

BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE BIBLE

PART 2
TRACTS

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The Consider Podcast

Examining Today's Wisdom, Folly, and Madness

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to those
willing to suffer with Christ.

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THE OFFENSIVE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. (Galatians 5:11)

Preach an outward form of Christianity and people will love you. Teach that we should read the Bible, pray, love in the name of Jesus and people will accept you. But expect persecution if you preach the offensive message of the cross that Jesus told us to declare. What is the offensive message of the cross? Simply listening to, accepting, and obeying a message that results in

death to self. Most preachers today try to abolish such a message. They teach you to just ask Jesus into your heart, and you will be saved. But Jesus wants to strike at your heart until self dies.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Any Christian knows that Jesus died for their sins, but such knowledge alone cannot save anyone. In order for a person to receive salvation, he must reach beyond a mere religious acknowledgement. The gospel message should leave you with only two options: the cross, or compromise. Anything less is whitewash. We see this in people who change dramatically at their conversion, yet refuse to die to self. Like the ten lepers, only one returned in true saving faith.¹ They only want redemption from the judgment and misery of sinning, not from sin itself.

We must allow God to crucify us if we hope for salvation. When we allow God to change all of us, sin is forgotten.² No matter how long you have been a Christian, if you persist in not allowing grace to have its way, God will judge the real you as a determined sinner.³ Only the offensive message of the cross completely saves a man. For this reason, Paul “resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁴ For anyone with true faith in Jesus must believe in everything Jesus taught concerning

salvation.⁵ What you are about to read is “foolishness” to the perishing.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

PAINFUL

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. (John 12:24)

Let’s make something clear right from the start, this message will hurt, and most people refuse to hear it. Consequently, it’s rarely preached from pulpits today. It is, however, the only message that can save, because Jesus said you have to die daily.

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Jesus words, “It is finished,” referred to His work of providing a way for our salvation.⁶ No one receiving the salvation that comes from Jesus is exempt from the

crucified life. There can be no resurrection without crucifixion. God cannot work the joyful resurrected life if you remain unwilling to die first. If you want God to save you and deliver you from sin, then you must allow the painful work of the cross to do its work. If this doesn't sound like grace, then adjust your attitude. Jesus wasn't crucified on a comfortable armchair. When they whipped Him and nailed His hands and feet to a rough wooden cross, He endured extreme pain. Your attitude towards God's salvation must become like Christ's.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.
(1 Peter 4:1–2)

WHY DEATH?

In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”
(John 3:3)

In order for a person to be “born again” their old life must die. You cannot have the sinful man and the righteous man living in you at the same time. God chose crucifixion as His method of execution. As we slowly die to who we are, God replaces us with a new person made

in the image of Jesus.⁷

Jesus didn't die on the cross to bless you with possessions, family, or happiness.⁸ He died on the cross to bless you by turning you from your wicked ways.⁹ This means that God will seek to offend your flesh by turning you from more sin every day. When God looks at your life, your heart, your actions, your loves—all that you are and do—His heart is “filled with pain.” He sees a rebellious, selfish, miserable creature. Simply put, God regrets He made you!

The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:6)

You might argue, “But I am made in the image of God!” That’s true enough, but you have become worthless.¹⁰ There is no one righteous, “not even one.”¹¹

As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace

they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:10–18)

All your kind deeds are really acts of cruelty, doing more harm than good.¹² Until the cross does its work, not one good thing lives in you.¹³ Even then, you are not good, but only Jesus in you is good. You personally will never be good, for only God alone is good.¹⁴

The offensive message of the cross provides the power to be born again. Anyone who does not preach or live this message is not born again. We must be born again into the image of Jesus and carry a cross like He did.

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:6)

THE JOY

You might wonder where the joy lies in this message. Only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness¹⁵ will consider the pain of the cross as good news. Jesus looked past the suffering of the cross and saw the joy of heaven waiting for Him. True faith in Jesus means that a person keeps his eyes fixed on Jesus, no matter what demands or offense of the cross comes in his life.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith, and carrying the cross allows God to mature our faith.¹⁶ If you want the joy Jesus had, then you must also gladly accept the sufferings of Jesus.¹⁷ If you want the overflow of comfort from God you must allow the sufferings of Christ to overflow into your life.¹⁸ You have a choice. You can go to a comfortable church that offers you a “feel good” message that packs the pews, or attend a church where the message of the cross crucifies you. A true Christian’s joy is “inexpressible and glorious.” In other words, flesh cannot express it. No smile or human emotion can express this glorious joy and no tear can put out this joy’s fire. For Jesus does not give peace as the world gives peace, or as most churches give so-called peace.¹⁹ The joy that comes from the message of the cross reaches beyond the feelings of the flesh and arises from deep within the soul. This joy springs forth because, even though crucifixion hurts, we know it is right and good.²⁰

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of

greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

(1 Peter 1:6–9)

If the “goal” of your faith is the salvation of your soul, then you will find this very good news indeed!

THE BLOOD

...through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Peter 1:2)

The blood of Jesus provides forgiveness and power to live a righteous life. Blood must continually flow to cleanse the body and bring health. A human body will die if blood stops flowing through it. Likewise, the Old Testament law required the constant sacrifice or flow of blood. In the New Testament, however, the blood of Jesus

continually moves through a disciple's life. If you want the blood of Jesus to forgive, you must allow it to flow through your life, cleansing you all the time. If it stops cleansing, you will die spiritually.²¹

God only gives forgiveness and the Holy Spirit to those willing to obey Him.²² It is "for obedience to Jesus Christ" that God sprinkles us with the saving blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus heals and forgives us for all of our sins. This is one of the grand promises of the message of the cross. By overcoming sin God does not mean reading the Bible and seeking to obey it—that is salvation by works. On the contrary, this means that you allow Him to work obedience to Scripture.²³ You must give up your own sinful religious will and, like Jesus, listen for God's voice and obey His will. This is the free gift of salvation—God working and willing to keep you from sinning, as you surrender.

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)

A false prophet preaches forgiveness but never teaches we must "die to self." Most people will joyfully follow a Jesus who never requires them to carry a cross or deal with sins. They like a form of Christianity that talks against sin but doesn't actually strike at self to kill that sin. But faith in Jesus is not just a matter of believing He

died for our sins—we must also eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus. Unless we suffer as Jesus did (eat His flesh), and die enough to ourselves to have His life (drink His blood), we will not have eternal life.²⁴

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.
(John 6:54)

If we want Jesus to die for us, but we do not die with Him daily, then we really don't love Him. We just selfishly want Jesus to save us from judgment. When the hard truth of the gospel dawns on many Christians they simply choose to stop following Jesus. They find easier, softer churches where they can continue to keep their desires, goals, prayers, and their compromise.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60)

Often, individuals will try to justify themselves by saying, "Our church preaches the same thing, but just in a different way." By this they actually mean that their church empties the "cross" of all its offense and power, and therefore never honestly deals with their sin and lack of obedience.

If you want healing and power, then allow the blood of Jesus to cleanse you daily.

PEACE WITH GOD

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

As we have seen, being “justified through faith” means a dynamic living faith that trusts God to save us through His work in us by way of the cross.

How do you begin the process of being crucified and resurrected with Jesus? For a more detailed teaching on this subject, please obtain a copy of the short book entitled *Even the Demons Believe*. This book will show you how to be born again, forgiven of all your sins, escape hell and become a true disciple of Christ.

ENDNOTES

1. Luke 17:17
2. Acts 26:29
3. Hebrews 10:26
4. 1 Corinthians 2:2
5. Mark 8:38
6. Acts 2:47, 2 Corinthians 2:15
7. 1 Peter 2:2
8. 1 John 2:15
9. Acts 3:26
10. Ecclesiastes 7:29
11. When Jesus speaks of being of value in Luke 12:24, He is speaking from our viewpoint. If this were not the case the rest of Scripture would be in error. God saves us not because we are of value, but because He is love. This is unmerited favor. God saves us because of who He is, not because of who we think we are. See Psalms 115:1.
12. Proverbs 12:10
13. Romans 7:18
14. Mark 10:18
15. Matthew 5:6
16. Philippians 3:10–11
17. 1 Thessalonians 5:18
18. 2 Corinthians 1:5
19. John 14:27
20. Colossians 1:16
21. Hebrews 6:5–6
22. Acts 5:32
23. Philippians 2:12–13, 1 John 3:9
24. The individuals who were listening to Jesus came to understand that Jesus was not talking about cannibalism, eating real flesh and drinking real blood. That is why they left. They understood that Jesus was talking about the life of discipleship in order for salvation to work redemption.

2

IT'S THE TONE

We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge for you and you did not cry. (Luke 7:32)

I just don't like the tone of his sermons. It seems unloving. He sounds so prideful and harsh.”

This familiar refrain is expressed every time someone does not want to repent of something in their heart or lives. So, let us explore this comment for just a moment while we ask ourselves a fundamental question, “Would they repent if the tone were different?”

Jesus declared they would not repent. God declared through His Son that it doesn't matter what tone the Holy Spirit works, when push comes to shove people just will not repent. Be it a dirge or a flute, they will not repent.

To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'" But wisdom is proved right by her actions. (Matthew 11:16–19)

Jesus said that God sent John the Baptist, a tough talking preacher, and then He sent His Son, instructed by the Holy Spirit not to raise His voice in the streets. Either way the people refused to listen, claiming that John had a demon and Jesus was a glutton. When people don't want to repent, they always attack the messenger. Even the world declares "Hate the message, kill the messenger."

Truthfully, sometimes the preaching the Holy Spirit works through me has a tone that grates against the flesh.

Not only does God work words that oppose the flesh, but also the tone guided by God crucifies sin. All true preachers should be God's instruments to play as He sees fit. No instrument ever tells the player what tune to make.

God has seen fit to make me an instrument that plays a “dirge.” Indeed, my wife says that my singing sounds like I am crying.

But there is something holy at work here. God gave me a wife who is a “flute” in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Many, however, display the same stubbornness toward God even if the Holy Spirit plays a dirge through me or a dancing song through my wife. In reality, it isn’t the tone that people don’t like but the Truth they hate. If you want to whine about the tone, then direct your grumbling against God. For His Holy Spirit not only gives me words to preach and write, but also how to say and write those words. Just like Jesus, those dead to themselves will not only be given words, but be told “how” to say those words.

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. (John 12:49)

Yes, yes, I know that sounds like self-righteousness and like I am saying that I am equal to Scripture, but I am not—so deal with this as it should be dealt with.

WEIGHTY

People didn’t like the tone of Paul’s letters so they ridiculed his character just as they do mine if they lack repentance.

For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” (2 Corinthians 10:10)

Individuals who don't like my tone should study Paul's letters. His messages were loaded with sarcasm, looking prideful as he attacked sin head on. For example, read what Paul wrote about himself and you will understand how many people slanderously accused Paul of being prideful, harsh, and egoistic.

I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. (2 Corinthians 1:23)

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. (1 Thessalonians 2:10)

Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. (Galatians 6:17)

Let me remind the reader that Jesus spoke gently, yet was crucified because of it. In the same way it doesn't seem to matter what tone God uses if someone does

not want to repent, they just will not repent. And if someone loves God, honestly desiring righteousness, they will not notice the tone of the message. The only people offended by the tone of a message are those who never really repent in the first place. Time and time again individuals are at first excited about sermons, books, and tracts. When it comes time, however, for God to put nails in their hands and feet to crucify their flesh, then, and only then do they start whining about the tone. For this reason, Jesus renounced most of the cities in which He preached with such a loving tone.

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. (Matthew 11:20)

Jesus denounced these cities right after the passage we read about false accusations of John having a demon and Himself a glutton. God has led me to denounce many people because they refused to repent even though they were at first excited about the goodness of God and His Word. As we close this section, did you catch that? For Jesus to denounce those cities doesn't sound very loving, kind, or gentle does it? To judge everyone in all those cities sure had a bad tone about it. For those who complain about my tone, one has to wonder if such people have ever read the Bible.

PAUL: TWO PERSONALITIES

Paul didn't have tape recorders during his day, so his sermons flow from the letters he wrote. Many called these letters weighty and very offensive. In person they remarked that Paul seemed "unimpressive" and his speeches amounted to "nothing." Paul appeared timid, weak, and ineffective when fellowshipping in person.

First, notice that Paul seemed like two different people. In the same way many act very surprised when they meet me in person, saying that I am not the same in my sermons. That I am shy and gentle in person and not at all like they pictured me. God works a love that gently urges individuals to repent, act, have faith, and love Him with everything. He works a patience of love combined with the truth that comes from love. Paul wrote about this gentle aspect of love in the following passage. Though his letters were weighty, his actions in person were "like a mother caring for her little children."

...but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

"I just don't like the tone of his sermons. They seem so harsh and unloving. He reeks of pride. So much of it is over-the-top. Not to mention those word games. And then there is that sarcasm."

Those who have reached past the offensive message

of the cross, (the tone) have discovered the resurrected life. Besides, those who refused to humble themselves would never have repented anyway.

As they did with Paul, some have taken me for a fool thinking that the Holy Spirit will not work such toughness, or as they put it “harshness,” when they meet me in person. This is not a wise course of thought.

Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. (2 Corinthians 10:11)

The Holy Spirit determines my actions in relationship to a person’s heart. In short, you get what you deserve. If you deserve the whip, the whip you shall receive. If you deserve gentle prodding and encouragement in the Lord, you shall receive that from the Holy Spirit. It is up to you, make your choice. Come with a humble hunger for righteousness and you will be greeted with all the gentleness you want. Come with a self-righteousness and deceitful heart and it will be revealed. It is your preference.

What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit? (1 Corinthians 4:21)

Sound arrogant on my part? Does this sound like I am boastful, making myself to be something? It sure does

sound that way, doesn't it? I know you are used to your false preachers who are what you want them to be. God is God, however, and He will play His instruments as He chooses. In reality, I am less than nothing.

A SECRET

Here is a secret that I should not really share. My sermons and my writings appear harsh so that God doesn't have to lead me to be so in person.

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come, I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.
(2 Corinthians 13:10)

If you let the tone and words of a sermon or book do the work God intends, then you will discover a rich source of gentleness that builds you up in Christ. Paul's sermons were "harsh" so that "I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority" and the Holy Spirit has not changed today.

The self-righteous cult-watchers, who understand nothing about the message of the cross, would love to make this sound sinister. Yet such things are really a safeguard for you in Christ. Great peace and love fills a church where the pastors, leaders, and elders are dead

enough to self to protect the flock from others and themselves. If need be, such leadership can protect each sheep from things that will cause them harm. Leadership dead to their greed, egos, and pride can allow the Holy Spirit to work His love—a love like Jesus that lays down their lives for the benefit of others. Blessed is the church with leaders crucified to self enough that no selfish motive or deceit can stop the power of the Holy Spirit from guarding the church.

The Holy Spirit works a love among true pastors that they become drink offerings for their congregation. It may not be a drink that most claiming to be Christians want to drink, yet never the less it's the true protecting love of Christ that only the Holy Spirit can work through a crucified life.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.
(Philippians 2:17)

CONCLUSION AND MORE

Of course, there are other comments, concerns, and complaints which the sermon by this name fully addresses. The important thing for each of us that seeks God with a full heart, is to surrender all of self, that God might

speak to us as He wishes. For God's way of coming to us is always love even if we don't think we deserve it. Those who have moved past the offensive of the cross, one offensive being my speaking and writing, have discovered a person filled with the love of Christ. Those who refuse to move past the offensive were never interested in a loving God in the first place.

We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1 John 4:6)

3

GRACE ACCORDING TO GOD

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2:11–12)

Grace is not unmerited favor. Nowhere in the Bible will you find such a notion. It belongs in books that begin with “Once upon a time.” God favors you in nothing, you are by nature vile, corrupt and completely disobedient. Grace is unmerited obedience.

God works an obedience to the Holy Spirit that we do not deserve. For this reason, Jesus is a “source” of salvation only for those who overflow with obedience by the power of this grace.

...and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:9)

God defines grace for us in the book of Titus. Any sermon, publication, commentary, or ministry that does not define grace this way does not really preach God’s grace. According to God, grace equals obedience. The person touched by God’s grace is filled with His will. He overflows with righteousness and lives in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Read it for yourself. But, as you do, notice the first verse that tells us that this is the “salvation” that “has appeared to all men.” No other kind of grace can deliver us from hell.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself

a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11–14)

Grace, according to God's definition, gives us the power to say "No" to sin. It gives the power to "live self-controlled, upright and godly lives." True Christians are obedient in "this present age" through this powerful grace.

You can tell that most individuals have not been touched by God's grace simply because of their hostility to the crucified life. If you dare to suggest the need to deny ourselves, or obey Scripture more than they personally believe necessary, you will encounter all kinds of excuses, whining, moaning, and grumbling. They will protest that it is a "negative gospel" or, of course, the old favorites; legalism and salvation by works.

Those filled with God's grace are "eager to do what is good." A church filled with God's grace will always look for some new way they can obey God's commands more. Scripture and God's Holy Spirit always reveals something new to obey, for God's commands are "boundless" (Psalms 119:96).

You can always spot a people genuinely touched by God's grace. They are eager and excited to find things in the Bible they can obey by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, those who have accepted a false message of grace are rebellious, self-righteous, and simply like to claim salvation and God's blessings. Titus tells us that

those whom God redeems have been redeemed from “wickedness” (that is from disobedience) and are purified unto obedience by the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Peter tells us that God only gives the Holy Spirit to those who “obey him.”

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.
(Acts 5:32)

Therefore, Paul writes in Romans that sin shall not be our master, for under grace we have the power to obey.

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

MERCY

Grace is the power to obey God, while mercy allows our sins to be forgiven. This distinction is made throughout the Bible.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. (2 John 1:3)

If a man accepts mercy but refuses the obedience that grace brings, he forfeits God's forgiveness. The unmerciful servant found this out the hard way and was "tortured" for his lack of obedience. Although he was forgiven by mercy, he found that forgiveness revoked because he refused to obey grace. Therefore, his debt of sin was reinstated. If we are not obedient to forgive others, God will not forgive us our sins.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they felt greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:31–35)

The Bible tells us to approach the throne of God and seek two things. First, that we might receive mercy that forgives our sins. Secondly, so that we might find "grace to help us in our time of need." By seeking mercy, we ask God to forgive our sins. And by seeking grace, we ask God for the power to enable us to obey.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Anyone who seizes the mercy of God, but refuses the grace of God, is nothing more than a rebel and a thief. Many people selfishly desire and claim God's mercy but, at the same time, they refuse true grace because it would cost them too much. It would require them to really deny themselves, pick up a cross, and hate their own lives, but they are unwilling to do so (John 12:25).

OBEDIENCE

Obedience shows that a person has received mercy and grace from heaven. In fact, every church should preach a message of obedience. Certainly, it is an obedience that comes from faith, but it is obedience, nonetheless.

Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (Romans 1:5)

Jesus said that we must make disciples, teaching them to “obey everything” (Matthew 28:20). The disciple that only obeys their church’s doctrine is not filled with God’s grace. A true disciple is led of the Spirit because they hate their own life, deny self, and pick up a cross. Again, every church should preach obedience, as Jesus said:

Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:19)

For example, disciples of Jesus cannot just choose to ignore what the Bible teaches about things like dress, appearance, music, baptism, women’s roles in church, living as though not married, following the voice of the Holy Spirit, walking in the Light, giving up everything, not compromising with the world, having all things in common, persecution, suffering against sin, despising money, and all the other holy ways of God. If they do choose to ignore these things, they should not expect to go to heaven. Anyone not reflecting an eager desire to discover new ways to deny self and obey God by the power of the Holy Spirit is not born of God.

If you know that he is righteous, you know that

everyone who does what is right has been born of him. (1 John 2:29)

We can be easily led astray by those who speak confidently of “freedom in Christ.” They think freedom means to have all the benefits of God, but without the cross doing its painful work in a Christian’s life (1 Peter 4:1). Do not be led astray. Only those who obey God by the power of grace are really born again.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. (1 John 3:7)

The vast majority of people in church have resisted true grace, revealed by their disobedience to the Scriptures and to the Living God. They claim the mercy and forgiveness of God, but their actions show that they deny Him. Instead of denying self, they deny God. People who walk in the true grace of God find such people “detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (Titus 1:16).

RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH

God forgives our sins and thus freely gives righteousness and justification through Jesus. The gift of grace then works the obedience of Jesus in us alongside forgiveness. Obedience becomes as much a free gift as mercy and forgiveness. Just as in Adam's sin we became disobedient by nature, so in Jesus we become obedient by nature. For we have His nature in us.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

As we have seen, no one can claim the mercy of God while refusing the obedience of Christ and expect to go to heaven. God requires all who call on the name of the Lord to surrender each day to the power of grace that works obedience to His will. In offering ourselves to God, by accepting His mercy, we offer ourselves "to obedience, which leads to righteousness."

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Romans 6:16)

Don't be fooled. God cannot and will not be mocked. Those who seek to please their flesh will go to hell. It doesn't matter if they claim Jesus as their Savior or not.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7–8)

CONCLUSION

God defines grace as the power that teaches us to say “No,” to be self-controlled, upright, and godly. It provides us with an attitude that hungers for the commands of God. A man can only claim that grace has touched him to the degree these things become a reality in his heart. Grace manifests only to the degree that obedience by the Holy Spirit is present in a man’s life. This is true faith in Jesus—not salvation by works, but true salvation by grace. Where grace finds a humble life that allows it to work the will of God (1 Corinthians 15:10).

And we must continue to surrender to God’s grace every day. For, although mercy will cover our sins, anyone who tramples on the blood of Jesus by resisting His grace will be in real danger of forfeiting not only grace, but mercy as well.

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:29)

Do not misunderstand God's mercy or patience. God is patient so that we might have time to become obedient. God grants us mercy that grace might empower obedience (2 Peter 3:9). The person who fights against God's powerful grace loses mercy and will burn in hell.

4

LEGALISM

...not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:9)

We are not saved by works!” is usually the kneejerk reaction to any suggestion today that we should actually obey Scripture. We need, however, to stop acting like brute beasts that believe by instinct rather than by enlightened faith. We must understand one thing very clearly. A person does not become legalistic by obeying Scripture. If that were the case, then all the Apostles would have fallen from grace.

Indeed, remember that Paul preached obedience—obedience that comes from faith, but obedience nonetheless. The bottom line is that if a man has true faith in Jesus, his life conforming to Scripture testifies of that faith. As a preacher I am to preach obedience, to “call” for an obedience that comes faith.

Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.
(Romans 1:5)

Three kinds of “obedience” take place in the church today. Only one, however, is the true obedience that comes from honest belief in Jesus.

- “Spirit-filled” and “charismatic” obedience: The claiming of the Holy Spirit without obedience. Where emotions and the flesh feel elevated to the position of God. It is an emotional, fleshly application of Scripture with each person doing whatever feels comfortable to them.
- Legalistic and logical obedience: Scripture is obeyed selectively, but without surrender to the Holy Spirit and cross. This is true legalism.
- The obedience of true discipleship: Surrender to the Holy Spirit that allows grace to work obedience to Scripture. This is the new life that Jesus came to bring. Let us look at these points in greater detail.

TRUE REBELLION

First of all, some believers claim to have the Holy Spirit, but they do not obey Scripture. Such is the case for the vast majority of “Spirit-filled” or “charismatic” Christians. Those on the outside can easily see that such people claim to follow the Word of God, but merely please themselves in the name of Jesus. They are the golden calf worshipers of today that will not wait for the commands of God to flow down from the holy mountain. They desire only to have liberty, fun, and freedom in the name of Jesus. The same thing happened in Exodus 32, when the Israelites made themselves a golden calf and danced around it with great joy and zeal; all in the name of the Lord.

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” (Exodus 32:5)

Many people say they are filled with the Holy Spirit, yet refuse to obey God. They will often use the tired old excuse that they do not want to be “legalistic” or fall into salvation by works. But simply obeying God’s commands does not constitute trying to earn salvation. Nor does doing a work in Christ mean that a man nullifies the free gift of God. Indeed, God creates us to do good works that

He “prepared in advance for us to do.”

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

If we refuse to allow God to “work” in us, we cut ourselves off from saving grace. A man cannot just do as he pleases, refusing to be moved by God’s saving, working grace, and then expect to go to heaven. That would be like the Israelites standing beside the parted Red Sea and whining to God, “This is salvation by works! Why are you asking us to do something? Why do we have to walk across? Why do we have to be baptized in Moses? Why do we have to pass through this water?” If they had stood there with that attitude, Pharaoh’s army would have destroyed them. Sin and worldliness would have overtaken them. As Jesus would say, “Let the reader understand.”

A faith in God, unaccompanied by obedience, is not a saving faith, but a demonic one that takes selfish liberty in the name of God’s mercy. True “friends” of God demonstrate that they receive a true faith, and their actions prove it. For this reason, water baptism can save a person without it being a work to earn salvation. For if the Holy Spirit works true faith in a person, there will also be, at the same time, obedience to what God commands. The man or woman who takes the prompting of the Holy Spirit and responds in a manner that God does not command is a rebel and liar. Such a faith cannot

save them. If Abraham had tried to offer up a cow instead of his son, he would not have been called a “friend” of God. If a person refuses to obey God’s command to be baptized, but instead tries to earn his salvation with a canned prayer, he shouldn’t expect to enter heaven.

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. (James 2:21–23)

TRUE LEGALISM

Secondly, we find the group made up of legalists and “logical” thinkers. They form most of what we consider the mainstream Protestant churches—such as Baptist, Church of Christ, Methodist, etc. Though many now embrace the foolishness of the Charismatic type churches, the majority remain very conservative and, in their approach to Scripture, greatly concerned with things like the “historical context” and the Greek or Hebrew. Like the first group, they claim something that they do not really have. They claim a belief in the Holy Spirit, but have no cross to make this a true reality. Such

people very logically approach the Scriptures, and base their beliefs on human wisdom, not enlightenment by the Holy Spirit and a mind crucified by Christ.

As we have already seen, it is how we obey that determines whether a person has fallen into legalism. The test of legalism is not the number of Scriptures we obey but how we obey those Scriptures. Jesus condemned Bible study by human effort when He declared that many people refused to come to Him to have true life. Christians can “diligently study the Scriptures” but refuse to submit to the cross of Jesus, so their Bible studies and debates have no life. They are legalists that seek to obey Scripture apart from the power of Jesus Christ, even as they lay claim to that power.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39–40)

If a person seeks to obey by human effort or, in other words, if they try to use their own mind to apply Scripture to their life, they fall under legalism. On the next page is the Scripture that defines legalism. It is trying to apply the Bible to our own life in the best manner we can. Legalism is choosing how we view Scriptures and how we will apply them. It uses our own minds to understand and obey Scripture.

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Galatians 3:3)

Everyone who goes to church obeys some set of rules or principles, which must be crucified. The only kind of obedience that counts is one that comes from death to self by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Legalists and logical thinkers do not want to give up their lives and follow the Holy Spirit in everything, so they turn to outlines, biblical principles, and their own concepts of what Scripture commands us to obey. This is actually the kind of Christianity most people walk in, even though they may talk about being Spirit-filled. Legalism is merely a man taking some idea out of the Bible and seeking to live it in his own strength and understanding. Salvation by works is nothing less than living by godly principles or getting oneself pumped up from a sermon and setting out to live those principles. It is the Garden of Eden lived out all over again, where each man decides what is right and wrong for himself. This is true salvation by works and in the end, it cannot save a person. Fig leaf faith will never cover our sin.

TRUE LIFE

The third and last type of obedience is demonstrated

by those who have found the narrow gate and walk the narrow road. They allow the Holy Spirit to crucify human effort in their life and do not rebel against the demands of grace. They understand that God's grace provides the power to live the Christian life. Indeed, they see no excuse for not living it. True humility marks their walk, along with rich obedience.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:3)

Look above again at what Peter wrote. The kind of faith that comes from heaven is loaded with power to obey. We have no excuse when we fail. We must admit our stubbornness and self-righteousness, for "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." The church today so easily shouts "legalism" because it overflows with rebels that have no honest desire to obey God by grace. The church claims to know God but, by their actions, prove the opposite and are "unfit for doing anything good."

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. (Titus 1:16)

If anyone says they have faith in God but they do not have a life full of obedience, then they do not have a faith that comes from heaven. Instead it is man's faith, man's opinion, man's religion, and man's idea of the Bible. That kind of faith is man working to follow Jesus—it is salvation by works. God only gives the Holy Spirit to those who "obey him." Obey "Him," and not our idea of what Scripture says or what a denomination declares. Those unwilling to submit to God's commands by saving grace simply do not have the Holy Spirit.

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.
(Acts 5:32)

Only those who are willing to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit leading and instructing them daily, will find the New Life. All others are liars, thieves, and robbers trying to earn their salvation in some other way.

TRUE SAVING FAITH

Can faith without deeds save a man? Can faith without...

- denying self
- taking the Lord's Supper
- hearing God's voice
- baptism

- hating one's own life
- despising the dollar
- prayer
- going to church
- taking proper roles in church
- watching what we watch
- giving to the poor
- watching what we say
- being led by the Spirit
- hating our father, mother, brother and sisters
- giving up all
- hair length that glorifies God
- becoming aliens and strangers in the world

Can faith without all the many other Scriptures save a man or woman? God, through James, has already given us the answer.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (James 2:14)

So, finally, what is salvation by works? What is legalism? Simply, man trying to obey anything apart from the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It is not the fact that a man obeys God's commands in Scripture. To only claim that we are saved by faith, as currently understood by the church, is to deliberately ignore the Bible and rebel against how God defines His grace. Such belief rebels against God's actual grace and mercy. What a

heavy judgment will befall such individuals for they have trampled on the blood of Jesus that they claim so strongly to have faith in. After all, mercy gives man time to repent, act, obey, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Let us not sin against heaven itself by misunderstanding mercy.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Let me recap again what we have covered, because those who hold to once saved always saved will inevitably try to confuse the issue. We are not saved by our works. Every true Christian can agree with Paul that works do not save us. We all agree that salvation is a free gift from God.

Most people have never really thought about the true meaning of “salvation by works.” They may have some vague ideas about trying to earn their salvation, but they rarely turn to Scripture for a true definition. The most common, current understanding usually boils down to this: If you teach that a person has to “do” anything in order to be saved, then you preach salvation by works. We have already seen the blatant hypocrisy of such a statement. Even teaching that we just have to ask Jesus into our hearts still advocates that we “do” something.

We must accept on Jesus’ terms an understanding of what it means to trust Him for salvation, not what we

wish He meant. “Trust” has come to mean just a shallow verbal acknowledgment that Jesus died for our sins. Nowhere in Scripture will we find such a concept. Even the demons know that. To trust or have faith in Jesus means that we obey Him by the power of the Holy Spirit as the cross is allowed to crucify self. To sum up our choices in the Lord:

- Holy Spirit without Obedience = Rebellion
- Obedience without the Holy Spirit = Legalism
- Holy Spirit with Obedience = The New Life

Which choice will you make?

5

THE MERCY OF GOD

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. (Isaiah 59:1–4)

God forgives us if we accept our guilt. He gives mercy only to those who have a deep desire to humbly rid themselves of sin. Many an individual feels sorry for his life, but few desire the mercy of God. Only when we bow down toward God's holy temple, does He give mercy.

But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. (Psalms 5:7)

If your one and only ambition is not to obey God, then don't bother asking Him for mercy (Hebrews 5:9).

Many churches today falsely reassure people that they have forgiveness without even really feeling guilty. At the first sign of conviction the church rushes in with a false Jesus that whitewashes their sin and guilty conscience. We can easily demonstrate this truth with a quick glance at the Bible and what God says about you.

REGRETTED

Did you know that God regrets that He even made you? When God looks at you His heart fills with pain. He sees a child He wishes He never created. Imagine you gave birth to a child, raised that child, and then he turned out so bad that you regretted his conception. Indeed, your heart fills with pain every time you think of him. That is how God feels.

The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:6)

This is not an Old Testament story that only applies to those people back in Noah's time. This lies at the root of mankind, and who we are to God's heart. Only God's mercy found favor in Noah enough to save mankind through the water baptism of the flood. Why did Noah find favor with God? Because Noah humbled himself and accepted God's truth—mankind deserves judgment and is a grievous regret to God. In the following passage, Jesus reiterated this.

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ‘I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’ (Luke 18:13–14)

David so deeply understood this need for humility that he declared himself a sinner in the womb. He cried, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalms 51:5).

Those who experience this have no trouble admitting

their need for God's mercy. Those, however, that still think some good lies within them cannot accept the mercy of God. Although they give lip service to the acceptance of mercy, it does not come from true faith in Jesus. They, as we just read in Isaiah 59:1–4, rely on “empty arguments and speak lies” when they claim that Jesus has forgiven them. How many claim the mercy of God but are still separated from Him! For in their pride they still think they hold some value to God.

WORTHLESS

Jesus did not die for you because you hold value to God. Rather, Jesus died for the sins of mankind because of who He is, not because of who we are. For we are all completely worthless human beings.

As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:10–18)

Let's take a closer look at this. Unless you are willing to call God a liar, what is listed here is you. To reject any one of them, is to forfeit mercy. To allow the Holy Spirit to guide us deeper into them, is to experience God's depth of mercy. After all, he who has been forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47).

- No one righteous, not even one
- No one understands
- No one seeks God
- All turned away
- All have become worthless
- No one does good, not even one
- Our talk resembles open graves
- Tongues practice deceit, covering our sinfulness
- We are full of cursing
- We are full of bitterness
- We swiftly shed blood to hurt others
- In all that we do, ruin and misery is our fruit
- We do not understand peace nor walk in the way of peace
- We simply do not fear God

We can easily see this in and out of the church. We quickly tolerate slanderers, and justify and excuse our sins and desires. The church, often known for its sinfulness, refuses to accept their real condition.

If you desire the mercy of God then you must daily, as you pick up your cross and follow Jesus, allow the Holy Spirit to convict you of these things. Those who surrender to His will not only find the mercy of God in forgiveness, but the power of Jesus to work righteousness

in their lives. Those who, by the Holy Spirit, build upon Romans 3:10–18 every day, experience the mercy of God in fresh and ever deeper ways.

NO ONE GOOD

Did you also know that you will never be good? You will never have value for your goodness, because only one person is good. Only God, and God alone is good.

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.” (Mark 10:18)

To think that Jesus died for you because you hold some value to Him means you believe a lie from Satan. It is blasphemy to say that Jesus died for you because you are of value. Again, Jesus died for you because of who God is, not because of who you are. God called you valuable in His sight because He calls things that are not as though they were, (Luke 12:24, 1 Corinthians 1:28). God calls man valuable because He made him, not because of who man is, for man is all together worthless and therefore God established hell. God sends His garbage to hell. For this reason, Paul declared that he knew the depth of his wickedness, for he knew “nothing good” lived in his sinful nature!

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature . . . (Romans 7:18a)

Those who allow God to crucify them on a daily basis will find Jesus living in them. The good then that lives in them, is not themselves but Jesus. It is utter sin for any man, Christian or not, to have a good self-esteem. To have a good self-esteem is to have the blackened heart that demons have.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Since Jesus said that only God is good, why would we dare think or even say we have some goodness in us that makes us valuable? The only true good in us is God within us. Christians never become good; they only become empty vessels through which God can pour out His goodness.

CHILD OF THE KING

“I am a child of the king,” a boast declared by professing Christians, is often said with pride, especially when people find themselves confronted with the fact that God regretted making them. They feel offended by the message of the cross and lash out in self-righteousness. When we combine pride with the mercy of God, we make for ourselves a deadly mixture that will poison our relationship with Jesus, souring the mercy God grants, pridefully using Jesus this way is the same manner in which Satan used God to exalt himself.

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. (Ezekiel 28:17)

Simply stated, Satan looked at himself, the beauty of God within him and by looking at himself, became the Devil. Any Christian who takes the mercy of God and the goodness of Christ within them and then boasts that they are a child of the King, have value in God’s sight, or some measure of goodness, only prepares themselves for hell.

Truly we are indeed children of the King, but true children do not use the mercy of the Father to cover over wounded pride. Instead, they declare with humility their worthlessness and only by God’s mercy will Jesus Christ

fill their hearts.

THE CROSS

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?
Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly por-
trayed as crucified. (Galatians 3:1)*

Jesus was crucified naked with every fault exposed for the world to see. Jesus hanging on the cross represents who we are, with all our sins and weaknesses laid out before our eyes. As Jesus hung on that cross, He took your place, and do you know what God did? He turned away because of who you are. God could not stand to look at Jesus because your vile self hung on that cross. This caused Jesus to cry out.

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

When we sinned God forsook us, not wanting to have anything to do with us. He felt grief and pain that He made us, so He turned from us. This judgment Jesus took upon Himself and now we, if we admit in our heart of souls who we really are, can find forgiveness and mercy.

Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God, making Himself worthless and vile for our sake.

Those who accept this truth by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit will freely give up all good self-esteem, hate their own lives, deny self, pick up their cross, and follow Jesus (John 12:25). Then they walk humbly with their God, allowing Him to show them new sins to repent of daily and how to die to themselves (Micah 6:8, John 12:24). Those who do not fully accept this forfeit the mercy of God.

MERCY

Man is less than a worm in God's sight. According to the book of Job, man is "but a maggot." We can easily understand this when we consider the holiness of God compared to what we have made ourselves.

How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is but a maggot—a son of man, who is only a worm! (Job 25:4–6)

In fact, God referred to Jacob as, "O little worm" (Isaiah 41:14). Therefore, Jesus warned us that unless we repent of our pride, admitting in humility who we are and our need for God's mercy, the worm in our nature

will never die—even in hell. Accepting anything less than this fact demonstrates, not humility, but pride striving to bargain with God to escape the torments of hell.

...where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:48)

This passage denotes our very selves that must be crucified by the power of Jesus. If you are willing to take more than a causal look at your sinfulness, rich mercy awaits you. God in His infinite love chooses to show us, the maggots called mankind, mercy. Oh, what mercy and joy that Jesus would save a worm, a maggot, a sinner like me!

6

HATING FOR JESUS

The following are edited excerpts from the special hard back edition of the book Hating for Jesus (John 12:25). The depth and seriousness of the issues addressed in the book far exceed this short tract.

The book zeros in on the offensive message of the cross that Jesus lived, and the apostles preached. The springboard for this comes from Luke 14:25–35 and John 12:25 (see end).

The Holy Spirit can only fill the hearts of Christians who hate their lives. Anyone choosing to follow Christ must do the same. If we hate our lives, we will deny ourselves and follow the will of Jesus.

This leads to a life of love—the same love that Jesus showed. A love for parents, wives, husbands, children, and mankind, that wells up from the Holy Spirit.

This hate separates sheep from goats and travelers from disciples. Within this mystery of hate lies the power to love, judge, serve, and break pride (Colossians 4:3). For individuals who allow God to work this, a true church, like the first church, will begin (John 13:35). In short, the very joys of heaven shall reign in the heart.

NOT WORLDLY HATE

Hating for Jesus is not a matter of going up to someone and slapping him in the face. Hating for Jesus is not the worldly kind of hate in which you seek to destroy someone else. No, it is something much more difficult to live.

The foundation for the truths of all the statements listed on the next page rest upon the Scriptures.

- A man must hate where he lives that he might settle in heaven.
- A man must hate where he walks that he might be guided by God.
- A man must hate his recreation that he might enjoy God's Sabbath rest.
- A man must hate his comfort that he might labor for God.
- A man must hate his love for his wife to have holy power to love her as Jesus loves the church.

- A man must hate his children that he might give them up as a gift to God.
- A man must hate his father and mother that we all might be brothers.
- A man must hate his words that he might have the bread of life.
- A man must hate his doctrine that he might gain the living Truth.
- A man must hate his thoughts that he might have the mind of Christ.
- A man must hate his opinions that he might speak words of wisdom.
- A man must hate his idea of right and wrong that he might do God's will.
- A man must hate money that he might make others rich.
- A man must hate his strength that he might be empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- A man must hate his kindness to know how and when to love.
- A man must hate his righteousness that he might grow in the holiness of God.
- A man must hate his own life that he might receive the mystery of God.

THE GREEK

Make no mistake about it; the Bible uses the word hate. The Greek word miseo, is used in Matthew 10:22,

24:10, and other passages. Matthew 10:22 speaks of the whole world hating Christians, while Matthew 24:10 warns of Christians who fall away and hate each other. The Greek word used in those passages is the same one used in Luke 14:26 and John 12:25. The literal meaning of the word is to hate or detest in the fullest sense. It is a very strong and old verb that speaks with much emotion. Even the commentaries speak of not watering it down “till the point is gone.”

In other words, hate is such a strong word that one naturally recoils from its demands and seeks to weaken it, but not too much, the commentaries warn. Yet, it is the same word used when Jesus talks about loving those who hate you, your enemies.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Jesus said the greatest commandment is this:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)

We must love God with all. All means 100 percent! However, to those who say that Luke 14:26 and John 12:25 mean only that we love God more than all other

things, all means only 51 percent. They love God more than all other loves; therefore, they allow a small majority to suffice. It does not matter to them that worshipping God while still having other loves constitutes idolatry. Indeed, this is why Scripture says, “Do not make any gods to be alongside me” (Exodus 20:23a). Those who love God only more than other loves have many gods alongside Him. God directly warned against idolatry throughout the Old Testament and the message continues in the New Testament: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

The greatest commandment does not read, “Love the Lord your God with a majority of your mind, strength, and soul.” The commandment says all, which means 100 percent, not 51 percent. Only in the church is 51 percent considered 100 percent. In no way does the commandment imply that we should love God merely more than half or more in comparison with other loves. In order for us to grow to love God with all, we must push out every other love. Otherwise we cannot possibly come to a place where we can say that we love God as He commands.

Luke 14 and John 12 are merely the how-to of the greatest commandment. Jesus has told us how we can grow in our love for God and other men. He has given us the key that will allow the Holy Spirit to work the greatest of all commandments in us. A man or woman unwilling to grow in this hatred will never know how to love God or his “neighbor as himself” by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you want to be filled with God’s love, then all other loves must go. Yet the only way we can possibly let

go of our loves is to learn to hate them.

GOD IS LOVE

Think of it this way: God is love, pure love, holy love, and the source of love. God's love is the only real love in the universe. When man separated himself from God, he lost the ability to love. Once someone returns to God with a surrendered heart, then God will begin to pour His love through that person, "for love comes from God."

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

THE SCRIPTURES

Few people seem to even notice these Bible passages, and those who do usually just write them off or explain them away. The true message of the cross, however, is as shattering now as it was at Jesus' crucifixion, when He loved us with heaven's love.

MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

TRAVELERS OR DISCIPLES

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off

and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
(Luke 14:25–35)

HATING YOUR LIFE

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:25)

7

GODLY SORROW

“God knows I am a sinner. I asked God for forgiveness and no one is perfect.”

Inside and outside of the church, this is the normal response people give when challenged about wrong-doing. God, however, considers this the biggest excuse for sin and will condemn them on judgment day. The only difference between the world and the church is that the church takes the name of Jesus in vain.

“I have confessed it to God and know that He has forgiven me,” is the whitewash used to paint over sins

in the church. But forgiveness of sins is never a private matter because sin is never simply a personal matter. The fact that when Eve sinned, it affected the whole universe ought to be proof enough. When we sin, whether privately or publicly, it affects everything all the way to heaven. For this reason, God has told us what He considers to be true sorrow over sin. We, in our sinful scheming, desire a false easy way of repentance. Elihu, a young man, full of wisdom, was correct when he rebuked Job by declaring the following:

Suppose a man says to God, “I am guilty but will offend no more. Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.” Should God then reward you on your terms, when you refuse to repent? You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know. (Job 34:31–33)

We often willingly say, “I am guilty and will sin no more.” We might even ask God to teach us what we cannot see as sinful and resolve to not sin again. We just want to ignore what we did and promise not to do it again. As the previous passage demonstrates, we always want to analyze more. Constantly when dealing with sin, people repeat, “I don’t know why I sinned.” They want to keep on searching out why they committed the sin

rather than acting to overcome. We already know why we sin—we are worthless to the core (Romans 3:12). The hard heart of man is always happy to learn more about

sin, as long as he never has to repent according to the will of God. Therefore, James reminds us that Bible study can become a deceptive matter (James 1:22).

Our sorrow remains too shallow and our resolve goes according to our own plans and design, therefore, we never overcome sin. Indeed, we brush aside wrongs done to others, so the consequences of sin continue to harm. Jesus does not forgive such repentance and we are in grave danger of being surprised when God sends us to hell. It does not matter if you think you asked Jesus into your heart or not, Christ commands that we repent on His terms when we sin.

SORROW: WORLDLY OR GODLY?

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Feeling sorry over the sins in your life means nothing. Men, in the church or out of the church, feel sorry for the sins they commit. Indeed, everyone in Hades right now is full of sorrow (Matthew 24:51). However, there are two kinds of sorrow over sin. One is “worldly sorrow” and the second is “godly sorrow.”

Worldly sorrow actually produces death. Think

of it. A man has sorrow for his sins in such a way that the sorrow over the sin actually works more death than the sin he committed. It would have been better if he were not sorrowful for the wrongs committed. After all, worldly sorrow produces a delusion that fools the person into thinking they are genuine in their repentance.

Some people leave our church regretting that they felt sorrowful over their exposed sins. They regret giving up things, confessing, and seeking to overcome sins. In fact, they become extremely bitter that they tried to repent. As a result, they resort to slandering those who tried to help them repent (Proverbs 19:3). This is why we read that only godly sorrow “leaves no regret.” Those who have godly sorrow discover the rich resurrected life after having suffered in their bodies to be done with sin (1 Peter 4:1).

Godly sorrow over sin can be seen in actions that spring from a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:6). Someone with godly sorrow will never have to announce to others that they are repenting. If a person has to tell you that they are repenting, then they are lying, because godly sorrow is self-evident.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice

done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. (2 Corinthians 7:10–11)

When someone says they have repented of a sin, ask yourself if they have godly or worldly sorrow. Do you see the good fruit Paul wrote about in Corinthians?

- **Earnestness:** A quickness to act with all their heart to deal with the sin.
- **Eagerness to clear:** Making sure to correct the wrong with an emotion that all can see and attest to.
- **Indignation:** A demonstration of anger toward the sin.
- **Alarm:** Showing a fear of God and a fear of what your sin might do against God's glory and how it might harm others.
- **Longing:** A desire for righteousness rather than wickedness; to long for holiness to replace wickedness. Longing involves time, hoping for what we do not yet have because in true repentance it often takes time for righteousness to replace wickedness.
- **Concern:** To worry about your sin until you have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit say you may rest and that the sin is covered.
- **Readiness to see justice done:** To realize that nothing unfair is being asked or demanded of you. That justice only demands what is right and

just. To praise God for His demands and disciplines (Hebrews 12:11).

“At every point” in the matter of repentance has the person proven they are “innocent” in the sin they feel sorry over? Have they repented—not because they were caught in a sin and had no choice but to confess—but because they felt cut to the heart by their wrongdoing? Even those in the world, when caught, will confess and ask for mercy. Godly sorrow shows alarm that goes way beyond the natural reaction to being caught. Godly sorrow goes back to every single person whom their sin affected and seeks to make things right. They don’t call their wrong a mistake and just apologize. No, they confess it as sin using the word “sin” and make restitution to cover over the offense. If a person comes out of the prayer closet, not only resolving to never do the sin again, but setting out with forethought and purpose to pay back with good the wrong they did, then that demonstrates godly sorrow. In short, they do more than is asked, required, or told of them to do by the Law or man. As Jesus said:

I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:20)

Truly sorrowful people humble themselves, confessing to all the harm they did, and persevere to seek God to the point of overcoming (Luke 8:15). Godly sorrow is

not fast food forgiveness.

FOUR TIMES

It is never enough to pay back good equal to the amount of sin you committed. Godly sorrow always surpasses what is required. Just look at Zacchaeus for one example of this.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”
(Luke 19:8)

Zacchaeus stood up, walked in the Light (1 John 1:7), and announced to God in front of men that he would give half of what he owned to the poor. He planned to remember who he cheated and pay them back four times the amount. He would spend a lot of time thinking of past sins, people who he might have cheated, and how to quickly repay them. The vast majority of people today would struggle to admit that they really had cheated, let alone take action to repent. Again, four times the amount! No wonder that Jesus ex- claimed that salvation had come to Zacchaeus that day. Those who do not repent like Zacchaeus cannot have—and have no right to claim—the salvation of Jesus.

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.”
(Luke 19:9)

If someone confesses they sinned, test their godly sorrow by their actions. Do they set out to pay back individuals four times the amount of their sin? A man who very quietly tells me he is sorry and leaves it at that, has not repented and should not be forgiven (John 20:23). God will not honor, nor forgive such unrepentant repenters. This is especially true when we have sinned against others in the church or even in the world. For Jesus instructed us to go to great lengths to reconcile with those we have sinned against. In the following passage it took a lot of time and ceremony to stand before the altar of God to offer a gift. A lot had to be done according to temple regulations. But never for a moment believe that our service and gifts to God will cause Him to excuse a sin that we remember needs repenting of.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24)

True repentance with godly sorrow is never convenient, easy, or cheap. It requires effort, and the expense of ourselves. Godly sorrow will search out the Scriptures and dig deep to see sin for all its sinfulness (Luke 6:48). Godly sorrow never takes a casual look at sin. Those who claim they have repented will have dug deep into the Bible and exposed their wicked sin to Scripture. Godly sorrow, when first detecting sin, rises early, quickly, and swiftly to repent according to the will of God. If we define sin as doing what we want to do, then true repentance means repenting as God wills, not as we want to repent.

CONCLUSION

If you have been given this because you sinned, then this is the kind of repentance men, angels, and Jesus expect. Anything less than this is a lie that seeks to cover up the sin and proves you love the darkness of evil over the holy light of God.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)

8

LOSER FOR JESUS

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Mark 8:35)

By all the standards of the world, Jesus was the biggest loser that ever lived. Therefore, anyone who chooses to become a Christian will also be a loser. If you decide to become a disciple of Jesus, God will make you a loser in this world so that you might become a winner in heaven.

You have a clear choice: become a loser for Jesus or perish with the world in hell. The Greek word for “lose”

in Mark 8:35 is apollumi, which means to destroy fully, lose, and perish. Unless your life is destroyed for Jesus and the gospel, you are not a Christian. You cannot be saved or enter heaven.

True Christians do not gain influence, wealth, or comfort. They do not expand their worldly territory. Instead, they pick up a cross that crucifies them to the world. Consider Jesus for a moment. He was truly the ultimate loser. He lost...

- His home, money, time, and comfort.
- His opinions, judgements, tastes, and wants.
- His reputation, justice, education, and health.
- His will, glory, words, and life.

First John 2:6 reminds us that “whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” The following Scripture also reinforces the fact that our attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ, who became “nothing.”

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5–8)

Jesus said we must become a slave to all men, because He too made Himself nothing and became a servant.

And if there is anyone the world calls a loser, it is a person who sets out to make himself nothing. No one teaches their children to go through school so they can be a slave to others. No one wants to grow up to do the will of someone else. We teach and encourage every child to “be something” when they grow up. Even the church urges people to become winners in the world, because by doing so they will somehow have influence for Jesus. But the only way a person can have true influence for Christ is to make themselves losers for Jesus, and become the slave of everyone.

*...and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.
(Mark 10:44)*

For example, God called me to drop out of college only a short time before I was due to graduate. My parents thought I was a loser and my campus minister thought I threw my life away. I had no idea what God wanted to do with my life, but I knew I had to obey Him. In the eyes of the world, including those in my church, I became a real loser. Of course, God doesn’t call everyone to drop out of college. But He does require all Christians to be losers to the point that most people will not even want to be around them. Indeed, the only people that will want to spend time with them are other losers for Jesus. Are you praying for God to make you a loser?

SO NEGATIVE

“It is so negative!” is the response of many Christians after seeing the Loser for Jesus® logo. In our sinful flesh we all want to gain the world and, when we come face to face with the call of Jesus to become losers, many of us feel offended. Though such people might attempt to change the meaning of what Jesus said, this truth is the offensive message of the cross that all true saints have preached and lived throughout history.

People today think this is such a negative message because they feel ashamed of the words of Jesus. They have never tasted the freedom and joy of being a loser for Jesus, so they are appalled at the mere idea that Jesus commanded all men to become losers for Him. After all, every Christian should rejoice and feel proud to wear the words of Jesus not just on a t-shirt, but upon their very lives. But because so many Christians today are ashamed of the words of Jesus, they naturally deny them. Therefore, Jesus will be ashamed of them when He comes back with His Father’s glory.

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels. (Mark 8:38)

Make no mistake. Those who remain ashamed of

Jesus' words, which call all men to lose their lives for Him, will find Jesus ashamed of them.

SCUM

If you are not willing to become scum, don't even think about becoming a Christian. Do not even let it cross your mind to accept the salvation of Jesus Christ. Choose another religion and go your merry way.

Paul's life reflected the glory of Jesus when he declared that he had become the "scum" of the earth.¹ Are you willing to become scum in the eyes of the majority of people in your community? Are you willing to be hated by the world?

...when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. (1 Corinthians 4:13)

Consider the meaning of the word "scum." It means refuse, a low, vile, or worthless person or group of people. The world holds so much influence today that, if you really start to follow the Holy Spirit, even most of the church will consider you scum. They will start avoiding you and giving you all kinds of labels. The church has become so corrupted by the world that they will think you have been brainwashed and have joined some kind of cult. If you honestly listen to and follow the Holy Spirit, rest assured

that you will be persecuted, not just by the world, but also by the church.²

PREPARE TO LOSE ALL

The end is coming, and you need to prepare to lose everything. Christians—at least, true Christians—will not be winners in the last days. They will have everything taken from them, including their lives. As the anti-Christ appears, one of two things will happen to true saints.

If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. (Revelation 13:10)

Scripture tells you the facts, plain and simple. You will not win. You will lose. But only in losing will you win in the end with Jesus. What does it mean to “lose your life” for Jesus? Let the following questions challenge you:

- Am I losing my plans, desires, and belongings for Jesus?
- Am I losing my career goals, education, and money for Jesus?
- Am I losing my style of music, fun, and pleasures for Jesus?

- Am I losing my hopes, dreams, and personality for Jesus?

Everything of this world must be surrendered and lost for Jesus. For this reason, Jesus warned us to remember Lot's wife.³ John tells us not to love anything in this world.⁴ Indeed, Jesus tells us to both hate and despise money—something which will definitely cause the world to call you a loser!⁵

FISH OR LOSER

Have you seen the fish symbol on clothing, Bible covers, and all sorts of Christian trinkets? Isn't it cute? Of course, that's the problem. The fish has become an acceptable and fashionable symbol for anyone who claims to be a Christian. Since the church removes the offense of the cross, no one's flesh struggles with displaying it. Indeed, you can find the fish symbol on the back of cars that Jesus would never drive or want anyone to buy! It has lost all real meaning. To the world, it merely reflects a certain viewpoint on social issues. The early Christians were driven underground because of persecution and were such losers that some even lived in holes in the ground. So, they developed a way to identify each other with a secret symbol. They chose the fish, referring to the idea that they were fishers of men.

The fish was not a celebrated or popular symbol at the time. Only as the church compromised with the world did it become a marketable item. As God's words became

a commodity that each man buys to fit his own opinion, so the fish symbol becomes a sign with no real meaning. So many people today preach and live an outward (circumcision) kind of gospel that the offense of the cross is abolished.

Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. (Galatians 5:11)

The church may preach about Jesus and the cross, but it is a watered-down, comfortable cross that bears little resemblance to Scripture. The offensive cross that Jesus taught and lived has been fully rejected. It is a false Jesus and a false gospel that does not require the crucifixion of one's very self and life, or a complete break with the ways of the world. For instance, just take a look at what most churches call Christian music today!¹⁶ This mire of sin and whitewash demands a new symbol that will help weed out the true Christian from the hypocrite.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark 13:13
2. 1 Timothy 3:12
3. Luke 17:32
4. 1 John 2:15
5. Matthew 6:24
6. Free tract entitled “What Is Acceptable Music?”

9

GOD CARES WHAT YOU WEAR

THE FIRST FASHION SHOW

The love and wisdom that made your soul is the same love and wisdom that made your body. God gave just as much attention to creating the body of man as He did to his soul. He created man and woman naked and saw that it was good. After the fall, man began to choose to wear what he desired. The first fashion show featured what Adam and Eve wanted to wear. They wanted to be themselves and so made for themselves

clothes to wear.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Genesis 3:6-7)

Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, “they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” And, ever since, man has been making clothes for himself rather than seeking God as to what he should wear. After God confronted them on their sin and rebellion, He took away their fig leaves and gave them clothing of His choosing.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)

If you are a Christian, then every day God will direct what you should wear. In fact, Jesus said we must “hate” our own lives, and part of that hatred means that we hate what we want to wear (John 12:25). The message of the cross crucifies our desires and wants. It is the only true Christian life.

HAIR, BODY PIERCING, AND TATTOOS

It is unscriptural for anyone to say God is not concerned with what we do to our bodies or the length of our hair. It is a sin for a man to have long hair and a sin for a woman to have short hair. The Scripture below is in context, clear, and sharply to the point.

Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. (1 Corinthians 11:14–15)

Would you think it a good thing if someone made their sister a prostitute? Of course not. Well, God compares the marking and cutting of our bodies to that of forcing your sister to become a prostitute.

Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord. Do not degrade your daughter by making

her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness. (Leviticus 19:27–29)

Men have decided what they will wear. Therefore, they have tattooed and pierced their bodies with ornaments. And women dress like prostitutes. Even the world remarks how the young women of today dress in an unholy way. You might say to yourself this was the Old Testament and we are not under the Law in Christ. This is a true statement that can be fully accepted if you realize one thing. God put the Law in place to show us right from wrong (1 Timothy 1:8–9). If we come to Jesus in true faith, He will show us how to dress and take care of our bodies in a way that surpasses the requirements of the Law.

After all, what constitutes long hair? And how can we know what is modest and immodest? These things are easy if we pick up the cross that crucifies our fleshly opinions about dress. God Himself will make it clear. The reason people cannot determine sin- fully long hair on a man, short hair on a woman, or immodest clothing is because they will not listen to God.

NOT TO DRESS OURSELVES

The whole Christian life can be summed up in this statement: Not doing what we want, but doing what God

desires. In everything that we say or do, we should be able to say, “This is God’s will, not mine.” Death to self means that we die to our plans and desires. Jesus told Peter that he used to dress himself and go where he wanted, but as he followed Jesus he would be dressed by someone else and led where he did not want to go. In short, Peter would be doing God’s will, not his own.

“I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” (John 21:18–19)

Therefore, Paul wrote that men and women must dress in a certain way. Men are to have “holy hands” that do not participate in evil by dressing or marking their bodies in such a way that reflects sin. Women must also dress in a way that reflects righteousness and purity.

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes... (1 Timothy 2:8–9)

The best way to know how to dress is to ask the Holy Spirit each day what to wear. If you are one of God's children, then like any child you ask your parent what you should wear that day. If you are "led by the Spirit" then you belong to God. If you decide what you want to wear, choosing to lead yourself, you are not a child of God. If you say to God, "Abba" or translated, "Dada" then your Father will dress you for the day's work. The only children that hear God speak to them of His love for them are those willing to let God dress and clean them up each day.

...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:14–16)

BE HOLY IN ALL

The word holy means to be separated unto God. Christians are to be a people that not only in word, but also in deed, reflect God's separation from sin. God commands that we "come out from them and be separate" and become a people that do not dress like the world.

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. (2 Corinthians 6:17)

Does this mean we should never wear blue jeans or a particular kind of suit? No, it isn't a matter of a bunch of rules or wearing clothes that don't reveal any skin. It is much more serious than that. Christians should be "perfecting holiness." In other words, they find out what is holy for their town, circle of friends, and country. For example, as a pastor in the United States of America, God instructs me to wear a suit when I preach. But it is a quiet, inexpensive suit that does not draw attention to myself. To wear a flashy suit that speaks fully of the current styles and trends would contaminate my body and spirit.

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

If I lived somewhere else, or went to preach somewhere else, God might instruct me to wear something different that would reflect His holiness in their culture or church. But if I were a Christian among a group of teenagers or bikers, God would not have me dress like them to "win them over." He would instruct me in how to

dress differently—to show them how they should dress. After all, Jesus sat down with drunkards, but He did not get drunk. In other words, God's Holy Spirit would work a hatred in my heart for the way they dressed.

...snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. (Jude 1:23)

Those who choose to dress like the world in order to win the world for Christ have made themselves enemies of God (James 4:4). Until you hate the clothing stained by corrupted flesh you will never hear from God what to wear. Until you hate the current fashion styles, He will not be able to guide and speak to you about what you should wear. You must pick up a cross that makes you realize you cannot strive to be your own person. As the next Scripture declares, "You are not your own." And since you are not your own and not allowed to dress the way you want, you must honor God with your body.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

DRESS UNTO GOD

Some things are obvious sins before God. For instance, obviously men and women should dress differently and wear clothes that reflect the gender in which God created them.

A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this. (Deuteronomy 22:5)

In order to hear God on how to dress, realize that God will guide you to dress in a way that will not draw attention to yourself—not according to the world's ideas of fashionable dress. Even dressing in colorless, drab clothing and wearing our hair in a certain way can draw attention to ourselves. Peter wrote that women must dress in a way that draws no attention to their clothing or to “outward adornment.”

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. (1 Peter 3:3)

Men should also dress in such a way that does not draw attention to themselves. Indeed, men often dress in such a way as to reflect the spirit of Satan. They want to

be noticed for the beauty they possess. God sent Satan to hell because he wanted to be noticed for his beauty.

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. (Ezekiel 28:17)

This may sound harsh and legalistic because the church today does not teach the finer things of holiness. In the name of a false freedom in Jesus, preachers tell everyone they can dress and do what they want. In doing so, they do violence to God and defile God's holy things.

Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. (Ezekiel 22:26)

WHITE CLOTHES

God will give those who let Jesus dress them here on earth clothes to wear in heaven. Anyone who claims to be a Christian, yet dresses themselves, will burn in hell. You have a choice each day—to dress as God would will

and command, or to go your own way. Those who choose God's way will be dressed in white someday.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. (Revelation 3:18)

Now is the time to listen to the Holy Spirit and to the “counsel” that comes from the Spirit, so that one day Jesus can give you a new wardrobe in heaven.

10

THE LORD'S SUPPER CAN KILL

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:23–24)

The Lord's Supper is not some dry tradition that men mindlessly perform. Nor should it be a happy moment filled with lively music, dancing, and celebration. To partake of the Lord's Supper is one of the most holy and serious moments in our worship of the Lord. We should drink the cup with the utmost

soberness, judgment, and self-examination. To take the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy manner" causes us to sin against Jesus.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.
(1 Corinthians 11:27)

Indeed, such people sin against the very blood and body that Jesus sacrificed for their sins. Because of this we should do as Scripture demands and examine ourselves, looking for sin in our lives. If we fail to judge ourselves before taking the Lord's Supper, we may face some serious consequences.

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. *(1 Corinthians 11:30)*

Many had fallen asleep—in other words, died—because, they did not take the Lord's Supper in a proper way. In fact, many in churches today are weak and ill because the Lord judges them for the way they partake of Communion. Truthfully, many people who are listed in church bulletins as sick are that way because they took the Lord's Supper in an unholy manner. Looking at today's church and how it takes Communion, it is a

wonder anyone is healthy at all. The only conclusion we can draw is that God is not present in such churches.

If you're thinking that such teaching is extreme, simply read Acts 5:1–10 and notice how God judges church members when His Spirit is truly present.

THE CHURCH BODY

When we sin, we sin against the whole body of Christ. No man sins in such a way that it only affects himself. We are all part of one body and even to sin in the privacy of our homes will send shockwaves throughout the church. Just look around at the churches today to see the truth of that statement. When Adam sinned privately at the forbidden tree the whole future world of mankind felt the effects. As Paul wrote, when one part suffers disgrace, the whole body suffers. When a church comes together each member must recognize the body of Christ, and how their sins affect everyone else.

For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:29)

Christ never intended for the Lord's Supper to be a personal event where everyone selfishly focuses in on their individual salvation experiences. Everything about the Lord's Supper concerns the church as a whole. When

we fail to recognize the “body of the Lord” we drink judgment upon ourselves. The body of the Lord consists of the whole church—the arms, legs, feet, and mouth. When we take the Lord’s Supper, we must think of ourselves and everyone in the church. Is each person healthy in the Lord? Is there a bitter root beginning to grow? Is there gossip brewing in the church? Have I sinned against someone in the Body? Are their special groups or cliques forming? Is my clothing fitting in the Lord? Is there any hint of sexual immorality? Is all greed being dealt with? Was my conversation holy during the week? Not only do we need to be very serious about taking the Lord’s Supper with a good heart, but we also need proper table manners, so that “judgment” does not occur.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions. (1 Corinthians 11:33–34)

Put simply: Whether physically or spiritually, feed yourselves at home so that you can serve others at church. Again, everything about the Lord’s Supper has to do with the church as a whole. This is why Paul says he will “give further directions.” We have a lot to prepare for and perform in a holy way before we drink the cup and eat the bread.

THE LORD'S DEATH

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:23–25)

The Last Supper denotes a time of betrayal, a night before immeasurable suffering, and a time when God would hide His face from His Son. It recalls the death of all deaths, which we must remember when we take Communion.

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
(1 Corinthians 11:26)*

It is of the utmost importance for us to understand what we do when we take the Lord's Supper. While of course we have the resurrection of Jesus in mind, Scripture commands us to meditate upon the death of Christ.

We must remember Christ crucified, and see clearly what our sin forced God to do to His beloved Son. We should specifically consider the death of Jesus and understand that we too must suffer with Christ. As the following passage shows, we must always carry around in our body the death of Jesus if we hope to have the overflowing life of Christ.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2 Corinthians 4:10)

The resurrected life of Christ is not the focus of the Lord's Supper. The spilled blood and the broken body of Jesus drive us to sober judgment—we must declare His death. Let us remind ourselves of the demands of Jesus—to deny self and carry our cross daily. Those who willingly rejoice in this suffering will discover the resurrected life of Jesus. For this reason, Peter tells us to prepare ourselves for suffering against sin in our lives. Those unwilling to suffer against sin in their lives will not go to heaven.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:1–2)

Those who allow God to crucify their sin will overcome and be done with that sin in their life. “As a result,” Peter writes, we can live for righteousness and holiness in this world. Whenever we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we declare this death, and should expect to experience the suffering of Christ in our lives so that we can be “done with sin.”

CONFESSİON OF SIN

To proclaim the Lord’s death means to admit our weakness, failure, unworthiness, and sinfulness. We declare God’s love for us, in that He took our sins upon Himself and publicly triumphed over them. This is why God tells us to confess our sins. Jesus was crucified naked, and confession of sin should be out in the Light for all to see and hear. We feel humbled, just as Jesus felt shamed when He hung on the Cross for us.

First John gives the requirement for the forgiving blood of Jesus to overflow in our lives. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7–9)

As John wrote, if we have “fellowship with one another” in the Light, then the blood of Jesus forgives and heals us from our transgressions as we confess our sins. At this church, you will hear individuals confessing their sins to one another during the week and when we take the Lord’s Supper before the whole church. This is not a rule or a law, but a matter of the heart. As the Holy Spirit and Word of God move in our lives, we judge ourselves and confess as the Lord leads.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16a)

After visiting us, one person said, “It is no wonder you guys change. You really confess sin.” As we obeyed James 5:16, this person saw the work of the Holy Spirit that directs us to confess our sins and to pray for each other so that we may be healed. Our relationship with God is

restored and renewed when we confess our sinfulness. Therefore, a church remains strong and healthy only to the degree it confesses sins to one another and becomes healed of those sins. Overcoming sin and finding forgiveness should be an experience for the church as a whole, not just each separate individual.

PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS

After Adam sinned, he hid from God.

But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”
(Genesis 3:9–10)

Of course, we must use great wisdom when confessing sins in the church and toward other men. But if we seek to hide our sins from God and from others, we stop the blood of Jesus from bringing forgiveness. We do not have time to examine this closely here but, as David learned, God grants forgiveness only to those who acknowledge their sins. As we found in 1 Corinthians 11:30, Psalm 32 agrees that keeping silent about our sins causes our bones to waste away. Like David, a man after God’s own heart, when we “confess” our transgressions then the Lord will forgive the guilt and heal us of our sin.

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. (Psalms 32:1–6)

As James and John told us to come into the Light, so David urges us to seek the Lord while He may be found; to acknowledge our sin and not cover up our iniquity. By confessing and renouncing our sins, we find mercy. Those who only confess their sins, but do not renounce them by a holy life, only remind God why He should send them to hell.

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

Those who have sinned against others and yet declare, “Oh, I confessed to the Lord and He forgave me,” live a colossal lie if their confession stops there. Such a declaration comes from Satan. Those who sin against others should stand up as Zacchaeus did, confessing specific sins and going to each person they sinned against.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.” (Luke 19:8–9)

Jesus said that salvation had come to Zacchaeus because he stood up in the Light and confessed his sins. He did not confess his sins in a booth, nor claim that God had forgiven him. He publicly declared the sin and repented to each person, in the same way he did to God. Anyone who does not beg for forgiveness from those he sins against should not dare to take the Lord’s Supper—for, as we have seen, it could kill them.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24)

CONCLUSION

If by faith (Romans 12:3) you judge yourself before taking the Lord's Supper and need to confess a sin, make certain you do the following things by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Ask yourself if you are really a Christian. (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Speak from the heart. (Psalms 51:17)
- Keep your words few and to the point. (Ecclesiastes 5:2)
- Declare specifically the sin. (Luke 19:8)
- Have a Scripture to share. (Colossians 3:16)
- Make a plan for repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:11)

Once these things are present, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into forgiveness and healing in God's timing (1 Peter 5:6). Know, however, that in the Holy Spirit we will pray according to the quality—or lack of quality—of your confession and repentance (Matthew 12:37).



DESPISING THE DOLLAR

Jesus said you cannot serve both God and Money. It is one or the other—God or money. There is no middle ground with Jesus. The man who does not hate money is not a Christian. The church goer who does not despise money will not go to heaven. Jesus spoke sharply, clearly, and to the point. We “either” hate God or hate money.

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Matthew 6:24)

Jesus meant a literal, violent, rejecting kind of hatred and despising of money. To demonstrate this we only need to look at the anti-Christ. When the anti-Christ comes on the scene, the words of Jesus will be as solid as concrete. No one will make a parable out of Jesus' statement that we need to hate and despise money. It will not be a matter of whitewashing greed, but whether a man will sell his soul for money. The anti-Christ will soon control all money and thus those who do not despise the dollar will gladly follow him.

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. (Revelation 13:16–17)

Many Christians who taught and warned about the anti-Christ will be the first in line to take the mark, since they did not both hate and despise the dollar by grace. God will simply not give them the power to withstand the anti-Christ because they did not stand by the words of Jesus in grace.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
(1 Timothy 6:10)

Many people whine that money isn't evil, but the "love of money" is the real sin. Well, how does a person know if they love money or not? We simply need to look to Jesus and our own hearts to find the answer. Jesus said, let me repeat, Jesus said, anyone who does not "hate" and "despise" money, loves it. First Timothy 6:10 applies to anyone who does not despise the dollar.

A life moved by coupons, getting things on sale, and searching for the best price, loves money. A heart that embraces retirement plans, investments, and great investment returns, loves money. Anyone seeking to expand their territory hates God because they do not despise money. A church seeking to cover its costs for preaching the gospel serves money. Anyone distressed about his debt does not despise money. Even though many people do these things and more in the name of the Lord, if a hatred and despising of money does not ring out loud and clear in their hearts, they live a lie. Those who think that the Bible teaches principles for investment are deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit that calls all men to hate money. Those seeking to live on a budget know nothing

about following Jesus (Mark 6:37). Being a good steward with money means only two things—one, hating money and two, despising money. All the other Scriptures and understanding about wealth and money flow from these pure words of Jesus. Any book, sermon, article, or person who does not preach this in an offensive way worships and loves money. A life of true faith in Jesus, from beginning to end, shows the fruit of these two things.

MONEY IS WICKED

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.” (Luke 16:14–15)

“What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.” Money is a detestable thing in the sight of God, and any Christian with the heart of God will pour contempt upon money. Jesus desires that all who would love God should have an attitude about money—a bad attitude. When God thinks of man’s money He reacts with an attitude of disgust because money is a vile invention. It is a lie to say that money itself is not evil, only the love of it. Money in and of itself is a contemptible thing. Heaven has no banks and only a people devoid of

love would invent a thing called money. Money is hell's invention not heaven's innovation.

You may, like the Pharisees, be "sneering" at this and find yourself disgusted at such a concept, but this only underscores the wickedness of your heart. Like the Pharisees Jesus so adamantly rebuked, you justify "yourselves in the eyes of men." This, however, does not make the love of money any less a sin. Indeed, though the church preaches a justification of greed and Christian book publishers print mountains of books on good stewardship to whitewash our greed, the fact still remains. Those who do not hate and despise money, worship it. If you really want to be a good steward of worldly wealth in God's sight, you can take only one course of action. Give it all up. The shadow that was the Law commanded we give ten percent, but Jesus surpassing the Law tells us no man belongs to Him unless they have given up one hundred percent.

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

There are no exceptions. Those who have a true saving faith in Jesus have left everything to follow Him. All others live a lie and have merely passed through a wide gate and walk down a wide road that will end in their destruction.

So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:11)

THE FIRST CHURCH

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:35)

As stated before, this is a matter of love. Jesus loved us enough to give up all of heaven and, if we want to love as He loved, we too will give up all. Jesus found it a joy to both hate and despise money, and a true church will joyfully despise the dollar. For this reason, Jesus said that all men will “know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Disciples are taught by God. And anyone taught by God about how to love one another will immediately learn to hate money.

We see the good fruit of love in the first church. Because Jesus taught them to hate and despise money, they naturally had all things in common. They were so dead to material things that “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own.” No wonder God could work a unity in the church so that all such believers were one in heart and mind.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32)

This does not mean that the church itself owned everyone's property, or that one man owned every other member's material things. Rather, since the members despised money, God could work the love of heaven that shares everything. After all, Satan, while in heaven, started to claim things for himself, which caused God to cast him down. And on his way to hell, Satan stopped at Earth and inspired man to invent money. Anyone claiming or grasping anything in the name of Jesus stands in league with the Devil. Claiming and grasping things denotes the complete opposite of the message of the cross. Like Jesus, who picked up His cross, each person should continue daily to surrender everything without any thought of getting anything back from God. We are not to grasp, just as Jesus did not grasp.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:6-7)

Those unwilling to despise the dollar cannot become the slave of all, as Jesus said. Those who love money will always seek in some way, small or large, to make others serve them, to benefit and bless themselves rather than to become a servant of all who expects nothing in return. Even those who pray for blessings so that they might bless others, in reality use the needs of others to bless themselves. They are like Judas who often helped himself to the money bag as he met the needs of Jesus (John 12:6).

How little true love the church possesses today. In spite of all the talk about loving each other in Christ, it is easy to see whether a Christian or church truly has the love of Jesus among them. If a church does not hate and despise money, they do not have the love of Jesus. Indeed, they have not even begun to know the love of Jesus in their church. We see in the book of Acts that God repeats the description of the love that was present in the first church.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (Acts 2:44–45)

Right after Peter preached his sermon at Pentecost, those who were baptized came together as a church. And what would someone see at this church? A group of people who hated and despised money proven by the fact they “had everything in common.” All those who gave up everything had everything in common.

DO NOT STORE

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19)

Is God against savings accounts? You bet He is. Didn't Jesus just say in the Scripture, "Do not store up... treasures?" Does this mean it is a sin to have a savings account?

Certainly, if the savings account is for yourself. We are called to hate our own lives (John 12:25) and Christians are a people that do nothing for themselves. Indeed, through poverty and making ourselves poor, we make others rich.

...poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:10)

Want a simple test to see if you hate or despise money? Then ask yourself this question. How poor have you become in the process of making others rich in Jesus? In this following Scripture, we see again the wisdom of Jesus. Those claiming to be in Jesus, and in the light, are often far more greedy and concerned about money than the world. A quick glance at the church, and those claiming

to be Christians, confirms that their concern over money is even greater than the world's. The very people that ought to be dead to money are the most worried about it.

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. (Luke 16:8–9)

Rarely does anyone find a Christian who uses worldly wealth to gain friends. In fact, those that appear at first to give generously are discovered to give only because it makes them feel good. They do not give for others, but only to benefit themselves in some way, whether emotionally or physically. Notice, too, that Jesus said we should use worldly wealth until “it is gone.” Every true disciple of Jesus should make it his goal to die as poor as Jesus did.

Jesus told us to look at the birds of the air and the fact that they do not “store away in barns.” Every bird reminds us not to store up worldly wealth. Indeed, only Christians who obey Jesus in despising money have the right to claim the promise of not worrying about it because God will provide for them.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:26)

FAITHFUL MEN AS LEADERS

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wildflower. (James 1:9–10)

If you are poor, the Bible says to rejoice in your high position in Jesus. And if you are rich, boast and brag about your low position in the church. If a church wants to be spiritual, they should appoint poor men as leaders, for in such people you can find rich faith (James 2:5).

12

WATER BAPTISM

TWO LEGS

Healthy men walk on two legs. Likewise, walking in true faith in Jesus Christ requires two legs. One leg is faith, the other one is deeds. The two are required to propel one forward in and toward the salvation of Christ. This is why James wrote that faith without deeds is dead. When one leg is weak the person walks in a circle, and if one leg is gone, little progress can be made on the narrow road. That is why those who

preach anything but what Peter proclaimed have a faith that keeps them walking in circles or hopping on one leg. Indeed, just as no man can be alive in the flesh without a spirit, so too, no man has true faith in Jesus without deeds.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:26)

Therefore, can a man be saved apart from water baptism? The complete answer lies in what we just read in James.

THE DO

What men must do to be saved is a question many have asked over generations. The definitive question and answer was found in the salvation sermon Peter preached at Pentecost, when the people cried out to the apostles... “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter replied in this model sermon, and all preachers and ministries must reply in a like manner: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” (Acts 2:38). Again, what must a man do “for the forgiveness of” sin? “Repent and be baptized” was Peter’s clear, solid answer.

It comes down to rebellion or humble submission to

God. Either a man continues in his religious rebellion towards God's will, or chooses, in brokenness, to surrender to His perfect plan of salvation. Those who teach that you only have to ask Jesus into your heart to receive salvation, preach, at best, a shallow message of God's grace. While there is more to God's plan of salvation than just getting wet, which we do not have time to explore in this publication, the overriding point is that churches refuse to submit to God's plan of righteousness. Instead, as Romans declares, they seek to "establish their own."

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.
(Romans 10:3)

Such religious rebellion toward God is quickly uncovered when they whine that water baptism is salvation by works. Their hypocrisy and devious duplicity becomes clear when we realize that they too preach one must do something to be saved. Their do is that a person must ask Jesus into their hearts and say a prayer in order to receive salvation. Therefore, both Peter and the "ask-Jesus-into-your-heart" crowd preach that one must do something in order to be saved. To say that being baptized is salvation by works, you might as well condemn the sinner's prayer as salvation by works. The question shouldn't be whether doing something constitutes salvation by works, but what does God require for a man to be saved? The answer

is very simple and easy to comprehend. Nowhere in the Bible is it recorded that anyone just asked Jesus into his or her heart to gain the salvation of God. In every situation and case, water baptism was the means, method, and direction pointed to. Peter wrote about water baptism that it “now saves you also.”

...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)

COMPLETE SALVATION?

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:20b–21)

We just read in the Scripture above that water baptism “now saves” us by the “resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Unless one desires to remove the resurrection of Jesus from Christianity, he cannot remove baptism from God’s method of saving a man. For God declares

the resurrection of Jesus, His Son, gives power to water baptism. One is never baptized to join a church or as a reflection of their faith—that is merely to take a religious bath.

Water baptism points us to the mercy shown to all men when Jesus died on the cross and rose again. To state that water baptism symbolizes our faith that already saves us, denotes arguing against God about the death and resurrection of His Son. Not only does this show a small understanding about real faith in Jesus, it is rebellion against God of the highest degree.

Jesus came and brought complete salvation to men, that is why Scripture declares that Christ came by water, blood, and Spirit. This tract quickly looks at the water aspect, where God works His salvation plan in those who submit to God's righteousness.

This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. (1 John 5:6–8)

No more than we would think of leaving out the blood of Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, should we think of leaving out the water. To do so blasphemers against the Triune nature of God and preaches an incomplete message about the grace of Jesus. It denotes that one can have the blood of

Jesus that saves us from the wrath of God, and be filled with the Holy Spirit without being cleansed from a bad conscience. This is why God told Peter to preach the “full message,” and not the current wide gate, easy believism, whitewash sinner’s prayer.

“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.” (Acts 5:20)

Those who preach anything less than what Peter preached are not declaring the full message of new life in Christ.

PHARAOH’S ARMY

Since Jesus came by blood, water, and Spirit, Scripture speaks of a baptism. For there is one baptism that symbolizes the Trinity of God whereby our salvation is sprinkled by the blood, baptized in the Spirit, and cleansed by water. Even the Old Testament reflected this truth when the Israelites, in order to be saved, had to sprinkle blood on their door frames, be empowered by the Spirit to leave Egypt, and then baptized at the Red Sea.

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Corinthians 10:2)

Water on both sides and a cloud of water, truly if a people were ever water baptized, it was the Israelites. Can't you imagine the rebel crowd of today standing at the parted sea and whining, "Moses, you are making this salvation by works! We will not go. We are already saved."? Moses certainly would have said, "Fine, you stand there in your false salvation and see how far it gets you." Pharaoh's army would have slaughtered them because God would not have protected and saved them. In order for them to find salvation, they had to get down into the Red Sea and be baptized. Only then was Egypt, in other words the world, cleansed from them and their pledge to keep a good conscience began. Had they not submitted to this grace God sought to work, their faith would have been in vain and they would have died without ever finding complete salvation.

MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

Since the offensive message of the cross has been deafened by those who claim the salvation of Jesus, the true meaning of baptism has all but disappeared. Even those who believe in water baptism reject the power of the cross that makes it a holy experience. Many who have been baptized sadly discover later their baptism was the baptism of John—the cleaning up of one's life by human effort. This message of the cross is introduced and God's plan of salvation fully laid out in the book Even the Demons Believe. For now, let us take a quick look at the

meaning of baptism.

Baptism is the moment when a man dies to who he is and allows God to create a brand new person. In short, at the moment of baptism someone is born again. Saying the sinner's prayer can by no exaggeration of imagination be considered a baptism of any sort. How ironic that those who preach the sinner's prayer like to quote Romans, but it is the book of Romans, that Paul wrote, that utterly destroys such a thing.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (Romans 6:3–8)

Rightly baptized people join Jesus in His death just as if they went down into the tomb with Him. Then as they come up out of the water they too are “raised from the dead through the glory of the Father.” Paul tells us in

Romans so that “we too may live a new life.” Only those who die with Christ “like this” begin the resurrected life. For this reason,

Jesus said that we must be born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5) after a man has chosen to hate his own life (John 12:25).

We see this fully in the way Paul himself was born again. Ananias told Paul what he must do to be saved and in baptism to “wash your sins away.” If Paul had said, “I will just say a prayer,” Ananias would have declared Paul an unrepentant rebel worthy of being cursed by God.

You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. (Acts 22:15–16)

After baptism Paul began “calling on his name.” Those who teach that we can call upon the Lord for a salvation experience, have the cart before the horse. They push the cart rather than allowing the horse to pull, refusing to let God’s perfect salvation plan lead individuals to salvation. They push men into their religious schemes rather than letting Jesus shepherd them.

Indeed, such people misunderstand the very fundamentals of salvation. They falsely think that once a person asks Jesus into their heart, they receive salvation and there is nothing more to it. They are like a runner in a race that believes a delusion that he won without ever

actually running the race. Every day and every hour we must call upon Jesus, the true meaning of Romans 10:9. This passage doesn't apply to a man's life until after he has been saved and chooses to become a disciple of Jesus. A man who refuses to call upon the name of the Lord while he, by grace, runs the race of faith will lose his salvation. After all, faith without deeds is a dead faith that cannot save a man from hell.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (James 2:19–20)

13

BAD FRUIT THE RESULT OF ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED

Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. (Luke 6:44)

JESUS SPOKE CLEARLY

He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said... (Mark 4:2)

The debate of whether someone can fall from God's grace has raged for decades. To find the truth in this matter, let us examine the parable of the sower, where Jesus used the words "believes" and "falls away" to show that some individuals could lose their salvation. If He used those very words, then that should end any debate. But, sadly, not even the words of Jesus Himself can silence those who believe in once saved always saved.

Jesus definitely declares that some individuals have faith in Him but fall away. A one-hundred-page commentary is not needed on this issue. Jesus expressed Himself with absolute clarity. The additional words of men are only clouds that shut out the clear sunlight.

In this parable, Jesus used the ground to represent the different types of hearts in men. Jesus moved from those who have hard hearts to those who have soft hearts. Jesus first talked about people with totally hard hearts. In such cases, Satan can snatch the Word away so that they do not believe the truth. Since faith comes from hearing the Word, these individuals cannot believe because Satan can remove the Word from them immediately.

The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. (Mark 4:14–15)

This applies to the vast majority of mankind. Their hearts remain so hard that they do not, and cannot,

believe Jesus is the way to life. Preaching has little or no effect on them and, as such, they cannot be saved. As recorded in Luke, they cannot “believe and be saved.” It is clear in the parable of the sower that Jesus equates belief with salvation.

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. (Luke 8:12)

I once spent a day sharing the gospel with a man who literally told me the very next day, “I can’t remember anything we talked about. What did we talk about?”

Jesus then spoke of those who, and I quote, “believe for a while” but later “fall away.” We know such people are actual believers because Jesus said that they “hear the word and at once receive it with joy.” Paul confirms this in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 when he writes, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” The “word of God” is doing its “work” in the person who believes on Jesus. Thus, it is the work of God and not the works of man.

It is a saving faith because it is a belief in Jesus. They accept who Jesus is and what He came to do. We know this is true because they “received it with joy,” the result of saving grace being poured into someone’s life. We see

this in the jailer who came to “believe” in God. He was “filled with joy” because of this belief.

The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (Acts 16:34)

You might think that Jesus should have the final word on the topic but, unfortunately, this is not the case. Instead, men resort to all kinds of textual trickery, and deceptive and hollow philosophies, in an effort to make Scripture fit their own mold and ease their troubled souls. For it certainly feels troubling to contemplate that three-fourths of those touched by God’s Word miss out on salvation. This is, however, part of the offensive message of the cross, and we either choose to accept God on His terms or make Jesus into an idol of our own design.

FALLEN BELIEVERS

Again, Luke recorded Jesus as saying they “believe.” They are believers in every sense of the word. Their hearts “receive” the living Word and their lives declare they are full of joy. The seed begins to grow, giving evidence of new life. Such people try to obey Scripture, something the unbelieving world never attempts to do. But, as Jesus said, they have no root. They do not allow the grace of

the new life to penetrate deeply (1 Thessalonians 1:5). So, as Mark wrote, when “trouble or persecution comes because of the word,” they “fall away.”

Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. (Mark 4:16–17)

God thought it worthwhile to have Luke repeat the words of Jesus, and so we will do the same. Again, we find that Jesus said clearly, “in the time of testing they fall away.”

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. (Luke 8:13)

Jesus taught that these believers have true faith, but they simply do not persevere in it. There can be no question, therefore, that Jesus referred to people with a true and saving belief in Himself.

In answer to the straightforward question, “Is it possible for people to believe then fall away?” Luke 8:13 contains Jesus’ defining answer. Yes, “in the time of testing they fall away.” How much clearer could He have

been? But, alas, our sinful flesh does not want to accept this.

THORNY CHRISTIANS

The next kind of person Jesus spoke of lasts longer than the previous kind, but not long enough to save them in the end. Such types of people fellowship with “thorns.” We would call them “worldly Christians.” They attend churches where the message of the cross is reduced to the story of the crucifixion. In other words, Jesus died for us 2000 years ago, and that is the extent of the gospel. The concept that a person must be crucified daily and always carry the death of Jesus in their lives has been lost (2 Corinthians 4:10). Instead of having the cross which crucifies them to the world, “life’s worries, riches and pleasures” choke them and they never mature. We can see this in church bulletins and Christian magazines advertising only fun and entertainment rather than reflecting the holiness worked by the cross.

Or perhaps they have come to worship their ministry more than God and so never mature in the message of the cross.

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. (Luke 8:14)

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Mark 4:18–19)

Desires for the things of the world, the worries of living a nice comfortable Christian life, concerns about money, or just wanting to have a good time, keep these seeds from becoming mature or fruitful. They grow by taking in grace, mercy, and the Word, but they bear nothing of value for God. They merely enjoy the things of God for themselves, and so remain selfish at their very core. Like the five foolish virgins, even though they waited in faith for Jesus to return, they never got beyond a self-centered trust in God.

CUT OFF BRANCHES

Because such believers refuse to move on to maturity, God will cut them off. But, for now, note that Jesus declared that God cuts off every branch in him that does not bear fruit.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes

so that it will be even more fruitful. (John 15:2)

Jesus did not say that these people will just lose some of their reward in heaven. He stated that they are completely cut off from the vine. And who is the vine? It is Jesus Christ Himself, as Jesus made clear in the previous verse. And God is the “gardener” who, as we will see, will not permit a man to return to Jesus once he or she falls away.

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
(John 15:1)*

These withering branches are “picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” Not just their works, their fruit, or their rewards are burned, but the branches themselves. For Jesus explained that they are burned because they don’t have enough fruit or reward. The “branch” itself is dry and dead, because it has been cut off from life giving nutrients and graces.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (John 15:5–6)

At first, these branches may not realize that they have been cut off from Christ. They slowly wither over time. No branch withers instantly when it is cut off from a tree or vine. Even if the branch starts to wither while still attached, it fools itself by thinking there is no danger. For this reason, Jesus often warned that we will “not know at what time I will come.”

It takes time, and therefore many who have been cut off from Christ don’t realize it until many years later. In fact, many go to their death bed with little clue they have been cut off, because they still see some green in a very dry life. They play the fool to the end, never testing themselves to see if they are fully in Christ. They refused to work out their salvation daily with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

The bad fruit of once saved always saved is seen everywhere in the church today. It has caused more harm than any cult and modern-day heresy. To explore how this bad fruit ruined the orchard of the Lord and for a better understanding on how Christians can fall away, you may want to order the book *Bad Fruit: The Result of Once Saved Always Saved* and the accompanying study guide.

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

We have to go over the top to reach today's youth!" "The church must be relevant to the times."

The church might as well say, "Christians should get drunk on Fridays to reach the drinkers."

Why are you so happy? Why do you have so much fun in the name of Jesus? Could it be that you worship at the First Church of Terrible Times?

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the

last days. People will be... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:1,5a)

The Christian church in the last days will be known for, among many terrible things, loving pleasure rather than God.

We see evidence of this truth everywhere. A quick glance at any church bulletin proves this point. Or go to church and just listen to the conversations. You will hear talk of movies, TV shows, computer games, and a multitude of discussions about future or past fun events. From special events to seminars, ministries promise fun to entice people to attend. How ironic to receive an invitation to attend a seminar on the topic of the last days and in the nice, colorful brochure it announces several golf courses, eating establishments, and numerous fun activities available.

While someone from our ministry took a cab to a recent event the driver happened to attend Bible college, preparing for ministry. He declared with zeal that God called him to a snow board ministry so that he could reach out to all the lost skiers. That way, he explained, he could do something fun yet serve the Lord.

The golden calf worship of fun fills a terrible times church. Just as Aaron allowed folly, so the church of the last days continues. They build a golden calf that allows fun and feasting, announcing that the next day will be a

celebration unto the Lord (Exodus 32:5).

From Christian concerts and youth events to serious talks about the anti-Christ, love for feasting and fun shouts aloud.

TICKET: THE MOURNFUL

Again, what are you so happy about? If you are a strong Christian, full of wisdom, then your sorrow would be the greatest. As Ecclesiastes 1:18 declares, “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” Those most like Jesus in this world are full of the sorrows of Christ (Isaiah 53:3). Like Paul, though he had the joy of Christ and not the fun of the world, sorrow filled his heart (2 Corinthians 6:10). Jesus spoke clearly, those who laugh now will mourn and weep after the judgment of their lives.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. (Luke 6:25b)

There just isn’t anything in this world to be happy about. Everything is about to come to a fiery end. Family, friends, fun, food, our loves, and festivals soon will be judged and burned when the whole world burns up at the judgment day of God. Then there is the matter of your salvation. You have probably responded to a wide gate gospel call, but those who work out their salvation with

fear and trembling, who take sin seriously, and treasure the blood of Jesus will mourn over their wicked condition (Philippians 2:12). Though filled with the peace and love of Christ they also mourn and groan over the convicted sin the Holy Spirit seeks to crucify in them. Those who do not walk daily in this are not being saved by Jesus. After all Jesus said:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Crucifixion, having nails driven into the flesh of one's hands and feet, is not a fun matter. If your Jesus does not sober you up with moments of pain and suffering you are not being saved. Peter preaches to us that only those who suffer in their bodies are done with sin. Jesus came to deliver us from sin and a painful cross does that work.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.
(1 Peter 4:1-2)

After all, the flesh, fun, loving pleasure and the judgment to come are no laughing matter. As we just read, we can only do the will of God by first suffering in

our body against sin.

Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered, and we too must learn this (Hebrews 5:8). Please do not think for a moment that you can receive the Holy Spirit by any other method, for God only gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32, Hebrews 5:9).

TICKET: POLLUTION

Whenever a church or event declares that they will have fun and the gospel at the same time you can be sure that you should not attend, for they have been polluted by the world.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: ...to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

The world promises a good time and the church, through idolatry of numbers and love of self, also offers just as good of a time. Indeed, today's church equates Jesus as making life in this world more fun and fulfilling. Examine the following Scripture to easily see the false church of today.

The false church mouths off and boasts about the freedom of Christ, their accomplishments, and how they are not under law or bondage.

For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. (2 Peter 2:18–19)

The church appeals to the desires of our flesh—fun, food, a good time, activity, and a better hope for this world. They attract those just starting to respond to Jesus, those just “escaping,” and lure them to their events. They “promise them freedom” but remain enslaved to the fun of the world. Freedom in Christ, for them, provides a way to enjoy the fun of the world without having to fear the righteous judgment of God. The true message of the cross, that crucifies and offends the flesh of man, has been lost in a flood of fun.

When we first started our current church, everyone showed up with coffee mugs in hand, bringing in a supply of cookies and food. They had come from other churches where fun was never crucified. I didn’t say a word about all of this but set out to preach the offensive message of the cross and watch the Holy Spirit lead. Without ever laying down a law, those things sloughed off as the living Word was preached.

Whenever our church has events, seminars, or church meetings we never declare that we will have fun. Just as

Jesus never said, “Come out with me to hear a sermon and watch me feed 5,000. Plenty of food, sun, and fun for everyone.” We would sin by mentioning any of the “fun” things that might take place. If someone attends the church or an event we hold, the matters that concern fun will just happen, for the cross keeps us from being engrossed in them.

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short... those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. (1 Corinthians 7:29–31)

TICKET: THE TRUTH

It is easy enough to build a following if you mix in food, fun, and meet the basic worldly needs the world chases after. After all, who doesn’t want to be out of debt, healthy, happy, and have a little fun? Many followed Jesus because He gave them health and food. The only difference between Jesus and the church today, is that Jesus rebuked those who followed Him for that reason.

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking

for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” (John 6:26)

Never, ever would we say to a teen, “Come to an event because we will have lots of fun and activities.” Never would we announce an ice cream social Sunday or church picnic to bring others into church. In short, we do not preach fun, we preach Jesus Christ crucified. If people want to see their sin clearly, be forgiven, pick up their crosses, love the Truth, deny themselves, and follow Jesus, then they should come. Anything less than that, then they should stay home.

One work of a pastor is to rebuke that part in every follower of Christ that seeks after Jesus because of the earthly things He provides. To love God, not for what one can get, but out of a selfless love. Such selflessness does not come naturally or easy to any man and therefore Jesus said that those who come after Him must hate their own lives (John 12:25).

This is not a matter of a pastor laying down a bunch of rules about not having fun (Colossians 2:20–22). Rather, it is about helping the sheep of Christ deal, before God, with their love of the world. Like the rich, whom a preacher should command that they not look to their money but be generous, so too a true declarer of God’s Word will preach the narrow road (1 Timothy 6:17).

A working of holiness, of being separate from the

fun and pleasures of this world, is the true meaning of holiness. Not an easy task, but one that does require the pain of the cross as we enjoy all things God gives us in this world. As I hate my life, hating fun I want to have, I might for example, be sent by God, into an area that involves a lot of fun. But the motives and manner that happens is totally different from that of the world and the worldly church. Knowing full well that I am not entitled to any fun in this world, nor desiring, needing, or having to have one more fun thing to do because I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me.

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

To keep oneself from being polluted by the world is pure religion to God (James 1:12). A major source of pollution in the church is the fun of the world and the joking from the pulpit.

TICKET: JOKING PREACHERS

The blame for all of this sits squarely on the shoulders of preachers, teachers, and youth leaders. After all, the one who can tell the most jokes, be the most entertaining, and tell exciting stories while teaching is considered a good leader. However, in God's eyes, only those who

show the seriousness the cross of Christ demands are acceptable.

*In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness...
(Titus 2:7)*

Or as the Greek declares, show gravity, which means a sense of heaviness and seriousness. After all, the flesh, fun, loving pleasure, sin and hell are no laughing matter.

15

OVERCOMING SEXUAL SIN

SICK FROM LUST

The church and the world are sick from sex. Lust causes the church to waste away, proving itself powerless as it preaches the good news of Jesus. Like Amnon, Christian brothers and sisters feel “frustrated to the point of illness.”

In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in

love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. (2 Samuel 13:1-2)

In the sight of God, sex has become so perverted in the vast majority of churches that unnatural behavior is now considered healthy, natural, and normal. Like Lot's daughters, who had lived too long under the bad influences of Sodom, the church engages in utterly sinful activities. Of course, like today's church, these girls had their justifications and noble reasons for sleeping with their father. Just like the teenagers today that justify the unholy dress they wear.

One day the older daughter said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. Let’s get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father.” That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and lay with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. (Genesis 19:31-33)

You probably believe this has nothing to do with you

or your church. Let us take a test and see if your church has adopted the customs of the world.

- Does your church believe that divorce and remarriage is adultery?

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.
(1 Corinthians 7:39)

- Does your church think it is okay to date or court?

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (1 Timothy 5:1b-2)

- Does your church focus in on the family instead of teaching the married to live as though they are single?

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none. (1 Corinthians 7:29)

- Does your church teach that singles should not look for partners?

Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. (1 Corinthians 7:27b)

- Do the girls in your church dress modestly and boys unworldly?

I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes . . . (1 Timothy 2:9)

We do not have space to explore all these points in this publication. We will, however, see that if we hope to overcome sexual sin, we must embrace the standards of God, by the grace of God. Without grace, anyone under the Lord's wrath will commit adultery.

The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; he who is under the Lord's wrath will fall into it. (Proverbs 22:14)

From one-night stands to long term commitments, to divorce and remarriage, all those ripe for the judgment of hell-fire will fall into the deep pit of the adulteress' mouth. If this includes you, then realize that God provides warning and opportunity for mercy, if you repent.

OVERCOME SEXUAL SIN

There are only two ways to overcome sexual sin—neither are easy. Yet those who persevere will find the joy of restfulness in Christ. This rest allows those who overcome to sit at the feet of Jesus without lustful passions welling up in the mind or heart.

1. FLEE

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)

As you flee sexual immorality run toward righteousness in Jesus Christ. Those who stand still in an attempt to conquer lust will be overcome by sexual sin. Like Lot, who fled Sodom, the first step to overcoming sexual sin is to stop standing and start running. What we run to, however, is just as important. For example, the Bible tells youth what they must pursue.

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who

call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Give yourselves fully to these things and lust will not gain a permanent hold on you. You may stumble along the way, but you shall overcome. And every time you stumble, jump back up and keep on running. Confess to God and to men over and over again, until you know from the Holy Spirit that you can run with humble confidence in the Lord (James 5:16). As I now approach old age, I can tell you in the Lord that if you run, He is faithful and will enable you to overcome. After all, true grace does not excuse sin, but provides the power to say “No” to sin (see Titus 2:11).

2. YOU MUST SUFFER

Secondly, you must suffer on the cross Jesus will give you to carry each day. You must suffer in your body, feeling the struggle and the pain as grace empowers and demands you to say “No.” Running is hard work and as Paul wrote, we must strain toward the goal (Philippians 3:13–14). When dealing with sexual immorality you had better run the plan God gives you—don’t just beat the air (1 Corinthians 9:26).

There are no quick fixes to sexual sins. God’s grace, however, will cause you to suffer in your body with sin

so you can be “done with sin.” “As a result,” the following passage promises, we can then do the will of God instead of burning with lust. We have a choice as Peter said. We can choose to do what the “pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust” and other sins, or we can pick up a cross that causes us to suffer against sexual sin. If anyone offers you some other way to deal with sexual sin than this kind of cross, they are false prophets. Rebuke and avoid such teaching at all costs for it does not have the power to help.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. (1 Peter 4:1–3)

MUST LEARN

Controlling our bodies is a learning process. Note in the following passage that we must “avoid sexual immorality,” reminding us once again that we must run from sexual sins. Each person “should learn to control his own body.”

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God. (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5)

Run to the prayer closet and ask the Lord what causes you to stumble into sin. Look at yourself in the spiritual mirror and take note of the things that point you in a direction sexually (James 1:23–24). Be honest about your heart and your flesh and what things move your steps in a direction toward sexual sin. You will find and discover, with the Holy Spirit's help, the small things that cause you to burn with lust. Perhaps you have thoughts that you need to take captive, or there is something you like to look at, books, magazines, or even the company you keep. Even if they are members of your own church, family, or a special friend it is time to come to our senses about sexual sin and stop sinning.

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:33–34)

Jesus said if you can be trusted with little you can be trusted with much (Luke 16:10). The Holy Spirit will show you many times seemingly unrelated events that can set your lust into motion. Perhaps a rich meal and too much resting and relaxation causes your mind to drift off, where you end up in an ocean of lustful desires.

Without God's grace you will not overcome sexual sin—it is that simple. If you are unwilling to obey God in everything, do not expect Him to give you victory over sexual sins. God doesn't just deliver us from the sins we don't like, He seeks to make us wholly righteous. It requires complete surrender and without it no man will overcome (Revelations 21:7).

THE CHURCH

Unfortunately, the church has tried to sanitize sexual sin by calling dating courting, divorce and remarriage a “new beginning” and singleness a greater hardship than marriage. In short, the church refuses to tell brothers and sisters to crucify the desire to date, marry, and fulfill “normal” desires. No wonder so much sexual failure occurs within the church and among pastors today. When we play with small matches, we are bound to set something ablaze.

The empty dryness of today's church causes individuals to feel lonely and, in their mind, justify the need to marry. Or there is the old classic line that a man uses to marry a divorced woman—her children need a father

and so out of nobility he marries her. A church full of the love and purity of Jesus will accept neither one of these excuses. The church has been unfaithful to God's word, committing adultery with the world while it preaches from the Bible. It causes many to fall under judgment for spiritual adultery. If you desire to overcome and truly outrun sexual immorality, then seek the Lord, and only the Lord. Accept all of God's Word for what the Holy Spirit declares it to mean. Only those who flee and pick up their cross will be set free from the trap and chains of sexual sin. Only God grants grace to those who please Him.

I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. (Ecclesiastes 7:26)

ALL OTHER SINS

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)

Sinning sexually means we sin directly against God. We were made in God's image and when we use our

bodies to sin sexually, we are using the person of God to sin. All other sins are against others, but to sin sexually is to strike at God directly.

When we masturbate, we do so in the image of God and are therefore using God in an unholy manner. When those in the church dress in a way that draws attention to themselves, they are like Satan that wanted to use his beauty to be noticed. Let us then understand that God has given us a spirit of self-discipline and we should bring our bodies, from dress to behavior, under the discipline of grace.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)



SIGN OF AUTHORITY

Do you recall a time when women wore hats to church? Well, that tradition came from Scripture. Indeed, in the first Christian churches the women wore a covering on their heads. However, as the church watered down the gospel and sought to please the sin in men rather than calling them to repentance, this command died out.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about how they should conduct themselves during worship. Starting in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 going all the way to chapter 14, Paul talks about a few matters including the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, unity, love, and the need to remain

strong in the faith. While no church would say that we don't need to love one another, or that we shouldn't take the Lord's Supper, most say that women do not need to wear a sign of authority—or a covering—during church services. As we would expect with Christ, though, no command can be ignored except at great peril to our spiritual safety and salvation. God made it clear, through Paul's letter, that a woman must wear a sign of authority during a worship service.

...the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. (1 Corinthians 11:10b)

NOT CULTURAL

Now, we know what you are thinking. Everyone immediately thinks this is a cultural command. You may even have been taught that Paul wrote the command because he was addressing some local social problem. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Let's look at what Paul wrote a little more closely and in context, starting with what he wrote before this command.

For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. (1 Corinthians 11:10)

Paul declares that a woman should wear a sign of authority “because of the angels.” The angels were not some local problem. Every true church in Jesus has angels helping, watching, and serving over it. In fact, none of the reasons Paul lists, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had anything to do with the culture of the time. Indeed, a woman must wear a sign of authority because of the way God made the universe. Let’s look at the main reasons why a woman should wear a sign of authority.

Christ is above every man. No one would say this is a cultural statement, but a simple fact regarding how God arranged not only the universe, but the heavens themselves. And, just as Christ is above every man, so God declared that man is the head over woman. Unless you want to say that God is not the head of Christ, you cannot say that women should not wear coverings.

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

If that were not enough, Paul gives another irrefutable fact—woman came from man. When God made Eve, the first woman, He did so by taking some of Adam. Again, this is no cultural matter, but a fundamental truth of creation.

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man. (1 Corinthians 11:8)

Woman was created for man. Paul strikes at the heart of why both women and men do not want a woman to wear a sign of authority. God did not make woman to live her life fulfilling her dreams, ambitions, and desires, but to help man fulfill his. God made the woman to be man's helpmate.

...neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Corinthians 11:9)

LONG HAIR

People often claim the Bible tells us that long hair is the covering—another classic excuse for not wearing a sign of authority. This is simply not the case, though. Paul actually wrote of long hair as being one more proof that a woman should wear a sign of authority. God gave woman long hair at creation. It is the original covering He created her with, and therefore a sign of authority is not needed outside the church. Long hair (and, of course, every Christian woman should have long hair) acts as a covering for her daily life. After the fall and the cross, however, God requires women to wear a sign of authority demonstrating to the angels and others that men are back in their true position of headship in the church.

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. (1 Corinthians 11:13–15)

So, people now say, “See, long hair is a covering.” Yet Paul used every argument he could to show that a sign of authority is needed in church. For example, if I wanted to prove that the earth is round, I might point out that the moon is also round, showing the natural state of things. However, that doesn’t mean the earth is the same size, or is full of craters like the moon. Paul pointed to woman’s original covering to support his point that she now needs another covering—a sign of authority in the church. He used one fact to prove another fact. Finally, we know that hair is not the covering because of 1 Corinthians 11:5.

And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. (1 Corinthians 11:5)

Obviously, Paul is referring to the lack of another covering in saying it is “just as though her head were

shaved.” For in saying “as though her head were shaved,” he makes the point that in reality her head is not shaved. Again, if this were not true, the passage would make no sense. Paul would have said something illogical like; “Every woman who prays or prophesies with a bald head—it is just as though her head were shaved.” Such a sentence would not be the work of a sane man, but a madman.

We know these women had hair on their heads because of verse six. Paul says if a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off. But if the woman has no hair on her head, how can it be cut off?

If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. (1 Corinthians 11:6)

Also, if hair truly is the covering then every man should shave his head bald. For it is a sin for man to pray with his head covered. This is why the Jewish Yarmulke is sin in God’s sight.

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. (1 Corinthians 11:7)

Whatever you may think about this topic, when a

woman prays with her head uncovered she dishonors Jesus Christ and the men in her church. She “dishonors her head.” Remember, Christ is the head of man and man the head of woman. Therefore, godly men and Christ become one head over women. Indeed, a woman’s head is certainly Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ has said that if she prays with her head uncovered, He is dishonored.

A SIGN

Let us remember that we are talking about a “sign of authority.” Something out of the ordinary that demonstrates to all, even angels, that women are in submission to men. Young’s Literal Greek translation puts it this way.

Because of this the woman ought to have a token of authority upon the head, because of the messengers. (1 Corinthians 11:10, ylt)

The word “token” provides a perfect definition for this passage. It means, “something serving as an indication, a proof, or an expression of something else; a sign.” The sign of authority is “proof, or an expression” of what lies in the heart. Non-Christian women in the world often have long hair—but for reasons of vanity, not godliness. This is why God requires a second covering during worship. Remember what we saw earlier? God made man and woman with their “natural” hair length—short

for man, long for woman—as a symbol of their inward spirituality and submission to His design. When we fell, so did those symbols and our acceptance of His plans. When a woman returns to the Lord, she returns to her God-given spiritual status. This new covering symbolizes her joyful submission to God. It represents that she once again accepts the authority of men as God first established. A sign of authority should not cover a woman's face, because we have a greater covenant than Moses. He had to cover his face because the "radiance" of the Old Covenant faded away (2 Corinthians 3:13). In other words, none of us have to cover our faces because, as part of the New Covenant, we have freedom through Christ to seek the face of God.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

For a woman, the sign of authority means that she is in submission to the men in the church, that she understands a woman must not teach or have authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:11–14), that she should be silent in the churches, and when she does speak in church it is only with permission from the male leaders. In fact, it is the covering that gives a woman an opportunity to pray, fellowship, and speak.

A sign of authority is not some fluffy, cute command that women obey to receive blessings. Because of woman's sin in the Garden of Eden, God requires Christian women today to wear a sign of authority. This is the offensive message of the cross and to wear a covering for any other reason is total sin. Certainly, it is a joy for women who wear it in faith as part of the crucified life, but only for those who truly admit their sinfulness and surrender to this loving discipline from God.

NO OTHER PRACTICE

If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:16)

In every New Testament church, except for the one in Corinth, the women wore coverings. It didn't matter if it was Rome, Spain, Athens, Israel, Colosse, Philippi, Ephesus, or any other culture, all Christian women wore a sign of authority. Only the Corinthian church became puffed up in pride and rebelled. As Paul stated, all the "churches of God" practiced these things. Simply, there was "no other practice." This was Paul's final proof. Therefore, all contention or objection to obeying what he wrote about this issue should be totally silenced. Yet many today say Paul meant that there was no practice of coverings in these other churches. What pure foolishness! This would

mean that Paul took the time to give commands about the Lord's Supper, love, spiritual gifts and more, but in the case of coverings he ended by saying, "Never mind, skip it. No other church practices these things." Again, to hold to this view makes Paul out to be some kind of whimsical madman.

In reality, Paul was so serious about these matters—from coverings to the proper use of spiritual gifts—that he declared if anyone ignores these directions, that person must be ignored.

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. (1 Corinthians 14:33–38)

It doesn't matter if they are a preacher, elder, leader, or your favorite brother or sister. If they ignore everything Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11 through 14, you must ignore them. You cannot speak to them, listen to their

sermons, or read their books. They must be ignored. If any woman will not wear a sign of authority in church, if any church will not require and teach that all women should wear a sign of authority, then they must be fully, completely, and totally “ignored”—just as Paul wrote.

IF YOU ARE A VISITOR

While this command is a clear requirement of God, it is very far from being “legalism.” The need to love is also a requirement of Jesus. We do not want visitors to wear a sign of authority just because you worship with us. Rather, we encourage you to seek the Lord, surrender to Him, and begin to wear a sign of authority in the joy of the Holy Spirit. For it is by faith and God’s grace that we obey all the things Jesus commanded. For, as Romans 1:5 says, this is an “obedience that comes from faith.”

KILL THE EASTER BUNNY

Here comes Peter Cottontail, Hopping down the bunny trail, Hippity hoppity, Easter's on its way. These words do not come from a spiritual hymn that the Holy Spirit inspired the church to sing on Easter Sunday. Nor does God look with any amount of pleasure at our chocolate bunnies and colored eggs. God only accepts religion that keeps us from the pollution of the world.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows

in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

We have forgotten that God does not desire for the church to learn the ways of other religions. The true church of Jesus totally destroys all other religions, customs, and ways of worship, and replaces them with the good news of God. Time and time again God would destroy, judge, and reject His people because they adopted the customs of other nations. They mixed their idols with the worship of Him, just as we combine today an Easter Bunny with the resurrection of Jesus.

They did not destroy the peoples as the Lord had commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. (Psalms 106:34–35)

The church, publishing houses, ministries, and pastor after pastor embrace Easter as if it were God's holiday. But as Nelson's Bible dictionary informs us, "Easter was originally a pagan festival honoring Eostre, a Teutonic goddess of light and spring. The only appearance of the word Easter (KJV) is a mistranslation of pacha, the Greek word for 'Passover' (Acts 12:4)." Which brings us to our main point, Jesus rose from the dead after the Passover, not on Easter day. Easter originates from

the Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, honored on the day of the vernal equinox (spring). Contrary to what we want to celebrate and believe, Christ did not resurrect on “Easter” morning. Traditions such as the Easter rabbit, symbols of fertility, and colored Easter eggs come from this pagan worship.

FIRST FRUITS

Jesus rose from the dead on the day of First Fruits. Passed down from Old Testament times, this Jewish holy day gives Christians not something to obey as Law, but to rejoice in. In other words, Jesus rose from the dead and offered God a first fruit sacrifice. Jesus, first risen from the dead, offered God a first fruit of the resurrection that will occur at the end. As the Scripture below demonstrates.

The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. (Matthew 27:52-53)

The feast of Unleavened Bread proceeds the day prior to First Fruits. A very important point because unleavened bread symbolizes in Scripture an offering without the yeast of sin. When we combine colored eggs, chocolate bunnies, fun, and games with God’s holy days we

add in the yeast of sin. And it is impossible for those in Christ to carry their cross and feed their flesh at the same time. The cross demands a killing of all the flesh and sin. Christians must be a people crucified to the world. In other words, Christians cannot drink the cup of demons and the cup of God at the same time. Why the church thinks it is stronger than the Lord is amazing.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:21–22)

The cross does not work out a compromise with the world, especially in the matters of worship. To teach children to search for hidden Easter eggs, eat chocolate bunnies, and marshmallow chickens in the name of Jesus only serves to blaspheme the holy name of God. This especially becomes clear when we read in the New Testament that we should be a people separate from the world—especially in matters of worship.

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. (2 Corinthians 6:17)

First Fruits is one of the most exciting days God gave

us. Jesus rose from the dead yet the church defiles it with food and fun, treating the blood of Jesus in a contemptible way. Repeated yearly by Christians, it reflects the golden calf worship that Moses so thoroughly judged Israel for celebrating. Notice that Moses' brother, Aaron, fashioned a golden calf, just as we fashion a hopping bunny today, and then he announced a festival to the Lord. There is no difference between the two concepts, except the church of today should act wiser because we can read in the Bible about Israel's golden calf idol worship.

He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." (Exodus 32:4–5, emphasis added)

VIOLENT PREACHERS

How literally astonishing that with all the Bible schools, colleges, commentaries, and ministries, the Christian community cannot even set one simple fact straight—Easter is a pagan holiday and First Fruits is a Christian one. This ignorance occurs only because our flesh still loves the party atmosphere of the world. We love the world with its fun times of Easter egg hunts, cheesy

songs, and of course food. Our hearts remain hard toward the Word of God and we would rather express spiritual truths with worldly words than the way God commands we should speak and worship (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Violence rages from the pulpits of today. Preacher after preacher rips and shreds the Bible, tearing it to pieces to justify anything as coming from the Lord. The most worldly of movies are made to seem as reflecting Jesus. Books written about finding Jesus, fashioned in the latest fad and entertainment of the world, fill the Christian stores. The real violence in the land is the fact that there is no difference between the holy and the common, in the church. The church is so cold it cannot tell the difference between a bunny and a risen Christ, between the word Easter and First Fruits. Between the world and worship.

Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. (Ezekiel 22:26)

This profaning of God's Word and holy things certainly sells the merchandise and draws the crowds, but God will destroy churches that hold Easter egg hunts. This violence against God knows no limits. A recent children's book in the Christian market depicts a picture on its first pages of a grouchy, unloving Christian telling

others that the Easter bunny is wrong. A church stands in the background, while puzzled Christian adults scowl and children leave in fear and dismay. The book continues expounding whitewash to combine the Easter Bunny with the resurrection of Jesus.

“Self-righteous” Christian rebukes the Easter bunny in a children’s book!

If such a justification is possible then Christians might as well smoke pot during church. After all, God gave us the marijuana plant and it can help everyone to relax and feel more freedom in Christ. This book ends with the children’s father eating a chocolate bunny and stating, “And since God made both bunnies and food, I think I’ll have a little bite too.”

Can you hear the echoes of Aaron and the golden calf? “‘Yes,’ Aaron agreed. ‘And since God made both cows and food, I think I’ll have a little bite, too.’ And he did.”

Think of how Satan mocks Peter the great apostle with the song, “Here comes Peter cottontail hopping down the bunny trail.” Children hear this song and then hear hymns of the cross. Have we forgotten the words of Jesus to guard against causing little ones to stumble? Let the church regain its saltiness and rebuke those attending church only on this day, allowing no mocker to enter into the church on that most holy of days.

KILL THE EASTER BUNNY

Let us zealously kill the Easter Bunny and replace it with the wisdom and purity of God. Let us grow in the knowledge of the Lord, full of wisdom about the Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the First Fruit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat—that is all you may do. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a

*lasting ordinance for the generations to come.
(Exodus 12:12–17)*

Let us surpass Moses whom God commanded to build the Tabernacle exactly according to His plan and will.

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” (Hebrews 8:5)

Jesus, not a bunny, provides the “exact representation of his being.” Let us love God enough to display and worship the Majesty of heaven in complete holiness. Let us do so in the richest of love, for we lose nothing in giving up the idols of the world. After all, when we enter heaven, we shall see the radiant face of the Son of God, not a bunny rabbit.

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided

purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:3)

WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE MUSIC?

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Psalms 119:105)

Alot of opinions are aired about what is acceptable Christian music. Rather than frame our discussion by human logic let us look at God's Word—for it is the Word of God that will light our path, and the Bible declares that only a fool delights in airing his own opinion (Proverbs 18:2).

We accept unholy music because we measure music by what we like—what feels good to us. Our flesh likes

what we hear and therefore labels it holy. So often in a discussion of what is acceptable music, arguments are the only result. This happens because each individual's flesh is attracted to different styles of music, and they are unwilling to surrender their tastes to the Lord. We must return to the cross, being crucified to what our flesh likes and dislikes, and discover the desires of Christ. This is what Paul means when he declares that he has been "crucified with Christ." Dead men are dead to their likes and dislikes. Only as we become crucified to our ears, will we have the ears of Christ—ears that listen only to what the Father finds pleasing and pure. Jesus did not come to please Himself but to please God, and we must follow Jesus' footsteps even in things like music. Bottom line, we must hate the kind of music we like. We are to be a people crucified to the kind of music that attracts us. This is the kind of hatred for our own life that Jesus calls all His disciples to (John 12:25).

God created music so that we might joyfully fulfill the greatest commandment. God invented music so that the soul, spirit, and body of man would all come into unity to praise

Him. Nothing moves all of a man like music. This is why music is so powerful and personal. Men will argue with great emotion over music because all of a man is involved. Music is able to move men to tears and nations to war. Music even calms the demon oppressed (1 Samuel 16:23).

In Exodus 32, the people of God built a golden calf in the name of the Lord. They became "corrupt" in their

worship of God just as the worship leaders and musicians of our day have become corrupt (Exodus 32:7). Worship has become the code word for entertainment in so many situations.

Today the church tolerates and whitewashes all manner of ungodly music, performed in the name of Jesus—and, just as Aaron did, there are plenty of individuals who will tack on the name of the Lord in order to justify fleshly desires.

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” (Exodus 32:5, emphasis added)

It is not the tune, style, or instrument that is sin, but how they are arranged. All must reflect the order, seriousness, and purity of a holy God. One cannot just tack on the name of Jesus as Aaron did with the golden calf without being judged by God. Some hymns may have come from bar tunes, but by the time the saints of old were done, no one would sing them in a bar.

However, we must test what is done in the name of the Lord by Scripture. In this short space, we list just a few basic guidelines. For we do not want to be a people that are full of “meaningless talk” concerning what is acceptable music to the Lord. Rather, we must have a true love for God “which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” and so be able to discern

what is holy and unholy (Ezekiel 22:26).

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. (1 Timothy 1:5–6)

1. MUSIC MUST LEAVE AS MUCH ROOM AS POSSIBLE FOR THE SOUL TO EXPRESS ITSELF.

Most artists write music to move the flesh and then the soul. Music should be written from a position of being on the cross—then it will not move the flesh to sin. This is why God tells us to first make music in our “heart” before using instruments.

We must first “speak” words of psalms, hymns, and spirituals songs to “one another.” No lights, no loud music, no fine playing bands, eloquent voices, nothing but normal conversation. A godly service certainly has no worship leaders psyching the crowds up, or musicians giving the people whatever kind of entertainment or worship they want. In a godly church everyone first speaks Scriptures and other spiritual things to each other before ever singing. Their hearts fill up with the Word of God, by way of a crucified life, and the worship directs

what bursts forth from their hearts. It is nothing less than crucified flesh being overcome by the joy of a pure heart. A far cry from what we see happening today.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:19)

After we're done speaking, the "heart" should be moved to "make music" to the Lord on its own. The responsibility of every music leader is to make certain that, however a musical instrument is used, it only brings out the music of the heart that flows first from speaking to one another in song. Any song or music that comes to man outwardly and then moves the heart is fleshly and wrong.

A Christian's music should be alien and strange to the ungodly. In short, they shouldn't like it. When individuals use music to draw the world, they actually become enemies of God (James 4:4). While it is true that Jesus sat with sinners, it is not true that He sinned while sitting down. Whenever a musician seeks to "cross over" they lose the cross of Christ and all the power of the gospel.

2. THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE MUST NOT LOOK LIKE THE WORLD.

It is a lie to say that God doesn't care what is on the outside, that He only looks at the heart. God, who created your soul, used the same love to create your body. Dress, hair, manners, conversation, all that other men see should reflect the glory of God. Anything that draws attention to ourselves, whether body piercing, tattoos, or hair length and styles, rebels against the Word of God and defies His glory. Not only is there no agreement between the temple of God and idols, but even a casual reading of Scripture clearly declares we are not to mark our bodies, dress in such a way as to draw attention to ourselves, or have hair length that is contrary to God's will. In all that the Holy Spirit guides us to do, it will reflect the cross that is dead to the styles of this world and the glamour of pointing to self.

"Therefore come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:17)

Everything a musician does should confirm the preceding Scripture; becoming "separate" and touching "no unclean thing." If you don't leave a concert and walk away saying to yourself, "That is different from the world," then

it is not of Jesus. Any concert in the name of Jesus should not have the smoke, lights, volume, and dress of the world. We are called to purify ourselves from outward things that “contaminate” the “body” (2 Corinthians 7:1) and ways of playing music that defile the “spirit.” Indeed, if music is so loud that it harms the ears, it is a sin against the body God gave us (1 Corinthians 3:17).

3. ALL SONGS MUST REFLECT THE GLORY OF GOD.

Every song should speak of Jesus. In “word or deed” every song must speak clearly of Jesus and the glory of God. Whether in psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs, if a person can’t understand that the song speaks of Jesus then it is unacceptable in God’s ears.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:16–17)

4. THE MUSICIANS MUST NOT BE PREACHING THEMSELVES.

Drop by the web site of Christian musicians, or look at their album covers, and you will see all manner of spiritual insanity. They seek the applause of man and point to themselves in all that they do. They sing in their own name and are accepted by so many because the audience likes the fact that they really sing about themselves. Listeners recognize that the singers are merely using God to glorify themselves—and that appeals to their flesh. Jesus revealed this truth when He walked on earth.

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. (John 5:43)

This is why Paul speaks of his ministry in these terms.

*For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
(2 Corinthians 4:5)*

All awards and approval of men must be utterly rejected. For music to be acceptable to God we must remove the Dove Awards. No more clapping between

songs, no more discussion of how many like the music. The music and musicians must reflect the heart of Jesus that did “not accept praise from men.”

I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. (John 5:41–42)

5. MUSIC MUST NEVER BE USED FOR EVANGELISM.

God never ordained music to be used to as a tool for today’s so-called evangelism. Music was always meant for worship. Using music for evangelism is to sing songs to demons and wicked men, and to lure the most unholy and unrepentant into our temples. Think about it. What interest does unrepentant man have in the words of worship in our songs? The only thing that draws them is the beat and style of music or the fact that the words have no depth. We are called to warn men, not to entertain them. We are to teach them to fear God, not give them something that pleases their flesh (2 Corinthians 5:11, Acts 2:40). It is never right for unrepentant men, or disobedient Christians, to sing to a holy God (Psalm 50:16). Music must never be used to make a situation, it must never move us, but we move it as it flows from the heart. And it should never please the flesh, but help

us overcome it. It is the world that uses music to set the mood.

Christians are people that use music to reflect the Scriptures that are in their hearts, just as the crowds did when they received Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus didn't send in music to work up the crowds, rather they expressed, without His help, what was in their hearts (John 12:13). And Paul never sent in a band to soften things up before he preached. Rather, both preached repentance and got persecuted.

When we create a style of music to draw the world, we become like the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In other words, only their flesh is drawn, just as man's flesh was lured to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If we use music to call the worldly to church, we might as well give away free beer. This is why Paul declares that we cannot eat at the table of demons and the table of the Lord at the same time (1 Corinthians 10:21). If true holiness flowed from our concerts, men would be convicted of sin or spurred onto more holiness. The beat would be lost to the sound of repentance and righteousness.

All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks

to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang: “He is good; his love endures forever.” Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God. (2 Chronicles 5:12–14)

CONCLUSION

True righteousness and purity cannot be hidden (1 Timothy 5:25), but that which falls short must be explained and justified with much debate. Men like to cloud the issue with words so that they don't have to obey God. Before we ever listen to a song, or pick up an instrument, let righteousness flow like a “never-failing stream.” Until then “away with the noise of your songs” and your justifications.

Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (Amos 5:23–24)



GOD IS TO BLAME

Cancer, accidents, war, injustice, poverty, work, hunger, misery, pain, crime, fevers, and disease are ever present and ever around us. God created death, and limits the number of days a man may live. Whatever handicaps or limitations you have, God takes responsibility for it. The Lord said to Moses, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11).

In the midst of this suffering God sent His Son, Jesus, to tell us that God is love. But how can God be love when He permits, allows, or sends so much evil into our lives?

What you are about to read will not seem pleasant, but is nevertheless the truth. A truth that, if accepted, leads to joy—eternal joy. In fact, it is better to feel sorrowful than happy. Because in reality, in this life there isn't much to feel happy about and it is good to take that truth to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:3)

A lot of people blame God for the misery in their lives, and they are correct. God is to blame. No matter how you look at it, God is responsible for the pain and suffering in the world. He has either set into motion the pain we feel, or He has permitted it to happen. Take the example below. God allows accidents to occur.

Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. (Exodus 21:12–13)

However, responsibility for pain doesn't mean guilt. God did no wrong in creating and allowing pain and has some very good and justified reasons. A serious look at the world around us causes us to conclude that mankind is under a heavy burden. A burden God says He has “laid on men.”

I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! (Ecclesiastes 1:13)

As we just read, God laid this heavy burden on man and as a result, unleashed Satan on the world; a Devil that torments man and causes even more pain and suffering. After all, God kicked us out of the Garden of Eden and allowed Satan to do his evil works. In fact, the Bible tells us that God takes responsibility for bringing disaster on cities.

When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? (Amos 3:6)

Finally, the list of evils ends with the fact of death. All life ends in death and each day brings us one hour closer to our time of death. Death may take some by surprise, yet everyone at one point must leave behind all they hold dear in this world.

If God is a God of love, why does He permit and work so many troubles in the world? What are we to make of wars, accidents, famines, and crimes? What should we make of a God who allows injustice and seems so quiet and disinterested in the sufferings of this world?

THE CORRECT QUESTION

The answer is found in asking the correct question. For the question isn't, why does God allow evil, but why doesn't God permit more evil to enter your life? The allowance of evil by God is only understood in the context of hell, the lake of burning sulfur where all but a very few who go to heaven will be tormented day and night for eternity. Where a billion years is only the start of torment.

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)

Most understand that the Hitlers and tyrants of this world deserve hell, but few understand that they are also worthy of damnation. Those who count themselves as Christians fail to embrace the misery in their lives as God's discipline (Hebrews 12:7). But a clear understanding of hell clarifies why God allows or sends bad things.

For the sake of argument let the reader assume that he or she is worthless and will end up in the lake of fire or hell, or if a Christian, is in need of discipline. If we accept this fact then we can easily see why God allows all manner of bad things to happen in our lives. God demonstrates an act of the deepest mercy when He permits an individual to experience hardships now rather than instantly to be thrown into hell. For every bad thing that happens

only serves to warn us that we will be judged for the vile, worthless beings that we have made ourselves. Or if a Christian, the need to more adequately die to self.

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Romans 3:12)

God is like a judge who condemns an evil man to death, but delays the execution for years, hoping the condemned man becomes truly sorrowful for his crime. In other words, no matter what your condition or belief in this life, we receive far less than we really deserve. Simply stated, each person is worthy of hell just as much as Hitler. This tract cannot possibly answer every question about why God allows evil, but it can make clear the reason why He does not punish you for your sins right now—He desires to show you mercy. God delayed your death sentence to allow time for you to admit that you deserve far worse than you have received up until now. Those who have experienced God's mercy know this to be true (Psalm 103:10).

Right now, God holds back evil. Most people sense that the world is falling apart and, as lawlessness increases, mankind will soon destroy itself. As the following passage reveals, God holds back wickedness until no hope remains that anyone will repent. Indeed, God holds you back from the evil desires that hide in your heart. Think for a moment what would happen if you could act

upon every thought and desire you have. We refuse to realize how evil we are and cannot see that even our acts of kindness are wicked (Proverbs 12:10).

For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

To be clear, if God permitted man complete free reign, mankind would have destroyed itself long, long ago.

If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. (Mark 13:20)

So, the real question is, why does God allow bad things to happen? For you see, bad things don't happen to good people, because there are no good people.

INJUSTICE

This concept, that God is to blame, will grow tougher to accept, but we must look at life honestly if we want to discover a God of infinite love. Now, do not let the reader misunderstand. wherever there is injustice, wrongdoing,

or wherever one man harms another, we must demand and deliver justice. True Christians never turn their backs on injustice, sickness, or heartache. Indeed, we weep like Jesus did at the tomb of Lazarus, knowing He would, in a few minutes, raise him from the dead. We too must weep with those who face injustice and hurt with those who suffer.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept. (John 11:32–35)

Justice in the world is at best a shallow victory. We cannot deny our powerlessness to stop most suffering and even more to stop injustice. We cannot right wrongs that have been committed against others in the past and make right the wrongs we have done to others to any worthwhile measure. In short, we cannot possibly straighten out a fully twisted and corrupt world. Only God can do that, and this brings us to the hope in God.

God can and does desire to right every wrong, and wipe away every tear. Mark these words down, whatever suffering, wrongs, or pains we face in this world, God will make it more than right. You just have to give God a

little faith and time. In the context of eternity our current pains are short matters. And the God who is pure joy, peace, and love can comfort and heal to such a degree that we will forget we ever faced troubles.

The first step to this peace is found in accepting one more fact. God placed you in your life situation; your country, state, and city with the people around you, whether good or bad for one reason. The address where you were born was determined by God before the world began. As the Scripture below tells us, God “determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.
(Acts 17:26–27)

In other words, God put you at your address for a specific reason—that you might cry out to Him. Hell is so serious, sin so deadly, life so short, and death so sure that God didn’t just let you be born at a whim. Rather He boxed your life in so that you might, in your misery, seek Him. In the greatest of love, God hopes that you will see your plight, admit the truth that you need a loving God, and therefore seek Him. God permits every accident,

every sickness, every crime, every injustice, and every sinful thing you do that you might seek out the true God. The Lord is so loving that, for a brief moment, He withholds His wrath against us because He longs to forgive us our crimes. Let no one guess as to why God permits the bad things He does—God does this because He wants to spare us from the lake of fire.

PEACE

To understand all of this we must look at time in the context of eternity. Our time here on earth is but a second compared to eternity. When we think of God allowing evil or injustice we must think from God's viewpoint. To God, evil and injustice last but a millisecond. In reality, in the context of eternity, His justice is immediate. God simply allows this brief second to give you and me a chance to repent so that we do not suffer hell. You see, you and I deserve hell. Allowing evil allows us the opportunity to sin instead of God immediately, righteously judging us.

Just because others die more quickly, or in some more severe fashion doesn't mean they are more guilty than you. One reason God allows evils to happen around us is, in His wisdom, He knows who to judge first so that others might take notice and repent of their sins.

Or those eighteen who died when the tower in

Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. (Luke 13:4–5)

Therefore evil, sickness, discipline, and injustice occur in the world so that we might humble ourselves, and see our need to repent.

If you want the mercy, peace, and joy that God offers through Jesus then consider becoming a disciple of Jesus. For in Jesus you will find a God of overwhelming love and mercy; a God of love that will more than answer your doubts and questions. So, stop, soften your heart, humble yourself and get down on your knees, surrender to what God is working, and ask Jesus what He is trying to teach you.

Those who surrender to God, whether Christian or atheist, embracing and learning from evils God allows, will proclaim, “The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him” (Psalms 92:15).

20

HOLY CHRISTMAS

The word Christmas comes from “Christ Mass,” a holy time to thank God for His son, Jesus. Notice, however, that it must be a holy time. Holy means to be separated unto God. And being holy means to separate from the sinfulness of the world. In fact, to be holy in God’s sight, each Christian must “come out” and “be separate” from the unclean things in the world.

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. (2 Corinthians 6:17)

In order for a Christian's worship of Jesus to be pure on December 25, it must be distinct from the world and according to the Bible. After all, it is the birthday of Jesus we celebrate and we should want to bring gifts that please Him. The first gift we should offer to Jesus is purity. Let us read more of the Scripture about coming out and being separate.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. (2 Corinthians 6:14–16)

This is very clear. When we combine the traditions, patterns, and religions of the world with our worship of Jesus, we sin. In short, you cannot have an evergreen tree, gluttony, self-indulgent gifts, entertainment, and idolatry of the family alongside celebrating the birth of Jesus. The Israelites tried mixing all of these things together and stirred up judgment from an angry God. Notice in the following passage, however, that the Israelites built an idol in the name of the Lord.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt.” (Exodus 32:1–7, emphasis added)

Looks just like Christmas doesn’t it? They gave up their gold to buy a golden calf. They “rose early” and got church out of the way so that they could sit down to eat and drink. Just like today, they had offerings, prayers,

tithes, and hymn singing. They gave God “fellowship of offerings,” no doubt saying that they loved Him and wanted to serve Him.

God called them a “corrupt” people who merely used His name to indulge their sinful desires, just as the church does today. The church is corrupt in its worship of Jesus on December 25, indulging the flesh while enticing others who would not normally attend church to join in and sing unto God. Instead of preaching that all are under the judgment of God, the church feeds their bellies and has a party before a holy God. Proving, once again, that the real god in the church today is people’s stomach (Philippians 3:19).

We have forgotten something about God’s mercy and peace, and this error is clearly reflected in our Christmas cards. Those cards often say, “Peace to all men,” and end there. But that is not what Scripture actually says. God declared peace to men “on whom his favor rests.”

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:12–14, emphasis added)

And God’s favor certainly does not rest on those who act unholy on December 25. For God only accepts a faith that is obedient, and unpolluted by the world (Romans

1:5, James 1:27; 2:18).

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Like the idolaters of old, people today bring a tree into their homes and churches—following the customs of the world. After all, Christmas originated from a pagan celebration of the winter solstice. In Rome, the Feast of Unconquerable Sun turned into a celebration of the birth of Jesus, after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This borderline unimportant fact underscores the truth that God never commanded us to worship Him with an evergreen tree (Deuteronomy 12:4). The church made an unholy compromise between the world and Jesus. In doing so, it became an enemy of God—as does every church, Christian, ministry, or group today that combines the customs of the world with worshipping God.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Just read the Scripture below and you will see clearly how it sounds just like our Christmas trees. Just as Jeremiah warned, the church has learned from the world. It learned how to celebrate the birth of Jesus on December

25th from the world, and it is total sin.

Hear what the Lord says to you, O house of Israel. This is what the Lord says: “Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter.” (Jeremiah 10:1–4)

The choice is clear—the cross or the Christmas tree. Although we claim the star on the top of the tree points to God, we still bow down to get our gifts. This is the very heart of idolatry, to bow down to something in order to get what we want. After all, it is supposed to be Jesus’ birthday, not yours! Whoever heard of going to a birthday party and bringing a gift for yourself? Just try that with one of your friends and see what kind of reception you receive. Arrive early with a big present and tell the person having the birthday party that the gift is for you. If your friends will not praise you for this, why do you expect God to accept your Christmas “gifts”? If you want to give gifts to Jesus at Christmas, here is Jesus’ wish list:

First, do not invite your family over for dinner.

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a

luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.” (Luke 14:12)

Show an attitude of hating and despising money. In other words, don’t care anything about presents, Christmas bonuses, or days off.

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Luke 16:13)

Give all your presents to Jesus by giving your gifts away to the poor. Tell others that whatever they plan to give, that you will give it to the poor who need it more.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:33–34)

Make sure all cold or lukewarm worshippers of God

are thoroughly rebuked and not allowed to come to church on December 25. That only those who plan to repent, coming to church all year long, loving God and others deeply will be permitted through the door.

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. (Ephesians 5:5–7)

Spend time fasting and praying rather than feasting and indulging the flesh with food, sports, and relaxation. Fast from all the anxiety that comes from the preparation for Christmas.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. (Luke 21:34)

These are only a few gift suggestions. You can, of course, find many more suggestions in the Bible.

WHICH CUP?

God wants us to choose from which cup we want to drink. Either we drink fully from the cup of demons, or from the cup of the Lord. All others, who are lukewarm, will be spit out of the mouth of Jesus.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:21–22)

God will never tolerate a church that takes on the customs of the world and tries to worship Him with those customs. As we saw earlier in Ephesians 5:5, such impure Christians have absolutely no share in heaven.

They worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought. (2 Kings 17:33)

True Christians have their own customs in righteousness and purity. True Christians abstain from pleasing their sinful desires on December 25. For this reason, Peter pointed out that they are aliens and strangers in

this world.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

Let us admit the truth. In reality we do not celebrate Christmas but Commerce Day; a time of indulgence, money, buying, selling, eating, drinking, and pleasing oneself. Even those who do something “charitable” at Christmas usually only do so to ease their guilty consciences. The “Christian” publishing world uses Santa Clause (Satan Claws) to sell its books, cards, videos, candies, and gift assortments. Instead of a time when disciples hate their own lives (John 12:25), Christmas is a time of vile corruption in the name of Jesus. May we leave our fleshly customs behind, and celebrate a holy Christ mass.

21

A WHISPER REVIVAL

TOO LATE FOR AMERICA

We can expect no revival for America. Anyone telling you that America will experience revival, declares a false prophecy. There are two reasons for this.

The first is that we are at the point of no return.

The sin of the American church is so great that God could not find enough individuals to work revival. No amount of prayer will bring a large-scale revival. In fact,

it is a sin to pray for America's blessing. Such prayers are not the will of God and do not flow from the Holy Spirit.

So the Lord said to me, “Do not pray for the welfare of this people. When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them. Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence.”
(Jeremiah 14:11–12)

The second reason is this time era.

The time period we live in does not allow for the kind of revival we expect. We will look at this in greater depth, but the birth pangs grow closer together and every true Christian should sense and understand the meaning of this.

But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (Matthew 24:8)

HYPOCRITES

“You hypocrites!” Jesus exclaimed because the people did not understand the time in which they lived. God uniquely designed every generation before the world began. Each time period in history poses its own

problems and holds its own promises. God did this so that each generation will cry out to Him rather than make the repeat of history their idol (Ecclesiastes 7:10). Indeed, as you read the New Testament, notice how Jesus healed the same illnesses but used different methods. God works differently in each generation so we will look to Him.

So too, we must understand the time period in which we live so that we are not taken in by false doctrine. We must understand God's last call to revival before all of hell breaks loose.

And He was also saying to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming,’ and so it turns out. And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, ‘It will be a hot day,’ and it turns out that way. You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?” (Luke 12:54–56)

We cannot gain the blessing of revival unless we realize how Jesus wants to come to each of us. Failure to realize what will bring us true peace today ensures the destruction of our religious world. Our Jerusalem will be torn down brick by brick.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he

wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Luke 19:41–44)

THE WHISPER REVIVAL

If you want revival, true revival in your life, there is hope. A whisper revival is possible. You will, however, have to become very quiet to experience and hold onto it. If you want the Holy Spirit to work this revival in you, then in simple humility, quietly surrender all to God. You must not look for revival in large groups, but in each individual. And you must know the one thing to look for that shows true revival.

True revival will not be advertised, promoted, or shouted. It will not come with or because of grand works, loud prayers, and zealous applications of rules and principles. The very minute you do that, the Holy Spirit will stop the work. God wants to lead us to the “quiet waters.” Don’t fight the Lord as He tries to lead you to the “quiet

waters” where you might honestly find revival.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters... (Psalm 23:2)

A quiet revival shatters, blesses, and changes one’s whole life, but it begins and ends with a whisper. The whisper will totally lay bare all of your church worship, your good deeds, and Christian walk. This same kind of revival took place in the book of Kings. Though you think yourself an Elijah, you too will hide your face. Even if your ministry is known as one of those tough talking ministries, you will discover you have left out the nails that come with the cross. For after the “fire” of Pentecost, at the start of the new church, comes the “gentle whisper.”

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:11–13)

For too long the church has deluded itself into thinking it stands on holy ground. Everything around us is deeply wicked. Therefore, it is easy to look holy in Sodom or appear pure compared to Jezebel.

Like Elijah, people in the church look for God in earthquakes, fire, wind, and the shattering of rocks. They believe themselves to be the only ones undefiled, because they cannot see the hidden servants of God. Like Elijah, they stay too busy looking at the loud and flashy things in the church to notice the 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to self. Like Elijah, they feel so correct, so on fire in the Lord, that they do not realize they stand where they should not be. They are blind to the fact that they too have fallen prey to the loud works and strivings of the flesh. Like Elijah, God asks the church how it arrived where it is at today. In other words, “What are you doing here...?”

If you want your eyes opened to see those hidden in God, then you must listen for the whisper of God. If you want to fellowship with true followers of God in our time, then you must sit down and become quiet with them as they worship the Lord, for whisper revival brings quiet and sober worship. Again, the times in which we live do not permit God to bring any other kind of revival.

OUR TIME PERIOD

It takes wisdom to understand the making of a whisper revival—wisdom about the times we live in. We

must become men who know “what Israel should do” from understanding “the times” in which we live.

...men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command... (1 Chronicles 12:32)

We cannot change the times we live in, but we can understand them by God’s grace. We cannot force God to do anything, but we can understand what He will do in our time.

So many people want revival and seek, with great zeal, to achieve it. The hunger for revival is so great that men will claim anything as revival. Year after year, something new comes along that the church places the stamp of revival on. Churches use the term revival to increase attendance and ministries use it to promote their agendas. Indeed, the great contest between men today is who can top the other “Christian” with tales of victory and miracles. After all, when was the last time you heard someone share how the cross humbled him and took more of his life away? We are bored with stories of escapes in a basket (2 Corinthians 11:33). Everywhere today men talk and hope for revival but refuse the only kind of revival that God offers in our time. How few people understood what Israel should do in order to receive revival and overcome sin. God warned us that false revivals would take place in the last days (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

NOT POSSIBLE

We must come to understand that, because of the times we live in, it is impossible for a large scale, emotionally charged revival to occur. We live in the last days when the love of most will grow cold. We live on the verge of total world breakdown and the coming of the anti-Christ, and so the kind of revival that men look for cannot happen. Wickedness has increased in the church to such a degree that a fiery, wind-like, earth shattering revival is not in God's will. Just look at the fruit of all the fiery "revivals" and self-promoted statements of "revival" with God's eyes and you will understand why.

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:12–13)

Indeed, God is about to let Satan loose on earth to break the church's power (Daniel 12:7). Therefore, the style of revival everyone looks for is just not in God's plan and the wise will understand. If you comprehend the times in which we live, then you know that we cannot claim the following Scripture.

...if my people, who are called by my name, will

humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

If you hear any ministry, preacher, or book promise revival, then you know they do not speak by the power of the Holy Spirit. They prophesy their own desires, not God's will and plan. Indeed, they are unwise and have no clue about the times in which we live. For such a revival of the people and the land cannot possibly happen until Jesus returns.

22

THE REBELLION OF WOMEN PREACHERS

BIBLICAL FACTS

Fact One: Adam was made before Eve.

Fact Two: The serpent deceived Eve.

Fact Three: God created women to bear children.

These facts led Paul to declare that a woman should not be permitted to become a preacher or leader in the church. Let us read the whole passage in context.

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. (1 Timothy 2:12–14)

Paul's command was not based on cultural things that only applied way back in the year 100 A.D. Indeed, Paul reached back to the Law and pulled it front and center into the New Testament reminding the church in Corinth that women should remain silent.

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. (1 Corinthians 14:34)

Let us look at these facts in greater detail.

DETAILS OF FACT ONE

Adam was made before Eve.

The fact that God made Adam first then created Eve is a reality that we cannot alter. Indeed, Eve was not even present when Adam named all of the animals. The role of Adam was one of leadership towards his soon-to-be-wife, Eve.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. (Genesis 2:15–20)

God created Eve to be a helpmate for Adam's work. When a man and a woman switch positions, they sin. Eve did not exist when God told Adam not to eat from the tree of good and evil. She would have to trust Adam's leadership and obey what he told her.

DETAILS OF FACT TWO

The serpent deceived Eve.

Taken in by the serpent's words, Eve believed his lies.

The Scriptures do not permit a woman to teach a man because she was taken in by the words of the Devil in the garden of Eden. Women today remain too vulnerable to words that lead them astray and therefore are not allowed to teach or pastor a church. Every man who has taken advantage of a woman knows how easily she is deceived by words. Although Eve knew that God stated they would die, she chose to believe the lie—seduced by the serpent's clever use of words.

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:4–6)

Adam, on the other hand, knew full well what was happening, but he wanted his sinful desires fed. Therefore, he willingly allowed his wife to fulfill that desire (Genesis 3:6). This is one reason men seem far more visual than

women in their enjoyment of sin. Men like to watch sin take place. Eve was the first woman pastor and Adam was the first congregation listening and following a woman.

DETAILS OF FACT THREE

God created women to bear children.

The Lord designed women with wombs for a specific purpose. He had a perfect plan—man in leadership and women raising children at home. But Eve took the position of leadership over Adam in the Garden of Eden. She became driven to find her calling, to be as god, and to gain attention for herself. Men became lazy, willing to sit back and let sinfulness roll over them. Because of this, Paul told Timothy when writing about women pastors that women will be “saved through childbearing.”

But women will be saved through child-bearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2:15)

Even more, Paul wrote to Titus that sound doctrine will include a teaching that women must be “busy at home.”

[women]... to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their

husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:5)

When a married woman works outside the home, whether in ministry or in the world, she maligns the Word of God. Indeed, the church has lost its power and influence in the world because women no longer stay busy at home but in the workplace.

DEBORAH

The story of the female Israelite prophetess invariably comes up in this discussion. God put the Israelites under judgment because of their sin. Therefore, the book telling of this time period is named Judges. Men refused to lead so God had to use a woman to lead Israel. God used a woman to judge the sin in the men because they would not take charge.

Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. (Judges 4:4)

If God cannot find any men to lead, He will use a woman, but that is not His perfect plan. In fact, if you claim that you have no men in your church qualified to lead, then give our ministry a call and we will gladly send

one. But let us now look at the heart of Deborah.

She rebuked the men because they would not lead. God tried to use Deborah to shame the men into fulfilling their leadership roles.

She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’” Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” “Very well,” Deborah said, “I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh... (Judges 4:6–9)

After the victorious battle, Deborah rejoiced not in the fact that a woman led Israel, but in the hope that the “princes,” the men, would lead.

When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the Lord! (Judges 5:2)

Deborah would have willingly and joyfully given up her leadership because she loved the Lord more than her own selfish ambition.

FULL SUBMISSION

Such examples from the Bible gave Paul a basis to write that a woman should “learn in quietness and full submission.” Let it be repeated, “learn,” not preach with full submission.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. (1 Timothy 2:11)

Because of sin, women must be silent in church. And until Jesus comes back, men must “rule over” their wives. After all, Christian women still must suffer pain in childbearing and in giving birth. Until labor pains cease, the command to women that a husband must rule over them stays in full effect.

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Genesis 3:16)

This is part of the offensive message of the cross. God

did not set down a cute, blessed rule that a woman must submit to her husband. Because of her sinful nature she must now be ruled over.

PARTNER IN LIFE

Because of the weakness woman demonstrated in the garden of Eden, a husband must be wise about this and treat his wife with greater protection and care. Only an unloving, uncaring, and selfish man would ever let his wife teach, preach, or have authority over a man. Only a selfish and lazy husband would allow her to lead. And only a congregation of spiritually dead men would let women lead them.

First Peter 3:7 commands men to love and appreciate true godly women, and such women provide tremendous help in spreading the gospel. For this reason, we read in Acts that Priscilla and Aquila invited a man into their home, not the church, and shared their lives and what they knew of Jesus with him. It was not a church service, or class but the sharing of their hearts in their living room.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. (Acts 18:26)

Women have a huge role and work in the church. Older women must teach younger women how to be busy at home, how to love their husbands, and how to serve in quiet- ness, how to work hard and how to enter God's rest. How to put to death the desire to be like god that drives a woman to work, control, and drip. In their service to the church they must be honored and are worthy of support and help (1 Timothy 5:9–15). Women who contend for the faith, helping the men in their leadership for the gospel, have their names written in the book of life. Those women who find their life in working outside the home or in ministry are rebels against God's creation plan.

Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
(Philippians 4:3)

JUDGMENT

Make no mistake about it. Any church with a woman pastor stands under judgment. A church that does not show women how to be busy at home only begs God to punish them. His hand will soon judge them. When you see a home, church, or nation ruled by a woman, there you see the judgment of God just waiting to happen.

Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done. Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path. (Isaiah 3:11–12)

Any church that has a woman pastor teaching men, there you find a church led astray from the path of life. For God's Holy Spirit does not fill that woman, nor does He fill the men who listen to and obey her. The signs of this sin are everywhere. Youths oppress us while women rule over men, churches and countries. God considers it no minor sin for the church to have women pastors or teachers leading men. Indeed, it was Satan's scheme, not God's blessing and He will soon crush Satan and his schemes. Women preachers, in the fruit of rebellion, are why God created hell.

23

WHEN GOD GOT A DIVORCE

God obtained a divorce. He separated from the wife He loved and sent her away. God gave Israel a certificate of divorce and sent her on her way because she committed adultery.

*I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.
(Jeremiah 3:8a)*

God commands that we be holy as He is holy.¹ For

God knows how to love, knows the meaning of love, and has the power to love.²

So, God provides an example for all those who divorce. Though this separation broke God's heart and grieved Him bitterly, He did not remarry. God never sought to fill the void in His heart by finding another bride. In short, God remained faithful even when the other partner did not. Even though separated, God remained devoted to His bride and waited for her to return. He labored, waited, and worked for her reconciliation. Such is the nature of selfless love. This same selfless love lies behind God's command that if a man and woman divorce, they must remain unmarried or be reconciled. The following command of the Lord allows no exceptions, excuses, or justifications.

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10–11)

Our understanding of the other Scriptures on this subject must hinge on these clear words. No other Scripture will contradict 1 Corinthians.

ADULTERY

If you divorce, you have to remain unmarried. Otherwise, you commit the sin of adultery. If a man divorces his wife and she marries another man she commits adultery.

He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:11–12)

The only way a husband cannot be held responsible for causing his wife to commit adultery is if she already committed adultery while in the marriage. Likewise, the only way a wife cannot be held responsible for her husband not committing adultery is if he already committed adultery before the divorce.

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

Most people assume that this verse gives them a license to divorce and remarry if the other person

commits adultery, rather than understanding Jesus' real point. Many a marriage has been slowly destroyed by one partner simply waiting for the other to commit adultery, in order to justify remarriage. But Jesus did not refer to remarriage at all. He only discussed the person responsible for causing the other spouse to commit adultery. In our sinful flesh we assume that Jesus gave us a "loophole" to allow a person to re-marry. As we have already seen, Jesus said a person must remain committed until their partner dies.

Every man or woman who remarries commits sexual immorality, a sin for which the penalty is hell. It doesn't matter if you divorced and remarried before you became a Christian. Adultery is always adultery, whether in Christ or not. For example, someone who murdered before coming to Christ is not then free to murder once they become a new creation in Jesus. Indeed, the new creation in Jesus is able to live the words of Jesus and thus remain unmarried. The new creation is able to call sin for what it is, in this case the sin of adultery.

All who divorce and remarry, and do not repent of such sin, will burn with liars, magic artists, cowards, unbelievers, murders, and idolaters. A second marriage means a second death.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. (Revelation 21:8, emphasis added)

Men complicate the divorce and remarriage question because they do not want to hear what Jesus had to say. In our sin we do not want to accept it, so we seek to talk our way around it. Like a spoiled teenager that pretends not to understand what you tell him, we too shut our ears to the Lord.³ In the next Scripture, Jesus tells us that God only permitted divorce and remarriage under Moses because the people's hearts were hard.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:3–9)

Jesus said that, in the “beginning,” God made man in such a way that he must remain committed to one person.

In other words, God only allowed Moses to grant divorce and remarriage because the people would not have even bothered to follow God at all if they couldn't divorce. The Israelites only concerned themselves with their own comfort, joy, and selfish happiness. As a pastor, many times have I heard men say, "I am going to marry her so that her children will have a father." What a noble lie. They really only care about their own personal pleasures and use the children to obtain the woman. After all, he doesn't have to marry the woman to fulfill that role. He could be a father to the children without marrying her. In fact, the church should so overflow with Holy Spirit⁴ inspired love, that the thought of such a marriage should not even occur. No woman in a church should feel the need for a husband because the love being poured out in the church should cause her to push past fleshly desires for love.⁵

When the disciples realized what Jesus said about marriage they couldn't help but declare, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."⁶ But Jesus spoke emphatically, just as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:10. Christians, who know the power of grace, must accept it. If you cannot accept this, then do not call yourself a Christian and do not claim the blessings of heaven. The world, of course, cannot accept these words and refuses to conform to God's demands. Therefore, they will burn in hell.

Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this

*word, but only those to whom it has been given. ”
(Matthew 19:11)*

ALLOWED TO DIVORCE

We have already seen that, until one of the partners dies, God does not allow marriage to another person. He does, however, permit divorce under certain circumstances.

*But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.
(1 Corinthians 7:15)⁷*

This passage refers to a Christian with an unbelieving spouse or false Christian spouse who does not let the household live in peace. He or she undermines, destroys, and manipulates situations to make his or her spouse look bad. Such a person disrupts the home environment seeking to make everyone, including the children, miserable because he or she does not agree with his spouse's beliefs. In such situations, if peace becomes impossible, the wife or husband is not "bound" to try and make the marriage work. Not being bound does not abolish the marriage as though it never existed. That would be foolish.

For example, if a man is not bound and the marriage void, are his children void also? Of course not. That man would still consider them to be his children. In the same way, whether living under the same roof or not, his wife remains his wife until she dies. The term “bound” here means that a person is not obligated to try and make the situation work in the home. As we have already seen, it does not mean that they are free to remarry. That would contradict everything else Jesus said. As Jesus said, “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”⁸ Think of the misery that occurs in a home where the unbeliever, or false Christian, constantly demands their partner to compromise their relationship with Jesus. God has called us to be at peace with all men.⁹ But one can never compromise their relationship with Jesus. When peace is not allowed to reign in a marriage, then God permits divorce.

However, as we have already seen, even in such circumstances, a person must remain unmarried or be reconciled to their partner. This one fact, if preached by the church today, would save a lot of marriages and a lot of believers’ relationships with the Lord. For, if you remove the hope of remarriage in a potential divorce situation, the motivation to make a marriage work goes way up. God is love and requires that we also have a love that hopes all things.¹⁰ Anyone divorced must always love their partner and hope that they might repent. They must be like God, and love even when receiving no love in return.

How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:16)

WILLFUL SIN

If you are a Christian and you remarry after reading this tract then you place your salvation in jeopardy. You cannot, now, willfully sin by marrying someone else and expect God to forgive you. For to remarry now would be to deliberately sin against the blood of Jesus—a matter that would separate you from the mercy of God.¹¹

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Hebrews 10:26–27)

You have received the knowledge of this truth and, even if you try to write this off as just an “opinion,” then you willfully sin against Jesus. So many divorced and remarried pastors, elders, and teachers fill the church because they have committed spiritual adultery against the Lord. They are enemies of God and will be consumed with raging fire and a fearful judgment too terrible to

contemplate. So strong a point is this with God that John the Baptist lost his head over the issue of divorce and remarriage.¹² If the church desires revival and purity, then we must renounce divorce and remarriage in no uncertain terms. For you can be sure of this,¹³ that the person who “deliberately” ignores this and disobeys will find “no sacrifice” for this crime against God.

FORGIVENESS

Is there forgiveness if a person has been divorced and remarried? For those who have not deliberately sinned, yes. However, the path to forgiveness is a narrow road and not one that many couples or churches want to walk. For if God allows a divorced and re-married couple to remain together (and He may not) they must take every opportunity to warn others against committing the same sin. See our web site for the story of one such couple.

Above all, don’t pray about your situation by yourselves. You no doubt deceived yourself before, and probably even believed that God called you to marry after your divorce. You must seek out those who know and have lived the offensive message of the cross.¹⁴ You must find people who will show you no favoritism,¹⁵ but can hear from God what will glorify His name.

As Joel declares, “Even now,” after all the misery you have created and the mess you have made, if you return to God with all your heart, He will forgive. And, instead of judging you, mercy and blessing will be found. But this

can be no outward token of tears. It must be a repentance deep within your heart and life. You will need to find a church that knows the power of being crucified with Christ, and how to teach honest repentance.

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. (Joel 2:12–14)

Great joy and forgiveness await you if you repent. God is indeed full of love and compassion. Indeed, He will relent from the calamity and work good. We can testify to you that we have seen God work good in all kinds of situations. Will you not come, confess your sin, and seek the Lord as to how He would work His goodness?

ENDNOTES

1. 1 Peter 1:16
2. 1 John 4:16
3. John 8:43–44
4. 1 Thessalonians 4:9
5. 1 Timothy 5:11–12, Note also that there is no mention of a divorced woman, only widows.
6. Matthew 19:10
7. We do not want to strain on a gnat and swallow a camel. We must understand that the scripture is calling for peace in the family.
8. Mark 3:25
9. Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14
10. 1 Corinthians 13:7
11. Hebrews 6:6
12. Luke 3:19
13. Ephesians 5:5
14. 1 Corinthians 1:18
15. 1 Timothy 5:21

24

MARRIAGE FAMILY AND GOD

Marriage should be honored by all... (Hebrews 13:4)

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND GOD

The title of this tract is backwards, as is most preaching and teaching about family life today. Actually, it is more than just backwards. The title should be “God, and only God, in a Family.” For it is only as each person in a family loves God 100 percent that a

true family is created and maintained.

The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:29–30)

Anything less than this is idolatry. And that is exactly what has happened today—an idolatry of marriage and family. The Truth has been perverted in the name of maintaining and salvaging marriages. As the world has gone more and more crazy, it has grabbed onto anything but God. There is now so much focusing on the family that it has caused us to take our eyes off of God and onto an idol.

DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND

Do not misunderstand what is being stated here. Marriage is to be honored by all and held up as holy in the Lord.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the

adulterer and all the sexually immoral. (Hebrews 13:4)

In fact, God came to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children, and He seeks to make strong families. I can testify to the power and love the Holy Spirit works to this end, as can many others.

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:17)

I fully believe in upholding and honoring marriage just as the writer to the Hebrews advocates. Therefore, I also preach what Scripture says about divorce—that if anyone does get a divorce, they cannot remarry. They are to be devoted to their spouse for life, and must remain single or be reconciled. This is a clear testimony to how highly we honor marriage. I hate divorce just as God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). It is this kind of purity and holy love that lies at the heart of the matter.

“This is a clear testimony to how highly we honor marriage.”

Jesus seeks to make a people who are ready for the Lord. That means a people who love God with all of their

heart, mind, soul and strength—and, as was already said, that's 100 percent. It is a total fallacy to say that we should love God first, family second, and ourselves last. That would not be 100 percent love for Jesus, but only 34 percent. To love God "more than" family, a person need only love God with 51 percent of his heart. Should this person then expect to go to heaven? Certainly not! For God will not accept such half-hearted, selfish love. He does not allow any other gods before Him—or alongside Him—and that includes family. Again, anything less than 100 percent love for God is pure idolatry. You can be sure that God will not grant His love to any man who thinks he can reserve part of his heart for his own idols.

*Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.
(Exodus 20:23)*

"The truth and righteousness of God has been thrown out for the sake of our idolatry."

JESUS AND DIVIDING FAMILIES

I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism

to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. (Luke 12:49–53)

These are troubling words to most churches, but they are life-giving to those who will love God with all. Jesus came to “bring fire on earth” and He desired greatly that it would be kindled. The fire Jesus discussed can result in division within households. In fact, Jesus said that any member of a person’s family could potentially become an enemy because of Him.

...a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matthew 10:36)

All through the history of the church there are stories of saints who have had to give up children, wives, husbands, fathers, and mothers because of their love for God—so none of this should surprise us. However, with the idolatry of family that is so prevalent in the church

today, the truth has been corrupted to the point that we now find all this to be shocking and distasteful. The truth and righteousness of God has been thrown out for the sake of our idolatry. Jesus said He came to bring “division”—and He used the specific context of families to drive home His point. While all true disciples are united in Christ by the bond of love and the Holy Spirit, nowhere in Scripture do we find that this unity extends to unbelieving or hypocritical members of a believer’s family. Jesus’ own earthly family was not even exempt from this. So why should we think it will be any different for us?

Jesus had to renounce His own mother on one occasion, and no one would argue that He was too harsh or not acting in the deepest of love. We should not think that the Spirit of Jesus has somehow changed since then. There will be many times when we must choose either God’s will or the appeasement of a family member. What we choose shows whether we are idolators or true lovers of God.

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:33–35)

The kind of false unity that is now worshipped in the church sacrifices Jesus on the altar of the idol of family.

It throws God's love into the fire and molds it into a golden calf. Most Christians would claim to want unity and salvation, but they want it without any cost. What they end up with is not Christianity at all, but a twisted set of personal idols—which demand that they sacrifice the holiness of God for the sake of a relationship with someone else.

Of course, God's desire is that all men come to know the Truth and to love Him. But the vast majority simply refuse to repent of their idolatry in order to devote 100 percent of their love to God. Indeed, most people who now claim to be Christians are not really disciples of Jesus at all. They don't have the slightest clue how to hate their lives and carry their cross, as Jesus demands.

“No one is permitted to love anything or anyone more than God.”

As they share the heart of God, every true Christian obviously desires that the other members of their family will also come to love God as they do—with all of their heart, mind, soul and strength. In fact, I would love to see the following story repeated time and time again by the power of the Holy Spirit. What joy there is in a whole family coming to truly believe in God.

The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (Acts 16:34)

LIVING IN PEACE

Unfortunately, there are many people who will not tolerate others loving God and refuse to live in peace with them. Sometimes this friction spills over into separation and that is why Paul wrote the following Scriptures.

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (1 Corinthians 7:12–15)

Of course, in today's religious climate, someone who claims to be a Christian and even goes to church can actually be an "unbeliever." When Paul speaks of "believers," he means those who are not hypocrites but true disciples of Jesus.

A true disciple of Jesus will certainly do everything

within his or her power to be at peace with every member of their family. We are called to pursue and work toward this peace as the Holy Spirit leads. For, in addition to the following Scripture, Jesus also said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What we must keep in our hearts, though, is that true peace can only be achieved by accepting God’s righteousness in every situation.

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

Obviously, however, this does not allow us to compromise our love and commitment to God, or tolerate idolatry, in any way. Anytime there is a parting of the ways, it is because the unbeliever or hypocritical Christian simply will not love. The true disciple of Jesus makes “every effort” to live in peace—but there comes a point when to compromise further would be to deny God.

Since those hostile to the Truth hate the light of God, they argue, slander, debate, stonewall, yell, fight, and sin against those who are only seeking to love them by God’s power. It is no different from the persecution Christians around the world receive from hostile governments and other religions. It is this persecution by the enemies of Jesus that often forces a separation, which is why Paul wrote the directions we just read.

NO COMPROMISE

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
(Matthew 10:37–39)

No one is permitted to love anything or anyone more than God. Often, though, those who hate God will push things to the point where it becomes “either God or me.” It may not be worded exactly this way, but the truth is that they force the confrontation while trying to make it look like the Christian is the one to blame for everything.

For example, it may be beneficial for a believer to get away for a few days alone to seek God and His will without the pressures and temptations of family around. However, this simple act of praying alone is twisted by unbelievers and hypocrites until it becomes some kind of conspiracy to divide families. Once again, this underscores how families have been made into an idol for so many.

“They may preserve their life and their family in this world, but they will ultimately perish as an idolator.”

As usual, it all comes down to the offensive message of the cross. Those who lose their lives for Jesus, those

who pick up their cross, those who hate their own lives in this world (John 12:25), those who worship only God, may find themselves at odds with family members. It will come down to a choice—either compromise one's love for God in order to keep a false and sinful peace that is based on a lie, or to maintain one's love for God and Truth at any cost. Those who bow down to the demands of others commit idolatry, in direct contradiction to Scripture.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)

It is always astonishing to see these tragic situations develop when there is absolutely no need for it. The one unbelieving spouse (or family member) refuses to compromise on anything, while demanding that the true believer compromise on everything. This the true believer can never do, for that would be to sin against God by becoming an idolator. And all idolators, even those who idolize their family, are cast out into the darkness and into hell.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22:14–15)

PRAYER

It is every true believer's sincere prayer that every member of a family will come to love God. Indeed, every disciple of Jesus Christ also prays that all men would be saved and that all families would glorify God by the "knowledge of the truth."

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3–4)

But no man, woman, child, relative or friend should ever cause that Truth to be compromised. No true believer in Jesus Christ can ever allow that to happen. To do so would be to demonstrate that they are not worthy of Jesus Christ. They may preserve their life and their family in this world, but they will ultimately perish as an idolator.

GAIN MORE

Let us end this tract with the joy that is in Jesus Christ. Those who are willing to love God and surrender all, no matter what the cost, will be filled with a joy that surpasses all the pain and suffering. As Jesus said, those

who give up 100 percent for God gain 100 times as much in return.

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:29–30)

No doubt those who oppose Jesus Christ will seek to destroy your peace and happiness in God, but those who persevere to the end shall be filled to overflowing with the joy and happiness of heaven itself. In short, it is never worth trading a relationship with the living God for any human being. The “inexpressible and glorious joy” of God cannot compare to any idol of man. After all, it is only God who can really make a strong and true family.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8–9)

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CRUCIFIED COUPLES

But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”
(Romans 10:6a)

According to Romans 10, the way to a godly marriage is not by striving to create a godly marriage. A godly marriage is the fruit of the cross where each person in the marriage has been crucified. In short, a true godly marriage is a crucified couple. As strange and simple as it may sound, a godly marriage is achieved by each person giving themselves fully, and

only to God. A godly marriage is not saying, “Who will ascend into heaven,” or in other words, “We strive and seek to have a godly marriage every day.” A holy marriage is arrived at only by way of the cross.

Singles can best prepare for marriage by not looking for a godly mate. As we will see, such statements are fully grounded in Scripture, even if they seem out of place in today’s Christian environment.

The message of the cross is foolishness to the mind and heart of man. God does things the opposite way man sets out to achieve a goal. But to those who let the offensive cross do its killing work, it becomes the transforming power of God.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The relationship books written today, and the advice given by speakers on this topic, do not reflect the foolishness of the cross, but the mind and religious schemes of man. The message of the cross reveals these things for what they really are, foolishness mixed with prayer.

For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has

not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Corinthians 1:19–20)

Crucified couples in the Lord are about each person being crucified to themselves. A crucified couple has been killed by God so that Jesus lives in each person. This is a painful and offensive process that few willingly surrender to, but it is the only way to a holy marriage (1 Peter 4:1). Many couples have a religious, even Biblical marriage, but not by way of the cross. They are simply married Pharisees.

DO NOT LOOK

Let us begin with the single person, for to be prepared for marriage we must not seek to be married.

Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. (1 Corinthians 7:27b)

A single person in the Lord never joins a match-making service and is never, ever on the look-out for a mate. They obey the Holy Spirit by not looking “for a wife.” Thus, finding joy and satisfaction only in the Lord. Single people, since they do not look for a mate, will feel shocked to hear God speak to their heart and say, “That

is the person you are to marry.”

Men, would you think about marrying your sister? Would you think it a proper desire to give your sister a passionate kiss? Do you care what your sister thinks about you? What you wear, what you say, and how you act? Would you look at her in a longing way? Biblically, men in the church are called to view women as their sisters, “with absolute purity.”

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (1 Timothy 5:1b–2)

The foolishness of the cross demonstrates that by not looking for a wife, treating all sisters as sisters, and crucifying all those desires the world calls “normal,” God can work and will a marriage—if that is indeed His will.

AFFAIRS OF THE WORLD

Consider that the single person has it easier when it comes to worshiping and loving the Lord. That is another reason why the church doesn’t need a support group for the singles in church. Because in every way, married couples should look at the lives of singles and envy the freedom they have to serve and love God.

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. (1 Corinthians 7:32–34)

As the Scripture above just told us, married men and women are, in reality, worldly, because they have a worldly concern—how they can please their partner. When a husband or wife asks themselves how they can please the other, they become worldly. Indeed, since we know that marriage will not exist in heaven, to think how we can please each other means to have our minds set on things of the earth—something the Bible commands us not to do (Mark 12:25, Colossians 3:2). As Paul put it, “a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife.”

Let us not think for a moment this is some kind of super-spiritual, high minded concept. It comes out in very practical ways we do not have time to explore. For as the Scripture below tells us, a married man should live as if he did not have a wife, “as if they had none.”

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none. (1 Corinthians 7:29)

When a married Christian man arises in the morning, he should feel totally unconcerned about what his wife wants him to do for her during the day. Indeed, he gives no thought to his wife's desires until he enters the prayer closet and seeks the will of God. He does not listen to her, give her attention, or care about her opinion or demands. He "lives" his life in such a way that he is single—single in heart and action.

LOVING YOUR WIFE

At this point the offense of the cross leaves most professing Christians behind. They will clamor and whine that men must love their wives like Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). Of course, they are correct, God commands them to love their wives, but they are wrong in how. Marriage is to be honored by all but the way to a truly godly marriage is by way of the cross (Hebrews 13:4).

The worldly counselors tell married couples to spend quality time with each other, to listen to each other, and to strive in every way to build a godly family. The message of the cross tells us the opposite and, in reality,

such strivings create a form of legalism, of salvation by works. The message of the cross allows God to crucify each person's flesh, desires, wants, and dreams. This is why we are told to "hate" our own lives (John 12:25).

I know this will come as a shock to many, but couples arrive at a godly marriage only by seeking God. Not God and a praying partner, not God and a ministry, not God and children, not God and Bible reading, but God and only God. Out of this kind of total focus and surrender God then creates the kind of marriage or single person He wills and wants. Only when we can say that we have suffered being crucified to ourselves can we gain a godly marriage (Galatians 2:20–21).

The cross demands that we give all to God, or as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 7:35, "I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord." The crucified marriage is not one of many restrictions, or something cold and heartless. On the contrary those couples that willingly give themselves to God in undivided devotion to be crucified with Christ will find a marriage filled with the joys and love of heaven. After all, in heaven everyone seeks only the face of God and out of that seeking bursts forth all the joy that is in heaven.

Therefore, there exists no biblical principles for a godly marriage. There are no four or even ten spiritual laws to a successful marriage. Only the cross can crucify each individual's plans, dreams, desires, and wants. And out of that death God brings forth His glory of godliness in each person (John 12:24). When individuals allow

Jesus to stamp His image in them, divorce becomes impossible. Love and unity flow naturally, unhindered and without effort.

GOD'S WILL

As each person crucifies their love, and the how and why they love others, God's pure love shines forth in a marriage. As a husband, when I go into the prayer closet to seek God's will, I not only hear God on how and when to show my wife love, but God also empowers me with His love. This is how each husband loves his wife like Christ loves the church. Jesus depends on God's love and will to love His bride. We all know that God is love and the source of true love. What we don't seem to know in the church today is that we should love others only by God's love. We might choose to pray with our spouse or to spend time with our children but if it is not God's will and power for the moment it counts for nothing. It is a big fat spiritual zero.

*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.
The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. (John 6:63)*

Jesus made this clear and John recorded in John 6:63. We might focus in on our families a million times over, but a million times zero is still zero. The flesh, with all of

its counseling, planning, and striving to ensure a good marriage amounts to nothing. The cross leaves no need for promise keeping, the signing of oaths of purity, or any other gimmick, for such is unholy swearing (James 5:12).

Only the Holy Spirit can give life to a marriage and while we often give lip service to this truth, most refuse the nails of the cross that crucifies our love. We do not want to go through the pain in order that God might be God in a marriage. We would rather enjoy our families, feel satisfied in our relationships. And ask God to bless our search for a mate than surrender to the will of God. After all, it may never be God's will for a married couple to pray together, it may be God's will that they bear no children, or a couple only spend a few brief months together as husband and wife. Of course, it could also be God's will that a couple pray together all of the time, spend time together constantly, and have many children.

The message of the cross is simply this. It is not what you desire and want, but what God wills and works. Anything less than what we have looked at here denotes idolatry.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)

If a couple sets themselves only toward the face of God, His righteousness will make them holy. God will work the cross in their lives, killing their marriage that it might be a marriage made by God. In this way, idolatry is

exposed and destroyed, and true love flows from heaven's throne into the marriage. All of this is done without the effort of man and thus God's power is made perfect in weakness. To Him be all the praise, glory and honor for such a working of His love in a marriage, where the individuals have been crucified into a crucified couple.

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

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THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. (2 Corinthians 5:16)

A very worldly Jesus is about to be unleashed upon the world by the Christian community. It will be a spirit like that found at summer Bible camp.

Summer bible camp, with its emotional discussions about God. New friendships are made and commitments to God are encouraged and stirred up. From Hell houses during Halloween, to pageants at Christmas, events

designed to present the gospel stir and heighten religious emotions to win individuals to Christ. Churches will not resist the temptation to use The Passion of the Christ to increase membership. After all, most individuals in the church today came to know Jesus by the presentation of a worldly, emotion filled gospel.

Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ is a movie for the church of our age. Today's church uses the flesh to motivate people to worship Jesus. Mel Gibson stated that he hoped that the graphic depiction of the crucifixion "moved" the audience. Like summer camp, it will move men and women to tears, but blind the church to how it should be really used. After all, most individuals who came to Jesus never sat down and counted the cost. In short, they are not disciples of Jesus, but mere travelers. Travelers that follow Jesus because they have been motivated by appealing to the flesh (John 6:26).

If people can turn the movie Star Wars into a religious experience, or learn the language of the Klingons from Star Trek it should not surprise us that many will become "Christians" as a result of this movie. The sinful nature of man follows the sensational and

the church will market and milk this movie to the fullest extent. As churches rent and fill entire theatres, they will offer wide road altar calls. Though individuals speak and act with emotion, it will not result from the drawing of the Holy Spirit, but the spirit that fills so many summer Bible camps.

CRAVING FOR VIOLENCE

We should note well that Jesus did not come during a time when a movie could be recorded about His life and crucifixion. In fact, none of the stories of the Bible happened during a time when the very graphic nature of them could be filmed. God had a good reason for this—because man has a craving for violence, for the sensational and for what he can see. Remember, we fell in the Garden of Eden because the fruit was “pleasing to the eye” (Genesis 3:6). I am not saying the movie The Passion of the Christ is evil in and of itself, but with all things concerning God, we must carefully make certain that the graphic depiction does not appeal to the sinful nature of man.

*From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things,
but the unfaithful have a craving for violence.
(Proverbs 13:2)*

God used words, the fruit of the lips of man, to cause him to think about eternity. When we read of David slaying Goliath, we read nothing of the blood and gore associated with the task. After generations of blood, gore, violence, and warfare on the screen The Passion of the Christ comes at a proper time. The church has been unfaithful to the Word of God with its easy beliefism, so naturally it will crave violence in the presentation of the

gospel. Look for the church to rejoice in the very graphic nature of this film and other books, movies, and items that will follow. More and more, the matter of following Jesus will become a movie experience that motivates people emotionally by letting others live out the action. It is always easier to let someone else obey God for us, than for us to seek a God we too must obey (Hebrews 5:9). This false Jesus, void of any real obedience, has been preached for years and the church will naturally become excited about watching it on a movie screen. After all, I doubt very many will leave the movie thinking that they too must do what they just saw Jesus experience on the screen (1 John 2:6).

DON'T TELL

“Don’t tell anyone” Jesus commanded the crippled man He healed. Jesus always told individuals He made well to be very sober and serious about what had happened to them—what they experienced. In the following incident Jesus wanted the man to focus back in on the Word of God, the Law.

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to

him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” (Matthew 8:2–4)

Jesus desired that the man tell the priest what God had done for him. “See that you don’t tell anyone,” Jesus commanded. But Jesus wanted the man to go to church and talk about his healing with those who knew about God’s commands, ways, and heart.

The man was to testify to what God had done and learn what God required. Jesus desired that the man get past the joy, the tears, the emotion of the situation, and with the greatest of seriousness, worship God. It is easy to move individuals to joy or tears, to motivate them to do what you want. Many a dictator or social club proves that point. But God seeks to move the heart first, and is therefore very careful about not making the gospel of His Son an “experience.”

This easy, wide road gospel presentation has occurred all over the world for years. The Passion of the Christ will excite these millions of travelers that have trudged behind Jesus for a long time. In short, the false church will use Mr. Gibson’s movie to the max for their own selfish purposes and to gain more influence and increase the number of salvation experiences.

Jesus on the other hand, always sought to make people sit down and think about following Him—to consider very seriously what it means to become a disciple of

Christ. Note well that Jesus said we must “sit down and estimate the cost.”

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? (Luke 14:28)

The wide road church fully rejects such contemplation as legalism and something contrary to the freedom they falsely think they have in Christ.

It is true that Jesus did the spectacular. From healings to raising the dead, from water to wine, Jesus certainly created a stir. But the cross always stood before Jesus, in His teaching and by the example of His life. The suffering, sober cross that He said all who follow Him must pick up. A painful cross in our lives is needed for us to overcome sin (1 Peter 4:1). The church will completely whitewash and water down this aspect of the cross. After all, will not most individuals hear that they just need to ask Jesus in their heart to be saved? All such teaching cannot be found anywhere in Scripture. In other words, the wide gate church will use this movie as they have other things to titillate the flesh in order to motivate a person to accept Jesus. Again, Jesus was not like this. He tried to talk people out of becoming a believer—just as we do at the church where I worship.

As they were walking along the road, a man said

to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57–58)

Jesus didn't get all excited about the person coming up to Him declaring, “I will follow you.” Like many who walk along the road with Jesus, there are moments when human commitment and zeal prompt an individual to say to God, “I will follow.” God, by the cross, will crucify this human aspect that seeks to belong, to join, to be a part of something, or to find purpose and fulfillment. The life of a true disciple of Jesus denies and crucifies self and surrenders all. It is neither easy nor quick and anyone who remotely thinks they want to become a Christian had better sit down and estimate the cost. Sadly, a whole army of false Christians will swarm in and use The Passion of the Christ to win yet more shallow believers. Christians will market and use this movie to its fullest extent. Not only for its money market value but because it will increase discussion about God, and the church will seize this as a rattlesnake does its victim, in order to increase membership.

FROM HERE

Where should we go from here and how should a

person respond to the multitude of multi-media presentations of the life of Jesus? For the vast majority, a proper response is simply impossible, for they do not know, nor understand, the offensive message of the cross. The words of Isaiah are true for the vast majority of ministries, churches, and Christians today.

We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world. (Isaiah 26:18)

How can those who have never really experienced the sufferings of the cross against sin, the despising of money, or the humility that comes from the shame the cross demands, share the good news with others? It takes years to be seasoned in such matters of God and not enough teachers of God today walk that narrow road to show others the way. Few have experienced the hating of one's life, family, and all aspects of this world, and can share how all those things and more are good news.

What will happen is this. Many who have experienced and accepted a shallow Jesus, will burst forth to seize the opportunity to make more shallow followers of Christ. Eventually even more followers in the name of Jesus will whine that counting the cost is salvation by works or legalism. They must be fully ignored and rebuked.

We must return to the offensive message of the cross—not the lip service and shallow acknowledgement

that currently fills the church. The church must pick up a cross that offends people to the point they will not naturally come to church or become Christians. Whether a person is religious and rigorous in their obedience for God, or liberal, they will feel offended and seek to actively avoid the true Jesus. In other words, you will have to accept a Jesus you do not want, like, or have in mind. If you have not accepted this kind of Jesus and if this is not the Jesus your church preaches, then you do not know the true message of the cross. In short, the church presents two kinds of Jesus today. One, a circumcision Jesus, which stands for something man can do, and the other, less preached, Jesus crucified. Circumcision represents something done outwardly by the hand of man, such as movies, activities, motivational speakers, the sensational, and the seemingly miraculous. The other is a Jesus of the true cross that offends all, and I do mean all. All will feel offended; all will seek to avoid; all will desire a different kind of church, a different kind of pastor, if they seek the true God.

Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. (Galatians 5:11)

No one naturally accepts the true Jesus but becomes a disciple by the movement of the Holy Spirit. When men take the methods and the spirit of this world to win souls for Christ, they unwittingly make disciples for the Devil.

27

PRETTY INK

WHEN IS THE BIBLE NO LONGER THE WORD OF GOD?

SENSIBLE PEOPLE

I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. (1 Corinthians 10:15)

Sensible, intelligent people in the Lord will quickly comprehend that the Bible is no longer God's Word when it pleases the flesh of man.

The Bible's purpose is to bless man by first opposing

and crucifying him. The crucifixion and rebirth process brings us into a vibrant relationship with the living God. There are two ways to please man's sin using the Bible.

1. By disobeying and applying the Bible as we see fit.
2. By presenting the Bible in a worldly manner.

DISOBEYING AND APPLYING THE BIBLE AS WE SEE FIT

A Christian book store in our area prides itself on being the place to purchase Bibles. In fact, they have won awards for this very thing. However, not only are they open on Sundays, but also during the worship services of their church. Thus, every Bible they sell no longer becomes the Word of God, but a worldly philosophy book that may be applied as they see fit. They may claim to be a Christian bookstore, or true believers in Christ, but their actions demonstrate that clearly they are unfit for doing anything good in Jesus (Titus 1:16). They might as well sell Stephen King horror novels. Jesus clearly states that if for the sake of our way of doing things we disobey God, we nullify the word of God.

Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that. (Mark 7:13)

The church seems to have forgotten that God only gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him, (Acts 5:32). The western world has a gluttony of Bibles and the more publishers print them, the more the church disobeys God. We will see why in a moment, but although we live in a land overflowing with Bibles, the church perishes from lack of knowledge.

You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother—my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children. The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful. They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness. (Hosea 4:5–8)

Selling ourselves to others as Christians; selling our churches as Spirit-filled; selling our doctrines and sales goals for Bible translations has brought about ignorance and stumbling into sin day and night. Everyone seems to acknowledge the sad state of the church today, but one would think that with all the Bibles available today that such conditions could not exist. It would be like having a storeroom of penicillin in a TB clinic while people languished in the final struggles of death. The answer is simple. We ignore the Bible and reject the wisdom God

offers through His Holy Spirit. We read the ink on paper, but refuse to come to Jesus, pick up the painful cross He has for us, and allow the Word of God to be the Word of God. We have a false faith that believes that studying the Bible gives us the right to claim eternal life. Our printed Bibles have created a delusion that we are saved from God's judgment.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39–40)

PRESENTING THE BIBLE IN A WORLDLY MANNER

The church is now loaded and overflowing with a “biblical” people who are not biblical at all. There is now a rich market for slick bibles that spiritually sick people enjoy reading in order to ignore the pangs of their conscience. Like the forbidden tree and fruit in the Garden of Eden, if it looks pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom, we quickly buy it (Genesis 3:6). For instance, the new magazine bibles demonstrate complete and total sin. Not only do these books hide the scriptures beneath canned answers, shiny graphics, and pretty ink, but the advice and doctrines taught remove the offense

of the cross. Thus, the Bible has become no longer the Word of God.

This situation arose because for years books with men's opinions have been sold as "bibles." The Ryrie Study, Max Lucado, and the Scofield Study Bibles, provide just a few examples of books that are not actually Bibles, but commentaries. If these books had been marketed as commentaries on the Bible there would be no crime. Again, they are not Bibles, but man's opinion mixed in with God's Holy Book. A high crime indeed.

These, and other traditional commentaries sold as Bibles, have opened the door for the flood of entertaining and deadly books touted today as God's Word. Our preachers teach us to disrespect God's Word to such a degree that we can now market and trample upon it without any fear or trembling toward a Holy God.

God has exalted above all things, His Word, but the church, pastors, and publishers no longer have this in their hearts.

I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. (Psalms 138:2)

From the sin of copyrights to the well-conceived marketing of Bibles, God's Word has been fully brought into the temple and marketed like any other trinket of the world. It is high time the church put a stop to all this

“bible” printing and demand holiness on the part of those who print the ink on paper. We must no longer allow anyone to carry merchandise into our churches and the temple of our hearts.

...and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. (Mark 11:16)

GOD ESTEEMS

I have written many books, but they must never be confused with God’s Word, the Bible. I keep a full separation between what I have written and what is written in the Bible.

In short, I have too much fear and trembling at God’s word to even contemplate placing my comments in a Bible and marketing it as the “Williams Study Bible.” Goodness, if I published such a book every enemy of the message of the cross would label me a heretic who only preached myself—and rightly so. After all, God only esteems those who tremble, from a humble and contrite spirit, before they open the Bible to read it.

This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2b)

What sin occurs when publishers have no fear and trembling, but dress up God's Word and promote it like a product of this world. Our preachers should teach us, with a humble and contrite heart, how to tremble before we open the pages of the Bible (Acts 9:31). Instead we teach our children that cartoon characters make it fun to read the Bible and accept eternal life. Long gone is the narrow gate and road that must be walked until the end.

In an effort to become relevant, we have become irreverent, so much so that now the vilest comic books are promoted as Bibles. We must understand clearly that when the Bible stops offending our sin, when instead of creating repentant sinners we only reform worldliness, we become enemies of God. Publishers make themselves enemies of God when they trivialize, demean, and rob God of the chance to convict and awaken sinners.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

We have made it so easy to understand the Bible that we remain completely ignorant of what it really teaches. We explain so much away that we no longer need God. Instead, men's minds and opinions, like the world's, are worshipped as god. Opinion has replaced the Omnipotent God.

A TRUE BIBLE

A plain Bible is the Word of God. A pure Bible has the following:

- Few, if any footnotes.
- The clearest, most offensive Greek/Hebrew equivalent words.
- No dictionary, maps, or commentaries.

We need to accept humbly in our hearts. God's people and the Lord's disciples must crave the Bible's pure beginnings. Every new Christian should be told that they are mere babies who need to "crave pure spiritual milk." Let me say it again, "pure milk." Again, I speak to a sensible people. A clean, straight forward Bible is one of the first steps to understanding and applying this passage.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation (1 Peter 2:2)

Anything more should be written as a separate book, with a different title. We should take this solid foundational beginning into the prayer closet and eagerly ask Jesus to make it real. Then we need to expect from God's hand a painful cross that will conform us into the image of His Son (1 Peter 4:1), the true Word of God, (John 1:1–2). After all, ink will not inherit eternal life; nor those who study the most, or read the most correct translation,

but only believers who allow God to crucify them will be resurrected with Jesus Christ.

Finally, consider that if the church rejected all the fancy bibles presented today how much effort could then be applied to translating the Bible for others. Thou- sands of language translations that have not even begun could happen. But we Christians in the West remain so selfish that we must have a Bible personalized just for us. Whether it be one of a multitude of idol bibles on the market today like the urban, Army, Navy, teenager, disaster, evangelism, messianic, woman's, or prison bible, we are selfish in the name of Jesus that calls us to deny self.



PRAYING PROPERLY

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. As the disciples watched Jesus pray, the weakness of their own prayer lives drove them to beg Him to teach them to pray. There- fore, when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1)

In this short publication we will take a look at how to pray properly. We hear a lot of murmurings in today's church, which are nothing but sinful petitions in the name of Jesus. People pray before sporting events, on

their sick beds, and in shouts of praise, but what is true prayer?

1. IN THE SPIRIT

If we miss this point, anything else simply becomes the babbling of pagans—a noisy clamor of annoying words in the ears of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions... (Ephesians 6:18)

Praying in the Spirit does not mean speaking in the gift of tongues. Indeed, one can pray in tongues without being in the Spirit. You can use this gift without any surrender to the Gift Giver, just as those in the world use the good gift of life for their own selfish interests.

Praying in the Holy Spirit requires a quiet, waiting attitude toward the living God, which does not come easily to anyone. Before bending your knees or lifting your hands, first pause, listen, and wait for God's attention. Prayer demonstrates a seeking of God and we should first look and see the expression on God's face. Is He smiling at us? Is there a frown or anxiety? Is the Holy Spirit pleased or grieved? Does He desire us to pray about something? Does God wish to inspire us unto praise or weeping? Praying in the Spirit means to first and foremost wait to discover God's heart for this

moment of prayer. “On all occasions” we should pray only in the Holy Spirit, moved, directed, and shown what to pray by Him. Praying in the Spirit rejects the strength of our efforts in prayer and makes certain that anything poured out before God comes through the Holy Spirit rather than through our own strength and wisdom.

2. IN YOUR IGNORANCE

When the disciples finally felt deeply their need to be taught by Jesus how to pray then He could teach them. In the same way, our prayers will never satisfy God until we start every prayer with the realization of our ignorance. Whenever I pray, I begin with my ignorance. I don’t know what to pray, and even if I do know God’s will at the moment, I do not know how to pray about it. Therefore, I must humble myself and wait for the Holy Spirit’s assistance. Only in our weakness does the Holy Spirit help us. God opposes the proud, and He will not hear their prayers nor inspire them to pray according to His will.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. (Romans 8:26)

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit and can sense

His working, we too will echo the groans of God and be blessed to have God work His perfect, pleasing will. Much arrogance fills the house of God as individual after individual floods the Lord's altar with words about their needs or how they want God to glorify His name. We, in our self-righteousness, think we know what glorifies God and how things should move forward. Praying in the Spirit leaves all of this confidence behind and picks up a cross that keenly feels the weakness of the flesh that thinks it knows what to pray. So many of our prayers go unanswered, or we feel confused about God's actions simply because we fail to grasp, by the Spirit, what the groans really mean.

To pray in the Spirit means to cease our efforts of prayer and allow the new life of Christ to move and inspire us in the proper posture for praying at any given moment. There is a time and season for everything under heaven and we are fools if we praise when we should weep, and weep when we should praise. We are foolish when we come before God with all our needs, concerns, and wants but have not asked Him to show the desires of the Holy Spirit. Hearing and doing the will of God takes a degree of humility most people completely reject. Human words cannot fully express God's will, and so the Holy Spirit must intercede with groans.

So why then do we think we can second guess God concerning His will? If you cannot understand the groans of the Holy Spirit, then wait in humility for God to reveal step by step His will. Wait upon God to impress on you the needs of Christ rather than your own. Wait upon God

to show what direction to go rather than running ahead to do what you think will glorify Him. Continually admit your ignorance and you will receive the mind of Christ and Jesus will teach you how to pray.

3. IN YOUR ROOM

Praying while jogging or walking is not “closed door” praying. Praying while driving and doing any other activity is not “closed door” praying. Lying upon your bed praying early in the morning is not “closed door” praying. Only after we arise, go into our rooms, shut the door, and pray are we prepared to pray as we jog, drive, and fulfill the demands of the day.

*But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen...
(Matthew 6:6, emphasize added).*

Jesus, the example of prayer, often arose before daybreak to find a lonely spot to pray. From these closed-door praying times, in other words shutting out the world, He could move throughout the day teaching, healing, and rebuking. When Jesus prayed to feed 5,000, His prayer was short, to the point, and powerful. Jesus simply blessed the food. Because He had spent time alone with God behind closed doors, the shortest of prayers could feed multitudes.

*Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.
(Mark 6:41a)*

One of the first things the Holy Spirit will work is to shut us up (Ecclesiastes 5:2, Matthew 6:7). Our prayers are way too wordy, and when words are many, sin is not far, (Proverbs 10:19). Unlike Jesus, our prayers of blessing food could not feed a family of five, let alone 5,000. People often remark how short my prayers are, for they are to the point and with a full heart. This comes from the work of the cross that produces life compared to the long-winded prayers that we must endure for the sake of showiness (Mark 12:40).

Is it any wonder we walk in such spiritual poverty? We can hardly feed ourselves, let alone consider feeding multitudes the bread of life. Why? Because we do not go into our rooms and close the door to the world. If we expect to hear God's voice, then we must close the door to our thoughts, emotions, and wills. How does this square with pouring our hearts out to God? That, as we will see, shows how the cross works in our prayer lives.

4. INSURRENDERED OBEDIENCE

The Bible declares we must walk as Jesus walked and if we expect God to hear our prayers and praises then we, too, must pray as Jesus prayed, in reverent submission.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:7-8)

Would you expect God to answer the prayers of Hitler? Of course not, for we know that Hitler's heart would have had to change before God would remotely consider listening to his prayers. In the same way God will not listen to our prayers unless we surrender to the suffering that the cross brings in our lives. Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered, and we too will only learn to pray correctly to the degree we have allowed the sufferings of Christ teach us to obey. The quiet times of Jesus consisted of loud cries and tears, a far cry from our coffee cup devotionals found at the local bookstore. Jesus could petition and pray to God and was heard because He willingly obeyed God, not out of selfish ambition, but

reverent submission. We must remember throughout the day that God gives the Holy Spirit only to those who joyfully obey that voice (Acts 5:32). As you let God lead you into the sufferings of Christ, He will also grant you the prayers of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and those prayers God answers (Romans 8:17, 1 Peter 4:1-2).

5. UNTO DYING

We must pray until we joyfully surrender to God's will. We must pray so that only God's strength performs His will. Jesus, our example, surrendered in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he wrestled until He had given up His entire will and replaced with a joyful obedience to the Father. Jesus died to His will and, by the Holy Spirit, moved with great speed and conviction to meet the cross head on.

Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Mark 14:42)

This is what Jesus meant when He spoke in John 12:24 of falling to the ground and dying. We must die to our wants, wills, and wishes to the point that we would never go back to them if given the chance. Prayerful worship offers our bodies to God to will and work as He desires. True worship and prayer ends with knowing in the heart and performing with our bodies the "good, pleasing and

perfect” will of God.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

SUMMARY

This publication by no means provides the definitive guideline to praying but a small part of what it means to pray in the Spirit. Indeed, there are no guidelines to praying, there is only the Holy Spirit which will teach and fill us unto acceptable prayers.

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