

# The Collapse Of The Church

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## OVERVIEW

During his last three years on this earth Jesus was in a continual state of confrontation with the religious leaders of Judea. The reason for this is very important. Jesus is Life. The leaders wanted religion.

Now in America every year those organizations which call themselves Christians find themselves more and more ineffective in the world around them. What has degenerated to religion has once again failed.

After over forty-five years of work and study, I submit the following reasons for the failure of Christianity in the United States of America.

1. Believers have been lulled to sleep by entertainment and materialism.
2. Concepts of the return of Christ have been reduced to mere escapism, the secret rapture.
3. True Faith has become mere religion.
4. The Confessions and Creeds have been abandoned.
5. The Kingdom of God is forgotten.
6. The Answers are in the New Testament Pattern.

There have always been cycles in the history of the Christian faith. The pattern is even given to us in the Old Testament book of Judges. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament periods it is primarily a generational cycle. One generation, we will call them the Fathers, will be set on fire for God and they usually manage to pass some of this fire on to the next generation, the Sons. Along with the fire the Fathers also pass on some doctrine which they have learned and some sort of form that they expect the church to take on. The Sons soon learn to look to the doctrine and the form and do not seek the fire. The next generations, the Grandsons, usually receive only the doctrine and the form but not the fire. So the Grandsons and then the Great Grandsons revert to the ways and appetites of the world around them.

The Great Grandsons soon get rid of the doctrines and only the form remains. If things go along comfortably, there is no reason for them to seek God. If times get hard, then they decide to call on God again. By the time the fire comes they are good and ready for it because God requires them to be very earnest before He will answer. Then the entire cycle starts over again. There have been some small revivals in America since the Second Great Awakening, but a Third Great Awakening is now necessary. (See chapter 12.)

## PROBLEMS

### ENTERTAINMENT

With the arrival and growth of the Charismatic movement in the early 1960's what is usually called "Praise And Worship" became popular in churches. At first it was largely found in independent churches where the people left the dead formalism of denominational churches. Before long it began to appear within the denominational churches. There were a few sincere believers who really wanted to praise and worship God together, but mostly the trend was to try to stem the tide of the massive abandonment of the church by the younger generation. So Ministers in a desperate move to preserve their salaries and buildings brought in the music that they believed would appeal to the teenagers and it worked for a while. The music became more and more like rock music and the words became more and more repetitive and monosyllabic in nature. Before long the congregants were no longer participating in the music but were now only observers while more and more musicians entertained them for the majority of the service.

The songs are also all about me. How God saved me. How God blessed me. Or even how another person blessed me by leading me to God. Sometimes we praise God for how He blesses me. But there is little praise to God simply for Who He Is. That concept went out with the protestant Reformation: those songs or hymns are old fashioned, the youth don't like them, and they are not "anointed." Remember, it's all about feeling.

If you take the time to look around in most church gatherings today only the first few rows will actually be participating in the worship experience. The majority of those in attendance are mere audience. Entertaining a crowd is not the same as influencing them for Christ. Entertainment will not save the church or the culture in America. It is time for all so-called worship leaders to require the full participation of the congregation or else revert to silence.

When people first came into the experience of the Holy Spirit, they could actually feel His Presence. They got hooked on this feeling just as surely as they would a drug. Since Christianity is primarily a matter of faith, the Holy Spirit withdrew these feelings in order to cause His people to grow in faith. As it turned out, neither the teens or their parents liked this change. So they turned to other addictions to satisfy their need for sensation. Many



of the younger people simply went to drugs. However, many of the older ones considered drugs to be an unacceptable alternative, so they found more respectable highs.

At the same time the entertainment industry was producing more and more audio and video products. Adults who had considered themselves fortunate to go to one movie a week now found themselves watching two or three movies a night on their cable TV or recording devices.

The church became more and more desperate to keep up. Small groups had been rediscovered during the charismatic movement and they continued on into the entertainment age of religion. In the original small groups believers met to study the Bible and to pray for each other. As the church sought more and more ways to compete in the entertainment realm, they changed their small groups from Bible Studies or Prayer Groups to various Interest Groups. Before long the interest groups prevailed. As long as the interest was more or less decent, it counted as a church small group. This ran the gambit from Men's Breakfasts, Auto Repair, Motorcycles, and Card Games for the men and Sewing Circles, Knitting Groups, Drama Clubs and Mom's Day out for the women. As long as church members did it together, it was considered to be "good ministry."

From entertainment we move on to Consumerism. Entertainment and consumerism go hand in hand. They are both integral parts of the massive self-indulgence practiced in America.

## CONSUMERISM

What's in it for me? The United States is first and foremost a nation of consumers. We consume the majority of all the 'good stuff' that there is in the world: gasoline, food, entertainment, clothing, etc. We are totally self-indulgent. Therefore, our gospel must be self-indulgent as well; that is if a preacher expects to hold onto his or her congregation and budget. So Church is where you get it. You get salvation there, your fire escape. But you really don't have to change the way you live; we live by a perverted view of grace and mercy. You get any number of other blessings there depending on what particular kind of church it is. Often you can get healed there, sometimes physically but mostly emotionally; of course this is harder to confirm but if you "feel better" then you were probably healed. After all, it is all about feelings. You can get a number of blessings "at the altar." There doesn't really have to be an altar, you just go 'down front' when you are told to and get the blessings. Next week you can come back to the same place and get more blessings after you drop something in the offering.

In being blessed we have lost sight of God Himself. The real pity is that it is our sight of God that preserves and strengthens us. We try to please the youth by giving them what they want instead of what they need and they abandon the faith in

droves as soon as they leave home and few ever return. Young mothers ask three year olds what they want to eat in restaurants. Do they really know? How about telling them what they want and telling the youth what they need in God. Without a vision the people perish.

Jesus did not come preaching the gospel of salvation. Is that a shocking sentence? Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. There is a considerable difference between the gospel of salvation and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. In a kingdom there is a king. In the United States we have “citizens” because the United States is a democratic republic. But in Britain they are “subjects” of her majesty the Queen. Christians are subjects of His Majesty King Jesus. That means that he is the ultimate authority as expressed by the Bible and the Holy Spirit. We don’t get to vote. We can only obey. The Gospel of the Kingdom contains the gospel of salvation. For this earthly and eternal salvation we owe the King total obedience. Americans have a difficult time living as “subjects.”

So now when Socialism is taking over, no one is alarmed because socialists will never interrupt our warm feelings – what a surprise is coming! – besides, we are “not of this world” and we are leaving soon, more of that in another chapter.

Consumerism has also taught Americans that if they are not totally satisfied with a product or a service, there is always someone else who will try harder to please them and get their business. This has now totally infiltrated their church life. They “church shop” continually. At the slightest sign of being displeased they change churches. Which is better, to graduate from High School in 12 years or to continually start the third grade over and over again for 10 years? The same 12 years are spent but there is no education. Therefore, we have a nation of spiritual children who can only demand satisfaction for their carnal appetites.

Youth groups were emphasized to provide an experience for the youth away from their parents who are, of course, the enemy. True family events were hard to find. Entertainment is the work of the hour. And still membership continues to drop steadily. Budgets are in danger, facilities are difficult to maintain and staff cannot be paid. Few full time ministers have no idea of how to work for a living to support themselves or their families outside the church. Yet the pressure is on to always own the latest gadget and to buy every teen their own car as soon as they are old enough to get a driver’s license. Jesus is forgotten.

With both parents working many adults have discovered a new high. How much income can they accumulate so they can buy the newest toys.

And if there are more toys than the income can purchase, just run up your credit card debt and get some more. The children follow suit. So if the parents are not parenting, the children will buy, beg, borrow or steal to accumulate their toys. Since over half of all marriages end in divorce, the children presume that everything and everyone is expendable. Just use it or them and then toss them. All our appliances are throw away devices. Why not people as well? This is where consumerism has taken us.

## THE PROSPERITY MESSAGE

Consumerism has given birth to the prosperity message which is a perversion of the scriptural truth of God's provision. This message has nearly ruined the witness of a large part of the Christian Church, especially in America. Yes, there is such a thing as God's abundance. But the extent of abundance is often the result of the present environment. When the church exists in the midst of prosperous economy, then it is likely to be blessed with an abundance of material goods. Even the poor often have their own automobiles and enough to eat. This is not true in cultures that are not in a state of prosperity. Their ministers may have enormous dedication and many become Christians, but they may not have shoes or their shoes are worn out. Does this mean that these believers have less faith? There are more evidences of the supernatural in their churches. They have no alternatives. If they do not receive divine healing, they die. Any message that is true for the church is manifested in all cultures. Otherwise, God loves some of His children more than others and this is never true. Furthermore, sometimes abundance can be a curse and not a blessing. When Israel in the wilderness complained about the manna, God sent them quail to eat. But the abundance was too much. It was more than they could eat or preserve. Soon the

whole camp smelled of dead birds. What do your chicken bones smell like after they are in the garbage can for a few days? How would you like to live in the midst of that? America's material abundance has turned into a curse for the church because it has taken us away from God.

People generally like for their church building to resemble their homes. If their homes are luxurious then they want the building to be the same even if the building is only used a few hours a week. The massive air conditioners run constantly consuming countless millions in electricity just so the people will be comfortable from the first second they enter the building. And yet, they don't have enough for missions. God sees all of this.

One of the groups denying the Gospel of the Kingdom today are the leaders. They promise all the blessings and they encourage living out of or "above" the world. They are super spiritual except when it comes to their edifice complex. They love buildings and embrace mortgages. It has been said that a preacher's boldness to speak out against social and political injustices is inversely related to the size of his mortgage. The bigger the mortgage, the bigger the monthly or weekly payments, the less he says. Why? He might lose his Federal tax exempt status or offend and drive off a tithing member. Money is god here. Now as to what will happen when they stand before their judge and



maker, that is God's business. But what have they taught their people? Only so much and it does not include how to stand up for what is right even if it costs you something. You may ask, what is the root of what they have done? Is the root fear or greed? Not really. These preachers are building a kingdom. What is wrong with that? Isn't Jesus really a king? Yes, but it is not His kingdom that they are building; it is their own. It is their own kingdom and the buildings are their monuments.

The Yuppie motto is "He that dies with the most toys wins." The Preacher's motto often is, "He that dies with the biggest building wins." The world shapes the church.

No other country in the world has such a thing as a tax exempt status and if things continue going in the present direction, the United States won't have it much longer. Get used to living without it. I asked a minister friend of mine in London if they had tax exempt status. He said, "Yes." Surprised I asked him how it worked. He said that when they buy items for the church, they don't have to pay sales tax. I asked him if the members get to deduct church donations from their income taxes. He said, "No, do you get to do that in America? When I told him we did, he was shocked and amazed. And yet they have built a new building in the greater London area for a thousand members. London is statistically the most expensive city in the world to

live in. How did they raise the money to build this building? God was with them. And they have no tax exempt status as we know it. If people in America who give large donations in late December do so only on the advice of their accountant, they won't get "credit" for a penny of it with God. So why do churches prostitute themselves to get it?

Special privileges isolate us at least in our own minds from the rest of the population. As a result when laws are made or court rulings come down, somehow we don't understand that they apply to us. They do. And when the reality of it hits us, it will be too late to stand up and be counted.

However, there is such a thing as "holding it loosely." This means that we are free to enjoy any and all blessings so long as we do not invest our hearts and love in them. God does give material blessings. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." I Timothy 6:17

But if we clutch them to ourselves, if we cannot stand the idea of losing them, then we are not holding them loosely. Then they have become idols and come between us and God. We can learn to hold them loosely. The test is always can we give them up at a moment's notice?

## END TIME

Here is summary of what will happen at the glorious return of Christ.

“When the Emperor returned from the invisible realm several things happened.

First, the believers who had died in faith were resurrected and given their Immortal bodies.

Second, the believers who were living on the earth at the time of the return were transformed instantly and given their Immortal bodies. Those who are human become Immortals; they are destined to reign.

Third, those living at the time of the return who were not believers remained mortal and fell under the rule of the Emperor and the Immortals who serve Him. The mortals are born, bear and raise children and die as all mortals do.

Fourth, the Enemy and his legions are bound for a Thousand years. Mortals still seek to rebel against the Emperor because of their fallen nature.

Fifth, those who had died who were not believers remained in their graves until the end of a Thousand years Reign.”

The premillennial position regarding endtimes is based upon the literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 in the New Testament. Those who hold this position believe that these verses describe Jesus’ coming again to the earth and the subsequent one thousand year reign. Therefore, it holds that Jesus will literally and physically be reigning on the earth for a thousand years after his second coming.

This belief holds that Jesus’ physical return to earth will occur just prior to the inauguration of the millennial reign. This is why it is called the PREmillennial position.

This is different from the other forms of Christian eschatology such as postmillennialism or amillennialism, which view the millennial rule as occurring before the second coming or as being merely figurative.

The Millennium Patterns:

Pre Millennial: We are living now before the one thousand years. The Second Coming begins the one thousand years.

A Millennial: We are living now during the “one thousand” years.

Post Millennial: The church will bring in the one thousand year reign and live it out before Jesus returns bodily.

The last two millennium patterns do not involve a literal 1,000 years, but rather a figurative or symbolic “1,000” years.

In studying the end times there are several patterns regarding both the Tribulation and the Rapture.

The Great Tribulation is generally understood to be a time of worldwide tribulation just prior to the second coming of Christ. It is often thought to last for seven years.

The word “Rapture” is not in the Bible. It is the “Catching Away.”

Pre Tribulation Rapture: The Church leaves before the tribulation.

Mid Tribulation Rapture: The Church leaves in the middle of the tribulation at 3 ½ years.

Post Tribulation Rapture: The Church leaves at the

end of the tribulation.

## THE PACKAGE

Many believe that a certain “package” of beliefs about “end time” must remain unbroken. This writer believes that the One Thousand year reign on the earth is in our resurrected future as depicted in his Reign novels (the Pre-Millennial position). However, two beliefs that often go along with the literal thousand year reign are the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture and the Great Tribulation. The Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture is when the believers suddenly disappear from the earth just before the Great Tribulation begins, the “Great Snatch.” The unbelievers cannot understand where they went. These believers are transported to the heavenlies where they receive their resurrected bodies and prepare to return after the seven years of the Great Tribulation.

When new believers learn about this “package,” they are usually told that it cannot be broken up. If you believe in the Thousand Year Reign, you should also believe in the Great Tribulation and the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Actually you have a choice as many sincere and equally studious believers differ on the interpretation of these matters. It is up to each believer to read and pray and decide what he or she believes about these end time matters.

The Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture is only believed by Pre-Millennials but not by all of them. Classical Pre-Millennials lived in the first four centuries A.D. Dispensational Pre-Millennials first lived in the 19th century; they believe in the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture. A-Millennials came in the 5th century. All positions believe in a Rapture which is the great “catching up” where believers receive their resurrected bodies.

Regarding tribulation or hard times there is something that needs to be said. Believers have experienced persecution and hardship on and off for two thousand years. We need to be willing to suffer for our faith. Death is a sure escape. Martyrs are highly honored in heaven. In China they were told in the 1930’s and onward that they would never experience tribulation for their faith. They experienced great tribulation. Many denied God. It was a great tribulation for them but not The Great Tribulation. Local tribulation is not the Great Tribulation. Beware of signs as they can be misread.

The negative effect of the Secret Rapture belief is inactivity by believers. This is a fact whether the position is true or not. The Bible says, “Occupy til I come.” (Lk 19:13) Granted that is in a parable so let us go to other references. It also says that all believers should be salt or be trodden under foot of



men. Is this not happening? (Mt 5:13) It also says, “if you confess me before men I will confess you before my Father . . .if you deny me before men I will deny you before my Father.” (Mt 10:32)

In addition, we must ask ourselves if we believe in “proof texts” as the ultimate authority in the Bible or much broader patterns. The Dispensational Pre-Millennial position is based on a few proof texts. The Classical Pre-Millennial position is based on patterns in scripture. God took care of his people through tribulation in Exodus, Daniel and Acts. Why should he not take care of them through any tribulation, even The Great Tribulation?



## A STRANGE NEW DOCTRINE

Along with all the entertainment and materialism a strange new doctrine has entered the church culture that promises a secret escape from all the problems and challenges of life.

Beginning in 1970 with *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay and continuing in the mid 1990's with the *Left Behind* books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins Christians were assured that there were some very hard times coming to America and to the world. But almost magically true believers would not be left on earth to experience these events because they would be leaving the earth in the secret rapture. In order to propagate this magnificent hoax the teaching on the return of Christ had to be subverted to meet the goals of these escapists.

In the late 1820's John Nelson Darby, 1800 – 1882, founder of the Darby School of Prophecy in Britain, conceived the doctrine of the “secret rapture.” A little later C. I. Scofield, 1843 – 1921, editor of the Scofield Reference Bible, turned this rapture teaching into biblical truth by including it as commentary in his Reference Bible. This bible sold well and the great secret rapture was now “in the Bible.” Then the great Dwight L. Moody, 1837 - 1899, the founder of the Moody Bible Institute in

Chicago made the teaching a regular part of his educational process. All Lindsay and LaHaye and Jenkins did was carry forth the myth.

All of these teachers have duped millions of Christians into believing things about the second coming of Christ and the “secret rapture” to the extent that the church’s influence has all but vanished in American culture.

## THE GREAT ESCAPE

Primary among the proof texts for the great escape are the ones about not knowing the time of the return. Actually these verses are quite clear and they refer only to not knowing the time of the glorious return. We shall distinguish the secret pre-tribulation rapture from the actual second coming by calling the actual second coming the Glorious Return. Those who want a secret pre-tribulation rapture also construe these verses to obscure the nature of the coming and not just the time. These scriptures are not talking about the nature of the coming, only the time. In context the only thing that is a secret here is the time of His coming, not the manner of His coming.

“. . . In such an hour as ye think not your Lord will come.” Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40.

Paul is quite clear about the second coming.

“The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a SHOUT, with the VOICE of an Archangel and the TRUMP of God.” I Thess. 4:16.

It would be difficult here for a secret rapture to happen with all that noise.

“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. The heavens shall pass away with a GREAT

NOISE” II Peter 3:10 More noise. Then there is this “thief” issue. This thief is not a sneak thief. This thief is an all out open bandit. He does not try to hide himself when he comes.

Then there is another one of their proof texts that references a thief. But it still refers only to the time of his coming.

“I will come on thee as a thief in the night and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” Rev. 3:3.

Or again:

"Behold I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth." Rev. 16:15.

And yet again there is this:

"But ye brethren are not in darkness that, that day shall overtake you as a thief." I Thess. 5:4.

So, believers are not to be taken as a thief. They should expect Jesus at any time. It should be clear that we cannot know the time. But we should live as if He were coming today. This is good. Most revivals in history have included an eschatological emphasis. When believers get revived, they start anticipating the return of the Lord. This is because of their heightened awareness of His Presence, the

importance of the Word, and their desire to have better and better fellowship with Him. We live like He is coming today; but we plan like the return is far in our future. We cannot become super spiritual and abandon our witness in the world.

Someone may ask what about the “one will be taken, the other left” teaching?

<sup>30</sup> "And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.<sup>[h]</sup> <sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world<sup>[i]</sup>— from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven. . . ."

<sup>40</sup> "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left." Matthew 24: 30,31,40,41.

As you can see printed above, the entire context of Matthew 24, the “little apocalypse (revelation)”, is a very public and noisy Return, not a secret one. “All the peoples of the earth” will see Him coming and there will be a “mighty blast of a trumpet.”

Then, after a short discourse about the days of Noah (and his flood was no secret either), there comes the passage about “one will be taken, the other left” Those who teach the secret pre-tribulation rapture use the “one will be taken, the other left” wording to prove their points. This denies the entire context of Jesus’ words about a public and noisy return. Yet the secret rapture people would be willing to die for the inerrancy of scripture. This just proves that people can use any authority or words to back up their erroneous thinking and teaching.

The secret pre-tribulation rapture teaching has done more harm to the Christian witness than any other philosophy or teaching in the last 150 years.

Now to the idea of Jesus coming with the saints. This is easily explained if scripture is used to interpret scripture. In this case it is in First Thessalonians as well.

<sup>13</sup>"To the end that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." I Thess. 3:13 Since the saints have been with Jesus for seven earthly years, they now return with him to the earth. Out of context this supports the secret rapture theory. However, Paul says later in the same letter



<sup>16</sup>"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

<sup>17</sup>Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." I Thess. 4:16-17

It is obvious again from context that those who are first with Jesus are the resurrected saints. Then follows quickly the transformed ones. They did not go ahead for seven years.

The entire case from scripture for the secret pre-tribulation rapture is founded on misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the scriptures and appeals to the American need to escape all hardship by whatever means possible.

You do not have to believe in the Secret Rapture to be Pre-Millennial. But all believers are expected to Stand Up for their faith.

Because of this Great Escape teaching believers by the millions have retired from the world that they live in. And if they have misread the signs and if the Great Escape does not indeed happen, their

children and grandchildren and great grand children will curse the day that the grandparents were born. They have left a dangerous legacy. And, according to their own values it will be an “unblessed” legacy which is the worst that they can imagine.

## FAITH HAS BECOME RELIGION.

It is said that Karl Marx, the founder of communism, once said that religion is the opiate of the people. By this he meant that the mass of people need some sort of religion to make life bearable and that this is a form of dependence akin to dependence on drugs. In this I agree with Marx. Human beings are religious by nature. They need to fill an inner void. If they don't have a religion of some kind, they will invent one. People always do when they go empty or get lost.

However, most religions are not healthy. They attempt to fill the void with superstitions, prejudice, idolatry, rules, morals and ceremony. None of these things truly satisfy the inner need of any human beings. Let's consider each of these individually.

### SUPERSTITION

Superstitions are based in an underlying paranoia. Superstitions automatically assume from the very beginning that something bad is going to happen. They are also linked to random experiences which will bring about this bad thing. "Step on a crack, break your mother's back. It's bad luck if a black cat crosses your path. It's bad luck to walk under a ladder." And it goes on and on. In their more sophisticated religious form superstitions can sound like, "If you're a bad boy, God will not like

you.” Or, “God will get you!” Or, “Don’t cuss in front of the preacher or you’ll go to Hell.” Or, “If you miss a church service you have to make it up or you will have a bad week.” There is seemingly no end to the scope and cruelty of religious superstitions. And they are all exactly opposed to the Gospel of Grace.

## PREJUDICE

Prejudice is even more cruel than superstitions and should not require much explanation these days. One of the worst religious prejudices is the one that claims that all people of a particular skin color are descended from Cain and are marked for misery and persecution in life. In the first place, this relationship is pure fable; no one knows much about the descendants of Cain. In the second place, even if it were true, the Gospel of Grace would have removed this curse as it removes all curses.

## IDOLATRY

If you don’t worship the Living God, you will worship someone or something else. These days civilized people do not carve grotesque images and set them up to be worshiped and admired. But there is still idolatry. The biggest idols today are often religious leaders. They are put on pedestals and greatly admired. When they fall off their pedestals or their clay feet begin to show, their followers become all disillusioned with church.

Jesus said, “There is none good but God.” When he said this, he was not implying that he was not good as some think. He was stating that only God was good and if they were going to call him good, they would have to acknowledge that he was God.

When we put an evangelist or a pastor on a pedestal, we are daring God to bring him or her down in shame and ruin. This has certainly happened over and over again in the last few decades in America. God makes it clear that he will not share his Glory and He means it.

We hear comments like, “I’ll just ask pastor,” or “I’ll get pastor to pray for me.” Sometimes this is acceptable, but are we actually reading our Bibles or just carrying them around. We are supposed to pray for one another. That means that all believers are supposed to pray for each other.

## RULES AND MORALS

Rules and morals work together. Christianity is not about morals. Having God in your life will cause you to be godly and, therefore, a moral person. But morality without God is a self-help project which is doomed to failure and will ultimately produce self-righteousness or Phariseeism.

## RULE KEEPERS

There is a natural enmity between those who would walk according to grace and those who would walk after the law. Those who prefer the rulebook will not treat those who want grace nicely. They look at them as rule breakers. Since these legalists do not have a relationship with God of their own, they are jealous of anyone who claims to have such a relationship. The legalists will always be looking for a way to condemn those who are free on “a technicality.” Hagar and Ishmael treated Sarah and Isaac spitefully. So the father, Abraham, threw Hagar and her son out. Paul says that is what the children of promise, the free children should do. They should reject the position of the legalists.

It is not necessary for a Christian to reject the legalists themselves, only what they believe in. The legalists, the Pharisees, treated Jesus and the disciples badly. Jesus did not go easy on them. He called them “hypocrites” and “blind guides.” Pharisees or legalists are always hard on people. It is not a casual thing to call a person a “Pharisee.” I do not use the word as a curse word. A Pharisee was simply a very devout and religious man who believed that only God could deliver his people from their oppressors. In New Testament times it was the Roman Empire. However, the Pharisee also believed equally as strongly that God would

not help his people unless they first “got their act together.” The Pharisee believed that the Jews should embark on a strenuous course of self improvement that would make them good enough to warrant God’s help. That is why they had so many rules. They were hard on every one. They can always find or create another rule to prove people wrong and make them feel unworthy.

Rule keepers are hard on men but they are especially hard on women. They are especially good at finding another rule to condemn women. Sometimes these Rule Keepers are women themselves. A lot of the time they are males. The Pharisees brought to Jesus the woman caught in the act of adultery. Now any adult can tell you that it takes two to commit adultery. Where was the man? They let him go. But Jesus did not condemn the woman. He let her go and drove away her accusers. He did tell her to sin no more for her own good. Jesus is the liberator of women. This is little understood even these days. Many do not want women to become the person that they can become. Jesus does. Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman. Jewish men of his day did not do that.

Rule keepers do not understand relationship with God. Jesus put down the objections of three prominent groups in his day: the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The Herodians were the political activists; they were easy to answer.

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.” The Sadducees did not know or believe the scripture and so they were easy to dispense with. The Pharisees did know the scriptures but they did not know God. They did not understand how the Messiah could be David’s descendent and his Lord at the same time. David knew that there was another person in the Godhead. He called this person, my Lord, and distinguished him from Yahweh or the LORD, as the English Bibles print it out. A thousand years later this Lord of David’s would become his descendent through the Incarnation of the Son as Jesus of Nazareth. David knew this because of his relationship with God. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day had no relationship with God like David did, so they were stumped.

## CEREMONY

Ceremony is a replacement for relationship and is merely rules in motion. Turn around and spit. Then you are righteous, or safe, or smart. Cross your fingers while you are lying and it is not a lie. What foolishness! In a more religious form it consists of processions and strange or outdated clothing.

Protestants may scoff at the Roman Catholic custom of crossing themselves. Then these very same protestants will feel guilty if they forget to carry a big Bible to church even if they never open



it. Now the Big Bible carriers scoff at those who read the Bible on their smart phones saying, “That’s not a real Bible.” Religious superstition and ceremony seemingly know no boundaries.

## CLERGY

Most forms of religion also have a professional paid clergy or leadership. In chapters two and three of the book of Revelation Jesus says he hates the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. There has been much debate as to the meaning of this. Essentially there are two possibilities. It can mean the followers of Nicolas who taught that there is no need for believers to avoid sin since the gospel has set aside the law. A comprehensive reading of the New Testament will quickly void this interpretation as Christian believers are to be an example to all in their lives due to the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer’s life.

The other meaning of the term “Nicolaitans” is based on the simple construction of the Greek in the name itself which means to “suppress the lay people.” A professional paid clergy soon learns how to keep the membership in line and, most of all, to keep them dependent on the ministrations of the clergy leadership. One purpose of this suppression is to guarantee job and, therefore, income security for the clergy. And another purpose is to encourage a reverential respect for

the clergy and the tyranny of the clergy which often simply amounts to idolatry. It also discourages spiritual and individual growth on the part of the believers since they are supposed to ask the “priests” about everything. Peter said,

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **NOR AS BEING LORDS OVER THOSE ENTRUSTED TO YOU**, but being examples to the flock" (1Peter 5:1-3).

If Peter’s warning to leadership is not followed, then the leaders are in danger of building only one kingdom, their own.

## LYING PROPHETS

The media prophets have made prediction after prediction that have not come to pass. Furthermore, in the full light of this unfulfilled evidence the so called “Prophets,” or “National Ministries” do not come forward and admit that they missed it. Instead they do one of several things. Either they do not acknowledge anything; they are very quiet. Or, they “reinterpret” the message. Or, they say that not enough people prayed hard enough to bring it to pass.

These actions are totally unacceptable. The most cowardly and irresponsible action is to say nothing. In doing this they appear to be hoping that people will just forget. Their defenders says things like, “Well, they were sincere!” They were sincerely wrong. Reinterpreting the message is super spiritual. “It came to pass, but we cannot see it, it happened in the hearts of people.” It happened in the “heavenlies” and not on the earth.” This lie compounds with other teachings and attitudes which teach that Christian believers have no responsibility for this world because they are spiritual beings. The reinterpretations are garbage.

Many times the prophet conditions his prediction, if it is a positive one, with the admonition that it will come to pass if enough

people pray with sufficient intensity. This way when it doesn't come to pass, it is the fault not of the prophet but of those who failed to pray. They may even claim that they know this amazing fact because they are prophetic. This kind of prophet is a false prophet. There is no way to know how many believers prayed or how sincerely or how long they prayed. This is known only to God. It simply gives the so called prophet a handy way out if nothing comes to pass. All Christians need to stop listening to these men and women and pull the financial plug on their lying ministries.

## STRIKE YOUR FLAGS

The objective of an enemy army is to take down your flags. The flags of Christianity have been taken down by the abandonment of inspired and time-tested Creeds.

Having Faith or Spirituality also includes creeds and doctrines. Creeds and doctrines are not in themselves bad. They are only detrimental if they are in error or are administered in a legalistic manner.

As sentient beings humans can verbalize their beliefs. This is a part of having faith. The early church creeds were written to teach the young and the illiterate what they believed. The Apostle's Creed dates from as early as 150 A.D. and it is based on the contents of the four Gospels. It has 12 basic points.

1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell:

5. The third day he rose again from the dead:
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:
7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:
8. I believe in the Holy Ghost:
9. I believe in the holy universal (“catholic”) church: the communion of saints:
10. The forgiveness of sins:
11. The resurrection of the body:
12. And the life everlasting.

These are all excellent and important points. All Christian believers should be able to recite these basic twelve points from memory. Many who think themselves to be “Anointed” people consider such recitations to be “dead.”

The words or lyrics of the great hymns are very often great creeds in themselves. Who can deny the truth of the words found in “When I Survey The Wondrous Cross,” or “Amazing Grace?”

1. When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of Glory died;  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
save in the death of Christ, my God;  
all the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.
3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down.  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown.
4. Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an offering far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

*Isaac Watts, 1674-1748*

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear

the hour I first believed.

3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be,  
as long as life endures.
5. Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
and mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
a life of joy and peace.
6. When we've been there ten thousand years,  
bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise  
than when we first begun.

*John Newton, 1725-1807*

Most present day “praise choruses” only praise the human need and not God and repeat one moronic phrase over and over again. I once counted the only words to such a chorus in a large service. The only words were, “ I want more,”



which were repeated a total of 219 times in a space of less than fifteen minutes.

The simple truth is that the Holy Spirit will not energize this glorification of the impoverished human condition. Jesus said, “He (the Holy Spirit) will glorify ME.”

Some people who have been revived say that because they sang these old hymns and recited some old creeds when they were spiritually dead, and therefore, now that are spiritually alive cannot voice them again. What kind of subjective reasoning is this? These words were meant to be said from the condition of genuine revival. This way the young and the unconverted can understand what all the exuberance is all about. What they learn before conversion is preparation for conversion and a source of clearness and strength in conversion. The First Great Awakening was started by educated theologians who believed in preparation for salvation by teaching the truths of conversion.

Also, to be a fanatic or a legalist is wrong. A legalist is someone who has an iron clad doctrine but no true enthusiasm for the faith. This enthusiasm comes from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. A fanatic has the enthusiasm but lacks the foundation of a developed and sound personal understanding of Christian doctrine. In

the balance between fanaticism and legalism both extremes are properly tempered by the other and a healthy faith can then come forth.

Another way of looking at it is, do we want revival or covenant? The progress starts with Revival, then goes to Transformation, then goes to Awakening. There is no conflict between Revival and solid Biblical theology. The most penetrating form of Biblical theology is Covenant Theology. The leaders of the First Great Awakening were Covenant theologians. God is a covenant making, covenant keeping God. When two parties enter into covenant, they commit themselves without reservation to each other. God, the Father, made a covenant with God, the Son, to be born into the world, live the perfect life, subdue human nature to God's will, take the full punishment for sin, be resurrected, and return to the right hand of the Father as our High Priest.

Jesus did all of this perfectly. Then the Triune God offers to mankind the opportunity by faith to share all the benefits with Jesus. When we accept this wonderful offer, we are then in covenant with God. Sometimes we are not faithful. But God remains faithful. This is part and parcel with Revival, Transformation and Awakening.

## ANSWERS

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Both John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. In the very first place a kingdom by definition requires a king. Those of us who are citizens of a democratic republic have little concept of what it is like to live in a kingdom. Furthermore, there are very few absolute monarchies remaining in the world today. The nation of Swaziland in southern Africa is an absolute monarchy. The Pope is an absolute monarch over the Vatican City State and other papal lands. Some of the kings of middle eastern countries are close to being absolute monarchs. The kings and queens of the countries of northern Europe such as Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and The United Kingdom are no longer absolute monarchs. But even in these countries the people of the country are not referred to as citizens but as subjects. I once had the privilege of attending an investiture in Edinburgh where the Queen of Scots, also the Queen of England, made several men Knights of the Thistle and one woman Dame of the Thistle. In the church service with almost a thousand in attendance one thing was very evident; it was all about the Queen. If she stands, all stand. Before

anyone speaks they bow in her direction. When the national anthem of Great Britain, "God Save The Queen," is sung she remains seated and does not sing. The Queen cannot be taxed as she is the state. The Queen is Head of State of the United Kingdom. The Queen's Prime Minister is Head of Government. In some 15 other countries including Australia and Canada the Queen is Head of State. Someone may say that this is all only symbolic as she no longer has any real political powers. But she does have enormous social and cultural power. She is the Sovereign. She is The Crown. In a democratic republic such as The United States or France the President is both Head of State and Head of Government.

Christians are called to be subjects of King Jesus. The Puritans understood this and when they thought that the earthly king was in disobedience to the King of Kings, they took steps to remove themselves from his authority.

Most Christian testimony is about how a person has been saved by Jesus, how they will go to heaven and how they are blessed in this life. The emphasis is on the benefits of being a believer but not on the King.

If, for instance, an American were to say to an Australian, "I don't want to offend you, but I want to say something about your country." The

Australian would most likely answer, “So long as you do not insult Her Majesty The Queen.” When they refer to her as “Her Majesty The Queen,” you had better watch out. Australians are very strong in their loyalty to the British queen. And yet someone may swear using the name of Jesus Christ and many Christians won’t say a word. Is not the King of Kings worthy of as much respect as the Queen of the United Kingdom?

People are not interested in becoming Christians because believers do not show them the King. He is wonderful in His Majesty and during this time when he is not seen in this world the only way the world can see His Majesty is in the adoration of His subjects. They will be more attracted by this than by the benefit plan.

”And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” Luke 19:13 According to Jesus the subjects of the Kingdom are to “occupy” until the Glorious Return. This means making their presence and influence felt in the world. This means not hiding behind an exclusively internal gospel. This means involving themselves as subjects of the King in financial matters. In this parable the master gave them money before he left and told them to occupy. This means fiscal responsibility by the subjects of the Kingdom. This

means not funding activities that offend the heart of the King. This means being willing to expose yourself for the sake of the King.

When King David's son Absalom rebelled against his father and drove him out of Jerusalem, David remembered those who betrayed him during that time. Then Absalom was killed against David's orders. A certain man named Ziba turned against his master Mephibosheth and lied to the king about Mephibosheth. David was in doubt so David split Mephibosheth's land between Ziba and Mephibosheth. It is not good for the king to be in doubt about your loyalty. Yet we count loyalty to our King as an optional loyalty. Unlike David our King is never in doubt because He knows everything.

In another place, and this is not in a parable in case that invalidates the command in the eyes of some, Jesus insists that believers are the salt of the earth. Salt is for flavoring and preserving. It was more important as a preservative in the days before refrigeration.

"You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Matthew 5:13

Salt that has lost its flavoring and preserving ability is used to throw on the path to keep the dust down. A middle eastern country in the dry season is very dusty. Since this used up salt is now in the path, it is now walked on by people. These days we are seeing Christianity targeted by liberal, leftist and socialist groups and consequently by the government. The Moslems have “rights,” the atheists have “rights,” the evolutionists have “rights,” but Christians no longer have their God given rights which formed the United States. Why? The salt has lost its saltiness. Christians no longer bring flavor to the world. Christians no longer bring a preserving influence to the world. Christians don’t feed the poor as Jesus commanded. The government feeds the poor. Christians don’t visit the prisons as they are supposed to do. So the government builds more and more prisons to hold more and more criminals. Christians don’t demand the end to abortion. So babies continue to die daily. Now Christians are being shunned and laughed at. The next step is outright persecution. Unless we get our salt back.

The church is not the kingdom. It is an expression of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is the unseen King now and he will be the visible King later. The Kingdom has both present and future aspects. It seems that believers today spend a lot of time and energy avoiding Jesus The King.





## AUTHENTIC NEW TESTAMENT FAITH,

Authentic Christian faith has to do with relationship, grace, personal growth, real life and living. New Testament Christianity is and should be a relationship with the Living God and His Son Jesus Christ. And following close after that is relationship with other believers.

New Testament Christianity in the first three centuries A.D. was a Way Of Life. It became a structured institutional form and is still often obvious today.

### Home meetings

Home meetings were also a part of the early believers' way of life. Believers met in homes for centuries before the church building came on the scene. When the church building arrived, it became the center of attention. It was referred to as the "church." The life of faith together was isolated to the church building which quickly became an institution. Believers forgot that the "church" is the people, not the building. The hospitality of home groups was gone. The closeness of the fellowship began to fade.

A return to home meetings is a sign of vitality among believers. Prompt decisive action needs to be taken to make the home meetings the principle

focus for Christian believers. These meetings should not be Bible studies alone. There should also be praise to God, baptisms, the Lord's supper, prayer and sharing of concerns and victories.

Is there a place for a big praise meeting? Yes, but it should be an outgrowth of a lot of small groups and not the other way around. If you compare the "wisdom that is from above" with the wisdom of the Institution, the institution will always have it upside down.

### Body Ministry

Paul's concept of ministry is a body where each member can minister to other members. Granted, everybody needs to have a mouth, but who says that the mouth has to be the only leader? Or even the principal minister? Grotesquely most congregations these days consist of one big mouth and a few subservient toes.

Paul says,

<sup>14</sup> "For the body is not one member, but many.

<sup>15</sup> If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

<sup>16</sup> And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

<sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." (I Cor12)

Using the human body for the picture Paul emphasizes the usefulness of every member of the body. The institution would have us believe that means that the preacher is the main man and that others can cook or clean as needed. But no one else stands behind the pulpit and no one prays at the altar without a license. This model has crippled the body of Christ and should not continue.

## Grace

Of all the teachings needed by believers today a thorough understanding of God's grace is the most important. Here are some highlights about grace. First and foremost, it is important to understand that to receive the grace of God we must first acknowledge both with our minds and our hearts that we are totally dependent on God. This is the first big problem. Today in Western culture we are taught that independence and self-reliance are the most important virtues that we can possess. In religious circles we are taught that we are dependent on God for our salvation because we are

sinners and desperately in need of the help and deliverance that only he can provide. This is true.

However, in the teaching of this we are so often left with the impression deep down in our beings that the dependence is because of our sin alone. This is not true. We were originally designed to be dependent on God. Adam was given great power to be in charge of the entire natural world. But he had this power in dependence on God. He lost this power when he took his life into his own hands. Jesus said that he did not do anything that he did not see the Father doing. Jesus walked in total dependence on God. Dependence on God is not wrong. Dependence on God is good. When our sins are dealt with by the cross of Christ, we are free from the consequences of them. But we were never supposed to be free from God. He wants us to draw from him continually. He delights in meeting our every need. The life of faith is an adventure with God meeting every need, even anticipating our needs and arranging the supply before we ask. This is healthy Christianity. To walk in grace, when we can only stop our sinning by degrees, requires us to be willingly dependent as a lifelong lifestyle. Only after we embrace this, can we truly understand grace.

Many earthly dependencies have unwanted side effects. Dependence on God has no unwanted side

effects. The unwanted side effects of drugs, for example, are that they can in themselves be damaging to a person. Also, they will lead to a dependency which will take a person away from the good things in life. And, last but not least, the supply of the drug may be interrupted or stopped and painful withdrawal will result. A dependency on God will not lead to any of these consequences. God is not damaging to the person. His goal is to free the person and help that person to realize all of his or her potential. A dependency on God will not take us away from the good things in life. Rather it will bring us into a complete fulfillment of the good things in life like health and love and relationship and joy. Finally, the prospect of not being able to receive God or the blessings of God at any time in the future is not possible, at least not from God's side of the relationship. God is always available to us and always will be in this life and in eternity.

This dependency does certainly imply relationship. We are to live in a living relationship with a living God. This is not a book of rules. The rules, called the Law, were added because of the growth of disobedience. But rules have never been the object of God's relationship with his people. A religion of rules is not the Christian faith; it is not the faith that Paul teaches; it is not the faith that Jesus teaches. They teach relationship with the living

God. Sometimes it is easier for people to learn to walk by rules than by relationship. Sometimes people prefer rules to relationship. “Just tell me what the rules are and I will do it.” Relationship is harder than rules because there is a living being on both sides of the issue. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of relationship. Rules lead to death; relationship leads to life. They say that the three most important things in real estate are location, location and location. The three most important things in the Christian life are relationship, relationship and relationship; relationship first with God and then with our fellow human beings.

The peace of God that accompanies grace is a special peace. The peace of God is not dependent on circumstances. Circumstances can be difficult and we can still have the peace of God that comes from walking in relationship with him. The peace of God passes or goes beyond understanding. Sometimes, this makes Christians look irrational. This is not because they do not understand rational conduct but because they have been enabled to live beyond the rational when necessary. Most of the time they will probably live within rational guidelines and understanding.

We should always remember that the strength of Christianity always returns.

## THE EARLY AWAKENINGS IN AMERICA

The most noteworthy and fantastic example of the fact that the strength of Christianity always returns is found in the two awakenings that occurred in America prior to and just after the American Revolution. These have been called the First Great Awakening and The Second Great Awakening. Between them was a massive decline in the Christian faith. This was the waning. The beginnings of these revivals in America spans from 1725 to 1792, just 67 years. This includes the entire first revival, the period of waning and the beginning of the second one.

There were some relatively minor movements at first but the first awakening began to rise first in the Dutch Reformed church of New Jersey in 1727. Then it spread to the nearby Scots Irish Presbyterians. The awakening soon spread from the Presbyterians to the Baptists in Pennsylvania and Virginia. At this time it spread among the poor and uneducated people. Their faithfulness to their beliefs caused them to rise financially and socially. The Baptists liked the prospects of a life changing experience and this contributed to their evangelizing the western frontier.

In 1734 the awakening broke out strongly in Northampton, Massachusetts in the preaching of

Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was by nature a quiet man with a very strong intellect. There are still 500 of his sermons still in print. He is usually best remembered for his sermon “Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God.” The awakening from Northampton spread throughout New England. It was criticized by some for being too emotional and for spawning extreme doctrines. Between 1740 and 1742 in New England 30,000 converts were added to a population of 300,000 and in twenty years 150 new churches were planted by pastors in the Congregational churches alone. The moral improvement in the towns of New England was significant.

Ultimately this awakening led to political activism which actually gave birth to the American Revolution. In time the institution overshadowed the vital experiences of the people emphasizing the fact that each and every generation of Christians must have their own dynamic experience with God.

After the American Revolution came a great moral decline in the United States. Apparently only the institutions survived but not the experience in the next generations. Any rational person would have to admit that Christianity in America was a thing of the past. But God is not impressed with such thoughts.



In North America there was some movement towards another awakening as early as 1780. But it really began in Boston in 1792 when the Baptists, who often long for individual spiritual experience, started praying and enlisting others in prayer. By 1798 the awakening was in full force. Whole congregations were converted.

By 1800 the awakening was across the mountains. This was among the uneducated people of the frontier. There were often extreme responses such as trembling and shaking, weeping and shouting for joy. They met in the fields in groups of up to 15,000. As evangelical Christianity grew, the students became leaders and missionaries and further expanded educational ministry.

We can only conclude that no matter how weak Christianity may become as the generations pass God will move to restore. And with the restoration comes a deep personal faith which is not dependent on the institutional organization often referred to as the Church. The life is not in the institution, although it is often bolstered by the awakening. The life is in the hearts of people as the Spirit of Christ moves among them and upon them. The strength of Christianity always returns.



## SYSTEMATIC EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Expository preaching is when the speaker takes a few verses which appear together in the Bible and explains them in detail. Topical preaching, on the other hand, is when the speaker roams all over the Bible finding a verse here and a verse there to support his position on a particular topic. It is obvious on the face of it that topical preaching can produce multiple interpretations, many of them in error, on any subject that the speaker may choose. Expository preaching not only exposes the meaning of the words and sentences but also takes into account the context of each word or sentence. Without the context the true meaning of a word, phrase or sentence is open to all kinds of interpretations.

Systematic preaching or teaching means that all of the Bible is eventually explained and not just the favorite passages of a speaker who may have a particular axe to grind. The people listening to a speaker over a period of time should be aware if that speaker persistently dwells on his or her favorite subjects and does not approach the scriptures systematically.



## STRAIGHT PREACHING

Eventual judgment in an eternal resurrected body is an essential truth of orthodox Christianity. But we never hear about it in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. It might offend somebody. People prefer to believe that either everyone has been reconciled to God through Christ with no need for individual repentance or that when you come to the end of your physical life there will be no more life or consciousness. Neither of these beliefs is true. Those that believe them are merely seeking comfort in believing in oblivion or nihilistic philosophy.

The Bible clearly teaches the resurrection of all people. The issue is where you will spend eternity while inhabiting an indestructible human body. Will it be spent in joy with Jesus who is the first to have such a body or will it be spent in eternal flames which can be felt by such an eternal body? Biblically these are the only two alternatives. This disturbing but enduring truth was preached by the great preachers of the awakenings and it produced concrete and lasting results.

No one taught the fact of eternal Hell in the New Testament more than Jesus himself. All biblical Jews believed in the resurrection of all people. The New Testament clearly echoes this message. In

addition to practicing authentic New Testament Christianity with many home group meetings and genuine discipleship, not just conversions, straight preaching on the only two eternal consequences is necessary today.

## CONFRONTATION

Often we hear the excuse that Christians should be “nice” and not confront anyone. There is a difference between a confrontation and a conflict. A conflict often involves violence. A confrontation does not have to involve violence. Based on the presumption that the Christian believers should follow Christ’s example, we can ask if he is recorded as ever having entered into confrontation with anyone. What does “confrontation” mean?

When speaking of confrontation, a dictionary may say something like: a personal meeting between people of different opinions to compare their beliefs.

However for conflict a dictionary may use words such as a clash of ideas, a fight, a battle.

There is obviously a considerable difference between confrontation and conflict. Just because people disagree they do not have to fight over it. It may come to a fight eventually but people of good will should try confrontation before conflict. If there is a lot at stake, however, like an entire way of life, passivity is not acceptable.

Many Christians believe that to be Christ-like they have to be “nice.” The supreme example for

Christians is Jesus himself. He was not always nice. He confronted. Important issues require confrontation.

Some Biblical examples of confrontation involve Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the far right religious leaders of his day and he frequently confronted them in the strongest of terms, "you brood of snakes, you white-washed tombs," etc. This is not to say that all conservatives of his day or ours are evil but that hyper conservatives often sacrifice mercy and relationship with God and man for correctness. Conservatives do have strong values while hyper liberals have none; for them the end always justifies the means. Theological liberals twist the scriptures to accomplish their goals.

However, Jesus also had some strong confrontational words to others including some of his own disciples. Here are a few confrontational statements of Jesus not spoken to the Far Right (Pharisees And Scribes), Far Left (Sadducees), Very Religious (Priests), Or Politicians (Herodians).

There were two cities that rejected Jesus and his ministry. Jesus told them, "Woe unto you." He as much as told them that they were impossible to convince and that something bad was going to



befall them as a result of their failure to accept him. This was not very “nice.” This was confrontational. Matthew 11:21

In another instance Jesus spoke confrontationally to Peter just moments after he had praised Peter for recognizing who he was. When Jesus mentioned his own death, Peter said that he did not want it to happen. Jesus then called Peter “Satan,” implying that Peter was allowing Satan to speak through him. Jesus told Peter to get behind him, that Peter was an offence to him, and that Peter did not want God’s will but the will of men. This was not “nice.” This was confrontational. Matthew 16:23

In another instance Jesus asked his disciples to pray with him just before he was arrested and crucified. They went to sleep instead. In anger Jesus asked Peter why he could not watch with him for even one hour. This was not “nice.” This was confrontational. Matthew 26:40

When Jesus’ friend Martha complained that her sister Mary was not helping in the kitchen, Jesus told Martha that Mary was doing the really important thing by fellowshipping with him and that Mary had chosen the good part. This was not “nice.” This was confrontational. Luke 10:42

When Jesus approached some disciples on the road to Emmaus and they did not see the benefit of Jesus' death and resurrection, he told them that they were "fools" and that they were too slow in believing. This was not "nice." This was confrontational. Luke 24:25

Jesus was even confrontational with his mother when she told him that those who were hosting a wedding dinner were running out of wine. He told her that was none of his concern and that he was not ready to work miracles yet but he ended up helping anyway. He turned the water into wine. Lots of it. His initial reaction was not "nice." It was confrontational. John 2: 3-4

Jesus came upon a crippled man and he knew that the man had been crippled for a long time. He confronted him by asking if he really wanted to be made whole. This was not "nice." Sometimes people would rather beg and ask for handouts instead of doing their share of the work. This was confrontational. John 5:6

During an unpopular phase of Jesus' ministry when many were abandoning him, he asked the twelve disciples if they were leaving too. This was confrontational. John 6:67

Once when Peter was acting jealous about the favor that Jesus showed towards John, Jesus told him that how he treated John was none of Peter's business. He told Peter that he could show any favor to John that he wished. He told Peter to put his attention on how well he was following Jesus. This was confrontational. John 21:22

Jesus also confronted Peter supernaturally in the books of Acts. He showed Peter a group of animals in a vision and told him to get up and kill one in order to eat it. Peter responded that some of the animals were not clean according to the dietary laws of Moses. Jesus told him that if he said they were clean, then they were clean. This was confrontational and also contributed to Peter's understanding that faith in Jesus was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Acts 11:7-9

It is also interesting that Paul had a strong admonition for Timothy. He told him not to change in his attitude no matter how he felt. He told him to reprove, rebuke and exhort the believers and not to stop and to be prepared to teach them why he was doing this. This is clearly confrontational. 2 Timothy 4:2

It is time for Christians to confront more than ever before. Confrontation is now tantamount to confessing Jesus before men. Christian faith and

values are being challenged everywhere in growing numbers. If we are duped into thinking that we have to be “nice” and not challenge in return, we are not being Christ-like. We are either misinformed or cowardly. Often a minority of atheists or humanists take control of an entire area while the followers of Jesus do nothing. Christians will not get off easy if they do not stand up and be counted. We are promised that if we will not vouch for Jesus before men that he will not vouch for us before the Father. Mt. 10:32-33

Some may say that they are not naturally talkative or confrontational. They will say, let others do the talking and the confrontation. Speak up. Speak up now. Make your convictions known.

It is usually easier to confront when you understand Jesus as a Man. Jesus became a man not only to be the spotless lamb of God but to identify with us. He is still a man and has chosen to remain in that form always. He is our older brother and the prototype of all future mankind. If we seek to identify with him as he has identified with us, confrontation will come more naturally to us.

## JESUS THE MAN

Long ago in a very important meeting of church leaders it was proclaimed that in Jesus Christ there was a union of two distinct and separate natures united in one Person forever. These two natures are his divine nature, He is God, and his human nature, He is also a man, a human being. The idea that there is a God has never offended anyone. All societies recognize some sort of a God, be it a good god or a bad god. What is offensive to the human mind is the idea of a man who claims to be God. Jesus is exactly that. And this Person with two natures is at the same time difficult to understand and the most wonderful person that there is to know. As Christians we are not excused from considering who He is. In this lies our salvation.

If we wish to avoid offense and still retain a belief in God, the easiest thing to do, and this is in fact what has been done widely in the church for centuries, is to affirm His divine nature loudly and forget his human nature. When we do this, however, the entire wonderful mystery of “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” is forgotten.

Believers will easily accept His divinity and even fight vigorously to defend it. But if you try to “flesh out” a true understanding of Christ’s humanity, a humanity that was just like our own, the sparks begin to fly. This is because the humanity of Jesus offends people. And it offends precisely because of his divinity. The idea of a man who claims to be God is offensive. He is then no longer remote. He is no longer apart from us. He is no longer far away. He is not avoidable. This offended religious people in Jesus’ day. It still offends religious people. They cannot keep him at bay. It should not be offensive, however, to anyone who really wants to know Jesus and walk with him as a way of life. To that person his humanity is good news indeed.

It is good news because he has walked in our shoes. He has felt our limitations, lived with them, felt the helplessness, the helplessness that we feel when a beloved relative or friend dies, like Lazarus. If not for the shortest verse in the New Testament, we might be tempted to think that Jesus was clinically detached from Lazarus’ death because he intentionally let him die so that he could raise him back to mortal life. But, “Jesus wept.” Many times we have been told that he was weeping because of the unbelief of Mary and Martha and the other Jews. Or that he was weeping because he knew that this miracle would target him

for eventual crucifixion by the leaders of the Jews. But what is wrong with the most obvious meaning? Does God indeed give us the scriptures to confuse us? Or are they a revelation? Jesus wept because his good friend went through the pain and suffering of being sick and dying. And Jesus was helpless to stop it because the Holy Spirit hindered him from doing anything. Now, he would raise Lazarus but Lazarus would have to die yet again to await the final resurrection into a glorious body.

Jesus identified with us so that we could identify with him. So that he could represent us before the Father as a faithful high priest. So that we could have what he has. The man Jesus is an eternal part of the life of Almighty God. And he is our big brother. We are related by blood, natural and redeeming blood.

We shall not discuss the divinity of Jesus here to any great extent. In the first place, this is a matter of faith and cannot be proven to anyone who is determined not to believe it. In the second place belief in His divine nature is much less often unclear in the minds of believers. Suffice it to say that Jesus Christ was and is God Almighty just as surely as His Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit are also God. Most Christians believe this.

However, when it comes to the true humanity of Jesus, that is often another story. This is not well believed and it is to our detriment. If we do not see the true humanity of Jesus, we do not understand our relationship to Him. As a matter of fact, once we have accepted God as our heavenly Father, as Jesus teaches us to do in the gospels, we have more need of a human Jesus than a divine one. We have a loving Father who is God Almighty and not a man. We need a brother who is not only God but fully human. We can identify with a big brother who knows what it is like to walk in our shoes. The only way to get into trouble here is to say that Jesus sinned because He did not. In every other way He was as human as we are. His mother Mary was no different than any other wholesome teenage virgin. Jesus gets his humanity honestly from her. But this does not fully cover the subject.

It says in Philippians chapter two, verse seven in the New American Standard Version that Jesus “emptied himself” when he became a human being. He grew for nine months in Mary’s womb and was born into our world. An understanding of this “emptying” is the only sensible way to understand how Jesus was truly a man with the limitations of a man while He lived and ministered for over 33 years among us. Once we understand this, the actions of Jesus in the gospels will make sense to us more than they ever have before. We



will then be able to see Him as a man of faith operating by the power of the Holy Spirit just as He expects us to do. We will no longer say when we sense that a certain thing is expected of us, “Well, that was Jesus!”

Peter makes it absolutely clear on the day of Pentecost that Jesus was a man. Furthermore, he says that Jesus was a man approved of God. Then he goes on to say that the miracles and wonders and signs that were worked were done by God. The primitive church started with the man and went on to recognize that Jesus was also God. This was natural to them. They would not have thought of approaching it any other way. After all, Jesus came to them as a man, they lived with him and touched him and knew who he was. It was only centuries later when the councils of bishops were meeting to combat various heresies that they started with God and also gave assent to his humanity.

This stress on his humanity is what gave the early disciples the zeal and confidence they needed to “turn the world upside down.”(Acts 17:6) They were of the same humanity as Jesus. He did what he did by the Holy Spirit. They believed that they, as possessors of this Spirit, could do the same things and even greater things. By the time the church councils were meeting and starting with Jesus the God and admitting to Jesus the man, the

power was gone from the church. In their efforts to put down the heresies which denied that Jesus was God, they forgot about his humanity. It was a long hard battle that they had to win and they won it only to find that they had gone off the road on the other side.

The Reformation addressed the problem but not fully enough. In the eighteen hundreds the Scottish minister Edward Irving stressed it and a true Pentecostal revival broke out. But the Church of Scotland put him out. Later some other theologians tried to restore the truth of the humanity of Jesus to the church but they were considered to be liberals to Bible believing folk and the word never got out to the membership. Now is the time for all to understand. Jesus was a man. He was a man approved of God which God the Father used to work miracles and signs and wonders among the Jews. He was dependent on his Father to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit because he had left his own divine prerogatives behind for a while.

It is so important to believe that Jesus came in our flesh. There is no other kind of human flesh. The apostle John says that if anyone denies that he came in the flesh then that person is antichrist. This is how John felt about it. Few Christians have ever felt this strongly about it. But John was Jesus' best friend. He was always with him during his

ministry. He walked with him and sweated with him. He was tired with him. He talked late into the night with him. John laid his head on Jesus' chest at the last supper. Jesus gave his mother into the keeping of John from the cross instead of to his natural half-brothers, the other sons of Mary by Joseph. And Jesus appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos and gave him the Revelation. John outlived all the other apostles and died when he was past 100 years old. John was the grand old man of the New Testament church. So John knew how important this was. And this is the proper interpretation of the verse. Jesus came in our flesh. He was tempted like we are. He never gave in. He changed that flesh into a flesh that serves God. He took it to the cross and he raised it from the dead.(Jn.10:18) After death Jesus was restored to full power and raised his body up glorified just like he said he would. This truth will revolutionize your life.

What does John mean when he says that they are anti-Christ? This does not just refer to the mere fact that he was here. It refers to the fact that he was here as the God-man, and John makes it plain that he was God in many places, Jesus came in the flesh, in flesh like the flesh of every person. The spirit of anti-Christ is not a spirit or a belief that does not recognize the Christ. This is an unbeliever. The spirit of anti-Christ is one that

seems to be Christian but is really against the truth; an insider who is really not inside but a betrayer of the truth. Not one that denies that God was here, but one that denies that he came as a real man. This is anti-Christ and John hates this with a terrible and a holy passion. Who knew the real humanity of Jesus better than John? No one. Did Paul? He never met the unglorified Jesus as far as we know. Did Peter? Even he was not as close as John. Did Mary his mother? Yes, but she left no records. John knew it all. And even in his lifetime some were starting to deny it. That is what he says. Already they are here. They deny that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, was really a man in real flesh, body and soul, like we are. This is deception and this is anti-Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The crucifixion of Jesus in 29 A.D. (there is a 4 year calendar error) was followed a scant three days later by his resurrection and fifty days later by Pentecost. How large a force was the infant church then? It was a handful of Judeans in a back water province of the Roman Empire. But by the year 300 A.D. Christianity had taken over the Roman Empire. This might seem like a long time to our short lived American calendar, but in reality it was not.

Peter was not concerned about offending anyone which he preached at Pentecost as found in Acts 2.

Peter promised salvation when he said, <sup>21</sup> "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Peter presented Jesus as a man who was a miracle worker.

<sup>22</sup> "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know."

Peter put the responsibility for Jesus' death on his audience.

<sup>23</sup> "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:"

Peter witnessed to the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus.

<sup>24</sup> "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be held by it."

<sup>32</sup> "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

Peter explained the coming of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>33</sup> "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

<sup>36</sup> "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The effect of Peter's words made people want to change. And Peter told them what they must do.

<sup>37</sup>"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

<sup>39</sup> For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call."

And Peter did not stop there.

<sup>40</sup> "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation."

America is what it is because the church is what it is. Only an awakened church can change America.

Peter, John and Paul and others did it by understanding the impoverished need of all people and the magnificent provision of Jesus Christ. They did it by "continuing daily with one accord in the temple (church building), and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart." Acts 2:46

The institutional church in America cannot be fixed. It is too far gone. Unless there is another sovereign massive Great Awakening in America Christianity in America must start all over again. So what if it takes a few generations? At any rate, every believers' life here is over when he or she goes to join Jesus. When he returns, he will raise us all.



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