

ObservationsOn the Hypocrisy\* of the Contemporary Church\*(Feigning to be what it is not)

Flesh vs. Spirit - Moods and modes characterize and dominate most Christians' lives.

Sympathetically, perhaps, but without acceptable tolerance or excuse for our errors, when we become Christians we are left with the strange dichotomy of two conflicting natures to constantly have to deal with for the remainder of our time on earth. (1) the old carnal nature, and (2) a new spiritual nature.

In a very real sense we have been delivered from the curse of sin, but not from its haunting presence, and temptation to it! "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death". But, "I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me.". Rom. 8:2, and 7:21.

We are exhorted to "walk in the spirit", and not "after the flesh". The words are plain enough to understand, and seem simple enough to obey or follow. Many things we do "in the flesh" are easy to recognize as such--especially if they are contrary to the principles, and injunctions of the word of God, which should be not only our guidelines to follow--but our constitution to continually live by.

But even in the relatively obvious things we do wrong, they seem to characterize our lives rather than be occasional or exceptions. A familiar plaque in Christian homes, says "prayer changes things". Automatically, or by the act of praying itself? "Ask and ye shall receive". Are there any conditions, or qualifications? No ifs, ands, or buts? Faithful claim, or presumption?

Too often, even such a basic necessity as being "in God's will" as a prerequisite for God's blessings (answers to prayer, etc.), is oversimplified, generalized, and assumed, without proper consideration of the fundamental factors involved in "being in God's will".

Looking at the negative side of the question, what might it take to be "out of God's will". Not only may we not see anything particular, or seriously wrong, we might dismiss the possibility, if the question was raised, by the not uncommon defensive claim that "God knows my heart"! Which statement is absolutely true, but the real question is, do you know your heart? We cannot summarily cover the situation by such a presumptuous oversimplification!

A point needs to be made here, that technically we could never say that we are completely, or unquestionably in God's will. Because of His great mercy, and our natural limitations, He makes the requirements fundamentally simple and always attainable by basic reasonable obedience to any, even all, of His demands. And this word "all" is the key to success! The "all" is both minimum and maximum. And that doesn't have to intimidate us. "I can do 'all' things in Christ Jesus, who strengtheneth me". This is not

only an encouragement for all things I may encounter as a challenge or test, but should be a commitment to do all the things I am responsible for--every day, all the way!

I am saying, in effect, that total conformity and obedience to all of God's principles and commands is both mandatory and possible. Your reaction may be one of complete agreement, which it should be. But, since the reality<sup>of the</sup> performance level of the great majority of Christians is far below the total requirement--we tend to relativize the standard, by comparing ourselves to others which the scriptures tell us is not wise (or more emphatically is foolish, or by whatever name--unacceptable).

Back again to our question of what could put us out of God's will, we must start with our conversion; at which point we would be in His will, in the simple sense of not having had time to do much of anything wrong.

But, even here, there are very possible potential wrong factors involved in our salvation experience, which could start us off on the wrong foot! Of course, there would be nothing wrong on God's side. Regeneration is a direct, complete and final act which God performs in us, regardless of the quality of the associated human ministry of prayer, witnessing, preaching, testimony, or any other methodological factors involved.

The wrong foot I referred to would be the very likely probability that most believers today, and for a long time now, were indoctrinated by a less than pure and sound presentation of the gospel. By which, I mean an Arminian interpretation of it, and corresponding application, that is based upon a concept of combined divine and human will and action, versus the Calvinistic principle of an exclusively sovereign divine will and act.

If this is so, and agreed with (or not) that it is a serious problem, who is at fault? First, whoever introduced them to the erroneous doctrine; but they are each at fault (and personally responsible for staying with the wrong concept after they have had time enough to learn the truth about it).

In other words, regarding the underlying reason for them being improperly indoctrinated is that they trusted man (the agent of God) instead of proving and establishing their constitutional beliefs directly by the bible, themselves. Acts 17:11"...in that they received the word of God (as presented, whether sound or not) with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so".

Now this isn't just good advice, but God has instituted it as a continual responsibility for every Christian to diligently practice in the hope of his development as a true, and faithful follower; yea, disciple!

But that's not the way it is, because of serious fundamental failures in the church and Christianity in general! Another way

of describing the current condition of the church is to say that it is in default! Carnal, Laodicean, with little spiritual vitality, and in dire need of major reformation. Where to begin?

What could fix it, or turn it around (back to God)? Improving one's daily behavior, by acting more in accordance with spiritual principles and methods? It is like a man once said, whom I had heard about, as an excuse for his problem with not having a good testimony by his life and actions, "If I could just get my devotions up". His problem, as with most believers, was a lot deeper than that. Yet, if those "devotions" would have led him to the root of his problem, and subsequent right track, then he was in that sense, right!

And even if somehow, and it does happen that some Christians do become sound in doctrine and practice of their beliefs and responsibilities--they are usually in a minority position in their churches. What are they to do about it? If they see fundamental, serious error in their church's constitution and resulting conduct, are they responsible to attempt to do something to help correct it?

What if their efforts are resisted and rejected? If in due time, no changes are made for the better, what alternatives does the dissenting brother, or do brethren have? Is there ultimately any real choice, but disassociation from the church (local assembly)?

We must be careful of subtle reaction and reasoning here. Rationalization will usually lead to wrong decisions. It is a test of principles; determining the priority responsibility. A conditioned natural reflex response will very probably result in a premature, unstudied opinion to remain with the status quo. Slightly paraphrased, and I don't recall the author of it, but a very appropriate indictment comes to mind: "A man who refuses to consider another man's opinion (especially on a subject unproven by the former), denies himself the right to change his mind."

By extension, think how costly such unwillingness and obstinacy may be, if full and proper consideration might have led him to the truth. Entrenched error, then, is mind-controlling, and very difficult to become extricated from. It requires a thorough deprogramming from false indoctrination. Realistically, it's a long road back, and sadly, the first step of turning around and going in the right direction, is seldom made.

Such is the testimony of the church's history, as attested to by Revelation prophecy, which has been rightly described as "history written beforehand".

In titling this section as the modern church's hypocrisy, I meant, in effect, that it has mainly been a false witness, or misrepresentative of the biblical truth it professes to believe.

There is no excuse, but the church is so badly brainwashed (or perhaps more accurately "brain-polluted") that it doesn't even realize its deplorable condition. Again, it is just as the Rev. prophecy of the church of Laodicea describes it:...."and knowest

not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

Do you think the average Christian who reads that scripture and related portions, or hears it in sermons believes it could apply to him? Seldom, if ever! Because as it said: he “knowest not.’

And the other descriptions in the passage referred to surely can’t be meant literally as applying to the vast majority of today’s church—can it? But it does, and I would be surprised if there is 1 in 100 that is not included in the indictment.

Why, then, in a general sense does this shameful condition exist? Because most of our professed knowledge and testimony is feigned or simulated—talked and lived in the flesh—without the spiritual acuity to reverently believe the gravity of God’s principles and teaching; especially its (His) demands for our loyal obedience and conformity.

Please listen, if you would, to the distinct words of 1Cor. 1:10, wherein God (through Paul) explicitly enjoins the church to come to doctrinal unity—oneness of mind:  
“ Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Do you think there are not literally thousands of sermons and lectures containing many of the right words, delivered by Christian pastors and others, who are nonetheless seriously guilty of the condemning charges of the Rev. 3 prophecy? A Christian who is in fact wrong about anything as serious as those things enumerated, should have a long time before been sensitive to whatever corrupting influences he was exposed to, and let himself capitulate to.

So that what might have been, or should be, spiritually nurturing and edifying became instead, dead orthodoxy, and the church extant little more than a shell or corpse of the new testament model (Acts 2:41-47).

Is there any real reformation going on in the church? Not only is there no concerted, or widespread effort, there is little evidence of anything happening to help revive it (the church in general , and scarcely locally).

So what are all its activities (works) accomplishing? Isn’t it producing results after its own kind? Reflecting centuries of degeneration because of deviation from the sound doctrine received from the apostles, and from the early church practices established

as a pattern to be literally conformed to by the historical church for all time.

Technical knowledge has no doubt increased greatly since the primitive church, but spirituality has greatly decreased. Interestingly, that factor didn't have to particularly increase, only maintain the status quo--which sadly, probably wasn't maintained through the first century. It doesn't take much reflection upon the tendencies and proclivities of the typical Christian (with all his exposure and supposed learning, he is yet immature and undeveloped!) to see how easily he began and continues his demise. Reasons are obvious, but no excuses are ever acceptable, or even allowable.

For example, you may definitely say "this is what I was taught". But, of course, you are responsible for what you learn. The teacher is accountable for his doctrinal output; that is, it is his stewardship responsibility. You are primarily and ultimately fully accountable for your intake. This is all embodied in the implied injunction previously cited--in Act. 17:11. It is a two-sided coin all right, but one side is his, and the other side is yours.

On the subject of reformation, first it has to be seen as needed, and that is not a commonly held awareness. A superficial observation of the church might see things as being essentially sound and in order; even active and "apparently" fruitful. How to know, then, if there might be anything seriously missing or wrong with the organization?

What would be its frame of reference to determine its spiritual state, or correctness, to use a modern term in the right way? If it compares itself to other churches, even fairly, what good is that if the others are similarly deficient?

As in the usually sound advice--which should be elementary, but so often overlooked--"when all else fails, read the directions". You are probably inclined to think that means applying various principles and teaching that relate to the problem. It should be possible to get to the solution that way, as it would be in normal day to day living. But the problem is deeper than that--farther back, even to the beginning of our new life.

Do we, then, have a base line or step-by-step set of directions to follow to start right and stay right? We ought to know that it would be just like God to give us a specific pattern not only to guide us, but even to guarantee our success. But, with the inviolable stipulation that we do not deviate from that system; not by non-performance, or omission, or any form of alteration of its particulars.

All of which failings have been committed now for most of the two millenia of the church's history. And even if you were to recognize that a certain scriptural passage consolidates all the

essential requirements for continual maintenance of the early church tradition, it would be highly likely that there would be almost instant rationalization of some of the text as not being supposed to be taken 100% literally. This would be because the implied requirement of continuous fulfillment by every church of the same performance as the original model church, seems impossible, even impractical--especially to be continually upheld.

The question to be settled is whether or not the implied demands of the subject scriptures are imperatives; or idealistic goals to be accomplished as much as is reasonably possible.

We should know what has happened (the negative historical results), but to what extent is the church culpable for failure to obey its mandated responsibility? What line have we drawn without authority? Granted, in our highly imperfect condition, we never reach a very high level of conformity to God's commands and principles. But if he has detailed and delineated our responsibilities, we cannot/must not, rationalize away our duty to follow them as specifically and fully as His will and grace may require.

If we allow ourselves to settle for our concept of a reasonably satisfactory degree of meeting the demands of the Acts 2 standards, how do we justify it in the face of the testimony of the early church that they fully followed all of their personal and collective responsibilities? In reality, then, we have settled for a high degree of failure--not success!

Someone will say that because the church was under intense persecution, that their circumstances would compel them to be more closely involved for mutual comfort and defense, even survival (spiritual, and physical).

We see increased effort and resolve today when the church is attacked by secularism, false religions, and outright atheism. It troubles me, though, that the church is poorly armed for conflict. How can it be anything else when it has compromised its required devotion to the principles of sound doctrine, and become adulterated and weakened to the state prophesied in Rev. 2 & 3?

Circumstances can never be cited as cause, or justification for success, or failure. Not when we have access to the means of accomplishment, and fail to use those means the way God has designed them to be successfully used.

If we do not strictly use God's methods to carry out our new life's duties, we cannot get God's intended results. In a word, or a few, we have not taken God's prescribed instructions seriously enough. Not anywhere near!

If you don't think that is not almost universally true, dare to measure yourselves--not "among yourselves" which is not wise, as we are told by the scriptures--but against the new testament original church model.

Moreover, that is step by step, to the letter!

Rarely will an individual test favorably against the matrix. Matrix, per Webster's New World College Dict.....Def.2: "That within which, or within and from which, something originates, takes form, or develops, specif. (a) a die or mold for casting or shaping.....". Succinctly put, just as that die or mold produces things of consistent identity and quality, so should today's church look very similar to the early church model.

But somebody (many somebodies--both leaders and followers, teachers and students) tampered with the pattern. First, maybe a little tweaking, a little modification here and there, compromise and capitulation, until as C. H. Spurgeon said about doctrine (paraphrased): it bore little resemblance to the true original form, except as a product of its decay.

So instead of today's church following the apostles' tradition, it has followed the corrupted historical tradition of the church elders. "Making the word of God of none effect....". Mk. 7-13.

When you look at the Acts. 2 account of the first church's conduct of its spiritual responsibilities, you will note the words "they" (implying everyone of the vs. 41 three thousand plus), "every soul", "all", "every man", "continuing daily", "one accord", and "singleness of heart". Trying to find anywhere near that total degree of participation and subsequent mutual edification and unity in the contemporary church is not only futile, but should be the cause of the greatest shame and concern, and hence reformation efforts to try to get back to the place God established for us, and that we have woefully betrayed!

Today's world is in such a social and cultural upheaval, that we are seeing every traditional institution attacked and undermined. Religion is a primary target, especially fundamental Christianity (and is anything else really Christianity?). Robert Bork, in his book, "Slouching towards Gommorah", commenting on the causes of the cultural degeneration occurring, states that an underlying basic cause would seem to be "the ebbing of religious faith".

That being generally, the effect of the decline of relative "religious" faith upon society--think of the similar more serious effect of the decline of true faith upon the church, By true faith, I mean, essentially, sound doctrine--the unwavering maintenance of which is the only thing that can produce biblically correct personal actions, and church practices.

Why should we be worried, or alarmed<sup>at</sup> the former situation? Most of the church is ignorant of its own corrupted, worldly condition, so how well can they understand the real reasons for what is going on in the world around them?

The main ministry of the church today should be reformation.

But obviously it isn't! And why not? Because we have allowed ourselves to be deceived into thinking that we have essentially got it right, and there are no major problems. Certainly not of the proportions of the Laodecian church of Revelation prophecy.

But we are that church, with all its faults, whether we can ever recognize and admit it or not!

If we thoughtfully and carefully look at the early church practices, and especially note the unanimous successful results, we have to make some kind of comparative judgment of our church situations.

Also if, as I believe, you could scarcely--if ever--find a modern day church that would compare in testimony to the original church, how seriously do we take it? Is it enough to say that we might have a relatively high level of faithfulness in comparison to many contemporary churches? But we still have badly missed the mark of the archetype or exemplar that God has established!

You might say, and sincerely, that you are totally committed to do everything the Lord reveals to you that He requires. Where would you begin? What would be your guiding example? Your church? Its teaching? Its members? You probably say yes, but ultimately, the scriptures directly, especially with the admonition of Acts 17:11.

If such a procedure were literally followed, wouldn't it produce the required and deserved results? You say yes, technically, but then have to agree that there is only partial comparative success today.

Looking at the beautiful picture of the model church supplied to us in Acts 2, note to begin with, vs. 42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.....". Three vital parts must be stressed here; (1) continued, (2) steadfastly, and (3) the apostles' doctrine.

Continued: stayed with it, always, and as often as required to increasingly learn; that is, they were committed to internalize and personalize the truth as it was delivered to them by the apostles. Remember, and this is critically important, there was no misinterpretation of doctrine at that time. Today there is much error in church doctrine. And yet, if it were only one serious deviation, it would not be allowable by God--no matter how much we might think the interpretation to be defensible and justified (but, in reality, a product of poor scholarship).

Now the word, steadfastly: per Webster's College Dictionary, 4th Ed., Def.1/"firm, fixed, settled or established, 2/ not changing, fickle, or wavering; constant".

We might think that there was the extenuating circumstance of

persecution which would be such a strong incentive, or crucible that would force them to be much more involved in consulting the scriptures, worshipping and praying, and fellowshiping that that is why they held such a completely unified, and unwavering position.

But even if that is true, I cannot believe that their example of faithfulness would be any less of a testimony under any other circumstances. One other factor will undoubtedly occur to the readers of this, or from their own scriptural reading: the fact that the Christians in the first church were established on sound footing by the apostles.

And though human nature was no doubt similar to that of today, it was not necessarily inevitable that the church should degenerate as it has for the past nearly two millenia. If we say that Christians couldn't hold the line at 100% conformity to the original church's example--we cast aspersions either upon the reality of the precedent, the literal mandate for all churches to completely follow and obey, or upon God's ability to make us all capable of meeting such high demands of performance.

But no matter what we think about it, suffice it to say that there has been centuries of rationalization and attempted justification for all the modifications (read: excuses) that have been made, instead of "steadfastly" fulfilling God's requirements precisely as he established them.

In a word, it has all happened because--with rare exception--we do not nearly have the proper respect and allegiance to God, His word, His will, or His authority. We ought to have, besides the greatest possible degree of love for Him, also a concomitant fear of displeasing or failing Him! "...my brethren, these things (failings) ought not so to be!" Jas. 3:10.

I said a few paragraphs back, that the early Christians would have had the same human nature characteristics that we do. By which commonality, we should realize that even though no dissension is alluded to in the Acts 2 account, that surely they wouldn't have lived too long before questions and disagreements over doctrine and practices would have arisen.

Remembering, that despite the wonderful fact that as Christians we possess a new spiritual nature, by which through Christ, we can do all things right, but that nonetheless because of the old nature which we retain, we are by consequence of the fall, "damaged goods". And we are going to show that ugly side of us a million times over in a lifetime. So that there will always be not only the tendency, but the reality of our acting according to that old, corrupted nature. Recognizing it, and doing something about it is not only essential for every believer, but often a problem not dealt with, so that serious mistakes are made personally, and collectively in the church.

One must conclude from the account cited, that the original church, not only did not let doctrinal errors become entrenched,

but did not let them go unresolved for any undue length of time. "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good". I Thess 5: 21.

Think about it! "Keep the faith" is, of course, a biblical admonition to Christians, and the world uses it glibly, or technically, in vain. But Christians being often exhorted to do in principle what that expression requires along with many similar injunctions from scripture, may take it comparatively seriously, but often or usually have already failed to "keep the faith" in some important way--usually involving fundamental doctrine!

Why? Because again, they did not have the strength of resolve that the early Christians had. They (the first church) would not (by virtue of strong commitment), and did not, capitulate or compromise principles; especially not foregoing holding the line on the right interpretation of doctrine.

The only technical difference between their basic foundation and ours was that the apostles delivered to them unquestionably sound doctrine, and we, in most cases, received historically altered theology--but have the same essential resources they had; that being the preserved truth of scriptures, with both the spirit-endowed ability to learn the truth, and the inherent and commanded responsibility to make certain of the accuracy and soundness of our beliefs. There are no alternatives, excuses, or options allowed for any believer to be in opposition to other believers--when sufficient time and effort have been given to determine the truth involved (in any, and every situation)!

But, we just don't take it seriously enough, as if it were somehow something less than mandatory to achieve and maintain doctrinal and practical unity in the church--locally and universally.

And what if it appears practically impossible to reverse a centuries-old problem that pervades the church?

Even as we see in our national and world cultures (in politics, government, education, social customs, etc.), an ever increasing controversy between conservatism and liberalism--so too has theology, or biblical doctrine been affected with the same conflict.

So then, if a believer sees something wrong in his church (and possibly extending to the worldwide church) what is he to do about it? The procedure is spelled out in Matt. 18, and other scriptures. It is, of course, at least implicit that there is always recourse for discussion and redress of wrongs, privately or with the church, as needed. Neither is it a matter of choice; we are commanded to settle any differences that could adversely affect relationships with brethren, personally and collectively.

If, after having taken the proper time to follow every step required to reconcile a problem, and then it is not resolved, what does the dissenting brother/brethren do?

If it involves a resolute, clear principle, how could it be compromised--which would be a common tendency to try to keep peace, or not have to take the drastic step of leaving the assembly?

It really doesn't mitigate the need of resolution, either, if one position can't be proven, or admitted to be right by both sides of the issue. Someone has to know what the one true interpretation, or answer is! And, then, even if no one else agrees with it (him or her) the right decision or action must be taken by the dissenter.

Which means he or she could not continue to remain in the assembly, when they go on advocating and disseminating error, or conduct a scripturally wrong practice. We have already established that the issue or charge brought cannot be over a trivial or minor matter.

Whoever made the first serious mistake in allowing a doctrinal change to be made, along with many others since who have promoted similar corruptions, have unwittingly (but reprehensibly) done a terrible disservice to the millions of other believers and churches who received such a defective heritage.

Yet, I reiterate, not a one of us can claim any excuse for perpetuating the erroneous theology, and associated malpractices. Because the cure is the same as the prevention: the scriptures, by which every word uttered, and every action taken must be judged, and reacted to accordingly. If the received teaching is right, the bible will confirm it; if it is wrong, it will prove it so--but it may often require diligent study, discernment, and wisdom, which is our continual responsibility (II Tim. 2:15). The enemy of <sup>our</sup> minds and souls never ceases in his nefarious efforts to captivate and control us. Neither can we relax our guard, nor fail to fortify our defenses, or use our resources against him!

Praise God for what he does for us despite our failures to obey His will, that we don't know the half of; but think what we have unnecessarily lost and suffered by not having explicitly, if even nearly, followed the injunctions of His word to us.

Can one fundamental error, misconception, or especially misinterpretation of specific doctrinal meaning cause us to be continually flawed--even "out of God's will"--until we fix the problem? Do you dare to say there is any safe exception to such a serious negative condition?

Are you going to meet the Lord in your flight (the rapture) with the baggage you have now, which will never pass inspection; but instead be ashamed when He judges you for your failure to obey God's will? Do you have to prove the negative church prophecy to be right, in your case?