. 15:1-8).

So the *proclamation of Christ* is the heart of the Gospel! It is therefore to be the heart of the *prophecy* and *preaching* of His brethren. And the preaching of His Name does not mean that we are proclaiming some *esoteric Christ of mysticism...a cosmic Christ consciousness of the New Age...a mystical Christ of Transcendental Meditation...the human Christ of liberal...the uncertain ‘historic Christ’ of neo-orthodoxy...the polygamous Christ of Mormonism... or any of the other cultic christs!* There have always been many **“false prophets”** who proclaim their **“false christs”** (Matt. 24:24). But as Paul warned, these are nothing but *heresy* - the proclamation of a **“different gospel”** of **“another Jesus”** inspired by a **“different spirit”** (I Cor. 11:4).

Paul’s *proclamation* then - and that of the rest of the Bible - is about the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the unique *God-Man* of history. He is the Incarnate Christ who was *born of a virgin...lived a sinless life...was crucified...buried ...bodily resurrected on the third day...ascended into heaven...sat down at God’s right hand...and will one day come again to judge the world in righteousness!* Jesus Christ alone is *fully God and fully man!* Therefore, He alone is the source of our eternal salvation!



African brother in prayer and
praise.

Leper Christian in Nepal in
prayer.

THE PRAYERS OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

When the Lord Jesus was spending His last evening of fellowship with His brethren around the Passover meal, He taught them many things. These were the final crucial hours before His arrest, trial and crucifixion. He again emphasized to them the changed relationship they now had with the Father because of Him. They were no longer *servants*, but *friends* (Jn. 15:15). They could now have the *intimacy* with the Father that He had. Preeminently, He emphasized to them that their relationships with each other was to be a reflection of His love for the Father, and the Father's love for Him. **"Love each other,"** Jesus exhorted them, **"as I have loved you"** (Jn. 15:12). And then He tied their love for each other with the effectiveness of their prayer life. In essence, He said that their lack of love for each other would short-circuit their prayers to God. **"The Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name,"** Jesus assured them. However, they must **"...love each other"** (Jn. 15:17). The Apostle John summarized Christ's command this way: **"Whoever loves God must also love his brother"** (I Jn. 4:21). In fact, John said that our *love for the brethren* was the greatest proofs of our conversion: **"We know that we have passed from death to life,"** John wrote, **"because we love our brothers"** (I Jn. 3:14). Why? Because **"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him"** (I Jn. 4:16). John was even more emphatic when he said:

"We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (I Jn. 4:19-21).

Jesus had earlier taught them this same principle about their relationship with God and their relationship with each other. One was a spiritual and relational reflection of the other. Therefore, if they went to the Temple to pray or make their offering - and realized there that they had a broken relationship with their brother, they were to stop *praying* and stop *giving* until that relationship was restored.

"...if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift

there in front of the altar. First go and *be reconciled to your brother*; then come and offer your gift” (Mtt. 5:23-24).

Perhaps one of the reasons that so many of our prayers remain unanswered is because of broken relationships with our brethren! How brotherly reconciliation would change most of our prayer life! And, how it would restore broken relationships within the Body of Christ. When that takes place, we will then have a new confidence and power in our praying. Listen to these words by John the Apostle:

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we *ask anything according to His will*, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of Him” (I Jn. 5:14).

John then relates our praying “...according to God’s will,” with our prayers for a brother who has fallen into sin:

“If anyone sees his *brother commit a sin* that does not lead to death, he should *pray* and God will give him life” (I Jn. 5:16).

So when our prayers for a fallen brother are *prompted by love and mercy* - and prayed *according to God’s will*, then they will be mightily used by God. They can literally save our brother’s life! And that thought leads us logically to our next principle, which is the...

THE PERFECTING OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

The word *perfecting*, or *teleios* in the New Testament, means to “*be complete, mature.*” And, whether we are *physical children* or *spiritual children*, we cannot come to maturity without *discipline* (Heb. 12:7-11). The New Testament further teaches us that there is a direct link between the *perfecting* of the brethren and the *purity* of the brethren. It also teaches us that *without purity there is no power!* Sin therefore short-circuits the *power* of our Christian life. It also destroys our witness to the watching world. That’s why Jesus taught His disciples so clearly about how to handle sin in their midst. Listen to these two similar passages:

- **“If your *brother sins against you*, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have *won your brother over*. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Mtt. 18:15-17).**

- **“If your *brother sins*, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”** (Lk. 17:3-4).

In both passages, the sin against us by our brother is not to be ignored or dealt with passively. We are to **“...rebuke him...go to him...show him his fault.”** This is so that God’s Spirit may convict him to the degree that he *repents*. Only then can you really **“...forgive him”** and **“win your brother over.”** This humble confrontation among brethren through **“...speaking the truth in love,”** is so that we may **“...in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ”** (Eph. 4:15).

However, in the passages we looked at under the *prayers* of the brethren, we looked at what John said about praying for a sinful brother. He said: **“If anyone sees him brother commit a sin that *does not lead to death*, he should pray and God will give him life.”** But John goes on to say that **“There is a sin that leads to death,”** and that we **“...should not pray about that”** (I Jn. 5:16-17). You see, God takes sin *deathly serious!* That’s why our sin cost Him the life of His son! As shocking as this is to our overly tolerant Western mind-set, *God sometimes takes a disobedient brother out of this life because of his persistent willful sinning.* That’s why we are never to be passive, unconcerned, and uninvolved about a brother’s sin. We are clearly exhorted to do everything in our power to restore him through *prayer...confrontation...rebuke...discipline - even excommunication!*

The Apostle Paul referred to this when he was calling for *church discipline* and *excommunication* in the case of the sexually immoral brother in the Church at Corinth. Paul instructed them to: **“...hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord”** (I Cor. 5:5). These verses remind us of what we studied earlier about the *protection* of the brethren. *“In Christ”* and *“in the Church”* there is spiritual protection from the evil one. But when we have broken fellowship with Christ, and are *“outside the Church”* and back *“in the world”* - we are in *enemy territory!* That’s because Satan is the **“...prince of this world”** (Jn. 12:31; 14:30). Therefore, **“...the whole world is under the control of the evil one”** (I Jn. 5:19). When a persistently sinful brother is *“put out of the church”* through *discipline* and *excommunication*, then both the *purity* and the *power* of the Church is safe-guarded. Young Christians, as well as other potential rebellious brothers are also warned by this example of public exposure (I Tim. 5:20). At times Paul did not even hesitate to *“call names”* of various so-called “brothers” - like *Hymenaeus, Alesander,* and *Philetus* who had **“...wandered from the truth,”** and thereby experienced the **“...shipwreck of their faith”** (I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 2:17-19).

This kind of *public rebuke* may sound strange and foreign to us. *Church discipline* and even *excommunication* may seem like hard and harsh spiritual sentences! However, God has the *eternal* view of things in mind. He alone works from the perspective of eternity. Therefore, if He has to prematurely take a sinful brother's *physical life* in order to safe-guard his *spiritual life* - then He will do it! As Paul said, He will sometimes even let Satan be the executioner!

So the *prayers of the brethren...love of the brethren...and discipline of the brethren*, have great spiritual consequences - both for *time* and *eternity*!



Michel Morrisset of Ebenezer Mission, Haiti & Larry Warren.



J.L. & Hanok Tamang
President of
Nepal Christian
Fellowship



Patt Williams with some of the wives of elders and deacons in Nepal who are strategic NDI partners.



J.L. & Pastor Nima Tshering
a converted Tibetan Monk



Pastor Simon Mkolo of
Zimbabwe, Africa and J.L.
Williams

THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE BROTHERHOOD:

If there is one thing that this study of the Church as a *Brotherhood* teaches us - it is that Christianity is not a *solo religion*. That's primarily because it is not a *religion* at all. Christianity is a *relationship* - a *relationship with the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ*. Therefore, since Christianity is not a *religion*, but rather a *relationship*, it cannot be lived out in isolation. As we have seen in earlier chapters of this book, Christianity is like *marriage* - and marriage cannot be lived out individually or in isolation. Marriage requires a minimum community of two people. And with the advent of children, the size of the family community soon grows. Then comes in-laws and grandchildren, and the extended family community grows even more!

In many of the other religions of the world, one's "*spirituality*" is often determined by the degree of their *isolation*. Religion becomes an individual matter, a solitary pursuit. Thus the many examples of the *religious recluse... sequestered hermit... cloistered monk... ascetic holy man*, the more isolated they are, the more "*spiritual*" they are perceived to be. The greater their withdrawal from life, the more "*religious*" their followers believe them to be.

No religion can rise higher than its concept of god. That's because every religion is nothing but an incarnation of their god-concept. Christianity is again unique among the world's religions because the Bible gives a revelation of a single God who is a *Trinity*. Not three Gods, but one God who eternally exists as *Three*

Persons. There is obviously a degree of mystery within the *God-head* of *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* that we can never fully comprehend. But there is one thing we do understand about the *Trinity*, and that is the fact of *relationship* within the God-Head. There is eternal *relationship...community...partnership...fellowship between* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And their eternal relationship is based upon total *equality of essence*. Each Member is essentially perfect God in every way. No Member is inferior in any way to the others. There is *perfect equality*. As such, there is an eternal *unity* in the God-Head.

The holy love and fellowship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has never been broken - except one time. That was during the Incarnation when the sins of the whole world were poured out on the sinless Son of God! That was the moment when **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us...”** (II Cor. 5:21). At that time, Jesus was suspended between heaven and earth on the cross - dying for our sins. Then the Holy Father turned His face away from His Beloved Son, with whom He had known nothing but eternal fellowship. Then Jesus cried out: **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”** (Matt. 27:46). That’s when Jesus faced the torment and separation of *hell* for you and me! But other than that time, there was never a moment of separation or brokenness between the members of the God-Head. There was always perfect unity.

Since there is a *plurality* within God, then it is understandable that He would also create man for *community...partnership...fellowship*. He would not create His image-bearers to live in solo...singularity...isolation... individualism. So at the core of man’s beings, there is a perpetual *craving for community*. Our full *humanity* and *happiness* can only be fully found in *partnership* - starting with marriage, and continuing in family. Likewise, the faith that God revealed for us, is to be lived out in *community*. Whereas each member is to have his or her own individual relationship with God, that relationship is to be demonstrated and lived out in the context of a *community of faith*. That community is known as the *brethren, or family of God*.

We should not be surprised then, to find so many Biblical exhortations about our relationship with our *brethren*. Our *physical* and *spiritual brothers* give us a strength in life that we cannot find as individuals. Solomon said: **“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”** (Prov. 17:17).

When the Children of Israel were crossing over we see how one brother was supposed to help another:

“...cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest, as He has done for

you, until they too have taken possession of the land that the Lord is giving them” (Josh. 1:14-15).



Trekking in Nepal to reach remote villages with the Gospel and to dedicate new churches.



In like manner, Jesus told Peter and the rest of His disciples that they would have many trials and tribulations in their Christian life - beginning with the events surrounding His immanent arrest and crucifixion. Jesus especially told Peter that during that time, Satan would try to “...sift you as wheat. **But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you turn back, strengthen your brothers**” (Lk. 22:32). Just like Jesus carried Peter through his time of trial and temptation by prayer and exhortation; Peter was to do the same for his brethren. In the same way that Jesus had *strengthened* Peter, he was to in turn “...**strengthen his brothers.**”

There are two close brothers of the Apostle Paul who constantly exercised this ministry of *strengthening the brethren*. Doctor Luke describes them this way: “**Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers**” (Acts 15:32). No greater tribute can be paid to any Christian than to be known as someone who *encourages* and *strengthens His brothers!*

These are key verses then, that spur us on to do all we can to help our brothers in Christ. Whether it is to help them fully *possess their possessions*, as in the days of Joshua; or *strengthening his brethren*, as Peter was to do. There are so many crucial areas of our Christian lives that we cannot face by ourselves - we need our brothers who have already “...**crossed over ahead of us,**” to then

“...turn back, and strengthen us.” We need to be in close relationships of accountability with Godly men like Judas and Silas. We need to have spiritual partners who are constantly speaking words of encouragement and exhortation to strengthen us. Only then can we fully enter in and possess our possessions in Christ! I trust that you are in those kinds of relationships!

Before closing this section on the *partnership* of the brethren, I want to briefly look at the ministry of partnership demonstrated by the life of the Apostle Paul. Second only to the Lord Jesus, Paul was the greatest *team player* in the New Testament. He was committed to *partnership*. Like his Master, everywhere Paul went, he was recruiting new spiritual partners. He had a *mobile Bible School* with him everywhere he went! As you read through his many letters to the Churches he had planted, you will find scores of personal names of his ministry partners. In addition, you will hear how tenderly and affectionately he speaks of them as **“My brother...dear brother...beloved brother...faithful brother.”** Note just several of his many loving greetings to his *brethren*:

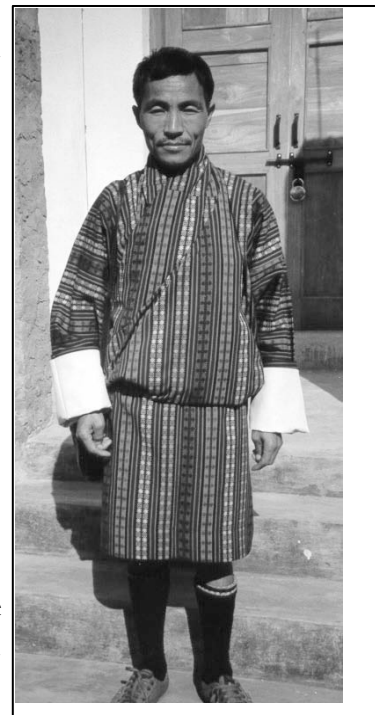
- **“Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”** (Eph. 6:22).
- **“Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss”** (I Thess. 5:26).
- **“Paul, an apostle...and all the brothers with me...grace and peace...”** (Gal. 1:2).
- **“To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse...”** (Col. 1:2).

Here are just a few of the names of some of Paul’s key ministry partners:

- ...**Apollos** (I Cor. 16:12)
- ...**Timothy** (II Cor. 1:1; Philm 1)
- ...**Titus** (II Cor. 2:13)
- ...**Unnamed to carry money** (II Cor. 8:18)
- ...**Tychicus** (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7)
- ...**Epaphroditus** (Phil. 2:25)
- ...**Timotheus** (Col. 1:1)
- ...**Onesimus** (Col. 4:9; Philm. 16)
- ...**Philemon** (Philm. 7, 20)

But those people are not nearly all of Paul’s ministry partners. In the last chapter of Romans, we find his longest list of partners. He

Y.P. Tamang, a Bhutanese partner.



sends love and greetings to 26 partners - six or seven of which were women. Like Christ, Paul also had ministry partnerships of integrity and purity with many women (Lk. 8:1-3). So the Apostle Paul was a *team player*. He believed in *spiritual partnership*, and exercised it faithfully in his personal life and public ministry.



Shante Thapa of Birendranagar Church, Nepal.



A member of Kutasingh Church in Nepal.



Yacob Tshering, a Tibetan partner.

The NDI Staff that makes our other partnerships possible
around the world!



Joseph Williams
Director of Overseas
Operations



Executive Director
Patt Williams

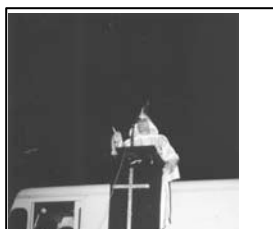


Robbie Hambright
Director of Operations



Woody and Nancy Lamm
Director of Partnership
Development

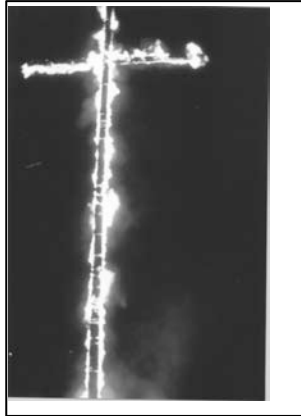
If we are going to be *faithful* and *fruitful* for the Lord Jesus, then we too must live out our Christian lives in *spiritual partnership!* However, not all relationships are equal. Sad to say, there are those numbered among the “*brethren*” that can hurt us more than they can help us. Tragically, some are in reality “*false brethren*” that we are sternly warned to avoid. An identification of these “*counterfeit Christians*” will bring us to the last section in this study.



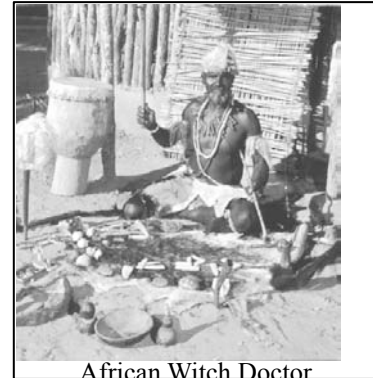
Klu Klux Klan



Blaspheming the cross of Christ
to promote racism.



Nepali Witch Doctor



African Witch Doctor

THE PERVERSION OF BROTHERHOOD:

“...they (Pharisees) love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’ But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you all are *brothers*” (Matt. 23:7-8).

In this final section, we are going to look briefly at a number of the so-called “*brethren*” that the Bible warns us to *avoid partnership with*. I want to focus on the *perversions of brotherhood* that the Bible clearly and carefully warns us about. Most of these are *relational perversions* that reveal a real *moral* failure in the brothers or sisters who are cited and indicted in the Scriptures. Several however, would be perversions arising more from *spiritual immaturity* and *ignorance* - rather than from *spiritual rebellion* and *moral impurity*. This is an important Biblical distinction. And the two perversions require discernment and different action: *immaturity needs instruction*; while *rebellion requires discipline*. The Apostle Paul, like the Lord Jesus, was very sensitive and gentle with the weak and immature - but he was very stern and decisive with the proud and rebellious! Look then with me at some of the chief *perversions of the brotherhood* under these categories:

1. ***INSOLENT BROTHER***
2. ***INTOLERANT BROTHER***
3. ***IMMORAL BROTHER***
4. ***IMPLACABLE BROTHER***
5. ***IDOLATROUS BROTHER***
6. ***IDLE BROTHER***
7. ***INSECURE BROTHER***
8. ***INJURED BROTHER***
9. ***INHOSPITABLE BROTHER***
10. ***IMITATION BROTHER***

Let's turn now to a brief study of these *perversions of brotherhood*...

INSOLENT BROTHER:

The Greek word for *insolence* is *hubristes*, and means: “*arrogance, violent, injurious, disrespectful of authority, impertinent, proud.*” One of the first words the Apostle Paul uses to describe those who are “*God-haters*” in Romans 1:30 is the word *insolent* (c.f. I Sam. 17:28), followed by the words: “*arrogant and boastful.*”

Therefore, when a person is a “*God-hater*” or *insolent* toward God; it is only natural that they will also be a “*brother-hater.*” The New Testament therefore often contrasts *love* and *hate* as antithetical to each other. Consider these verses:

- “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not *murder,*’ and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is *angry with his brother* will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to brother, ‘*Raca,*’ [An Aramaic term of contempt] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell’ (Matt. 5:21-22).
- “Anyone who claims to be in the light but *hates his brother* is still in the darkness. Whoever *loves his brother* lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever *hates his brother* is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him” (I Jn. 2:9-11).
- “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we *love the brothers.* Anyone who *hates his brother* is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him” (I Jn. 3:14-15).
- “We love because He first loved us. If anyone says: ‘I love God,’ yet *hates his brother* is a liar. For anyone who does not *love his brother*, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom

he has not seen. And He has given us this command: **Whoever loves God must also love his brother**" (I Jn. 4:19-21).

- **"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous" (I Jn. 3:11- 12).**

INTOLERANT BROTHER:

The *intolerant brother* is the one who is constantly standing in judgment against others. He usually does so with a *critical* and *condemning spirit* in his mind and attitude - which soon spills out through his words and is expressed by his actions. There are several very specific warnings about that type of hyper-critical, judgmental, condemning brother:

- **"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:1-5).**
- **"Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it...There is one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy. But you - who are you to judge your neighbor?" (Ja. 4:11-12).**

IMMORAL BROTHER:

Since we studied examples of this kind of *immoral brother* above when we looked at the matters of *discipline* and *excommunication*, we need only cite one other very clear reference at this point:

"...I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (I Cor. 5:11).

IMPLACABLE BROTHER:

The disobedient spirit of this *implacable* brother flows logically and contextually from the preceding study of the *immoral* brother. Both have to do with *judging* within the Christian Church. *The word implacable means that one “cannot be appeased.”* It implies that someone has been hurt...offended...wronged - and now they *will not be appeased*. They continue to *carry the offense* and *nurse the grudge* to the degree that they are going to “get even” - regardless of the cost!

Apparently there were some of these type of carnal brethren in the very young and immature Church at Corinth. Due to disagreements and disputes among them, some were even taking legal action against each other. This was unthinkable to the Apostle Paul! How dare one brother take another brother to court before a pagan judge. How dare they profane and disdain the Name of the Lord Jesus by taking out lawsuits against each other! How could they possibly justify hauling each other into secular courts where pagan judges would be called upon to decide issues between Christian brothers! This would result in a complete loss of integrity for the Church before the world. It would “blow their witness” before the non-Christians in Corinth. It was utterly inconceivable to Paul that professing Christians would act this way! He had already written and reminded them that *natural men* - those who had not been *born again*, could never understand the spiritual realm. They were *spiritually dead* to the spiritual realm.

“The man without the Spirit,” Paul wrote, “does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

On the other hand, Paul contrasted: **“The *spiritual man* makes judgments about all things...”** (I Cor. 2:14-15). With those words in mind, note carefully Paul’s almost sarcastic argument and exhortation to the brethren at Corinth:

“If any of you has a *dispute* with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have *disputes* about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to go to law against another - and this in front of unbelievers!

The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather *be wronged*? Why not rather *be cheated*? Instead, you yourselves *cheat* and *do wrong*, and you do this to *your brothers*” (I Cor. 6:1-8).

IDOLATROUS BROTHER:

When speaking of an *idolatrous brother*, I am not referring to one who worships *pagan idols*. If a person was an *idolater* in that sense of the word, he could not be considered a *Christian...a brother in Christ*. The word *idolatrous* here refers to a person who makes *money* and *material things* his god. He serves *mammon* rather than God.

A man with that motivation approached Christ one day to ask for His intervention in his behalf toward the end that he would receive his financial inheritance. Apparently he was somewhere in a crowd of people listening to Jesus. Note carefully his appeal to Jesus - and Christ's rather poignant response to him. Then pay particular attention to the motivation of the man's heart that Jesus warned about:

“Someone in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell *my brother* to divide the inheritance with me.’

“Jesus replied, ‘Man, who appointed Me a judge or an arbiter between you?’ Then He said to them, ‘watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of *greed*; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’” (Lk. 12:13-15).

After those words of warning, Jesus then told the now famous parable of the ‘*Rich Fool*’ who was also guilty of a life of selfishness and greed.

“...He told them this parable: ‘The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all *my grain* and *my goods*. And I'll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

“But God said to him, ‘*You fool!*’ This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Lk. 12:18-21).

Since Jesus knew men’s hearts, He would not have told that *“Parable of the Rich Fool”* unless one, or both of the brothers in this incident, were not guilty of the *greed* that He warned the crowd about. Apparently the brother who was not sharing the inheritance was the *elder brother*. In the Jewish Culture of the day, the oldest brother got two thirds of the father’s inheritance. The remaining third was then divided among the other children. So either this elder brother was not dividing the inheritance; or the younger brother who approached Christ was not satisfied with his portion. Either way, there was *greed* in one, or both of these brother’s hearts.

The Apostle Paul clearly related *greed* to *idolatry*. Listen to his words to the Church at Colossae:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and *greed, which is idolatry*” (Col. 3:5; c.f. Rom. 1:29; Eph. 5:3; II Pet. 2:14).

Paul further warned the young pastor Timothy, to avoid those false *prosperity ‘profit prophets’* who use the Gospel for gain. He said they were **“...men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that *godliness is a means to financial gain*”** (I Tim. 6:6). It seems that one of Paul’s own ministry partners - and an associate of young Timothy, had also been snared by materialism. His name was Demas. With great sadness, Paul said of him: **“Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me...”** (II Tim. 4:9).

Idolatrous greed then, can become the secret god of *physical brothers*, or *spiritual brothers*. But the clear Biblical warning is that no true *spiritual brother of the Lord Jesus can be motivated by greed* - because that would be making *money* the Lord of his life rather than Christ. He would be *mastered* by *mammon* rather than *mastered by the Master!*

IDLE BROTHER:

“One who is *slack in his work* is brother to one who *destroys*” (Prov. 18:9).

The Bible teaches that God is a God of *action* and *activity*. Jesus’ earthly life was an Incarnation and reflection of the heavenly work of God. That’s why Jesus was always doing good works. After healing a blind man on the Sabbath, he was condemned by the religious leaders. Jesus’ response was very crucial:

“My Father is *always at His work to this very day*, and I, too, *am working*” (Jn. 5:17).

So until God becomes idle, His brethren cannot be idle! Not until He stops work - can they stop work!

The Apostle Paul was also very active for the Kingdom of God - both in *physical work* and in *spiritual work*. Therefore, an *idle brother* was someone he could not, and would not tolerate. Note his stern words of rebuke concerning a *slack, idle brother*:

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to *keep away from every brother who is idle* and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this...in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat’...If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but *warn him as a brother*” (II Thess. 3:6-10; 14-15; c.f. I Thess. 4:11; Eph. 4:28; Col. 3:23).

INSECURE BROTHER:

Here we are speaking primarily about a *weaker brother*. Not one who is *weak physically*, but rather one who is still *weak and insecure in his faith*. The older brethren must learn to be very *sensitive* and *patient* with these spiritually insecure brethren until they grow and mature in their faith.

- **“Therefore, *let us stop passing judgment on one another*. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.... If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ dies...Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to *mutual edification*. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall*” (Rom. 14:1-21).**

“Everything is permissible - but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible - but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, *but the good of others*...whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble...even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (I Cor. 10:23-11:1).

INJURED BROTHER:

“An *offended brother* is more unyielding than a fortified city...” (Prov. 18:19).

Young and insecure brothers can be easily injured - especially by the freedom and liberty in Christ demonstrated by an older brother. Their conscience is still weak and fragile. It is still mixed with the morality and immorality of the world. It will take time to program and instruct a young brother’s conscience with the truths of the Bible. During that time, they can easily be hurt and injured by others in the Church.

In Paul’s day, the young converts from paganism would sometimes struggle over things like food and drink - especially when it had first been offered to idols. Others struggled over commemoration of certain *‘holy days’* observed by others. So Paul wrote these instructions to the brethren:

“...food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak...this *weak brother*, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you *sin against your brother in this way* and wound their weak conscience, you *sin against Christ*. Therefore, *if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall*” (I Cor. 8:8-13).

“Accept him whose *faith is weak*, without passing judgment on *disputable matters*. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, *whose faith is weak*, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for *God has accepted him*. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:1-4).

“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us *lives to himself alone* and none of us *dies to himself alone*. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord...You then, why do you *judge your brother*? Or why do you *look down on your brother*. For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat...So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:5-12).

INHOSPITABLE BROTHER:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is extending *hospitality* to those in need. That’s why Paul said: “**Practice hospitality**” (Rom. 12:13). Likewise, when the Apostle Peter was listing some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he too said: “**Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling**” (I Pet. 4:9). The writer of Hebrews even suggested that in extending love and hospitality to the *brethren*, we were unknowingly entertaining angelic visitors:

“Keep on loving each other as *brothers*. Do not forget to *entertain strangers*, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:1-2).

As they traveled from city to city, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers of the First Century were totally dependent upon the Christian hospitality of their brethren. I find the same is true today among our Christian brethren in underdeveloped countries. They do not have the financial means to stay in hotels or guest houses, even when they are available - which is seldom in remote regions. So they always enjoy the hospitality of their brethren as they travel and minister. Some of the greatest experiences of my life and ministry have been as I have slept on dirt floors in the simple thatched roofed homes of God’s saints! Living as they live...eating what they eat...sleeping where they sleep, are special times of Christian fellowship!

It was because of the necessity of Christian hospitality that one false brother was singled out for *“dishonorable mention”* in one of the letters of John. His name was *Diotrephes*. This is what John said of him:

“Diotrephes, who loves to be *first*, will have nothing to do with us...he is...gossiping maliciously about us...he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church” (III Jn. 9-10).

Conversely, the Apostle Paul extols the hospitality of one of his dear friends and partners. In his *“postscript”* at the end of his letter to the Church at Rome, he says:

“Gaius, whose *hospitality* I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings” (Rom. 16:23).

With similar words of appreciation, Paul wrote to thank his friend Philemon, for his hospitality in the past. He says: **“...you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”** But then Paul goes on to tell him to make preparations for his visit:

“And one thing more: Prepare a *guest room for me*, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers” (Philm. 7, 22).

After being under house arrest in Rome, Paul was really looking forward to being released and refreshed by the Christian hospitality of his dear friend, Philemon!

IMITATION BROTHER:

We saw earlier in our study that the normative word in the New Testament for *brother* is the word, *adelphos*. Therefore, when the Apostle Paul wanted to describe the brothers who were *impostors* or *imitations*, he added the prefix *pseudo*, meaning *false*. Thus we find the word *pseudadelphos*, or “*false brethren*.”

These men were not some theoretical group of religious people that Paul was only speculating about. Over and over again, he was harassed by people like the *Judaizers* - the *religious legalists* who were always wanting to put the new Gentile converts under the yoke of the law. They sought to destroy his ministry just as he had sought to destroy the ministry of the Church before his conversion. He writes to warn the Christians in Galatia about them:

“...some *false brothers* had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves” (Gal. 2:4).

In the eleventh chapter of Second Corinthians, Paul gives a long list of *dangers* he constantly confronts in ministry. In the midst of that list, he says that he is constantly “**...in danger from *false brethren*...**” (II Cor. 11:26).

It is clear from the many Biblical warnings that we are not to associate or fellowship with *imitation brethren*. Note this further warning from Paul:

“I urge you, *brothers*, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. *Keep away from them*. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By *smooth talk* and *flattery* they deceive the minds of naive people” (Rom. 16:17-18).

Perhaps the most difficult *imitation brethren* to discern are those who “*say all of the right things*.” They sound good...look good...preach good. Paul also dealt with these kind of *false brethren*. In speaking of them, he said: “**It is true that some preach Christ out of *envy* and *rivalry*...**” He goes on to say that they “**...preach Christ out of *selfish ambition*, not sincerity...**” (Phil. 1:15-17).

So if Paul and the early church had to deal often with *false brethren*, we will have to do so today. The church in every age has had a fresh batch of *pseudo-brothers* who infiltrate the church and cause division. So be alert to *false brethren!* In doing so, we should heed the admonition of Paul to the Philippian Church:

“Join with others in following my example, *brothers*, and take note of those who live according to the *pattern we gave you*. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, *many live as enemies of the cross of Christ*. Their

destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. *Their mind is on earthly things.* But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.

Therefore, *my brothers*, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown...*stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*"

(Phil. 3:17-4:1).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I want us to ask ourselves one of the oldest questions in recorded history. It was an evasive question that Cain asked of God, when he queried: "**Am I my brother's keeper?**" (Gen. 4:9). The obvious answer to this brotherly question is a resounding "NO!" We are not to be our "*brother's keeper*, but rather our *brother's brother!* Too many within the Christian brotherhood are guilty of wanting to be their "*brother's keeper.*" They want to *keep* their brother in his

place – whether that is a place of failure...defeat...immaturity...unforgiveness...indebtedness...racial inferiority, etc. But the constant exhortation of the New Testament is to...

“LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD OF BELIEVERS...”
(I Peter 2:17)



SUMMARY

SOME FINAL SNAPSHOTS OF THE CHURCH...

As I close this photographic album of *Biblical Pictures of the Church*, I want to give a summary of some of the *changes of priority* that I believe the Lord wants His people to make in many of His local Churches around the world. These changes can help reorient the Church around a more *Biblical model* of ministry, rather than a *worldly model* of ministry. Understandably, not all of these changes of emphasis will be needed in every church. I know that many of my beloved brethren, who are pastors in other countries of the world, will also be reading and studying this book. In many of the places where they minister, the church is much younger than it is in the United States. In those places, the church has not existed long enough to have developed a spiritual heritage or theological history. Therefore, the application of some of these *changes of priority* will not be needed. For them, this chapter will serve more as spiritual “warning signs” from our example in the Western Church. These snapshots will be examples of what *not* to follow, or imitate in the American or European Church! But whether we are looking at the older church in the First World, or the younger churches in the Two-Thirds World, each has its own unique set of spiritual and cultural problems. Whether in the First Century or Twenty First Century, we all struggle to “**...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ**” (Eph. 4:13). All Christians in all cultures struggle against the pressures not to be “**...conformed to the pattern of this world, but...transformed by the renewing of our mind**” (Rom. 12:2).

Often the Church of Jesus Christ in the Developing Countries is more Biblically authentic and pristine than the Western Church. Here, we are too often *bound by tradition* and *divided by theology*! By contrast, in the Church of the Third World there is often a beautiful simplicity of faith and worship that is a joy to experience! This is especially so in countries where the Church is still *first generational*. All of the Believers are freshly liberated from paganism and idolatry. They have been recently freed from the “**...kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ**” (Col. 1:13). The Church experience in those pioneer situations tends to be a continuation of what we read about in the Book of Acts. Those young churches have not existed long enough to be bound by the “**...tradition of the elders**” (Matt. 15:2). Nor have they yet been divided by the theologies and denominations of man: “**I follow Paul...I follow Apollos... I follow Cephas...**” (I Cor. 1:12; 3:4). Or, to use our more familiar terminology: “*I follow Luther...I follow Wesley...I follow Calvin...I follow the Pope...*” Thankfully, many of these saints have not yet been “theologically circumcised” by Western Christians. Neither have they adopted the denominational names and distinctives of the Western Church - like *Methodist... Baptist... Lutheran... Presbyterian...Anglican...Catholic...Pentecostal*, etc. Theological divisions like *Calvinism...Armenianism...Reform...Pentecostal...Fundamentalist...Holiness...Ch*

arismatic are largely non-issues. They are simply the *Body of Christ* in a particular locality. And, like the First Century Church, they usually take their name from their geographical locality, or from some name in the Bible - not from the names of particular men or pet doctrines.

In addition, when it comes to theology, the church in the Third World is more *pragmatic* than *philosophical* - they are more *practical* than *polemic*. Their primary concern is not whether a doctrine makes for a good *systematic theology* - but *does it change lives?! Does it set people free?! Does it give authority over evil spirits?! Does it save from sin, sickness and Satan?!* If a theology works in their real life-and-death experiences, then they will embrace it. If not, they won't.

By contrast, our theology in the Western Church tends to be largely *formal*, while theirs is more *functional*. Our theology tends to be more *cerebral* and *credal*; while theirs is more *existential* and *experiential*. For us, faith is a matter of the *head*. For them, faith is more of a matter of the *heart*. Therefore, the major issue for our brethren in these pioneer places is not: "*Does it make sense?*" - but rather, "*Does it work?*"

In other parts of the world where pioneer missionaries long ago established local churches through great hardship and sacrifice, tradition has tended to build up across the years. The spiritual phenomena of *hardening wineskins* seem to be the same in every generation and in every culture (Matt. 9:17)! As a result, many once vibrant national churches that were flowing with the wine of God's Holy Spirit, have now grown rigid and tradition bound. Following the path of the Western Church, they now have their own traditions that have become more sacred than the Gospel! And, those traditions are destroying the very life and vitality of their churches - just as "religious tradition" bound the Judaism of Christ's day - and binds much of the church in our day!

Look at the *Church in Europe* where the Protestant Reformation and Wesley Revivals originated. Most of those same churches today are either spiritually dormant, or dead. Once great churches and cathedrals are now largely silent and empty. In earlier days, their great preachers and expositors of the Word shook their nations - even the world! Their pulpits once thundered "*Thus saith the Lord!*" Now those same pulpits are little more than silent sentinels to once glorious days of ministry. These magnificent edifices today only serve as beautiful spiritual museums that have tragically become religious mausoleums. Their magnificent pipe organs...stained glass windows...works of art, no longer inspire worship and awe in the people of God. They are only viewed by curious sight-seers as interesting - but obsolete religious relics of the past! As a result, Europe is rapidly plunging into what is now being called the "*Post-Christian Era...Neo-Paganism...the New Dark Ages!*" Tragically, many down-town churches in America are going down the same spiritual and cultural path to spiritual oblivion! As Jesus warned: "*...if the salt loses its saltiness...it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men*" (Matt. 5:13). Much

of traditional denominationalism in the West already has the footprints of the world all over it!

So whether we are a part of the Western Church, or the National Church, we all need to prayerfully and honestly take stock of where we are individually and collectively. As Paul exhorts: **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves”** (II Cor. 13:5). So I share the following lists as a *“spiritual examination.”* On the left column of the page I have suggested a word that often typifies some aspect of Church life today. On the right column, I have substituted words that I believe need to replace them - words that more closely represent the Biblical model of church and ministry. As you will see, many of the words are very similar, and amplify each other. Under each, I have only given a few sentences of explanation. Each could be a whole chapter unto itself! However, I leave that for your prayerfully consideration and amplification under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He alone is the **“Spirit of truth”** who has the authority and ability to **“...guide you into all truth”** (Jn. 14:17; 16:13).

One final challenge. As human beings, *we all have almost an infinite capacity for self-deception and rationalization!* As a result, it is often so hard for us to really be honest with ourselves - especially when we are *grading ourselves* on a spiritual examination such as this! We lose our objectivity. *And sometimes we Christian leaders are the most self-deceived of all!* Therefore, whether we are pastors...ministers...bishops... evangelists...elders...deacons - it is so easy for us to be *willfully blind* about many of these areas. Oftentimes we have too many invested interests in the *ecclesiastical status quo* to contemplate serious change! For many of us, our current position of authority will make it very difficult for us to honestly look at the spiritual facts. There is just too much at stake for us to make radical changes in our current ways of doing ministry. We desire to hold onto the *human power* we have achieved - rather than lay hold of a fresh anointing of God's *spiritual power*. In reality we prefer *human authority* to *God's authority*. However, if we are a minister worth our salt and worthy of our light, then we *must be agents of change* whenever and wherever Biblical change is called for! We must *fear God* more than we *fear man*. The Church belongs to Him and not to us. He is the *Head*, and we are the *body* (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18). *He leads and we follow*. Our only calling is to obey whatever the cost!

So as a Church leader whom the Lord dearly loves, I exhort and challenge you to sit down with some of your most mature and trusted elders or deacons, and go through this list. If you find yourself and your church more in the left column than the right, then commit yourself to change through the power of the Holy Spirit. If you find yourself and your church more in the right column, then be encouraged and keep **“...fighting the good fight of faith”** (I Tim. 6:12)! These are the greatest days of *evangelism* and *expansion* in the history of the Christian Church! Don't miss being on the *cutting edge* of what God's Spirit is doing through His Church. The whole world has a sure and set rendezvous with the Lord Jesus. His Kingdom is going to come **“...on earth as it is in heaven”** (Matt. 6:10).

Ultimately, Jesus is going to “...**have supremacy in everything**” (Col. 1:18). Before Him alone “...**every knee will bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**” (Phil. 2:10-11)! As Paul said:

“Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet...” (I Cor. 15:24-25).

The angelic voices of heaven will soon triumphantly sing: “**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever**” (Rev. 11:15). Live and minister then in such a way that you will be able to be a victorious voice in that eternal celebration of Christ and His Church!

CHURCH CHANGES

As I have stated above, if authentic Biblical change is going to take place in the church, *it must start in the head and heart of the leaders!* Until the pastor changes, the people cannot change. Positive Biblical change in the leader becomes the catalyst for dynamic change in the people and in the church. The first prerequisite then, for change in the pews is for there to be change in the pulpit! I have therefore divided these changes in five areas...

- 1. CHANGES IN PASTORS;**
- 2. CHANGES IN PRINCIPLES;**
- 3. CHANGES IN PRACTICES;**
- 4. CHANGES IN PEOPLE;**
- 5. CHANGES IN PREACHING;**

So before we look at areas where the *people* must change, let's look at places where the *pastor* must change - in *principle* and in *practice*.

CHANGE IN PASTORS

1. CREDENTIALS.....CHARACTER

In the Bible we clearly see that the primary concern of God in the choosing and using of spiritual leaders is *character*. The *heart of the man* is always the

heart of the matter to God! However, today we tend to become more focused on *credentials* than we do on *character*. We are often more impressed by a pastor's *theological degrees* and *social pedigrees* - than we are his *spiritual degrees*. It is not a person's *standing with man* that qualifies him for ministry - but his *standing with God*. People give *credentials*; God builds *character*. Tragically, many colleges, Bible Schools and Seminaries specialize in turning out *men of credential* rather than *men of character*. So in your choice of a pastor or Christian leader, look for what God looks for - *a man after His own heart* (I Sam. 13:14). Look for spiritual, moral and marital, and monetary *character*.

2. PROFESSIONAL.....PRIESTHOOD

Just as there has been an unfortunate shift in emphasis from *character* to *credentials*; there has been a corresponding shift from *priesthood* to *professionalism*. In much of ministerial training and selection, the focus has moved from *spiritual competence - character, spirituality, godliness, maturity, theological balance*; to *professional competence*. And *professional competence* tends to be defined and determined by whether a pastor has been properly schooled and trained in things like *psychology* and the *social sciences*. And in many realms of the church, *professional competence* is equated with *political correctness*. There is little or no concern with *Biblical* and *theological correctness*. So there has been a growing trend toward defining the *religious professional* with man's measuring rod rather than with God's. But as we saw above, God is always far more concerned with *character* than with *credentials*. Therefore, churches should not look for pastors who are *religious professionals*. If they think of themselves as the *professional*, then they will never really give practical expression to the *priesthood of all Believers*. They will foster the mentality that the *professional* does all of the important ministry, and the others only watch and pay the bills! There is no place for the *religious professional* within the Body of Christ. Tragically, many Seminaries and Graduate Schools of Theology are more oriented toward educating and training *ecclesiastical professionals*, than they are in educating and equipping real *Biblical pastors*.

3. PRACTITIONER.....PASTOR

This is closely linked with the attitude above. The word *practitioner* means: "*one who practices a profession*." However, the ministry is not a *profession* - it is a *calling*. It is not based upon *our choice of Him*, but upon *His choice of*

us (Jn. 15:16). Paul does not list either a *professional* or a *practitioner* in his list of leadership gifts in the church. But he does list *pastors* and *teachers* (Eph. 4:11). While a *religious practitioner* focuses on *externals*; a true *spiritual pastor* is oriented toward the *internal* - the *heart* of his people. One focuses on the *temporal*; while the other focuses on the *eternal*.

4. MAINTENANCE.....MOBILIZATION

When a Christian leader has a *professional* or *practitioner* attitude, then he will be oriented toward the *maintenance* of a religious system; rather than the *mobilization* of God's people. He will do all of the important *ministry*, and never *mobilize* the people of God for ministry. Rigid obedience to a religious organization and hierarchy will be emphasized - all toward the end of *ecclesiastical upward mobility* for the pastor! Tragically, *spiritual mobilization* will often times be replaced by *monetary mobilization*. The primary role of the person in the pew will be to "pay the bills" and "oil the ecclesiastical machinery." In the process, the church members will often be mobilized by the church bureaucracy for the support of religious, political and social causes beyond their own local congregation. In the process, a shift of power and authority takes place from the local church to a regional or national church body. Often times local church members will be pressured to pay for programs and causes that they do not fully understand or agree with. Maintenance of man's agenda becomes more important than the mobilization of God's people for His agenda for a lost world.

5. HIRELING.....HUSBANDRY

Jesus summarized the "religious professional" and the "ecclesiastical practitioner" as a *hireling* rather than a true *shepherd* (Jn. 10:12-13). The Bible says that this false religious leader really *prostitutes the sheep* for his own well-being (Ezek. 34:1-6). He has no sense of pastoral *husbandry*. Jesus said that God was a *Husbandman* (Jn. 15:1; KJV). The word means: "One who manages domestic affairs and resources carefully." It means the "careful, thrifty, frugal management of domestic affairs." It is very similar to the word *husband*, or one who "cultivates and tends carefully." So just as a husband is to *carefully cultivate his wife into full maturity as a woman, wife and mother*; the pastor is to *carefully cultivate the people of God into full maturity in Christ* (Eph. 4:13-15). This takes the heart of a *shepherd* and *husband* - not that of a *hireling* who "**...cares nothing for the sheep**" (Jn. 10:13).

CHANGE IN PRINCIPLES

Once there has been a *shift in leadership*, there must be a corresponding *shift of emphasis*. The list above represents a shift of *person*. The following list represents a shift of *principle*.

1. RELIGION.....RELATIONSHIP

Contrary to what many people think, Christianity is not a religion! The Latin word, religion, means "to bind." The Greek word emphasizes the external. So religion tends to bind people by an emphasis on eternal rules, regulations and rituals. Certainly there are some external expressions and manifestations of our Christian Faith. However, first and foremost, *Christianity is a relationship*. It is a relationship with the One true and living God through the Person of Jesus Christ by His indwelling Holy Spirit. That's why the highest analogy of Christianity in the Bible is the *relationship of marriage* (Isa. 62:5; Eph. 5:25-32). So while religion emphasizes external obedience and ecclesiastical performance; a living relationship with God through Christ emphasizes love...internal transformation...*integrity of heart*. Christianity then is a call into *temporal* and *eternal relationships*. The purpose for which man was created, and the deepest hunger of his heart, is for *real relationships* - first with God, then with others. Only Christianity makes this possible. *Religion destroys relationships* while *Christianity builds relationships*. Satan does not fear religion, or religious activity - in fact, he takes diabolical delight in them! Religion always ultimately build *Towers of Babel* which God curses with *confusion* and *division* (Gen. 11:1). But the heart of true faith is an *altar for worship* (Gen. 12:7). So while Satan promotes *religion*; God provides *relationships*.

2. ORGANIZATION.....ORGANISM

Since religion emphasizes *externals*, it focuses more on *organization* than it does on *organism*. Religion is preoccupied with building up an impressive and well running *organization* - just like the world does. However, Christianity is concerned with building up the living *organism* of the Body of Christ. The larger the *organization* that is built by religion, the more *tithes and offerings* it takes to run it - just like the larger the secular government is, the more *taxes* it takes to keep it running. One becomes a *political machine* supported by *taxes*; the other becomes a *religious machine* sustained by *tithes*. Both are *worldly* models rather than *spiritual* models. Both develop cumbersome and costly bureaucracies! In both cases the *people become pawns of the system*. Whereas our religious *organizations* are *temporal*; only the *spiritual organism* is eternal. Understandably, some *organization* is necessary for the existence and expansion of the *organism* called the church. It is like railroad tracks for a train. The train is the *organism*; and the *organization* are the tracks. The

tracks do not exist for themselves - but for the train to run on. Likewise, a train cannot go anywhere without tracks. Both are necessary, and both need each other. So *organization* must always be subservient to the *organism* - never the reverse.

3. PROGRAMS.....PEOPLE

When *organization* becomes the emphasis rather than *organism*, then *programs* will become more important than *people*. In religion, the *primary purpose of the people is to perpetuate the programs*. Therefore, in the priority of an *organization*, the *programs are more important than the people*. It would never be expressed that way, but in actuality, that often becomes the case in practice. That's why so many people complain of the church being *impersonal*. In that kind of religious system, *people are sacrificed for the sake of programs*. It usually does not start out that way, but it often ends up that way. At first, *programs* are established to meet the needs of *people*. Over time, the *programs* become more important than the *people* - and the *people begin to exist to perpetuate the programs*. But again, *programs are temporal; only people are eternal*.

4. MEMBERSHIP.....MATURITY

When *programs* become more important than *people*; then *membership* will be more important than *maturity*. Our concern will be to gain as many members as possible so that they can perpetuate our programs. And, the more members we have, the better we look as leaders! The great concern will not be to bring them to *maturity in Christ*. The primary concern is that they keep *coming and giving* so our church records and reports will look impressive. We will be more motivated toward impressing men with the size of our membership - than in answering to God for the maturity of His people we have shepherded. Membership and money will be our spiritual *modus operandi*, not the spiritual maturity of the people of God we have been entrusted with. Tragically, churches in the West are filled with people who have been members for many years, but have never really begun their journey toward maturity in Christ. Many of them were christened or baptized as infants - and have remained "*babes in Christ*" (I Cor. 3:1) all of their adult lives! They may have been *confirmed* as children, but they have never been *conformed* to the image of Christ! Even though they were baptized with water; they have never been baptized with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; I Cor. 12:13).

5. DECISIONS.....DISCIPLESHIP

When membership becomes more important than maturity; then decisions will be more important than discipleship. Gaining decisions only takes a few

moments; building disciples takes years! Organizations require programs, and programs require members - and members come through decisions. That's why one of the greatest dangers in Western Christianity is the "Protestant numbers racket" - *working for decisions* rather than *building disciples*. It is possible to gain large numbers of decisions in a short period of time. However, it is impossible to build mature disciples quickly, or in large numbers. Discipleship takes a lot of one-on-one time, just like parenting. There are no short cuts! Certainly, decisions are important. That's the beginning point - that's spiritual birth. But decisions are not to be an end in themselves. They are to be the first step in a lifetime of discipleship. A perpetual danger in ministry then, is to sacrifice *depth* for *breadth*. To confuse *decisions* with *disciples*. To mistake *membership* for *maturity*.

6. METHODS.....MENTORING

When our goal is to get quick *decisions* rather than build growing *disciples*; then *method* will become more important than *mentoring*. We will subtly shift into the mentality that the "end justifies the means." Whatever *method* we can use to increase our *membership* and perpetuate our *programs* will be acceptable. On the other hand, we can become so oriented toward certain *methods of ministry*, that the *method becomes more sacred than the message*. While our *message is sacred* and must never change (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Jude 3); our *method is not sacred* - and often needs to change. But all of our *methods of ministry* must be oriented toward *mentoring disciples to maturity in Christ*. We can use *methods* that will *manipulate membership* - but we can only personally *mentor people to maturity in Christ through the systematic preaching and practice of God's Word* (Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:11-16).

7. NEGLECT.....NURTURE

Too many pastors - just like too many husbands and fathers, are guilty of *neglect*. In their press to build a large, impressive religious organization with many members, they have *neglected* the most important thing - the *nurture* of their people in the Word of God. Like the Teachers of the Law, and Pharisees that Jesus indicted with his "seven woes," it is easy to become very proficient and perfunctory in the practice of the externalities of religion. But in the process, we often "**...neglect the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness**" (Matt. 23:23). Too many ministers "**...neglect the ministry of the Word of God...**" in order to "**...wait on tables**" - the tables of religious activity (Acts 6:2). Like Martha, we can become very *busy in religion*, and at the same time neglect "**...what is better**" (Lk. 10:38-42). And for the pastor, that which is better is to "**...give attention to prayer and the ministry of the word**" (Acts 6:4) - which is the only kind of ministry that will *nurture* people to spiritual maturity.

8. ENTERTAINMENT.....EDIFICATION

When the goal is to build a large and successful religious organization with many members - and a program for every member; then the emphasis will be more on *religious entertainment* rather than on *spiritual edification*. Everything will revolve around wooing and winning people by having the best *religious entertainment* in town! The issue will not be: “*Where can I go to be edified by the Word, and built up in the Lord?*” - but rather: “*Where can I go to be spiritually entertained this Sunday?*” Whoever has the best *religious show* in town, draws the most people! That’s why so much of “TV Religion” is so popular in America - and at the same time so superficial! No one can have a covenant relationship with a celluloid Christian celebrity - any more than they can be married to their fantasy of a tabloid beauty queen! The Church is all about flesh-and-blood relationships that must be played out with real people in real life situations! So again, religion revolves around *externals, experience* and *entertainment* - while Christianity is based in living *relationships*. Therefore, it is only *spiritual relationships of integrity* that *nurture* and *edify* the inner man through the Spirit and the Word.

9. HAPPINESS.....HOLINESS

When we begin to place the emphasis on the *entertainment of the flesh* rather than upon the *edification of the spirit*, then we must emphasize *happiness* over *holiness*. The main issue in church and faith becomes what will make me *feel good*. That’s why the ‘Prosperity Gospel’ has always had appeal (I Tim. 6:5). That kind of religion ends up being *man-centered* -- while Christianity is from start to finish *God-centered*. God is not nearly as concerned with our *happiness* as He is with our *holiness!* Our human *happiness* tends to be based upon positive circumstances...good feelings...getting our own way...having what we want. However, spiritual *holiness* is a matter of the heart. It is based in *character*, not in *circumstance*. Therefore, *holiness* is not primarily based on *our will* - but on *God’s will*. True *experiential holiness* often comes only through *pain* and *loss*. It begins to be produced in our lives at the point where *our will* will cross *God’s will* - and at that point we must *die to self!* Then we experience both *holiness* and *happiness*. That’s because true *happiness* is a by-produce of *holiness*. And, *religion can never produce holiness* - with all of its emphasis upon rules, regulations, and rituals. Religion can produce *external conformity*; but never *internal transformation*. Therefore, true *spiritual holiness* is *imputed* and *imparted* to us through our position “*in Christ*” (I Cor. 1:30). Then as we grow in maturity, that *positional holiness* will have ever increasing *practical expression* in all of our *relationships* of life.

10. SALVATION.....SANCTIFICATION

The ministry emphasis *within* the church must be more on *sanctification* rather than on *salvation*. As is often times the case, there are two equal and opposite spiritual errors here. First, there are the churches that only preach *salvation messages* week after week. There is one theme: **“You must be born again”** (Jn. 3:7). Then there are the churches that *never preach salvation*, but assume and presume that everyone who attends church is already saved. They equate *confirmation, baptism, or church membership* with *salvation*. Both errors are wrong. Certainly the message of the church must *begin with salvation*. We must do all we can to make sure that people are truly **“...born again...born of the Spirit”** (Jn. 3:3, 8). However, it must not end there - it must move the believer every onward in *sanctification, or maturity in Christ*. Whereas *salvation is a once-for-all-time crisis experience* (Heb. 7:27); *sanctification is a life-long process* (II Cor. 7:1). Therefore, *salvation is a birth message; while sanctification is a growth message*.

11. SURVIVAL.....SERVING

If we only preach *salvation*, we will retard believers into a *survival mode* where they will live their Christian lives just trying to ‘make it.’ They will live out their Christian lives in *immaturity* and *insecurity*. They will constantly struggle with doubts about their salvation. They will largely have only a *self-survival* and *self-serving* mentality, rather than an orientation toward *servicing others*. We cannot live to *serve ourselves* and *serve others* at the same time. Jesus taught and demonstrated that the *essence of the Christian life is in servicing others*. He said: **“I am among you as one who serves”** (Lk. 22:27). Therefore, we are *reborn to serve!* The essence then of the Christian life is not to just personally *survive* between here and heaven -- but to *serve* on earth while we are on the way to heaven. Indeed, the greatest tool for *spiritual survival* is a life of *spiritual service!* When we are living a life in *service to Christ*, and in *service to others*, we do not have the time or energy to *serve ourselves!* As Jesus taught and demonstrated, **“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”** (Jn. 12:25).

12. WELFARE.....WARFARE

Too many church members passively live on *spiritual welfare* rather than be actively engaged in *spiritual warfare!* They come to church week after week to get their meager portion of *spiritual welfare* in order to try to survive another week. Like many *social welfare* recipients, they *live with their hand out*. They have developed a *beggar mentality*. In their minds, the church exists to help them *survive*. Like *social welfare* recipients looking to the Federal Government for *support*; the *spiritual welfare* recipients look to the local church for their *sustenance* and *survival*. They have no concept of *servicing*. They have never been awakened to the reality that the Christian life is a *call to warfare* (Eph. 6:10-18) - not *welfare* (I Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14; II Thess. 3:10).

They are either *AWOL* (“Away With Out Leave); or they have become *barrack Christians* - always staying in the shelter and safety of the *church barracks*. They may be found on the *enemy line* - but never on the *spiritual front lines*, or kingdom *firing line!* To them, the essence of the Christian life is *passivity* rather than *activity*. The song, “*Onward Christian Soldiers*” has been taken out of their hymn book! They live as though the church is called to establish *detante with the devil!* However, the true church of Jesus Christ is always a *militant church!* It gets people off *welfare* and into *warfare!* It teaches people how to “*Endure hard-ship...like a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (II Tim. 2:3). It trains and equips them to “*...fight the good fight of faith*” (I Tim. 1:18; 6:12).

13. WITHDRAWAL.....WITNESS

When *welfare* becomes the mind-set rather than *warfare*; then church members develop a *withdrawal* mentality - rather than a *witness* mentality. Either they have not been taught - or they have conveniently forgotten, the command of Jesus: “*...you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). So they withdraw into their safe little spiritual cocoons known as the church. There they develop a *monastery mentality*, and increasingly *withdraw* from the world. Often pastor and parishioner alike settle down into a *spiritual comfort zone* - and never venture out into any of the world’s many *danger zones* for the Kingdom of God. They withdraw into a nice, safe, antiseptic, sterile, passive, predictable, indulgent, pampering ecclesiastical environment - and then call it “*church.*” And through it all, it takes nearly all of their meager financial gifts to maintain their *spiritually narcissistic* religious activity! Little of their *time, talent, and treasure* is directed toward *witness* to a lost and dying world.

14. MEDIOCRITY.....MISSION

The kind of church and religious experience that I have described in the left column of this chapter so far - can only at best be described as *spiritual mediocrity!* It is a *bland belief* that *pampers people into spiritual mediocrity!* But Jesus did not die to redeem a people for a life of *mediocrity!* He was not resurrected in power to produce a *placid church!* We are not to be *bland* - but *bold* - “*bold as a lion!*” (Prov. 28:1) We are not to be *lukewarm* (Rev. 3:16) - but *boiling hot*; what Paul calls “*...fervent in spirit*” (Rom. 12:11). His Holy Spirit was not poured out on the Day of Pentecost to empower and embolden His people for a life of *self-seeking...self-serving...self-indulgent...self-satisfying religiosity!* His church has been given the highest call of all - a *mission to reach the entire world for Christ!* So all of the *preaching* and *programs* of the church are to be toward the end of *discipling...mentoring...nurturing...equipping* Christians for *service and warfare*. To be actively engaged in *mission* both *locally* and *globally!* That’s a church that is truly worth its salt and light - and worthy of the Name of Jesus!

15. GRUMBLING.....GLORY

Tragically, far too many churches in the West today are characterized by *grumbling* rather than by *glory*! When you listen to much of the conversation between professing Christians, they are constantly expressing discontentment ...dissatisfaction...disenchantment...disillusionment. It may be with the preacher, the length of the sermon...the choice of deacon...the music director...the choir robes...the organist...the types of songs being sung...the need for money...the faded carpet...the hard pews...the long prayers - the list of complaints seems as individual as the people present! Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, they are always *murmuring*, *grumbling*, and *complaining* (Num. 11)! Far too many church members today act as though *grumbling* is a spiritual gift! They are duly baptized members of the “*First Church of the Wilderness*” (Acts 7:38)! However, a *grumbling church* is not a *glorifying Church*. Jesus did not say: “***I will build My Church...***” (Mtt. 16:18) so she could become a *congregation of complainers*! Just as He came to reveal the *glory of God* (Jn. 1:14; 17:5, 24); He expects His Church to *glorify Him*. Christians are expected “***...to live to the praise of His glory***” (Eph. 1:12 -14). Only as a church increasingly moves from the left column of this page to the right, will it be a *glorious church*. That’s why every pastor and parishioner should constantly pray with the Apostle Paul: “***...to Him be glory in the Church...throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!***” (Eph. 3:21).

CHANGE IN PRACTICES

When we have truly made changes in Biblical principles of the Church; then there will be a corresponding change in practice! *Biblical principles* produce *Biblical practices*. Let’s look at some of them.

1. LITURGY.....LIFE

A church that becomes more oriented toward *religion* than *relationship*, will soon exchange *liturgy* for *life*. Increasingly the emphasis will shift from the *internal* to the *externalities* of religious *litany* and *liturgy*. The word *litany* means: “*A form of prayer in which the clergy and the congregation take part alternately, with recitation and response.*” Similarly, the word *liturgy* means: “*Prescribed forms or ritual for public worship.*” Certainly there is nothing wrong with either of these *per se*. However, both emphasize the *external*. The prerequisite of *form* often becomes *conform*! Unfortunately, “*form*” soon hardens into *formalism*! Then *liturgy* suppresses *life*. Usually there is a direct proportional relationship in a church between the *increased emphasis on liturgy* and the *decreased emphasis on life*. Tragically, *liturgy* then becomes nothing more than *window dressing on a mannequin*! Our *religious*

mannequins may look good as we change their robes and vestments week by week - but there is *no life!* Like the formalized religion of Christ's day, much of our *churchanity* has become like "...**whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean**" (Matt. 23:27). So we must learn to distinguish between *liturgy*, *litany* - and *life!*

2. RITUAL.....REVELATION

Closely related to a growing emphasis on *liturgy* is corresponding emphasis upon *ritual*. As *liturgy* replaces *life* - in the same way *religious ritual* replaces *spiritual revelation*. The church is to revolve around *divine revelation* - not around human *ritual*. The root of *ritual* is the word *rite*, which means: "A ceremonial or formal, solemn act, observance or procedure in accordance with prescribed rule or custom; any formal, customary observance or procedure." Likewise, *liturgy* means: "A set form or system of rites; the observance of set forms or rites." So we can see how easily *litany* becomes *liturgy* - and *rite* becomes *ritual!* Therefore, most people who grow up in the church become very accustomed and acclimatized to *ritual* - but they are very unfamiliar and uncomfortable with *revelation*. They hear a great deal of: "This is the tradition of our church...our denomination teaches...this is what we practice..." But they hear little of the *revelation* of God's Word. They hear weekly the *voice of man* - but seldom hear the *voice of God!* From our pulpits we hear much of what is *politically correct*, but little about what is *spiritually correct*. We hear little of: "Thus saith the Lord!"

3. FORMALISM.....FELLOWSHIP

As *religion* replaces *relationship*...*liturgy* replaces *life*...and *ritual* replaces *revelation*; then *formalism* replaces *fellowship*. Again we must go to the root - and the root of *formalism* is "form." Among other things, this word means: "An established or customary way of acting or behaving; ceremony, ritual, formality; a fixed order of words; formula." Therefore, *formalism* means: "Strict or excessive attention to, or insistence on, outward forms and customs, as in religion." Again you can clearly see that the emphasis is upon the *externals*. Religious *form* has now solidified into *formalism*. Denominational *customs* and theological *creeds* have now become *codified* and *ritualized*. Recitation of a creed is mistaken for the redemption of one's life. *Religious ritual* replaces *reality* and *relationship*. Tragically, going through the weekly forms of religious *formalism* becomes a substitution for *fellowship with God* and *fellowship with man*. And since man was created by God for *relationship* rather than *religion*; no amount of *form* or *formalism*, can satisfy man's innate hunger for *spiritual fellowship*. At the heart of Judaism was two things: *sacrifices* and *feasts*. The *sacrifices* were the basis for *relationship*; while the *feasts* were the basis for *fellowship* - *fellowship with God* and *fellowship with each other*. Also, *fellowship* cannot be divorced from *faith* - "...**the faith that**

was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). That’s why Paul said: **“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”** (II Cor. 6:14-15). Therefore, true spiritual *fellowship* is only possible within the context of *faith*. That’s why it is said that the church after the Day of Pentecost **“...devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship...”** (Acts 2:42).

4. FORMULA.....FREEDOM

When *liturgy* replaces *life...ritual* replaces *revelation...formalism* replaces *fellowship* - then *formula* soon replaces *freedom*. When our *rites* become *rituals*, and our *form* becomes *formalism* - then our religious *formulas* become a substitute for spiritual *freedom*. Once things have become *codified...creedalized...ritualized...formalized* - they soon become *ossified!* Religion becomes *rigid*. There is little room for the *spontaneous*. If it is not *written in the bulletin* - and prescribed in the ‘*Order of Worship*’ - then it *must* not happen! *Litany* suppresses *liberty* – and *form* replaces *freedom*. Again, there needs to be *balance*. There must be both *form* and *freedom*. In fact, the best freedom is always the *freedom that takes place within the context of form*. Whether in *marriage* or *ministry*, the greatest freedom is always expressed and experienced within the context of form. The external form of one is the relationship of marriage lived out within the context of the *physical home*. The context of the other is the *fellowship* and *freedom of faith* within the *spiritual home*, or church.

5. TRADITION.....TRUTH

Just as is the case with *liturgy...ritual...formula...creed* -- *tradition* is not necessarily bad. As a physical family or spiritual family, we can establish and build up good or bad traditions. Whether it is to our *physical children* or *spiritual children*, we are to *pass on good Biblical spiritual traditions*. Jesus grew up doing certain things that were **“...His custom”** - and He continued these things all of His adult life (Lk. 2:42; 4:16; 22:39; Mk. 10:1). They were *traditions* based upon *truth*. They were *godly traditions* rather than the *traditions of man*. Tragically, even *godly traditions* can over time become *man’s traditions* - what the Bible calls the **“...tradition of the elders.”** That’s what happened to much of the Judaism of Christ’s day. Remember that Judaism is the only *revealed religion*. All other religions, without exception, come from the *deception of Satan!* He is the *master counterfeiter of religion* (II Cor. 11:13-14). What God had originally *revealed* to men like Abraham and Moses, had become *formalized Judaism* by the time of Christ. The **“tradition**

of the elders” had become more sacred than the *Word of God*. As a result, Jesus and his disciples were condemned by the *religious leaders* for “**...breaking the tradition of the elders.**” Jesus in turn condemned them for “**...breaking the command of God for the sake of their traditions.**” (Mtt. 15:2-3). Jesus warned that religion in every age can fall into the same deception. Paul said that he was consumed with tradition before his conversion to Christ! He said that he was “**...extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers**” (Gal. 1:14). So whether Paul or us, religion is always the same. It substitutes *man’s traditions* for *God’s Word*. That’s why *God has judged all religion!* Why? Because it teaches people to “**...honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men**” (Matt. 15:1-9). So neither the “**tradition of the elders,**” nor the “**rules taught by men**” can satisfy the deepest spiritual longings of man’s hearts! Only a living *relationship* with God through Christ can provide that - for time and eternity!

6. CEREMONY.....CELEBRATION

Over time as the “**...traditions of the elders**” become more important than the *Word of God* - then *religious ceremony* replaces *spiritual celebration*. Again, the difference is between *religion* and *relationship...the internal* and the *external...the flesh* and the *spirit*. True *spiritual celebration* always flows outward and upward from the *spirit*. *Religious ceremony is only the hollow shell left behind after the Spirit of God has departed*. Religious pomp and circumstances does not need God’s presence in order to take place. It doesn’t need God’s Spirit in order to process...perform...posture...preen...‘preach’...and pontificate! The *flesh* can go through all of those religious ceremonies without God. *Religiosity* and *church-anity* do not need God’s presence in order to survive and thrive. Every religion of the world is very proficient in the practice of *ceremony*. It abounded in Biblical times - among the Jews and Samaritans - and even among the Greeks. But to the Jews God said: “**...you worship Me in vain**” (Matt. 15:9). Of the Samaritan religion, Jesus said: “**You Samaritans worship what you do not know...**” (Jn. 4:22). To the Greeks with their many altars and idols, Paul said: “**What you worship in ignorance, I am going to proclaim to you**” (Acts 17:23). There was much religious ‘*pomp and ceremony*’ in all of these religions - but all were devoid of the presence of God. They were *religious ceremonies*, but not true *spiritual celebration!*

7. CONTROL.....CHARISMA

When *ceremony* is substituted for *celebration* - then *control* will soon replace *charisma*. The orderly organizational, orchestrational and oratorical talents of man replace the expression of the gifts of the Spirit. In the execution of religious *ceremony*, everything must be tightly and rigidly *controlled*. The bulletin - not the Spirit of God through the *Word of God* - dictates and controls

the order of worship. Everything must be done “*decently and in order.*” In fact, *order* has replaced *ardor!* Everything in the religious ceremony is carefully staged and timed. And, it all must be concluded before 12:00 noon on Sunday morning! The New Testament however, prescribes a church worship and celebration that is under the control of the Holy Spirit. “***When you come together,***” Paul instructs the early church, “***each one has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church***” (I Cor. 14:26). As far as I am aware, that is the closest thing to an “*Order of Worship*” that we find in the New Testament! Many pastors, organists, choir directors, and worship leaders in dead churches today would do well to give up their *control* of the services - and allow the Holy Spirit to *control* the services. But the thought of that scares many of them to death! As a result, death reigns in far too many services! Their religious *ceremonies* remain *listless and lifeless.* They forget why the Holy Spirit was given to the Church - to bring *celebration* back into worship through the experience and expression of His *charisma*, or gifts! That’s why Peter and the other disciples were accused of being “***drunk with wine***” on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:13)! However, their lives were filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Their Jewish *ceremonies* were replaced with the *celebration* in the Holy Spirit! In most churches today we would be accused of being *dead* - but not *drunk!* So in many churches there needs to be less of *man’s control* and more of the *Spirit’s control.* Then there would be less *ceremony* - and more *celebration!*

8. PERFORMANCE.....PARTICIPATION

When *ceremony* replaces *celebration* - and *control* regulates *charisma* - then much of Christian worship becomes *performance* rather than *participation.* In the Western church, our eleven o’clock worship services have become the *performance of the professional* - rather than the *participation of the people.* Like much of athletics, Christianity today is tragically reduced to a ‘spectator sport.’ The stands are filled with the *spectators* - watching a few professionals play the game. Likewise, in too many of our churches, the *pews* are where the people passively sit - except at offering time - and watch the religious professionals go through their *pageantry* and *performance.* And if their *performance* is not impressive enough, then the spectators will find another church with more professional religious performers! So while we say that we believe in the “***priesthood of all believers***” as the Bible clearly teaches (I Pet. 2:4-10; Rev. 1:6; 5:10), in actuality we practice the ‘*priesthood of the pastors!*’ He performs, we watch...he prays, we listen...he leads, we follow...he exercises his gifts, we suppress ours...he plays all of the parts - and we pay all the bills! But Paul says that the role of the “***...apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastors and teachers***” is to “***...equip God’s people for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ***” (Eph. 4:11-12). The ministry of *equipping* is the only way a church moves from *performance* to *participation.*

9. WATCHING.....WORSHIP

So we must move from *ceremony* to *celebration*...from *performance* to *participation*...from *watching* to *worship*. We move from being *passive spectators* to being *active participants*. Then we will not just *watch* - we will *worship!* And again, at the heart of Biblical worship is an *altar* - a place for *sacrifice*. Sacrifice means that we come into God's presence on the virtue of someone else's spiritual merit. In Christianity, that means on the merit of the blood of the Lamb - Jesus Christ. Only He can replace *religion* with *relationship*. As our *High Priest* (Heb. 4:14), Jesus then calls each of us into spiritual *priesthood*. On the basis of His *perfect sacrifice* (Heb. 9:26), every believer is to continually offer up the "**...sacrifice of praise**" (Heb. 13:15). Then, through the *discovery, development* and *deployment* of our *charismata* (spiritual gifts), we become the real spiritual *celebrants* - rather than spectators watching the ceremony of the religious *celebrities*. We begin to experience, express and enjoy worship that is indeed in "**...spirit and in truth**" (Jn. 4:24). We existentially come to know that "**...the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom**" (II Cor. 3:17). It is impossible to experience that kind of *freedom in worship* by just watching...spectating...observing. The word *worship* means "*to kiss toward.*" So in a very real sense, *worship is love making to God in a spirit of humility!* We express our love to Him through our *prayers, praise, adoration, thanksgiving, singing, giving, dancing*. Like the two lovers in the *Song of Solomon*, worship is *extolling the virtue and attributes of our Beloved!* And, that is not something that can be expressed or experienced through passive *watching*. It is only experienced through *active worship*.

10. GATHERING.....GIVING

Therefore, in true Christian worship, we move from *performance* to *participation*. As we have already seen, the name of the game in *performance based religion* is to *gather people together*. The better the *performance*, the greater the *gathering*. So the emphasis is upon building bigger and bigger *gathering places*. The more spectators the better! The weekly *gathering* becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Of course, worshipping God is an end in itself. It is the purpose for which man was created (Rom. 12:2). But God will not just allow us to *focus on Him* while we *forget our neighbor*. Jesus made an integral spiritual connection between our *love for God* and our *love of others* (Matt. 22:37-40; Ja. 2:8). So our *gathering* is for *worshipping* so that there will then be a *scattering for witness*. The essence of Christianity is not *receiving, but rather giving!* We *give* because He first of all "**...gave His only begotten Son**" (Jn. 3:16). We *love* because "**...He first loved us**" (I Jn. 4:10). *Gathering...coming together...koinonia...fellowship* are central to the Christian faith (Acts 2:44-46). But we *gather to receive*, so that we can *scatter to give*.

CHANGE IN PEOPLE

1. SINNERS.....SAINTS

Tragically, in many churches there is too much emphasis upon our *sinfulness* - rather than upon our *saintliness!* When it comes to the matter of sin - as with so many things in the Christian life, there are two equal and opposite errors. Both play right into the enemy's hand - and keep people in spiritual defeat. The first error is not to mention sin at all. It is not to believe in the basic *sinlessness of man*. This is to make the false assumption that man is basically *good* by nature. The opposite error is to constantly stress the *sinfulness of man*. Liberal churches tend to preach the first error - while conservative churches tend to emphasize the other error. In one we are told to "*be good because we are good.*" In the other there is a steady diet of "*hell fire and brimstone!*" The *sin nature of man, or the sinfulness of sin* must never be compromised (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:9; 23; 5:12; Gal. 3:23). But when people accept Christ, they are no longer *sinners* - they are *saints!* They are not *sinners who sin* - but rather *saints who sin*. In Church they need to be taught from God's Word about how to *live saintly* - rather than continue to *live sinfully*. People tend to live up to the expectations placed upon them. So if we constantly emphasize to people the fact that they are *sinners*, then they will likely continue to sin - or live in constant fear of sinning. But if we teach them that they are now *saints* because they are "*in Christ,*" then they will learn to live differently. Through faith in Christ, they now have a *new nature* (II Pet. 1:4; Eph. 4:24). They are *indwelt by the Holy Spirit* (I Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:16). They may still sin from time to time. But again, they are now *saints who sin* - not *sinners who sin!* It is a wise pastor who knows how to lead his people from the bondage and immaturity of sin, to the freedom and maturity of being a *saint of God!*

2. SLAVES.....SONS

As long as our theological emphasis is *sin* - then the longer our ministry will keep people living like *slaves* rather than like *sons*. The moment a person receives Christ, they become "*...children of God*" (Jn. 1:12). They become *sons* and *daughters* of the "*King of kings, and Lord of lords*" (I Jn. 3:1-3; I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16). They are now a *prince* or *princess* in the Kingdom of God! They are "*...joint-heirs with Christ*" (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7), and one day they will *reign and rule* with Him (II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6; 22:5). Tragically though, far too many Christians are *saints with a sinner's mind set*. They are *sons living with a slave's mentality!* Christians living like this go through life with a *beggarly mentality*. They are always groveling before the Lord. They are under the *bondage of law* rather than a *bondslave of love*. Rather than exclaim with confidence: "*Abba, Father*" (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6); they live under the constant condemnation of "*...woe is me*" (Isa. 6:5). So *evangelism*

is bringing people from *sinners* to *saints* - while *discipleship* is bringing people from *slaves* to *sons*!

3. SURVIVORS.....SOLDIERS

When the church reinforces in Christians a *sinner mentality* rather than a *saint mentality* - and leave them in the bondage of *slavery* rather than in the liberty of sonship, then they retard true Christians into a perpetual state of just *spiritually surviving*. With that mentality, all a Christian tries to do is just *survive* between here and heaven. Tragically, many believers become frustrated and defeated. They then end up *living like hell on the way to heaven* - rather than *living the life of heaven on earth on the way to heaven*! They ultimately become *survivors* rather than *soldiers*. Whereas *survivors* have a *beggar* mentality - soldiers have a *battle* mentality. One mind-set leads to *bitterness*; the other results in *boldness* (Prov. 28:1)! While *survivors are timid* - *soldiers are tough* (I Tim. 1:7; 2:3). One lives the life of the *vanquished*, while the other increasingly experiences *victory*! The Church of the living God is to produce *soldiers*, not just *survivors*! The Holy Spirit was not poured out so that we would be *trampled* by Satan - but so that we could *trample him* (Rom. 16:20)! In this life we are not to be *terrified* - but rather we are to march in Christ's *triumph* (II Cor. 2:14)! The resurrection power of the Lord Jesus was not given to us so that we would live in *defeat* -- but so that we could live in *victory* (I Cor. 15:57)!

4. LUKEWARMNESS.....LORDSHIP

Finally, it is easy to see that the above brand of religiosity and church-anity ultimately dooms people to live in *lukewarmness* rather than under the *Lordship of Christ*. Far too many churches in the West are *cold* and *carnal*. They are filled with people who are spiritually *tepid* and *tired*. Most are neither *hot* nor *cold* - but rather *lukewarm*, and nauseating to God (Rev. 3:15-16)! I have never met a *carnal, lukewarm Christian* who was excited about their faith. They may go to church week after week, but they are just "going through the motions" of Christianity. They have the "**...form of godliness...**" but not its power (II Tim. 3:5). It is only the obedient Christian who is learning to live under the *Lordship of Christ* who is really excited about their faith. "*Jesus is Lord*" is the singular creed of the church (I Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). His Lordship is to be the essence of all preaching worthy of the name *Biblical* (II Cor. 4:5). And discipleship means teaching people how to daily live in the *Lordship of Christ* (Phil. 4:1; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:17-24; I Pet. 3:15). Only that kind of Christian life lifts us from *groaning* to *glory*. What Paul called the "**...glorious freedom of the children of God**" (Rom. 8:21)!

CHANGE IN PREACHING

1. EXPEDIENCY.....EXPOSITION

Unfortunately, the greatest change that usually needs to take place is in the *pulpit* rather than in the *pew*. In Church, everything spiritually runs down hill from the pulpit. Therefore, all significant church changes must begin there. When the *pastor changes* - then the *preaching changes*. And one of the greatest shifts that needs to take place in most preaching is from *expediency* to *exposition*. That means that there must be a radical shift of emphasis from preaching that *pleases man* to preaching that which *pleases God*. There is a shift in preaching from being *man-centered* to being *God-centered*. Therefore, many preachers need to change from preaching what is *politically correct* - to what is *spiritually correct*. When we preach what is *expedient* then the *world sets the agenda*. When we preach *expositionally*, then the *Word sets the agenda*. The *spirit of the age* lives in *expedient preaching*. The *Spirit of God* lives in *expositional preaching*. While man's agenda constantly changes - God's agenda is eternal (Ps. 119:89). *Expediency* will make you *popular with man* - while *exposition* will make you *popular with God*. *Expedient preaching* is captured by the *mood of the moment...what is 'in'...what is popular...what people want to hear*. These false preachers and teachers only say what people's **"...itching ears want to hear"** because they have **"...turned their ears from truth to myths"** (II Tim. 4:3-4). They ask the preacher to **"Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions"** (Isa. 30:10). Therefore, the pulpit agenda of a worldly preacher is always changing. Both he and his congregation are **"...blown here and there by every wind of teaching..."** (Eph. 4:14). The sounds from the pulpit are no different from the sounds from political stumps of the world. On the other hand, a true minister has turned from the *world's myths* to *God's mysteries* (Eph. 6:19; Rom. 16:25). He is firmly anchored by the un-changableness of God's Word - and only preaches **"...sound doctrine"** (I Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:1). Over time he preaches and teaches the **"...whole council of God"** (Acts 20:27). So the minister who is committed to *exposition* will **"...preach the Word...in season and out of season..."** (II Tim. 4:2). Only then will people be brought to **"...maturity in Christ"** (Eph. 4:13).

2. COMPROMISE.....CONVICTION

When our hearts as ministers are committed to *expediency*, then we will always have to *compromise* with the world. We will lack the *conviction* of the Word. This kind of preaching exchanges **"...darkness for light and light for darkness...bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter"** (Isa. 5:20). A *compromised message* produces *compromising Christians*. Sin is no longer called *sin*...disobedience is no longer *disobedience*...judgment is no longer *judgment*...hell is no longer *hell!* Therefore, *carnality* always results from *compromised preaching*. God's indictment of this kind of preacher and preaching still echoes through the ages: **"They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when**

there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). However, when we ministers are committed to the faithful study, obedience and teaching of God’s Word, like Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 7:10) - then we will have unshakable *conviction*. The *conviction of God’s Word* will be like ***“fire in our bones”*** (Jer. 5:14; 20:9; 23:29)! Either we will faithfully preach and teach it so it can burn away all *compromise* and *carnality* - or God’s fire will consume us! Today we need more preachers like Martin Luther - whose conscience and convictions were held captive by the Word of God! Our conviction must be that of the Apostle Paul: ***“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!”*** (I Cor. 9:16).

3. APOSTASY.....APOLOGETICS

Even though *compromise* usually always starts in seemingly small, insignificant areas, it soon infiltrates and infects MAJOR doctrine. As Jesus warned, it works like *leaven*, or *yeast*. When “hid” in bread (Matt.13:33), a small bit of yeast will soon *penetrate...permeate... pollute...putrefy*. That’s why He warned His first disciples to ***“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees and...Herodians”*** (Matt. 16:11; Mk. 8:15). Paul added a warning to the First Century church to root out the *leaven* of the *Corinthians* and the *Judaizers* (I Cor. 5:1-13; Gal. 5:1-9). Even though *leaven* is very small, its ultimate influence is VERY BIG! The very nature of leaven is to permeate all of the flour it is put in. Thus the Pauline warning: ***“...a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough”*** (I Cor. 5:6). Note that all 5 of these *spiritual leavens* that the Bible warns us about are *religious* by nature! They thrived in the Judaism of Christ’s day, and soon infiltrated the life of the early church. So Biblical preaching is like *salt* that *preserves* - while compromised preaching is like *leaven* which *pollutes*. Paul warns against these *apostles of apostasy* whose ***“...teaching will spread like gangrene”*** (II Tim. 2:17). ***“The Spirit clearly says,”*** Paul wrote, ***“that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”*** (I Tim. 4:1). Likewise Peter wrote: ***“...there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord...Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute”*** (II Pet. 2:1-2). However, a preacher worth his salt and worthy of his light, must ***“...correctly handle the word of truth”*** (II Tim. 2:2). He must become an *apologist*, or *defender* of the Word (I Pet. 3:15). Like Paul, we must ***“...reason from the Scriptures”*** (Acts 9:29; 17:2, 17; 19:8). So after their ‘theological training,’ too many ministers become *apologists against the Word*, rather than *apologists for the Word*. They become *apologists for the world against the Word* - rather than *apologists for the Word against the World!* So if the minister doesn’t *stand for truth* - then his people will *fall for a lie*.

4. LAW.....LOVE

Tragically, one of the most deadly *leavens* that has permeated some expressions of the church of Jesus Christ is the *leaven of law!* When *religion* supersedes *relationship*, then *rules* and *regulations* soon dominate. *Law* then replaces *love*. Of course there is a place for *law* in the *spiritual realm* - just like in the *physical realm*. God created *laws* to govern every area of life. But behind the *Law of God* is the *Love of God*. Therefore, when we preach *law* apart from *love*, there is a misplaced emphasis. *Law* soon degenerates into *legalism*. This kind of misplaced emphasis in preaching wrongly assumes that *rules can regulate rebellion* - that *laws* can kill the old sin nature. This is the spiritual fantasy that rugged obedience to law can bring us to maturity in Christ. Tragically, legalism keeps people at the foot of *Mt. Sinai* - rather than at the foot of *Mt. Calvary*. It dooms them to the spiritual futility of living under the *Old Covenant* - rather than under the *New Covenant*. It commits people to the futility of their own *perpetual sacrifice* - rather than resting in Christ's *perfect sacrifice*. By rules and regulations, it tries to keep the sin nature from sinning! This preaching ends up *intimidating by law* rather than *invigorating by love*. As Paul warned: **"He has made us...ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"** (II Cor. 3:6). Legalism is the *leaven of the Judaizers* that infiltrated the Church at Galatia. So Paul sternly rebukes them: **"O you foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?...After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"** (Gal. 3:1-3). He further exhorts them: **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free...do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery"** (Gal. 5:1). The law was only a teacher to **"...lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith"** (Gal. 3:24). Jesus lived a sinless life and died a sinless death in our behalf so that He could **"...redeem those under the law that we might receive full rights of sons."** Then and only then can *love* do what *law* never could - give us the spiritual assurance that we are *unconditionally loved* and *unequivocally forgiven*. We no longer live under *spiritual condemnation* (Rom. 8:1). Why? **"Because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us"** (Rom. 5:6). Now we are *compelled by love* (II Cor. 5:14); rather than *condemned by law* (Ja. 2:10). As a result, we have the internal witness of **"...His Spirit with our spirit that we are God's children"** (Rom. 8:16). Then our spirit cries out with the Spirit of Christ within us: **"Abba, Father"** (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). That's the *conviction of love* rather than the *condemnation of law!* So while the *preaching of law* condemns people to *slavery* and *immaturity* - the *preaching of love* frees them to the *maturity of sonship!* Under the *law*, **"...death reigned"** (Rom. 5:14). However, through *love* we are able to **"...reign in life through...Jesus Christ"** (Rom. 5:17). Only the systematic exposition of the *Word of God* through the *Spirit of God* by the *man of God* - will liberate the *people of God!*

5. GUILT.....GRACE

Just as *law* is a perversion of *love* - *guilt* is an inversion of *grace*. When preaching revolves around *law*, then people perpetually live in *guilt*. We are condemned to a life of “*blame and shame*.” When it happens in the church, it is a sure spiritual sign that Christians have “**...fallen away from grace**” - just like the Galatian Christians did for a time as the Judaizers put them back under the “yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1-4). Therefore Paul reminded them: “**I do not set aside the grace of God, for it righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing**” (Gal. 2:21). Conversely, when preaching is centered in *love*, then people are liberated by *grace*. That’s why Paul emphasized again and again: “**For it is by grace that you have been saved...**” (Eph. 2:8-9). The Christian life is *grace from start to finish!* When our preaching then is balanced Biblical preaching, it will focus on the *Gospel of Grace* (Acts 20:24) rather than the *false gospel of guilt*. When we focus on *law*, then *guilt will reign* in the life of the Christian. However, God wants “**...grace to reign...through Jesus Christ our Lord**” (Rom. 5:21). That’s why Paul speaks of the “**...riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us...in Christ**” (Eph. 1:8). So if God “**lavished grace**” on us “**...because of His great love for us**” (Eph. 2:4); then we should likewise *lavish love and grace* on people through our preaching! Then they will “**...grow in the GRACE and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**” (II Pet. 3:18). And as they *rest in love* and *mature in grace*, then they will have the “**...peace of God which passes understanding**” (Phil. 4:7). But our hearts will not be flooded with the *peace of God* until our minds are saturated with the *love of God* and *grace of God!* That’s why almost every letter in the New Testament begins with the salutation: “**...grace and peace**” (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; II Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; II Thess. 1:2; tit. 1:4; Philm 3; I Pet. 1:2; II Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4). So as we preach *love and grace* to the people of God, then “**...the peace of God...will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**” (Phil. 4:7).

6. FEAR.....FAITH

Just like God does not want His people to *live under law* and be condemned by *guilt* - but rather to *live under love* and be *freed by grace*; He does not want them to *live by fear* - but *live by faith*. Just like *guilt* is the result of a misplaced emphasis on *law*; *fear* is the result of a misunderstanding of *faith*. Too many preachers through their emphasis upon *law* and *guilt*, keep people living in *fear* - rather than living in *faith!* Thinking they are helping them grow as Christians, they in reality are condemning them to live like *slaves* rather than like *sons!* As Paul wrote: “**You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship**” (Rom. 8:15). So God does not give us a “**...spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-control**” (II Tim. 1:7). Fear is man’s oldest spiritual and emotional enemy. It causes him to hide from God...from himself...from others...from life (Gen. 3:8-10). It was *God’s love* that sought man out while he was *fearfully hiding*. Through *grace*, God re-focused man’s life from *fear*

to faith. Biblical preaching is to do the same thing. As John wisely wrote: **“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love”** (I Jn. 4:18). When we ministers teach our people to *focus their faith* on the *love of God* and the *grace of God* - then our people will be able to mature as the *people of God*. Because *“God is love,”* they will learn to **“...live in love”** and **“live in God, and...in this way love is made complete.”** Then Christians **“...will have confidence on the day of judgment”** (I Jn. 4:16-17).

7. POVERTY.....PROSPERITY

Through the above shifts of emphasis, pastors will ultimately be able to take their people from *spiritual poverty* to *spiritual prosperity*. But first they must take that journey themselves. They cannot take people where they have not already gone - any more than they can come back from where they have not been! If the minister does not fully *possess his possessions* through the Word of God and the Spirit of God - then both he and his people will live in *spiritual poverty*. Like the children of Israel, they will live a life of *wandering* in the *wilderness of carnality* - rather than *wondering* over God’s love and grace in the *Promised Land of spiritual living!* But again, *spiritual prosperity cannot be divorced from the Word of God* (Ps. 1:3). That’s why God instructed Joshua, who had just inherited a congregation of several million Jews:

“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, then you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Josh. 1:7-8).

Correctly understood, there is no contradiction between the *law of God* and the *love of God*. One reflects the other. That’s why James rightly calls it **“...the perfect law that gives freedom”** (Ja. 1:25; 2:12). So as we preach and teach the *love of God* through the *Word of God*, then our people will naturally obey the *law of God* through the indwelling *Spirit of God*. As a result, they will increasingly experience *peace* and *prosperity* in their lives. They will walk in *liberty* rather than in *bondage*. Rather than experience the *curses of God* (Deut. 28:15-45); they will enjoy the *blessings of God* - and His promised **“abundant prosperity”** (Deut. 28:11; 30:9). **“I know the plans I have for you,”** God said, **“plans to prosper you...to give you hope and a future”** (Jer. 29:11). It is still true that **“...he who trusts in the Lord will prosper”** (Prov. 28:25; III Jn. 2)!

CONCLUSION

If through the Holy Spirit we will make the spiritual shifts I have listed, then it will be said of our people what was said of the Jews of Ezra's day: ***"...the people prospered under the preaching of Haggai the prophet"*** (Ezra 6:14). What a fitting epitaph for any preacher's life and ministry! May those words be recorded in the annals of heaven for every preacher reading this book!

**“NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE
TO DO
IMMEASURABLY MORE
THAN ALL WE COULD
ASK OR IMAGINE,
ACCORDING TO HIS POWER
THAT IS AT WORK WITHIN US,
TO HIM BE *GLORY IN THE
CHURCH*
AND IN CHRIST JESUS
THROUGHOUT ALL
GENERATIONS,
FOREVER AND EVER!
AMEN!”**
(Eph. 3:21)