

THAT CURSED GROUND! **An Invitation to Discipleship**

“Cursed is the ground because of you (Adam), in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you.....by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.....” (Gen. 3:17-19)

Would you guess that God was angry at Adam and Eve for defying and betraying Him? Yes, furious! And heartbroken. And already (already!) moving to Plan B, the plan of rescue and redemption. And this curse was a part of it. Note: God’s curse was not restricted to Adam, and to all future farmers and gardeners, but applies equally to all work, careers, and professions. Men (and ladies): there is a curse on your work!

And God said to Eve (to all women): “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth.....yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”(Gen. 3:16) Ladies (and men): there is a curse on your relationships!

Men look primarily to their jobs, careers, professions, ministries, for meaning and fulfillment in life. When a man meets another man, usually the first question has to do with his job. Women look primarily to their relationships, marriage and children, for meaning and fulfillment. God throws a big monkey-wrench into the machinery (as we used to say in Texas), by cursing the very things that men and women look to for meaning and fulfillment! Is that harsh, and cruel, or what! Harsh, yes; cruel, no.

John Eldredge explains, brilliantly, that God created man for relationship with Him as his Heavenly Father. Man rebelled against God, and His plan, and set out from the garden to build a fulfilling life for himself without God. Isn’t that what you see the people around you busily doing? Isn’t it what you did in the past (hopefully in the past)? So God tilts the whole universe so that our plan will not work! Jobs/careers/professions/ministries are hard and difficult and frustrating! Relationships are all of those adjectives, and a lot more!

Come on, God, why did you make life so intolerably hard? Because life is not about us, it is about Him. This is His cosmos. He created it, and He created man, and He certainly knows how everything should work to accomplish His good and loving purpose. He loves men and women, and He surely knows what is best for us. Satan said that life lived independently of God is the best life. He lied! He is a liar! Life lived independently of God is a disaster waiting to happen. Disaster most certainly will happen, if not in this life, then in the judgment that is waiting at the end of the road. If we could create our own paradise here on earth, which we all try to do, why would we bother to seek after the real thing?

Of course, work and relationships can be a great blessing to men and women, unless they become our god! We are to strive for excellence in our work, for His glory, and to advance His Kingdom, not so we can bask in our own glory, or so we can buy more toys. Jesus said we are to “hate” father, mother, spouse, children, in comparison to our love for Him. Well, we say, that statement is rhetorical, because it is unrealistic. God doesn’t really expect us to love Him *that* much. Read the teachings of Jesus in the four Gospels, and read the rest of the New Testament, to see if He really meant it. If you love your family more than you do the Lord, you have made of your family an idol, and your love for them will be destructive and not healthy. By and large, American Christians don’t understand what it means to be a follower of Christ. They have never heard it presented

clearly and honestly in their churches, and when they read the Bible they filter out and dismiss all the “extreme” statements.

The Typical “Conversion”

Following is John Bevere’s rehearsal of a typical evangelistic service. (And let me say that even this presentation is too strong for many of the “seeker friendly” churches in our land.): The preacher preaches a “come to Jesus and get blessed” message. He tells how Jesus will give us joy, peace, prosperity, happiness, health, heaven, and so forth. Don’t get me wrong. It’s God’s desire to bless us, but Jesus never used the blessing to entice people to follow Him. Then after the sales pitch, he asks the audience to bow their heads and asks if they were to die tonight would they go to heaven? He then gives a strong invitation to come forward and settle the matter today.

As the candidates come forward, songs are sung, such as “Just as I Am.” The audience claps and smiles as they march to the front. The minister asks them to bow their heads and repeat a prayer such as, “Father, I confess I am a sinner, forgive me of my sin. This day I ask Jesus into my life as my Lord and Savior. Thank You for making me your child. In Jesus’ name, amen.” The audience cheers, the music plays, and the new “converts” go back to their seats, “just as they were.” Except now they are deceived. Nothing has been said concerning repentance from disobedient lifestyles, denying their own desires in order to embrace the will of God, and losing their lives for the cause of Christ. They have confessed Jesus as their “Lord,” but there has been no heart change. Jesus is now just a part of their lives.

Let me inform you, the King of kings and Lord of lords does not come into anyone’s life as second, or even first, among rival lovers. He only comes in as our complete and total King with no person, thing, or activity vying for His place in our hearts. He must be Lord, which means Supreme Master and Owner, meaning we don’t own our lives any longer. *And He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, **but for Him** who died and rose again on their behalf.* (2 Cor. 5:15) These “new converts” have not allowed the Cross to slay their self-seeking life and make room for the new nature of Jesus to be formed within. (This, of course, is a process, but most Christians don’t understand the Biblical premise, and are never exhorted to devote themselves to the process wholeheartedly.)

In summary, John Bevere insists that the Christianity modeled, preached, and practiced in most American churches is DECEPTION! It is a form of institutionalized religion, without the power, love, sacrifice, or benefits of the real thing. It is by its very nature lukewarm, how could it be anything else? It makes God nauseous. And God, because of His love (not in contradiction to it), will spew it out of His mouth. There is a way to escape the inevitable judgment that is even now bearing down on the American church. Read the third chapter of Revelation. It involves a drastic repentance and reordering of all of life, and is very costly. Not many will be interested.

Am I saying that all the folks sitting in American churches are lukewarm and headed toward disaster? No, of course not. I meet church people who appear to be living the genuine life of a disciple of Christ here and there in all kinds of churches (and let me be quick to add that only God knows our hearts, and I am certain He has His 7,000 who have not bowed their knees to Baal hidden in many places). Some of them have come through the fire of suffering, loss, affliction, or they are living in the midst of that fire. They are usually invisible in their churches, regarded as nonentities, misfits, fanatics, extremists.

They are living only for the Lord. Sometimes, they are leaders in their churches, but this is rare. (I was once one of those leaders, projecting a humility that was faked, full of vainglory and selfish ambition.)

The Struggle to Stay Surrendered

For the last several months, I was on a spiritual high. This period started before I went to Mexico, and included my attendance at the conference in Pasadena, the trip to Mexico, ministry at the Dream Center, and visit to a prison after I returned to Grand Junction. I have noticed that there is a spiritual down-cycle that follows a time of intense ministry, and, boy, I went down! I remained very busy doing Kingdom stuff, or so I thought. But I was fatigued, my thoughts were scattered, I wasn't sleeping well, felt vaguely anxious, and started watching some non-Christian TV again, justifying it because I was tired, etc. (By the way, I am not trying to put any judgment on anyone about television, this is something between God and me.) And I suddenly realized that although I was busy, busy, busy, doing "Christian" stuff, I was running my own life, and a million miles from God. I was once again starting to dislike myself intensely, and to feel like a hypocrite. I asked God what was in my heart that was pulling me away from Him in this manner, and heard a clear response: "Independence!" And I heard another impression deep within: "I can't use you like this."

I repented, with tears, and asked the Lord to not only forgive me, but to cleanse me of the deep rebellion (that is what independence is) that still lurks in my heart. God, in His mercy, forgave me again, and I am once again walking in His peace and favor. Please pray for me.

THE TRINITY AS REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This is the name of a just published book by my friend Ford Wilson. Ford and Beth are life-time missionaries in Mexico, and in his spare time (that's a joke, son!) Ford has spent 50 years studying the Bible in the original languages, and studying the works of scholars, ancient and modern. This 400-page work is the fruit of a lifetime of prayer and faithful study. If "Jesus loves me, this I know..." is as deep as you have ever gotten in Bible study, this book is not for you. (Just a hint of spiritual elitism there. Ha!) I am not a scholar, but I found this book fascinating. I read 103 pages the day I received it, and have read much of it twice already. A few quotes, in paraphrase:

- When Christ healed the man born blind, the Pharisees could not see that He was the Creator, again using the dust of the earth mixed with divine saliva and His word, to re-create the eyes of a man born blind.
- In Romans, Paul revealed to us the profound mysteries of the Godhead like no one else (he mentions God there once in every thirteen words). Only those who determine to obey God will know God's truth.
- Scripture does not merely contain a few anthropomorphisms; on the contrary, all Scripture is anthropomorphic, expressed in human terms, from beginning to end (three pages of examples).
- Section 2 is a study of passages in the Old Testament which portray the existence of two persons called "God," "Jehovah," "Creator," "Adonai" (Lord), The Spirit of God, and about the "Angel of the Lord," who is also called "God," "Jehovah," "Creator," and "Adonai," who has the nature and attributes

of God, while being distinguished from another called “God,” ”Jehovah,” “Creator,” and “Adonai.”

- Section 3 is research into the Old Testament that reveals to us three distinct individuals or persons with the names, attributes, or actions corresponding to God mentioned in the same passage.
- The word translated “God;” ELOHIM in the Hebrew, is uniplural. This word is used 2,570 times in the Old Testament.
- This book is a gold mine to refute the heresies of: Unitarianism/Dualism/Polytheism/Pantheism/Atheism/Mormonism/Jehovah’s Witnesses/Evolution/Humanism/Deism/Jesus only.

I could go on and on, but you get the idea. To purchase this book, send \$22.00, plus \$3:00 shipping and handling, to: Alliance for Church Progress, P.O.Box 1013, Kaufman, Tex., 75142.

MORE QUOTES FROM BILL JOHNSON – HARVEST ROCK CONFERENCE

- Jesus is not interested in raising up followers that only obey Him when they understand.
- His shed blood was for our salvation; His beating was for our healing.
- When Paul tells us to “examine ourselves” before taking Communion, it is not to see if we are worthy. We are not! It is to see if we are repentant, surrendered, thankful.
- There is no *revelation* except by *personal experience*: Salvation, forgiveness, presence of God, healing, baptism of the Holy Spirit, demonization, etc. You can have knowledge about all of these things by studying the Scripture, but without personal experience they are merely abstractions, without power to change your life.
- To stay encouraged, focus on what God has done, not on what He has not done. Relate this to the guy that buried his one talent.
- The church is so accustomed to powerlessness, that when God shows us, people think it is the devil.
- Human reasoning is the god of this nation.
- “Any part of your life that is hopeless shows that you are living in that area in deception.” – Francis Frangipane

MINISTRY – TRIP TO COLOMBIA

On July 2nd I leave Grand Junction to Dallas; July 3rd to Miami, to Bogata, to Leticia on the southern tip of Colombia (on the Amazon, next to Brazil). This is a ministry trip of Global Advance, a mission organization based in Dallas, dedicated to training and encouraging leaders in the third world. Dale Witt, whom I know from Loveland when we were both pastors, has been Executive Director of Global Advance for a number of years. The ministry team will be: Dale, Tony Nichols from Siloam Springs, Ark., Russ Frase from Arvada, Co., and me. Attending will be some 2,000 pastors and leaders from Colombia, Brazil, and surrounding nations. I am honored to be a part of this outreach.

As mentioned last month, the people at Global Advance have learned that if there are people fasting and praying, the results of the ministry are multiplied. I am asking you (I see you hiding under the bed) to fast and pray for us for one day at some period between July 2 and July 10. For our protection: yellow fever, malaria, air travel, accidents, government bureaucracy, piranha, crocodiles. Protection from enemy attacks: all of the above, plus disunity, discouragement, mechanical problems, sickness of any kind. Pray not only for our team in these ways, but for all the people who will be attending: some will be paddling up the Amazon for several days, some traveling by 3rd class buses, and they will arrive without food or money, having sacrificed tremendously to receive the teaching and encouragement they need so desperately. Pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

CD OF MY TEACHINGS AVAILABLE

Last year while in San Juan del Rio, I spent three consecutive evenings recording about 11 hours of my teachings. This was the idea of my friend, Steve Wilson, who plans to distribute them, along with other sets of teachings, to his contacts in India, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. I have now received these 11 CD's, and since copying and mailing all of them would be expensive, my friend, Jon James, has consolidated them onto one CD, in MP3 format. This CD can be used with Windows Media Player, iTunes, and many other MP3 players, including in newer autos. (I don't have a clue what I just said, but Jon tells me it makes sense.) The last three hours are not up to the quality of the first eight (because the right sound man was not available at that time), but they are understandable. The teachings are: Why Can't Christians Grow? / Bad Fruits and Bad Roots / Word Curses / Ungodly Soul Ties / Generational Blessings / Generational Curses / The Importance of our Thoughts and Words / Trauma / Occult and Witchcraft / Spiritual Housecleaning / Salvation – Past, Present, and Future / Overcoming Self-Condensation / Overcoming Addictions / How to Pray for the Sick / Resentment Against God / Five Steps in Forgiveness / Steps in Counseling.

If you want a copy of this CD, let me know. I will not charge for it, and you may feel free to make and distribute copies.)