

BIBLICAL CHURCH

Bringing the Teachings of Jesus
and Biblical Community into Your Home

Biblical Church

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To Leonard Verduin, although I never met him, his book “The Anatomy of a Hybrid” opened my understanding to the errors in the modern church structure. His writings changed my life and I am forever grateful to him.

Teryl Hebert

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FOREWORD

A few months ago I met Teryl and Diane for the first time. We met through a mutual friend that is very involved in a House Church that Teryl oversees. Before I traveled down to Baton Rouge, my friend talked a lot about her House Church and even sent me Teryl's book, *The Doctrines of Christ*. At first I was very skeptical, but after reading the book and noticing her dramatic spiritual growth, I wanted to see what this was all about.

During my visit I had a chance to fellowship with Teryl and Diane and many other members of the House Churches in that area. One thing Teryl discussed with me, which has stuck in my brain since our meeting, was the "Power of Relationships".

I grew up in church, was involved in the Jesus movement, been a member and in leadership positions in numerous churches, earned a Masters Degree from a prestigious Christian University, but at 52 years old, I find myself "unchurched", not in significant relationships with other believers, and disappointed with organized religion. I know I am not alone. Many of us have been hurt and abused by church leaders and fellow believers, we know there is something wrong with "church" but not sure exactly what it is or how to correct it. So we isolate ourselves and concentrate on our relationship with Christ, but if we are honest, we will admit that there is truly something missing.

We really do need each other, as strange as that might be. Somehow God created this dynamic and without it we can not become complete in Him. What a mystery. I know that the current church structure

does not allow for this vital aspect, building true relationships. The House Church gives us the opportunity to come into a family relationship, with all the struggles that a real family might have. But, working out issues while being in a safe place really helps develop the true nature of Christ in us all.

Let this book renew your hope. It may be hard reading for some of you. But like me, my prayer is that your eyes will be opened and you will find the ember in your spirit being fanned again into a flame!

Jonathan Rovetto

INTRODUCTION

Many say that you can't judge a book by its cover, but in the case of "Biblical Church" I hope that we do. The simple title "Biblical Church" could easily be overlooked so I want to expound on it to prepare you for what you are about to read.

Biblical

The first word in the title of this book is "Biblical." Bible is the root word for Biblical. How profound is that? I believe that the Bible is God's written Word and that it holds the same weight of authority as if God was speaking to man right now.

But a new authority has been established among the church leaders of our day. It is the authority of church growth! Their reasoning is simple and pragmatic, if it makes your church's attendance and finances grow then do it. In their reasoning the end justifies the means. Then if you grow a BIG church it means that God approves of you. They absolutely believe that "*gain is godliness*" (I Timothy 6:5), the Bible says to "withdraw from such people." But instead, leaders of smaller churches flock to their conferences to learn from the "superstars" in hopes of growing the next large church.

So whether large or small the same spirit is driving the congregations of our day. Truly the sons of God are marrying the daughters of this world (worldly principles) and many are birthing giant hybrid churches (Genesis 6:1-8). I will remind you that the first time this happened God sent the judgment of Noah's flood!

Church

The second word in the title is "Church." The Greek word for church is "ecclesia," and it means the called out assembly. We are called out of sin and set apart for God's use. We are called to be saints; we are called to be holy! Yet in the American Churches today you can hardly distinguish between the church and the rest of the world. The churches claim to be forgiven but bear no fruit of being changed. How can this be? What's wrong with the churches of our day? These are the questions that will be answered in this book.

When the New Testament was still being written there were no church buildings, professional preachers, or church programs to entertain the people. The structure of the church was totally relational. Family and friends who loved Jesus developed loving relationships with one another. These Christ centered relationships were so powerful that multitudes were drawn to Jesus by the love that they had for one another. Even under the threat of persecution multitudes came to Christ.

My Testimony

On August 6, 2011, I will celebrate my thirtieth year of being born again. I was powerfully converted to Christ in 1981 here's my testimony of how that happened.

I was raised Roman Catholic. I had the "sacraments" of christening, confirmation, catechism, communion, and confession. But I was not born of God's Spirit. I was religious but not Christian.

I left home in my teenage years and began to live a riotous life of drinking, drugs, fornication, fighting... I was a very sinful man. It was in this sinful state that God's Spirit began to draw me. I was under heavy con-

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viction for nearly one year. Sometimes I would be under such heavy conviction that I would read a Bible that a former girlfriend had given me. I would have a drink in one hand and a joint in the other hand and my Bible in my lap; this is the picture of confusion. I would get so convicted when I would read words like "take up your cross and follow me. " But I didn't know what to do to break free.

In August of 1981, I heard a preacher give an "invitation" to come to Jesus. I responded that night and walked forward to "give my life to the Lord." I recall that he was leading the people in prayers but I was not listening. I said to the Lord that night, "Lord, You know my life; You know what I have been and what I have done. Please give me that peace that the preacher was talking about and I will do whatever you tell me to do."

From that night forward God gave me a vision that I could not shake. It was a vision of the crucified face of Jesus. I saw it every waking moment. I couldn't shake free from it. I remember asking the Lord over and over, "why did Jesus die?" I always believed that Jesus died and was buried, and rose again, but I did not know why. After weeks of being in this condition God answered my question. He simply spoke to my heart and said, "Jesus took what you deserved." Right then my understanding opened and the injustice of that statement filled my mind. I began to cry out loud, "that's not fair!" Everything that I knew about Jesus was good and everything about me was bad. It was not fair in my thinking for that good man, the Son of God to die in my place. The injustice of it was overwhelming. I was so ashamed that I began to weep. Suddenly the love of God came upon me and seemed to be all around me. In my shame I resisted. I just didn't feel worthy because I wasn't. To this day I don't know why but I just stopped resisting and cried out, "Lord, come into my heart." I wept so hard over my sins that it felt like my sins were

pouring out of my eyes. As my sins came out God's love came in. That day I was converted to Christ.

Now What

Now that I was born again what was I supposed to do? After all, I promised God I would do whatever He told me to do. So I searched the Bible. I began to devour the Scripture like I was the hungriest man alive. I couldn't get enough of God's Word. Then I began to resent the Roman Catholic Church for failing to teach me the things that I was reading in the Bible. They had seventeen years of my life and they would not get another. I was certain that Roman Catholicism was not the way of the Scripture.

I went with my girlfriend Diane, who is now my wife, to the Methodist Church. I wanted to understand what the Methodists were about. So I read a book about the Methodist's founder John Wesley called *The Burning Heart* by A. Skevington Wood. It didn't take long to realize that today's Methodists were not being taught what Wesley preached, therefore, were not living the life of holiness declared by scripture. But I was forever addicted to the spirit of revival that Wesley promoted. This totally agreed with my conversion.

I felt like a round peg in a square hole from then on. I just didn't fit with the churches. I found more fellowship on the job just sharing the Lord with men I worked with who were born again than I found in the churches. We experienced a measure of revival while on that job.

A Kindred Spirit

I heard about a man who had a similar testimony to me who was teaching Bible studies. So I went to one. Finally I found someone who believed what the Bible said. God was using him in a powerful way to teach the Bible in a boat shop. Many hardened sinners were coming to Christ and out of this a church was born.

For the first few years I thought I had died and went to heaven. It was a glorious time of pure revival. Then we began to try to look like a “real church.” We rented a store front building and got some chairs and a pulpit and began to look like everyone else. Surely our message would make us different, or so I thought. But after a few years, things really began to change, and we became like every other church. We left that church utterly broken and defeated. What went wrong? How could something so good begin to decline? If only I knew then what I know now. It was the congregational structure of the church that destroyed a pure revival. I will explain this thoroughly in this book.

Bapticostal

I had a friend who was very excited about his church and asked me if I wanted to go to church with him. It was a Southern Baptist Church that allowed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, complete with speaking in tongues. They had vibrant music, singing, and dancing. It was an emotionally charged atmosphere. But Diane and I were very hurt from what we had just experienced and we guarded our hearts. The one thing that stood out the most is that they lacked the relationships that we had in our other church.

During our stay there I went to Bible College. It was a grand time for me. The teacher loved the Word of

God and was very anointed. I revived during that time and seemed to get past some of the hurts from our first church.

We were invited to be on staff at this Bapticostal Church to be youth pastors and we accepted. It was then we began seeing very disturbing things going on in the church. They were very carnal; they allowed sinful practices and neglected the people.

Diane and I had taken a very small dying youth group and turned it into a very large excited bunch. The youth were on fire for Jesus but there religious parents wanted none of it, especially the elders and their children. We had a serious clash with the elders and left that church in 1992.

No One to Blame but Me

In December of 1992 we started a church in our home with eighteen people. Our plan was to have a cell church. We would come together on Sunday's for traditional worship, and then meet in homes during the week. We prospered under that vision. Our church grew to twenty nine cell groups then we planted another church out of that and then another. By all appearances we were doing well. But I knew something was wrong.

I have always preached strong messages of repentance and holiness. I thought the answer to the church's problems was to preach better messages. But I found that no matter how pure the message was the church was still not right. I had no one to blame but me. I had created these churches and I didn't like what they were becoming and I especially didn't like what I was becoming.

Our success at traditional church planting caught the eye of my former Bible College professor. He asked us to become leaders in an “apostolic network”. This network stressed the need for governmental oversight that many call “covering.” I was under a “covering” and was also helping to provide “covering” for other churches. It turned out that covering was just another word for control. The more I saw of pastors the less I wanted to be one. Where did the purity of my conversion go? What was I becoming? What were our churches becoming? I resigned from that network in 2003.

Answers

When I looked back over my journey from my conversion to a church planter it was bitter sweet. My love for Jesus was as strong as ever but I didn’t like the church. I began to ask God where I went wrong. I put everything on the table. I was willing to change anything that He wanted me to. As God began to answer my questions everything became clear to me. He showed me the relational structure of the early church. Next, He revealed the history of how the church slowly departed from its relational roots, into a sterile non-relational congregation. I thank God for books like “Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up,” “The Kingdom that turned the World Upside Down,” “The Anatomy of a Hybrid” and many more that trace the historical steps of the church. These emboldened me to take the steps that brought me out of the Babylon structure and back to the Biblical Church.

I Repented

In January of 2006 we closed down our “successful” traditional churches and started over. Let me stress that we were not failing in the traditional sense. Many pastors would love to have the churches that we had.

We were not defeated. We were just wrong. We quit going to church so we could practice Christianity!

This book is about the revelations that God gave me of the Biblical and historical Church. I pray as you read it you will consider what I'm saying. Even if what I say rubs you wrong, remember it rubbed me wrong first. I heard someone say that if something rubs you wrong just turn around. In other words, repent.

This book is about my repentance from the traditional congregational model of church and returning to "Biblical Church." I hope that it will give you courage and direction to come out of the traditional structure and return to the Biblical Church.

Blessings,

Teryl Hebert

1

CHEATED BY TRADITIONS

Questions

Have you ever wondered why Christians get all dressed up on Sunday, then go to a building, sit in rows, and listen to one professional person give a monologue sermon? Why do we have Sunday schools, nurseries, children's churches, and youth churches? Why do churches spend so much money on elaborate buildings and even call their building the house of God? Why will church leaders forsake the Bible, and do almost anything to fill their buildings? Why do we baptize an infant or say a sinner's prayer and call that salvation? Why do we eat a little cracker and drink a tiny cup of juice and call that the Lord's Supper?

For years I have asked the Lord about these things and many other questions I had about the church. But in 2005, through a series of events, I pressed the questions even harder and God began to give me answers. I had no idea how life changing the answers would be but like the merchant who found the "pearl of great price," I have sold out to buy it! This book is about the answers that God gave me to all of my questions. It is my earnest prayer that many of you will also sell out and buy into this valuable gem of the Biblical Church.

Cheated by Traditions

I became a Christian in August of 1981. Since then, I have done my best to adhere to the teachings of Jesus found in the Bible, while being led by the Holy Spirit. Many times I was frustrated as I tried to apply the great truths of Scripture in the traditional church structure that I just called into question above. As a pastor and church planter I just assumed that the congregational model of church was what God intended. But after building three congregational churches as a senior pastor, I knew that something was wrong. The churches appeared successful yet I felt that they were failing to measure up to *the* Biblical standard. I had no one to blame or to point the finger at but myself because I planted these churches. I loved the people but I didn't love what we were doing. I especially didn't like what I was becoming as I served the churches that I built. Finally, the mounting frustrations of my inability to get "The Word to become flesh" brought me to the place where I was questioning everything. That's when God began to give me answers, both Biblical and historical. Consider this passage of Scripture that forewarns of the problems that the traditions of men cause.

Colossians 2:8, "8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

The apostle Paul warned the church of Colosse that there were people who would try to cheat Christians through deceitful philosophy based on traditions of men. These traditions are based on worldly principles and not on Christ. Traditions were already becoming a problem in the first century church, today they have

escalated into an epidemic. There are church leaders today who make no apology when they teach that we should run the church as if it was corporate America. Sadly, the American churches have been doing this for so long that we can no longer distinguish the church from the world. Even sadder, the American Church's worldly influence has spread around the globe.

The Greek word for traditions is "paradosis" and it means transmission, especially in the sense of the Jewish laws known as the "traditions of men or the elders." The English word transmission is taken from the root word transmit, it means to send to a recipient or destination. The word transmission can be used in many applications; for instance in the transmission of a disease, where a disease is spread from one to another, or parents can transmit genetics to their children, radios transmit electronic waves, and our cars have automatic transmissions that shift smoothly from one gear to another.

The application of the word transmission that would best describe the traditions of the church would be to pass on a right or obligation to heirs or descendants. When one generation observes what the former generation does many times it is treated like fact even if it is wrong. During Jesus' earthly ministry the traditions of men controlled the spiritual climate just as it does in our present generation. One day Jesus clashed with the Pharisees from Jerusalem over the traditions of the elders.

Tradition of the Elders

We can learn much from the fiery exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning traditions found in Matthew 15:1-20.

“¹ Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ² “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” ³ He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— ⁶ then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. ⁷ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸ ‘ These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. ⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” ¹⁰ When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear and understand: ¹¹ Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” ¹² Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” ¹³ But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” ¹⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.” ¹⁶ So Jesus said, “Are you also still without under-

standing? ¹⁷ Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. ²⁰ These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Transgressing Traditions

The Pharisees confronted Jesus and actually accused Him of sinning against their traditions. The argument that day was about ceremonial hand washing before you eat a meal. This ceremonial hand washing was supposed to make you holy, but Jesus and His disciples did not practice the tradition. The Pharisees considered the tradition to carry such a weight of authority that it was a sin to go against it.

Jesus fired back by accusing them of sinning against God in order to keep their traditions.

Honor Your Father and Mother

Could it be that many of our traditions today actually cause us to sin against God? I believe that they do! Today's churches do not emphasize religious hand washings before a meal, but Jesus' next argument is a little more pertinent to us. He brought up the fifth commandment, "*Honor your father and your mother.*" The word honor means to place a value on, even a monetary value. The tradition on the other hand, said that if you were to give money to God you did not have to give finances to your parents. Have you guessed where the money that was called a gift of God went? If you

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guessed the religious leaders you are absolutely correct. So tell me how it is different today in the church world? Church leaders have undone almost every Biblical teaching concerning alms for the poor, widows, and orphans. Give your money to God, they say, when actually they are keeping it for themselves and their programs while sinning against God. This has become a powerful tradition in our churches today and is the equivalent of what Jesus was accusing the Pharisees of doing.

Hypocrites

After clearly presenting His case proving that keeping traditions had become a sin against God, Jesus called them hypocrites! He strengthened His argument by quoting the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah's ministry was about seven hundred years before Jesus came to earth and yet he was encountering the same problem. Men liked to talk about how they were right with God while their lives showed otherwise. They had "lip-honor", yet their hearts dishonored Him. Their worship was only the doctrines of men and it was empty. Nothing has changed, the problem that plagued Isaiah, and Jesus is troubling us today. Now the Christian church is as guilty as the Jews of being hypocrites!

Fear of Offending Religious Leaders

The next thing that I want to point out in Jesus' exchange with the Pharisees is His disciples' response to the whole matter. They were so concerned that He had offended the Pharisees because they feared them. The church today is equally afraid of offending its leaders. We think that we should take these abuses and never say a word. Jesus saw this from a totally different perspective. We assume that because someone is a religious leader that he, or she, must be from God. Jesus straightened out their thinking by saying if God did not plant them then they will be plucked up. He went on to say that they were blind leaders of the blind, causing many to fall into the ditch. The only insight we have to judge whether or not a person is from God is if they keep the commandments of God or the commandments of men!

Defilement

Jesus finished the lesson by saying it's not what goes into your mouth defiles you but what comes out of it. There are certainly health benefits to washing your hands before you eat but the benefits have nothing to do with spiritual issues. We can wash our hands and then eat with a filthy heart. We can make our outside clean while we are inwardly defiled. Today we put so much emphasis on outward appearance that we are stunned when someone who looks good outwardly does something bad. Someone may look ritually right while taking the Lord's Supper yet they are living in gross sin. Today we seem more concerned with being ritually right.

Paul's Bad Traditions

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In Galatians 1:10-14, the apostle Paul is describing the effects of his traditions prior to becoming a Christian.

“10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. 11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”

Paul starts the discussion of the effects that traditions had on him by making a distinction between pleasing men verses pleasing God. He presses the issue even farther when he insisted that he did not get the gospel from men. Paul testifies that he received a revelation from Jesus Christ that taught him the gospel that he preached.

Next Paul explains why he so adamantly defends the fact that he received the gospel by revelation from Jesus. Paul persecuted the church prior to his conversion. He consented to the death of Stephen and then brought many Christians to prison. He did all of this evil against the church because he was zealous for the traditions of the fathers!

There is no question that today's churches are practicing things that are traditions of men and not the commandments of God. So we would do well to take heed that we are not unconverted zealots for the Chris-

tian religion who are actually persecuting the true church.

Tradition and Redemption

The apostle Peter also confessed that traditions even clouded the issue of how we are redeemed. He makes his case in I Peter 1:13-19.

“13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Peter pointed out that because of the tradition of the fathers many thought that they were redeemed by silver or gold. He even took the case a little farther by saying that this confusion in redemption caused “aimless conduct.” I hope that you can see how similar the effects of traditions are on those in Peter’s day and on our generation. It would not be hard to make a case that today’s churches wander about with aimless conduct. Let’s be more specific, we are void of holiness. If you were raised in a religious tradition (even Christian religion), chances are holiness was never taught. On the other hand most churches today never miss an opportunity to talk more about money. You cannot serve God and mammon yet it seems that mammon has won out in the churches of our day. The prosperity gospel of today would go so far as to tell us that the amount

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of silver and gold we possess is directly proportionate to our relationship with God.

We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb without blemish or spot, completely holy! We must never allow any tradition of men to reduce our redemption to gold and silver.

Good Traditions

To be fair the Bible does speak of traditions in a good way also. Twice in the book of II Thessalonians the apostle Paul makes a case for holding on to good traditions.

Sanctification by the Holy Spirit

II Thessalonians 2:13-17, "13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."

We were chosen for salvation **through** sanctification (set apart for God's use) by the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth. There are those today who want to say that we are chosen by God and now we have no human responsibility. This doctrine has become a tradition of men that has permeated our society like a cancer. We must go through the sanctification process with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. I will speak much

more about this a little later in our chapters on the history of the church's doctrine. The apostle Paul encouraged all to hold on to this tradition. It's amazing how easy it is to keep the traditions of men and how hard it is to keep the traditions of God.

Paul ended his discussion with an exhortation to be established in every good word and work. The traditions of men want to do away with the good tradition of sanctification in word and work, reducing sanctification to words only.

Withdraw from the Disorderly

II Thessalonians 3:6-15, "6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Paul commanded the Thessalonians to withdraw from any who claimed to be Christian but walked "dis-

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orderly.” He then describes disorderly behavior as those who would not work, especially ministers. He used his own ministry as a standard to gauge this by because he provided for his own needs. Paul said if someone won’t work he should not be given food to eat.

Paul was encouraging the Thessalonians to keep this as a good tradition; I also believe it would serve our generation well. I don’t like preachers who don’t like to work. There are ministers who work hard and earn their keep, but there are those who are just plain lazy, and should not be paid. Paul said that we should not keep company with such people so that they will be ashamed.

So we see that there are some good traditions and I would love to see the church return to them. What a blessing it would be to see the church walking in sanctification of the Spirit and the Word of God, and to see those in the ministry walking in order, setting an example of integrity, not abusing the church for money. Unfortunately the church has forsaken those good traditions and has chosen the traditions of men. We have been cheated!

In our next chapters we will examine where those traditions of men came from. We will look first at the history of the church’s structure and then the history of the church’s theology.

2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH'S STRUCTURE PT I

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were both penned by Luke, a Gentile physician who was converted to Christ and then became the Apostle Paul's travelling companion. The Book of Acts is a fascinating account of the history of the early church. There are three milestones in the church's history that I will highlight from Luke's writings:

- "The Promise of Power"
- "Pentecost"
- "Persecution"

I want to launch our study of the church's history with an excerpt from the last chapter of the Gospel of Luke and the opening chapter of the Book of Acts.

The Promise of Power

Luke 24:44-53, "44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. 46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." 50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen."

Acts 1:4-8, "4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Luke ends his gospel and begins the history of the early church with Jesus' parting words to His disciples. Notice that I underlined in both passages that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Holy Spirit. Once they were endued with power they were to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and all of the earth with the message of repentance and remission of sins.

This is our first historical milestone; the disciples were to wait for the promise of power before taking the message of repentance and remission of sins to the whole world. With that Jesus ended His earthly ministry.

Pentecost

Our second historical milestone is found in the Book of Acts 2:1-4:

"1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

This fulfilled the Promise of the Father that Jesus commanded His disciples to wait for. From the beginning of creation until Noah's flood, God dealt directly with man. Then from Abram until Jesus, God dealt with man through Christ. Now, on the Day of Pentecost, a new era began where God would deal with man through the Person of the Holy Spirit, the church was born and we are still living in the church age.

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The most outstanding feature of the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit is that they all began to speak with other tongues. This is obviously in accord with Jesus' instruction to go to all of the nations. The language barrier would be bridged so the messengers could make plain the message of the gospel to every tongue under heaven.

There are several other things that I want to point out about the Day of Pentecost that are found at the end of Acts 2:41-47:

"41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

A huge influx of new converts to Christ from the Jewish faith created many challenges for the apostles. Three thousand came into the church on that day, then a few days later five thousand more came in all at once (Acts 4:4), also, people were coming in on daily basis. It would be safe to say that the fledgling church was inundated with new members. Just think of all that the apostles had to do. They were continually bringing new people in. They needed to baptize and disciple the converts. They had to make sure everyone was cared for.

Money and goods were pouring in that had to be distributed. And they still had to pray and study God's Word. I'm sure they were overwhelmed to say the least!

Another thing that I would like to point out is the four dynamics that were instantly birthed into the new church found in verse 42, *"42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* We will spend much time on each of these for dynamics later in this book, but for now I just want to point out that with the birth of the new church came an instant need for a new method of worship. In John 4:19-24, Jesus spoke to a woman about this new kind of worship that He would usher in:

"19 The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' 21 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'"

When confronted with her sin, this Samaritan woman did what all of us do; we get religious! She immediately began to discuss the fine points of where we should go to church. But Jesus quickly set her straight. It's not about when and where we worship, it's about Who and how we worship Him. The true worshippers must worship God in spirit and in truth. If there are "true" worshippers there must be "false"

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worshippers. I believe that the distinction between the two is that a false worshipper is absolutely dependent upon religious buildings, sacraments, and rituals. True worshippers only need the Holy Spirit and God's Word to live out their relationships with God and with one another. We will discuss this thoroughly later in this book.

With that said it's only natural that the new church would gather at the temple where the revival began. At first they divided their time between the temple and breaking bread from house to house. Soon the only expression of worship the new church would have would be the church in the house. This brings us to milestone number three...

Persecution

To say that the religious community in Jerusalem was experiencing a paradigm shift would be a gross understatement; the religious world was being turned upside down. Think about what we've learned so far. At least eight thousand new converts had joined the new church. If the apostles were counting true to form this number could be much larger. When Jesus fed the five thousand they only counted the men (Matthew 14:21). If that were the case at Pentecost and the Gate Beautiful, plus the daily conversions, there could be as many as fifty thousand people in the church at Jerusalem within weeks of its birth!

Now let me pose a hypothetical situation for us to consider. What if ten to fifty thousand people suddenly left the churches in any city today and began to worship in the open air or in homes and quit funding the institutional churches? What do you think the religious leaders would do when they could no longer pay for

their buildings, salaries, and programs? What do you think the political leaders would do? They would do exactly what the religious and political leaders did in the early church. They would be enraged, not so much at the message but at the huge economic shift! This is clearly displayed later in the Book of Acts in response to the Apostle Paul's tremendous success in Ephesus:

Acts 19:23-27, "23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. 25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. 26 Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. 27 So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

We can see from this passage that the hypothetical scenario that I posed was not so farfetched but was one that was actually happening and would repeat itself wherever the gospel was preached. Ten to fifty thousand new worshippers of Christ were now in the church at Jerusalem. They were so powerfully devoted to the Lord that they began to sell all of their possessions and lay them at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-37). The offerings were so abundant that the apostles had to appoint men to conduct the distribution of land, houses, money, clothing, and food (Acts 6:1-7). This trend will lead us to our third milestone in the church's history.

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One of the men chosen for the daily distribution was named Stephen, a man full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. His preaching was so powerful that no one could stop him. Stephen's story is found in Acts 6:8 and ends with his martyrdom in Acts 7:60. I only want to include the last portion of the sermon that got Stephen killed because of its significance to ushering in the persecution that would set the course for the church for the next three hundred years.

Acts 7:44-53, "44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, 45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, 46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built Him a house. 48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 49 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?' 51 "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

Stephen was declaring that God did not live in the building, and this was too much for his religious audience to bear! With that they rushed on him and killed him.

God does not live in buildings that men make, but He dwells in men that He makes! We are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we should take care that we are not resisting Him by trying to put God in a building. This message got Stephen killed and would be the catalyst for the third milestone in the early church's history.

Acts 8:1, "1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

I believe this to be one of the most significant turning points in the history of the church. Stephen's martyrdom ushered in a great time of bitter persecution against the church. No longer would the followers of Christ dare to show themselves publicly at the temple. They were forced to meet in homes or in secret places because following Christ officially became illegal in all of the Roman Empire and Rome ruled the world.

This set the church's course for the next three centuries. The church would mostly meet in the homes of those who followed Christ. Many that I talk to about this conclude that the church only quit going to the temple because of the persecution and that once the persecution ceased they were free to congregate once again. Could it be that this persecution was a judgment from God against the church? After all, Jesus commanded them to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the entire world, yet the church stayed in Jerusalem until the persecution hit. Then they went to Judea and Samaria. But even then the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. Was the reluctance of the apostles to leave Jerusalem the reason for the persecution? Another-

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er question that I would pose to you is this. If God really wants us to build a relational church without a building shouldn't we just obey Him instead of reacting to a judgment that He sends on us? It's my solemn prayer that the church would act in obedience instead of reacting to judgment, and return to the Biblical model of church that thrived in the first three centuries.

In our next chapter, I will point out events in history that are not recorded in the Bible that reshaped the church for the worse for the next 1200 years.

3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH'S STRUCTURE PT II

For some reason we tend to romanticize the early church as though it was wonderful and problem free, but that is simply not the case. Most of the epistles in the Scripture are pointing out all sorts of problems that the early church was encountering. The Jewish converts were trying to have all Gentile believers circumcised. Getting the Gentile converts from pagan religion to live holy was another issue. False teachers and false doctrines were rampant. I could go on but I think you get the point.

John, the last surviving member of Jesus' twelve apostles, died at about 100 A.D. Ignatius, who was one of John's disciples, was already placing an inordinate emphasis on obeying the bishops as early as 100 A.D. This would be an eventual framework for "top down" leadership in the "pseudo" church.

Marcionism

By 129 A.D. a man named Marcion led a protest movement complaining that the church had become too

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much like the Old Testament. I want to make it clear that I do not agree with the teachings of Marcion, especially due to the fact that he taught that the Old Testament God was not the same God as in the New Testament. However, he did have a point about the blending of the Old and New Testaments because of the powerful influence of the Jewish converts. The Apostle Paul fought against this on almost every page of his epistles and it's obvious after his death it became rampant. Be they right or wrong, it's only natural that some would stand to counter these kinds of movements.

Montanism

Another protest movement began around 150 A.D. called Montanism named after the movements founder Montan. Montan's main goal was to restore primitive Christianity, especially the prophetic and personal experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, much like the Charismatic Movement of our day. Even though the Charismatic movement became filled with excess and false doctrines, few would say that it was not a valid move of God. It is noteworthy to inject here that even Turtullian, one of the most accurate of the early church historians, joined himself to the Montanists.

Novatianism

A third movement sprung up near the third century called Novatianism, named after its founder Novatian. Novatian was troubled by the lack of holiness that the church's members displayed as the church got further away from the teachings of its early days. He wanted to restore strict entry requirements and discipline to keep the church's conduct distinctive from the world.

Personal holiness was the theme of the movement and it became widespread.

I have been a student of revival for nearly twenty five years and I can't think of a revival that did not have, at the heart of it, a burning desire to restore holiness to the church.

Heretics?

I point out these three movements here to make two points. First, the early church began straying away from its foundational principles even before the death of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. These negative trends called for counter movements that many call heresy, but before we judge these "heretics" too harshly we should consider that every revival throughout the church's history contained one or more elements of each of these "heresies." Marcion called for a pure New Testament church; so do I. Montan called for a return to the prophetic and personal experience; so do I. Novatian called for a return to holiness; so do I. While I may not agree with everything that each of these men said and did, I do agree with the main reasons that these three counter movements came up.

The second point I want to make about these movements is that the church seemed to be trending toward a direction that would set itself up for a fatal blow that would alter the structure and theology of the church for the next 1700 years.

Constantine

In 306 A.D. Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantine became Emperor of Rome. By 324 A.D. he had solidified himself as ruler of the entire Roman Empire. It has been said that "He who wins the war writes the history." Never is that saying truer than in the case of Constantine. Almost everything we read about him is written in a good light as though he single handedly turned Christianity for the better. I believe that he single handedly turned the church but I don't believe for one second that it was for the better. As I present the facts briefly here and you see when and how the church turned, you decide in your own heart if this was from God or man.

Edict of Tolerance

Early in Constantine's reign, his mother became Christian leaving her son with a terrible dilemma; his mom could be killed for treason according to Roman law. This no doubt influenced what Constantine would do next. In 313 A.D. the single most important event in the history of the church took place; Constantine made Christianity legal for the first time since Acts 8:1. The law was called at the beginning the "Edict of Tolerance" and later became known as the "Edict of Milan" after the city it was written in.

Once the Christians realized that they were no longer being persecuted they slowly began to emerge from hiding. It soon became known just how large the Christian movement had grown over the past three centuries. The church had not only survived but thrived meeting almost exclusively in houses! For three hundred years the church had neither public buildings nor professional ministers. They only had the Word and the Spirit and yet they grew so large that all

of the Roman Empire had to take note, especially Constantine.

Let me re-emphasize here that the Edict of Tolerance was the key act that would turn the church's structure from a relational model to a religious congregation. From there a domino effect began to tumble the pillars of the early church's relational model and soon they would be replaced by a worldly pyramid structure of religion.

The Official Religion of Rome

Constantine, being a shrewd politician, knew that this huge group of people meant political advantage. This prompted him to enact another piece of legislation declaring that Christianity was the only right religion and all others were wrong. Three hundred years of persecution could not break the church; it only caused the church to thrive under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. But legalizing Christianity would soon do what persecution never could do; make the church part of the world!

You can only imagine what this huge reversal of fortunes did. Now the shoe was on the other foot. Those who worshipped pagan gods were now the ones being shunned and persecuted instead of the Christians, creating a whole new set of problems. The pagans resented being forced to acknowledge the Christian God as the One True God.

The pagans were now being forced to attend "indoctrination classes" which were to be followed with baptism. Refusal to be baptized was met with swift penalties. At first it meant to be expelled from your community, but later it became punishable by death.

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Under Constantine's reforms the peaceful church that had been ruthlessly persecuted for three hundred was now the persecutor. Does this sound like Christianity to you? Does this reflect the teachings of Christ or His disciples? How then can we say that Constantine's reforms were good? I believe that every Christian should be brought to a decision concerning this matter; was Constantine from God or from hell? I believe he was from hell!

We will talk more about this in the next chapter but I wonder if those pagans had any idea of what they were about to suffer at the hands of this new Constantine style of church?

Congregations

Constantine began to rebuild the pagan shrines that were destroyed during his battle campaigns, restoring them at taxpayer's expense. Next he gave them to the Christians for congregational worship centers. This marked a significant departure from the original structure of the Biblical church. For three hundred years worship was conducted in the homes of Christians who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Now under this new paradigm only trained ministers would be allowed to speak while the untrained were forced to sit in rows and listen without interrupting the professionals.

I cannot over emphasize how damaging this single move was to the structure of the church. Now we consider congregational worship as a fact of the New Testament Church, when actually the word "congregation" is used only once in the New Testament referring to a Jewish synagogue. In other words "congregation" was an Old Testament word used for the nation of

Israel and never once was it used in the Bible to define New Testament Christianity.

Eventually it became illegal to meet in homes. Worship was only permitted in state-approved congregations with state-trained ministers. Another pillar of the Biblical Church was toppled.

Ministers

Constantine also noticed that most Christian leaders were poor and uneducated. So he began to build schools to educate the new clergy of the official religion of the state. Then he began to pay them salaries.

This too, dealt a huge blow to the structure of the Biblical Church that had done so well for three hundred years led by those who were converted to Christ and led by the Holy Spirit. Once again, I must strongly emphasize here the huge amount of damage that this did to shift the church. This new development created a distinction between clergy and laity, which did not exist previously in the New Testament Church.

The Nicaean Council

The next historic milestone enacted by Constantine that reshaped Christianity, moving it even further in a wrong direction away from its origins, was the Nicaean Council. Constantine presumptuously usurped the authority of the Bishops of the church by presiding over them to form a doctrinal creed. Keep in mind that there is no record that Constantine was even a Christian. He was actually baptized on his death bed in 337 A.D., even then leaving us to wonder if he had ever been converted!

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The damage done to the Biblical Church from this development was that Christianity was no longer a life style but a statement of faith. There was no longer any need to change your life, all you had to do was recite the creed and you were considered Christian. They were once called "the people of the way" (Acts 22:4, 24:14, 24:22), now we have become "*the people who say.*"

This was a devastating blow and you will see why in the next chapter when we see the damage that was done to the apostle's doctrine and fellowship. Interpreting the Scripture inside of this new structure would take on a whole new meaning when the Bible was applied to religion instead of relationships.

The Birth of a Hybrid

Legalizing Christianity and then making it the official state religion made Christianity a "hybrid" from that time forward. Like all hybrids they can grow large but they are unable to reproduce; sterile if you would. Once the church and the state got married, they produced a giant hybrid church that was unable to yield Christian fruit.

I would suggest to all who read this to obtain and read a copy of Leonard Verduin's book "The Anatomy of a Hybrid." Verduin does a splendid job of retracing the historical steps of the church in great detail, (I relied heavily on his compilation of history in the writing of this book). He then applies those details inside of the frame work of a Bible passage found in Genesis 6:1-6:

"1 Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, 2

that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. 3 And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 4 There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."

When the "sons of God" (Christians) and the "daughters of men" (the world) get married their children are giants. In other words, when the church begins to use the principles of the world it can grow quite large but it is not holy. Even cancer will grow, but no one wants that kind of growth. Yet the church is addicted to worldly corporate principles that cause cancerous growth. Many teachers today say without apology that the church should use the principles of corporate America if we want to be successful and grow. Pastors that are eager to fill their pews pay these teachers enormous amounts of money to come teach these principles to their churches. This caused God to judge the whole earth and destroy it in Noah's day. How will we escape God's wrath if we are doing the same things today. I believe that this scenario is repeating itself today as the church and the world continually cohabit to create giant churches void of Christian fruit.

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There were many in the “remnant church” that resisted Constantine’s reforms and held to the original church structure and doctrines. These resistors would soon be ironed out by a “new” theologian who built a new style of doctrine to fit the new Constantine structure.

4

CONSTANTINE'S STRUCTURE, AUGUSTINE'S DOCTRINE

Try to imagine what it was like for the church to have met for three hundred years in homes. There were absolutely no church buildings, no clever church names, only the church that met at the "Smith's" house. When the church met everyone participated in the service with psalms, words, gifts, prayers... everyone brought something. There was no professional clergy, only humble men and women who loved Jesus with all of their hearts. They ate a meal together and loved each other in such a remarkable way that even under the threat of persecution those who knew them wanted to be a part of such a circle of friends.

Then along came Constantine and within a few short years the church no longer met in homes but in refurbished pagan temples. The meetings were professionally run by state trained clergy. Gone were the days where everyone was encouraged to participate; now they were expected to sit there and just

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listen. They no longer ate together and after a while no one really wanted to. With the agape meal abolished so was the agape. The new structure was not an environment where the world would know we are His disciples by the love that we have for one another.

The new structure of the church called for a new theology. The old theology just didn't fit in the new structure. The New Testament was written while everyone still met in homes so it would stand to reason that its application was for a relational environment. But with Constantine's changes, the church's environment became religious and ritualistic, so applying relational terms to a ritual environment became a problem. Then came Augustine...

Augustine

Aurelius Augustine was born in 354 A.D. about 17 years after the death of Constantine. He was a gifted orator and even made his living with his great speaking skills.

After his "conversion", Augustine eventually became the Bishop of Hippo, which was a region of northern Africa under the Roman Empire. From this position he rose to prominence among all of the professional clergy of the new Constantine structure. No doubt that his tremendous ability to speak proved handy as he squelched all would be arguments while he began to forge out a new doctrine to fit Constantine's fledgling structure.

A Sample of His Doctrine

- Mary was born without sin and lived her whole life sinless.
- Unbaptized infants are eternally damned.

- Sex, even within marriage is a debased act.
- War can be holy.
- There is no millennium.
- No forgiveness of sins outside of the Roman Catholic Church.
- Some of the practices and teachings of the twelve apostles no longer apply to Christians because the apostles lived in a different age.
- There is a purgatorial (purging) fire after death.
- The church is divided into two groups Corpus Christi (The Body of Christ) and Corpus Christianum (the body of Christendom).
- The dead can benefit from the Eucharist (communion).
- It is proper for a Christian state to persecute heretics.

Now I want to enlarge a bit on some of Augustine's teachings and show how the new structure promoted such doctrine.

Augustine on Salvation

Adam's fall caused all men to be totally depraved. This became known as the doctrine of "original sin." This means that the guilt of Adam's sin was passed on to all of us. In other words, we are born guilty of sin because of what Adam did. This would factor in heavily when he concocted infant baptism.

He taught that man has no free will to choose to believe or not to believe; only those whom God gives grace to can believe. He came to this because he also believed that God predestined who would be saved and who would be damned, there is nothing that man can do about it. He was the first to teach that those whom

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God predestined for salvation cannot possibly lose it and those predestined for damnation cannot possibly be saved.

He took these thoughts even further by teaching that the gift of faith and the gift of perseverance are different. In other words, those who are not predestined to salvation will not persevere. Also, he taught that we have no way of knowing who has been given the gift of perseverance.

The Bible on Salvation

Allow me to highlight a few things that Christ and the apostles taught that are in glaring contrast to Augustine.

Concerning Adam's fall, in Romans 5:12-14,

"12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— 13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come."

Yes, sin did enter the world through Adam, but the thing passed on to us was death, not sin. Death spread because all of us sin. We are certainly born with a fallen nature and all men do sin, but we are not accountable for what Adam did. Augustine believed that we enter the world already guilty of Adam's sin. Therefore if a baby dies before baptism it is eternally damned, thus the need for infant baptism. I do not be-

lieve that innocent babies go to hell before ever offending God or man, do you?

Predestination

All of Augustine's false doctrine hinges on the misuse of the idea of predestination. Through this misuse, Augustine totally removes all human responsibility from the equation, and therein lies the heresy. The Bible does teach us about predestination, in Ephesians 1:3-6,

"3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."

God chose us "in Him," that is, "in Christ" before the foundation of the world. Before the world was even formed, God's plan to save mankind was already complete. The Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Did God choose individuals or did He choose a plan? I submit to you that God chose to save men "in Christ" before the world began. And also, that those saved under this plan would live holy and without blame in love with Him.

The plan to adopt sons by Jesus Christ is what was actually predestined, not the individuals that God would save. Man can choose to cooperate with this process and be saved, or he can choose not to cooperate and be damned. Bible references that include man's will concerning salvation are too numerous to

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exhaust in this short paper so let's just take one, consider the words of Jesus in Mark 8:34-38,

"34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Notice that man can desire (or will) to come after Jesus and be saved! God did not do away with human responsibility in salvation. The will of man must continually be surrendered to God throughout our life on earth. The will of man is the proving ground where our love for God is put to the test.

Truly, man has nothing to do with God sending His Son to the earth and allowing His blood to be shed for the salvation of all who believe. God cut the covenant. But men must enter into this covenant by faith and keep the covenant by faith or we will abort the adoption process.

The Doctrine of "The Two Swords"

After Constantine legalized Christianity through the "Edict of Tolerance," the church and the state of Rome began to work together, each with the others interests in mind. This was foreign thinking to the pre-Constantine church even before the persecution that began in Acts chapter eight. The Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are two different entities. But now, Rome had the church's back and the church had Rome's back, paving the way for one of Augustine's most deplorable doctrines, the doctrine of the two swords.

If you will recall, after the Passover meal Jesus told His disciples in Luke 22:34-38,

"35 And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing." 36 Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. 37 For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors. For the things concerning Me have an end.'" 38 So they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."

Augustine interpreted this passage of Scripture to mean that the church has one sword of authority and the state has the other sword of authority. From this premise he taught that the spiritual authority of the church and the literal sword of the Roman army were to work together to evangelize the world.

He actually coupled this thought with another obscure passage from the Book of Luke 14:15-24,

“15 Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” 16 Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, 17 and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ 18 But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ 19 And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ 20 Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ 21 So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ 22 And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ 23 Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”

Notice in verse 23, where the master said to “compel them to come in.” Augustine combined the doctrine of the two swords and the little phrase “compel them to come in” to create a new kind of evangelism that had absolutely no Scriptural merit.

The priests of Rome would march ahead of the Roman armies into a city, town, or village and would preach the gospel. Then they would command the entire audience to be baptized or the army would kill them! So naturally most would submit to water baptism (the church’s authority), to keep from being put to death by the sword of Rome. This unprecedented method of “salvation” brought more to water baptism

than ever before, but it brought salvation to none! Those who resisted, like the Donatists' of northern Africa who were declared to be heretics by Augustine, were put to the sword. The church who had once suffered persecution from the Roman blade was now persecuting all who stood against the right religion of Rome. This would pave the way for the examination and extermination of "heretics" (those who resisted the state approved religion).

Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum

With the massive influx of those "compelled" to come into the church a new challenge arose. Unconverted people were now attending the functions that were once called holy. Augustine solved this dilemma with yet another unprecedented thought; he made two classes of people within the church. The first, he called Corpus Christi, which means the body of Christ. The second, a sub-phylum if you would, he called Corpus Christianum, which represents those who were christened, thus saved, but they showed no fruits of conversion to Christ.

Gone were the days of being cut to the heart by a convicting sermon and surrendering to Christ. Instead, souls were afraid of being cut to pieces by Rome's sword so they surrendered to the Roman priests. No longer did souls struggle to become converted, they complied to keep from being killed. And so, the church was now being populated with the unconverted, which were being told by the Roman leaders that they were saved because of the power of the church's authority to baptize.

Believe it or not this is taught in varying forms today which I will point out in our next chapter.

***Summary: He who wins the war,
writes the history***

In this chapter I have highlighted Augustine's three doctrines of predestined salvation/damnation, the two swords, and Corpus Christi/Corpus Christianum. Understanding this, helps us to see how Constantine's structure, helped to forge the way for Augustine's new doctrine. The damaging effects of these, when paired together, would thrust the church into a new era, where they were no longer the persecuted but the persecutor. It's no wonder why the years following, when the Popes ruled, were called the dark ages. This period was filled with unthinkable horrors from the two swords put upon any "heretic" that would dare to question or disagree.

We have covered nearly four hundred years of history in a very short time using very broad strokes to paint the picture. Some who read this might find it contrary to most of what has traditionally been taught, especially concerning Constantine or Augustine. Remember, "He who wins the war gets to writes the history." History's portrait of Constantine and Augustine usually paints them in an almost heroic light. But remember they did win the wars of their day enabling them to spin the history in a way that made them look good. On the other hand I believe that these two men damaged the church more than any others before or after them. But those who followed after them would continue to move the church further and further from the foundations of Christ and His apostles.

5

THE REFORMATION?

Once in place, the structural changes of Constantine and the theological changes implemented by Augustine dominated the church for the next 1200 years. This period of time would become known as the “Dark Ages” and for good cause. The church that once had been ruthlessly persecuted by the Roman State had now joined forces with its former foe, to become the persecutor of all that would dare to disagree with it.

Many works have been written that tell of the horrific tortures imposed on the so called “heretics” that would dare to oppose Augustine’s infant baptism. Books like Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Martyrs Mirror recall with graphic detail the demonic cruelties by which those martyrs were killed. I especially want to place emphasis those martyrdoms between the years of 313 A.D. and 1517 A.D., because these died under inquisition from the Roman Catholic Church!

It is important to point out, that those who were being killed for their opposition to the Roman Church were those who dared to stand up for Biblical Christianity! Let me re-emphasize here that infant baptism was at the heart of most of the persecutions. This will factor in heavily as I point out the influence of Augustine’s infant baptism and Luther’s “reformed” theology.

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As we delve into the history of the “Protestant Reformation” we will discover that very little was actually reformed. The most notable thing reformed had little to do with Constantine’s structure or Augustine’s doctrine, but had mostly to do with who was in control! Once in power this new leadership would prove to be nearly as bloodthirsty as its Roman predecessor.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546), was a German priest who was heavily influenced by Augustinian theology. He spent two years in a monastery of Augustinian friars. Without a doubt Augustine had a large influence on Luther’s doctrine.

In the year 1517, a Dominican friar named Johann Tetzel was commissioned by the pope and sent to Germany to sell indulgences to raise money to refurbish St. Peter’s Basilica. Indulgences were a practice of the Roman Catholic Church that was supposed to grant pardon to sinners who gave money to the church. It was through the sale of indulgences that the Roman Church amassed its fortune. Luther, who opposed indulgences, sent a letter to his bishop Albert of Mainz stating his opposition to the Roman practice of selling indulgences for obtaining Divine favor. This letter to Albert of Mainz became known as the “95 Theses,” and would be credited with the start of what became known as the Protestant Reformation.

Luther’s letter to his bishop was printed and circulated throughout all of Germany. Luther soon found that he had more followers than he could have imagined. The truth is that Luther’s letter was just a rallying point for a movement that was already in full swing.

The Anabaptists

There has always been a remnant of believers who dare to worship God the same way the early church did. During Augustine's time the Donatists of northern Africa, were severely persecuted to extermination by Augustine. In the time of the "reformation," groups like the Waldensians (followers of Peter Waldo, 1200 A.D.) and the Hussites (followers of John Huss, 1400 A.D.); were labeled as "heretics" by the Roman Church. Another term affixed to these would be "Anabaptists," which means to baptize again or re-baptizers. These and many others ran to Luther's side until they understood that his intentions were not pure. He was not turning back to the apostolic way, but was merely tweaking the Roman system with doctrinal substitutes that would prove to be just as damaging as Augustine's. Once this was understood by the remnant church, they parted ways with Luther. We need to try to understand what drew the "heretics" to Luther, then what changed to cause them to flee.

Luther's Early Position Concerning Heresy

In 1523, Luther penned these words, "In matters of faith we have to do with a free act, one to which no one can be coerced...Heresy is something spiritual; it can neither be bruised with iron nor burned with fire nor drowned with water; only the Word of God can overcome it... The secular authorities should keep hands off, should busy themselves with their own affairs and let everyone believe this or that as he can or chooses; force must not be used in this area of life."

In that same year Luther said, "The soul's thoughts and reflections are revealed to no one but God; there-

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fore, it is impossible to compel one with physical force to believe this or that. Another kind of compulsion does it; physical force does not.”

Surely this type of language against the church using the state for the examination and execution of “heretics” must have put Luther on common ground with those “heretics” who held to the Biblical Church. Those who had long been the victims of torture would certainly be interested in causing it to cease.

Concerning Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum

Luther’s early position on the Augustinian heresy of Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum would certainly have further endeared him to the “heretics.” In Luther’s “Deutsche Messe,” composed in 1526 he wrote, “They who seriously want to be Christians and want to confess to the Gospel in word and deed, these ought to have their names inscribed in a book and assemble in a house by themselves for the purpose of prayer, the reading of Scripture, the administration of baptism, the reception of the sacrament, and to engage in other Christian cultal acts... but I neither can nor may as yet set up such a gathering, for I do not as yet have the people for it. If, however, the time comes that I must do it, so that I cannot with a good conscience refrain from it, then I am ready to do my part.”

Was Luther actually advocating that the true church be separate from the state church? Was he also suggesting that the church move back to the house church structure? Yes and yes! But notice that his main hesitancy was that he “didn’t have the people for it.” In other words, he was not interested in a small “true church.” He would rather have a large “false church!”

This rationale still exists today in the church growth movement.

Luther would soon reverse himself on these foundational issues and align himself with the Roman Catholic Church.

Luther's Later Positions

You must realize that holding to the above mentioned positions made Luther an enemy of the Roman Church and the state. Because of this Luther was forced to flee for his life to Wartburg. It was during his stay in Wartburg that Luther reversed himself on many positions. Just as the seed planted in stony ground springs up quickly and withers equally as fast, so did Luther. The stony ground of an Augustinian heart couldn't stand the heat of persecution and Luther shrunk back from his early positions.

Concerning Heresy

Consider this paper written by Luther, Bugenhagen, and Creutziger, called "Recommendation" submitted to Philip of Hesse concerning the duties of the magistrates in putting heretics to death.

"Every person is duty-bound to prevent and suppress blasphemy, each according to his status. By virtue of this commandment princes and civil authorities have the power and the duty to abolish unlawful cults and to establish orthodox teaching and worship. Concerning this point Leviticus applies: "He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, let him be put to death." ...Princes must not only protect the goods and the physical being of their subjects but their most essential function is to promote the honor of God, to

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repress blasphemy and idolatry. This is why in the Old Testament the kings... put false prophets and idolaters to death. Such examples apply to the function of the princes.”

Wow! I think that to say he reversed himself would be an understatement. With this statement he totally agreed with Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church. This hardly seems like the language of reformation to me, how about you?

Later Concerning Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum

Remember, early on Luther said that true Christians (Corpus Christi) should join together in houses for prayer, Scripture reading, and the Lord's Supper separate from the masses (Corpus Christianum).

Now listen to his revised thoughts on this same subject, “Conventicles (a secret meeting for worship) are in no case to be tolerated...these are the thieves and murderers of whom Christ spoke in John 10:8, persons who invade another man's parish and usurp another man's office, conduct not commanded them but forbidden to them. And a citizen is obliged, if and when such a sneak-thief comes, before he listens to him or lets him teach, to inform his civil magistrate as well as the pastor whose parishioner he is. If he fails to do this then let him realize that he behaves like one unfaithful to his magistrate and acts contrary to his oath, and, as a despiser of the pastor whom he is obliged to respect, acts against God. Moreover, he thereby becomes himself guilty and has become a thief and a rogue along with the sneak-thief... They must neither be tolerated nor listened to, even though they seek to preach pure Gospel, yes even if they are angelic and simon-pure

Gabriels from heaven... Therefore let everyone ponder this, that if he wants to preach or teach let him exhibit the call or commission that drives him to it or else let him keep his mouth shut. If he refuses this then let the magistrate consign the scoundrel into the hands of his proper master whose name is Master Hans (a euphemism for hangman)."

Once again the "reformer" Luther was perfectly aligned with Constantine and Augustine.

The Lord's Supper

I might add here that Luther also held the same position of the Roman Catholics concerning The Lord's Supper, in that he held to the false doctrine known as "transubstantiation." Roman Catholics believe that during the "sacrifice of the mass," the bread and wine literally turn into the body and blood of Jesus. During the "sacrifice of the mass" the priest raises the bread and wine and prays "Lord accept this sacrifice from our hands..." They actually believe that Jesus is put to death at each mass! Luther's defense of this doctrine became a major point of contention between himself and another "reformer" named Ulrich Zwingli.

Luther's Summary

When everything was said and done with the reformation, the most notable thing that we could ascribe to Luther would be the doctrine of "sola fide" or faith alone. At the first of the reformation, sola fide would be necessary to swing the pendulum of doctrinal imbalance. The Roman Church laid heavy burdens of works on its subjects. But Luther caused the pendulum to swing out of balance to the other side and unfortunately it is still stuck there today.

This equally damaging imbalance places an over emphasis on forgiveness of sin without any renewal of life. Jesus and His disciples clearly taught repentance (change) for remission (pardon). But this truth out of balance has swept the entire world promising forgiveness without any change of life. As the prophets of old warned, "they promise peace when there is no peace." Also, any who would dare to mention the words of John the Baptist, demanding "fruits worthy of repentance," would quickly be tagged with the contemporary label that you are a "works preacher."

I know that I have painted Luther in a bad light and he has other "good" things that he said and did, which is true enough. However, he has volumes of books painting him out to be a heroic reformer. Let those praise him, but I question him to the core. I believe he started with some good themes then shrunk back quickly. When everything was said and done, Luther defended Constantine's structure and Augustine's doctrine. When all of the dust finally settled all that was achieved was the pendulum swung from brutal emphasis on works to an equally brutal emphasis on faith only. The Book of James is a book that Luther despised and wished to have deleted from the Bible because it

unraveled his false teaching. But the result of Luther's "reforms" would be that today's church could best be described by a Scripture from James 1:22, "22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Today's church hears and does nothing, thus deceiving themselves. If I could be so bold as to quote James again, "...faith without works is dead being alone!"

Ulrich Zwingli

While Luther was busy with the "reformation" in Germany, another "reformer" named Ulrich Zwingli was rising up in Switzerland. Zwingli, like Luther, was a Roman Catholic priest who began to declare that the Bible, not the Pope or the Roman Catholic Church, was the sole authority of the Church. Then he also, like Luther, would reverse himself and defend Roman Catholicism.

In 1522, Zwingli became friends with a man named Conrad Grebel. Grebel had formerly studied humanism in Vienna, but was converted to Christ under the powerful preaching of Zwingli. He was a changed man and quickly advanced to the forefront of the protestant movement. Grebel also developed a close relationship to Felix Manz, a young clergy man who agreed with Zwingli.

However, in 1523 an apparent rift emerged with Zwingli on one side and Grebel and Manz on the other. Grebel and Manz would prove to be true reformers and would soon earn the title "Anabaptist" or "rebaptizers," because of their rejection and refusal of infant baptism. Zwingli, on the other hand, had at one time publicly refuted the Roman Catholic Mass and the idols in the church buildings. But as it became clear

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that this was not gaining traction, he not only quit pursuing this but also continued to perform the mass himself. Grebel and Manz protested this vehemently.

In 1525, Conrad Grebel and his wife had an infant daughter. When she was two weeks old, he made it clear that he would not submit her to "the Romish water bath." This infuriated his former friend Zwingli who now would totally align himself with the Roman Church by leading the trial against Grebel arguing in favor of infant baptism and condemning his former friend. In 1527, Felix Manz was ordered to be put to death by the "third baptism" (death by drowning), which was actually suggested by Ulrich Zwingli!

Now Zwingli had a battle raging on two fronts. On the one he fought against the Roman Catholic Church, which he was mostly in agreement with. And on the other front he fought the Anabaptist or the "heretics" as they were called. Zwingli and Luther both, in their early days, agreed with the "re-baptizers" but when faced with the pressure of persecution from Roman Catholicism both buckled. The clearest evidence that both Luther and Zwingli were still blinded by Constantine and Augustine was their willingness to take up the sword and persecute to the death those with whom they disagreed.

Zwingli met his end on the night of October 11, 1531 in a surprise attack against him. He refused to have a catholic confessor and was put to death on the battlefield in the second of the Kappel wars. "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword," Once again we see how Augustine's idea of the church's sword moved the church further and further away from the teachings of Christ.

John Calvin

The last “reformer” that we will discuss is John Calvin, originally known as Jean Cauvin, a French born theologian and pastor who broke with the Roman Church in 1530.

Like Luther and Zwingli, Calvin was a staunch supporter of Augustinian theology. So much so that the theology that bears his name known as Calvinism would be better named as Augustinianism, as there is almost no difference. Calvin, like the two predecessors of “reformation” that we have already discussed, differed little, if any, with the Roman Catholic Church.

Calvin on Corpus Christi and Corpus Christia-num

Listen to Calvin’s views on the church in his writing called the “Institutes.” “The Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways; sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God, the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are the sons of God and by the sanctification of the Spirit are true members of Christ... often too by the name Church is designated the whole body of mankind who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord’s Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the Word of the Lord and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. In this Church there is a large admixture of hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance, ambitious, avaricious, envious, evil-speaking men, some of impure lives moreover.”

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It's clear from this that Calvin, like Augustine, Luther, and Zwingli wanted a church that embraced everybody. All of these argued vehemently against the idea that the "true church" could be distinguished from the false church by its life style. Catholic and Protestant alike all stood united in one camp. Let's state it clearly, they all believed the the church's authority to baptize would save a person from hell. They would further contend that this salvation from a future in hell had nothing to do with a present departure from sin. The only place that these so called "reformers" were at odds is in the "formula" of baptism!

Calvin on the two swords

Calvin, like Augustine, Luther, and Zwingli, also prescribed to the use of the "sword of the government" to enforce the "sword of the church." Calvin wrote, "Whosoever shall now contend that it is unjust to put heretics and blasphemers to death will, knowingly or unknowingly, incur their very guilt. This is not laid down on human authority; it is God that speaks and prescribes it as a perpetual rule for the Church."

It was this mentality that Calvin would use to put Michael Servetus to death by slow burning!

Calvin and Augustine

I find these two men's doctrine virtually indistinguishable, mostly because all that Calvin taught was borrowed from Augustine. Nowhere is this more evident in Calvin's teaching on predestination. Calvin, like Augustine, contended that men were predestined either to heaven or hell and there was nothing anyone could do about it. This teaching removes all human responsibility from their brand of the gospel. When you

put this together with Luther's "sola fide", faith only, it becomes the doctrine of "que sera sera," whatever will be will be. There's no room for human responsibility or good works.

Consider this, Augustine and Calvin are the main theologians for most of those who call themselves Christian in this present day. Their teachings are the most influential among Catholic and Evangelical alike! Constantine and Augustine changed the structure and the doctrine of the church. The "reformation" served only to shift the authority of the church from the popes of the Roman Church to whoever was/is the popular leader with momentum.

The sons of those who killed the prophets

What would Jesus say about all of the events of history that I just described?

He did address this in Matthew 23:29-36 when He said, "29 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'* 31 *Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? 34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, 35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple*

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and the altar. 36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation."

In Jesus' day things were the same as they are in our day. There are those who justify themselves while continuing to take part in an evil enterprise. Jesus was rebuking those scribes and Pharisees who followed in the footsteps of their forefathers who had killed the prophets. They lightly brushed off their bloody heritage by saying, "we would not have done that."

Could you imagine driving down the road and seeing a church named "The Church of Saint Hitler?" Yet we see churches labeled Augustine, Luther, or Calvin and we count them as heroes! All of these have blood on their hands and so do those who follow them!

In John 18:36, "36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

When did Jesus' kingdom become "of this world?" When did He dispatch His servants to fight? Was the advent of Constantine and Augustine the second coming of Christ? The answers to these questions are all emphatically NO!

We have been cheated through the traditions of Constantine and Augustine! It's time to get our heads out of the sands of ignorance and return to the structure and doctrine of the early church.

Pontius Pilate

The crucifixion of Christ is a perfect example of religion run amuck! In Matthew 27:1-2 the stage is set, *“1 When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. 2 And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.”*

This passage perfectly represents all that I have been trying to show you so far. The religious leaders are handing Jesus over to the civil authorities to get their evil work done. Religion and those who control it have been murderers throughout history, especially when the religion and the state are viewed as the same thing.

When you combine all of the gospel accounts of Pilate struggling with the judicial issues concerning Jesus, you can almost feel his pain as he sorts through this tough case. I don't have compassion on him or think he was a good guy. I just see the dilemma that comes with the wicked marriage of religion and the state.

Let's highlight verse twenty four, *“24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” 25 And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children.”*

Pilate proclaimed himself innocent of Jesus' innocent blood as he reluctantly succumbed to the political pressures that the religious leaders imposed on him. On the other hand, the religious leaders and people

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placed a curse on themselves that still stands today,
“His blood *be* on us and on our children.”

Truly today the blood is on all who practice “Chris-
tian Religion” in the form of Constantine and
Augustine.

6

PYRAMIDS

Revivals

As I said before, the main thing that the “reformation” changed was who would be in charge of the church. For the next two hundred years, the church endured much turmoil as varying political powers chose sides with the numerous religious powers. The absolute power of the Roman Church’s pope was now being diffused as other large movements rallied behind the various doctrines of the “reformation.”

After the “reformation,” came the revivals. Time would fail us in this book to speak in depth of John Wesley, George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards in the 1700’s. In the 1800’s evangelists Charles Finney and Dwight Moody led the way. The Azusa Street and the east coast revivals of the 1900’s awakened the Pentecostal movement. Next came the healing revivals of the 1950’s, Billy Graham, the Jesus Movement, the Charismatic movement, and the rise of cell groups in the 1990’s and finally the emergent church movement at the present.

The one constant that I see in all of this church history is that since Constantine and Augustine no one

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has changed the structure of the church. The closest that the church ever came to returning to the original pattern of the apostles was during the revivals of John Wesley. Wesley assembled those converted under his ministry into home groups known as “class meetings.” After his death these quickly were herded back into congregational meetings that institutionalized and killed the movement.

Pyramids

If we were to draw a picture that would best describe the Constantine structure it would be that of a pyramid. One person, or ruling body, sits on top of the pyramid while they arrange and keep everyone under the one on top. Building the base only raises the leader higher and higher. Many have been burned in pyramid schemes over the years and this has even been declared illegal as a business structure. But nowhere has it ever been more abused than in the church.

Leaders who operate under Constantine’s structure and Augustine’s thought of Corpus Christianum, build their bases larger and larger, all the while elevating themselves. Whether this is done on purpose or innocently, on a large scale or small the result is always the same. One dominant leader or body of leaders ends up controlling the masses, and that control is usually fear based. We will discuss this further a little later in this chapter but first let’s look at the Biblical origin of the pyramid.

Nimrod

After the great flood of Noah’s generation, Noah was defiled by his son Ham who, “looked on his father’s nakedness.” This is a term used often to describe having sexual intercourse with someone. The idea of merely

seeing his father naked was not the problem the Bible says, "So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him." (Genesis 9:24). It seems to indicate that Ham had sexual intercourse with his father, and as a result Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan.

Ham was a sexual pervert, who had another son named Cush, who also had a son named Nimrod.

His birth is recorded in Genesis 10:6-14, "6 The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. 7 The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. 8 Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, 12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city). 13 Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, 14 Pathrusim, and Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim)."

Out of Ham's lineage came Nimrod. Ham despised his father's authority and defiled him. But this grandson would pervert all authority and become the father of the pyramid scheme.

The Bible says that Nimrod was a "mighty one in the earth." He became a powerful ruler and the first empire builder in history. His name is associated with hunting or lying in wait. But what he really hunted was people.

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In creation, God gave man specific instructions to have dominion over the earth, (see Genesis 1:26-28). Nowhere did God tell man to have dominion over another man, only over the earth and its creatures. Just as Nimrod's grandfather Ham was perverted toward his father, Nimrod perverted our Heavenly Father's commandment to "have dominion." The perversion of our dominion nature by exercising it over another human being is called control, and fear is the main tool used in this perverted means of authority. This would serve Nimrod well in the empire that he began to build.

Babel

Nimrod's kingdom began with the city of Babel in the land of Shinar, which is modern day Iraq. I want to include here the entire Bible passage of the rise the city of Babel.

In Genesis 11:1-9 we read, "1 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore

its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth."

This attempt by Nimrod to build a tower to reach heaven was frowned on by God. So much so that God confused the languages there, then scattered them so this could not happen. This pattern is obviously disapproved of by God but has been repeated by every "kingdom builder" throughout history. Whether political or financial, this system of the world has been proven affective for men to control things. However, the most damaging use of this demonic system was when it was applied to religion instituted by Constantine and then legitimized by Augustine.

The Tower of Babel

The most pertinent aspect of this story to our study is the tower of Babel itself. The structure was called a "ziggurat." It started with a wide base that narrowed as it went higher. Another term for this would be called a pyramid. While the tower was tall, it was not actually intended to reach heaven, instead it was an observation tower to read the heavens. Some suggest that they were actually using it for astrology purposes. Whatever the case, God disapproved and caused it to cease, yet men keep reviving this structure.

Out of Egypt I called My Son

Pyramids have been built all over the world by many civilizations. But when I think of pyramids the first country I usually think of is Egypt, the land of the pyramids.

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The Book of Exodus is the story of God's people in bondage and slavery to Egypt, and then God brings them out in a powerful series of events. The Bible tells us that the law is our tutor that leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The Exodus story teaches us many lessons in figurative language that are pertinent to the New Testament. Egypt represents sin, Pharaoh represents the devil, and Israel represents God's people in slavery to sin building pyramids for Pharaoh (the devil). Moses represents Christ, who delivers God's people from the devil and slavery to sin (pyramid building). At the birth of Christ in the Book of Matthew 2:15, Matthew quotes the prophet Hosea when he says, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*" I believe that God calls all of His sons and daughters out of Egypt, but He also calls us out of another situation that is closely associated with pyramids...Babylon.

Come out of her My people

The history of God's people, Israel, begins with God calling Abram out of his country, which was Ur of the Chaldeans, which is Babylon or Babel, (Genesis 11:31-32 and 12:1-4). Abram, who was renamed Abraham by God, was the grandfather of Israel. It was the children of Israel who were in bondage to Egypt in the story that we just studied. We tend to forget, however, that after Israel was brought into the Promised Land, their relationship to God was like a roller coaster. They would rebel against God, go into slavery, and then God would bring them out. Ultimately, God sent them into captivity into Babylon for seventy years. This captivity, like the one in Egypt, is also filled with much figurative language for us in the New Testament.

In the beginning God delivers us from the bondage of sin, just like the Exodus story. After coming to God

it seems there is another trap of bondage that we have to contend with, RELIGION, which is Babylon! I believe that modern day Babylon was built by Constantine and Augustine. I don't think that it is just the Roman Catholic Church, I believe it is ALL RELIGION that operates within Constantine and Augustine's structure and theology. I also believe that God is calling His people out of that religious system right now.

In Revelation 18:1-5 we read, "1After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." 4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

The day is coming when this system will be utterly destroyed by God. I want you to notice that God has people in this system and He wants them to come out of it. I want all who read this to understand me clearly. I believe that there are Godly people in the Catholic and Evangelical churches alike, but I believe that God despises the entire system! His people are not being what He called them to be as long as they are in bondage to this structure. According to George Barna, over one million people are leaving the churches of America annually. Could it be that the collapse of the Babylon structure has begun?

A friend of mine who read a rough draft of this manuscript pointed out to me that the first time the word "Alleluia" is used in Scripture is to rejoice over the fall of Babylon (Revelation 19:1-6)! I know that just the thought of the church without Babylon makes me want to praise the Lord! Perhaps that's why Revelation 18:20 instructs those of the apostolic way to *"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"*

Fornication

Fornication is a general term for all sexual sin, especially sexual intimacy outside of the covenant of marriage. Our generation is totally immersed in this perversion. Did you notice in Revelation 18:3, that Babylon caused the kings of the earth to commit fornication with her? I believe this is describing the results of what Augustine taught then passed on to the entire church world in the idea of Corpus Christianum. In other words, you can enjoy spiritual intimacy without being in covenant with God. The result, multitudes claim to be Christian without a changed life style, yet they believe they are going to heaven. The "kings of the earth" in particular were caught in this trap as the Babylon system used the church's sword to entice the kings by promising them God's favor. At the same time the church used the king's sword to advance the church's agenda through fear of the sword. Clearly this is Nimrod's kingdom!

The success of the Babylonian structure is dependent upon a Nimrod type of leader who can keep his subjects within the framework of his pyramid. Fear is the tool of choice for this task.

“Yet it shall not be so among you”

One day the mother of James and John came to Jesus with a strange request, in Matthew 20:21-23 we read, *“20 Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. 21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom.” 22 But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They said to Him, “We are able.” 23 So He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.”*

James and John’s mother wanted her sons to have the choicest seats of authority in Jesus’ kingdom. When the other ten heard this request they were angry. Matthew 20:24-28, *“24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Jesus used this situation to drive a powerful point home, the Gentile (worldly) rulers exercise lordship over their subjects but *“it shall not be so among you!”* The church is not to operate in the ways of the world especially concerning leadership. Constantine and Augustine totally violated this commandment of Jesus as do all of the pyramid structures of our day.

Authority from Heaven or Men?

Let's consider another incident with the religious leaders of Jesus' day that is related to our subject. We find this story in Matthew 21:23-27, "23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" 24 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 25 The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Jesus taught that there were only two kinds of authority, one was from heaven and one was from men. The religious leaders refused to answer because they wanted to stay in power. To answer that John's baptism was from heaven would mean that they would have to give over their power and submit to John. That is why every revival that ever happened had to bypass those in control of the religious system of their day.

Diotrephes

This dilemma could be seen in the early church when the Apostle John addressed a man named Diotrephes. In III John 9-10 we read, "9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with mali-

cious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church."

Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence, which means that he wanted to be first in rank or in power. This place is reserved in the New Testament for Christ alone. In Colossians 1:18 we read, *"18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."*

The structure of Constantine and the doctrine of Augustine build a false case to take this power away from Christ and His Holy Spirit and put men on top of the pyramid. I warn every church leader today that the higher your pyramid elevates you the more in danger you are of being struck down by God Himself! God says in Isaiah 42:8, *"8 I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another..."*

Summary

In the first six chapters of this book I have attempted to write a very brief history of the church. The idea I was trying to capture was to show how we have built traditions that are commonplace today but are not Biblical. The damage done to the church through Constantine, Augustine, and most of the reformers was severe and is still causing problems today. We are being cheated through philosophy of men based on the principles of the world. Now that we have an understanding of how we received these religious traditions, the question is, what can we do about it? This will end the first section of this book, in our next section I will set out to build a case for the Biblical Church.

7

THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE BIBLICAL CHURCH, PT I

The Way Forward Is Backward

Jesus taught that the way to save your life is to lose your life, the way to be first is to be last, the way to be great is to become least, the way to be exalted is to be humble. You get the point. These and many other paradoxical teachings of Jesus provide Biblical foundation for the case I am about to make concerning the church. That is, the way forward is backward. Yes, the church needs to return to the Biblical pattern to undo 1700 years of Constantine's structural error and Augustine's theological error.

Most will agree with me that there are many problems plaguing the church in our day, but few will agree on a solution to the problems. Many dissatisfied people have simply quit church or they go through the motions of the weekly programs and religious rituals. If George Barna's research is correct, he claims in his book "Revolution" that over twenty million people have left the church in America. He also claims that many of these have not left their faith, just the institu-

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tional church. That means that approximately 400,000 people in every state in the union are “out of church.” He also says that about one million people per year are leaving the church. At that rate the church of America will look like the church of Europe within the next twenty years. We must determine if these trends are apostasy or a Holy dissatisfaction. I believe that it is some of both and that we should go back to the principles of the early church to correct this problem.

News of a target audience that large would normally make pastors salivate to rush in and reap the harvest, but not with this group. They have “been there and done that” concerning church and found the modern church wanting. Today’s religious leaders, keeping in step with religious leaders from history, are willing to change God’s message to get people in, but they are not willing to change the structure. Let me say it plainly, without the pyramid they can’t control things (people and money) and they know it!

This is why they are reluctant to follow Christ’s teaching of leaving the ninety nine to go after the one or in this case leaving the one to go after the ninety nine! Going after the “lost sheep of the church” would call for a re-tooling that most are not willing to do.

Today’s mega-church pastors justify themselves with their Wal-mart sized congregations and believe that God’s approval must surely be on them. But compare those “out of church” to those “in church” and the “out of church” crowd would totally dwarf the “in church” crowd.

The Lost Sheep of the Church

Consider what Jesus said as He viewed the multitudes in Matthew 9:36-38, *“36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*

Jesus identified those sheep without a shepherd as a ripe harvest. In Matthew 10:6 Jesus called them *“...the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*

I believe that those people who are out of church, and many that are in church, are not being ministered to (just preaching a sermon is not shepherding a soul). In order to reach this harvest we will have to adapt our message to reach these souls where they are. They already believe in God and in the message of the gospel. It's the church that they don't believe in! But they too have been cheated by traditions and will take some convincing that the way forward is backwards. Once we have honed our message to reach these lost sheep we must change our structure. I pray that these next chapters will help us to reach this vast harvest field, that I call the lost sheep of the church.

The Day the Church Began

If the church is to go forward by going backward we must start at the beginning of the church, which is the Day of Pentecost. Fifty days after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, God sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples.

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Acts 2:1-4 recounts this great event, *“1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

With that the church was born! When the crowds came together to see what was going on Peter delivered the first fiery sermon of the New Testament Church. By the time he finished preaching three thousand people repented of their sins believing that Jesus was the Christ and they were baptized. What happened next will provide us a simple starting point and guideline of returning to the New Testament way of “doing church.”

Four Pillars of the Early Church

Acts 2:41-47, *gives an account of the fledgling church’s agenda, “41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”*

In verse forty two we find the key to the four pillars or dynamics of the early church, the apostles' doctrine, apostles' fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers. This was the entire agenda of the first New Testament Church. There were no programs like Sunday school, children's church, nursery, worship teams, etc... There was no need to entertain the people because of the great fruit coming out of these four pillars.

In verses forty three through forty seven we see what was happening in the church through following the Holy Spirit's agenda. The fear of the Lord came upon all as they saw the signs and wonders done by the apostles. Then there was the tremendous unity and generosity that was a sign and wonder happening through the people. They divided their time between the temple and going to one another's homes. However, the temple was quickly removed from the equation in Acts 8:1 as we discussed earlier. And finally we see that people were coming into the church on a daily basis. That's it! Plus nothing, minus nothing, what else did they need in their day? What else do we need in today? Oh that we would return to the simplicity of the early church.

Let's take a closer look at each of the four pillars of the early church.

Pillar #1: Apostles' Doctrine

The first pillar that we will discuss is the apostles' doctrine, which simply means, the teachings of Jesus' twelve apostles. I have written extensively on this subject in my book, "The Doctrines of Christ." You can obtain a copy by visiting our website found in the back of this book.

The Doctrines of Christ

In my book, I build a case for the “Doctrines of Christ” found in Hebrews 6:1-3, *“1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.”*

My book thoroughly discusses each of these six doctrines and is well suited for use in making disciples who obey Jesus. Let’s consider what the apostle John says about the doctrine of Christ in his second epistle.

II John 4-10, “4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. 5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. 9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

Notice that John pointed out that only “some” were “walking in truth.” This would indicate that many were not walking in truth. We should take heed as to how easy it is to stray from truth. John goes on to teach

that to walk according to the truth of Christ's commandments is to walk in love toward one another.

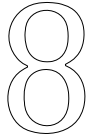
Then he warns of antichrist deceivers who teach that Jesus has not come in the flesh. There are two ways that we could look at this. The first way is that those deceivers deny that Jesus Christ ever came to earth in the flesh. The second is to deny that the teachings of Christ are to be lived out in our flesh. I believe that the latter is what John is talking about. This is the kind of thinking that came from Constantine and Augustine which teaches a "theory" of Christianity that has no earthly evidence. It's no wonder that Martin Luther tried to remove Hebrews, James, I John, II John, III John, I Peter, II Peter, Jude, and Revelation from the Bible. Because these books totally undo the false doctrines of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin!

Then John gives us the solution in dealing with these false teachers and their false doctrine; hold to the doctrines of Christ! He further says that if any do not teach this doctrine don't let him into your house; don't even say hello to him!

I will not attempt to fully teach the apostles' doctrine here because my book covers that completely. I only want to build a case for us to cling to the early church's doctrine.

Part of the problem that came out of the Constantine and Augustine error was that there was a heavy emphasis on what you believed instead of how you lived. In other words, if you could recite the proper creed it really didn't matter how you lived.

In our next chapter we will see how the doctrine had to be lived out relationally.



THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE BIBLICAL CHURCH, PT II

Apostles' Fellowship

As we learned in chapter seven, Acts 2:42 gave us the four pillars of the early church, *"42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

You will notice that the apostles' doctrine and fellowship are linked together. As I stated in chapter seven, the Constantine and Augustine congregational model places heavy emphasis on doctrine yet it reduces fellowship to a minimum. The average church attendee would consider fellowship as something you do in the foyer of the building before or after service because the whole of Christendom is focused around hearing a sermon. But fellowship in the early church had equal footing with doctrine!

Fellowship: Key to the Structure

Understanding fellowship is the key to understanding the early church structure. As a matter of fact, the early church's structure was built out of loving relationships! When God began to reveal this to me the Bible became brand new. Trying to make the Scriptures fit into the Constantine and Augustine model always causes difficulty. It's like trying to apply family terminology to a corporate business. Calling your boss daddy sounds weird. Equally as weird, is applying intimate spiritual terms to a cold corporate congregational structure.

Consider this passage from Ephesians 2:19-22, *"19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."*

The apostles' doctrine and fellowship are clearly demonstrated in these verses. First, the apostles' doctrine is seen in the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The apostles and prophets are not the foundation, Jesus is. The doctrines of Christ are the foundation to the individual and corporate life of every Christian. We could all agree on that, but it's the second part that we bog down on.

God's building is made up of lives being "fitted together" to become the New Testament temple where the Holy Spirit lives! Buildings have absolutely nothing to do with this. It's about people's lives being reshaped

by the doctrines of Christ to learn to fit with one another. The apostles and prophets of the early church built relational structures but not one building!

Jesus said in John 13:34-35, ³⁴*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

This is another passage that illustrates the apostles' doctrine, "35 By this all will know that you are My disciples...", and the apostles' fellowship, "love one another; as I have loved you..." When are we supposed to prove this kind of love in the Constantine and Augustine congregations? We drive to a building once or twice a week, sit in a row with people that we barely know, sing a few songs, listen to a sermon, shake a few hands, and then we go home. So how does this prove our love for one another? To quote the epistle of James 1:22, "22 *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*" The church today believes that hearing a sermon on a weekly basis defines Christianity. We hear and do nothing. We have been cheated by the Constantine and Augustine error that created a sterile non-relational environment that removed us from the apostolic relational structure.

The defining mark of our discipleship should be the love we have for one another. As a matter of fact, I will dare to say that the only proof of our love for God is the way we treat one another in the church. Instead of our love for one another defining us to all, our lack of love for one another has us mocked by all. You can hardly have a conversation with "unchurched" people without them accusing the church of hypocrisy, and to be honest, we can't argue against them. The world is looking for proof of our love not our words!

Defining Light

Paul called himself the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter was the apostle to the Jews, but the apostle John seemed to be the apostle of relationships. Most of our doctrine in the New Testament is heavily influenced by the apostle Paul but few of us realize that the apostle John wrote fifty chapters of the New Testament. And we would do well to further note that his writings placed more emphasis on love than doctrinal understanding. Paul had a brilliant scholarly mind and God wonderfully used him to create a huge body of doctrine for the church. But doctrine must be in the proper structure or it is just a theory. John's writings define the New Testament structure that New Testament doctrine should be applied to.

With that said, let's examine a passage of Scripture from I John 1:1-7, *"1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. 5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us*

our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

In verse three, John reveals why he was writing this epistle, that those who read it could have fellowship with the apostles, which was to share in the fellowship with God and with Jesus. We have to walk in the apostles' doctrine to walk in the apostles' fellowship, and vice versa. John said that this fellowship would be the source of full joy to the Christian.

In verse four John declares that God is light and absolutely no darkness can be found in God. Then in verses six and seven he gives a litmus test of sorts to Christians. John says to claim to have fellowship with God and walk in darkness is just a lie. Then in verse seven he defines what it means to "walk in the light." If we walk in the light we have fellowship with one another. Can you see this? To walk in the light means to walk in a loving relationship with other believers. Could we then reason verse six to mean that walking in darkness means to walk without being in relationship to other believers? If so, could we further reason, that in conclusion to verse seven if we walk in the light of relationships the blood will cleanse us and if we walk non-relationally the blood will not cleanse us from sin?

Remember that Jesus said in John 8:12, *"12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*

But Jesus also said in Matthew 5:14-16, *"14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are*

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in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, but He also declared that we are the light of the world, and that our light would give light to all in the house. Funny that He didn't say light to all that are in the temple or building. We live in houses and it's there that our Christianity must be applied, not in the sterile congregational structures of Constantine.

Let's say it plainly, to walk in the light means to walk in such a relationship with other Christians that they can see by your behavior that you are a Christian...or not!

The Structure of Light versus The Structure of Darkness

Now that we have established the fact that the Bible defines light as a relationship with other Christians, let's examine a very familiar passage in this context.

One of the best known Scriptures of the Bible is found in John 3:16-21, *"16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds*

should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Most folks who have been around church for any amount of time can quote John 3:16. Actually this is the last portion of Jesus' conversation with a religious leader named Nicodemus concerning being born again. To those who are born again there is a great promise of eternal life because we believe that Jesus saves us from sin and death.

Although many can quote John 3:16 very few know what Jesus said next or the context in which He said it. In verse 17-18, He explains the idea of condemnation. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world because it is already condemned by God Himself! It's only through faith in Christ that we can be saved from this certain condemnation.

In verse 18, Jesus explains why we are condemned, *"19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."*

The Bible says that God is Light (I John 1:5), and that Jesus is Light (John 8:12), and that those who follow Him are light (Matthew 5:14-16). Light is not just the message of truth; it is the person of truth, Divine or human! Men would rather walk in darkness than in light. Let's say it another way, men would rather walk without the accountability of relationships because they don't want others to see their evil deeds. This is why the religious structures of Constantine are so appealing to those who are not born again. They can continue to live selfish lives of sin while claiming to go

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to heaven. But actually they are walking in darkness on their way to hell!

Those who have been born again embrace the light of relationship and love it! They welcome the accountability because they walk in truth and DO GOOD DEEDS and want those deeds to glorify God!

This sounds like blasphemy to those in the religious Constantine structure of darkness, because they don't believe that you have to quit sinning or that Christians have to do good deeds. But to those who have been born again this is a refreshing word. They love the relational apostolic structure of light, because they have left their sins behind and walk in the truth and light of God's love in relationship with God's people.

Inside of a Pyramid

Pyramids were just elaborate tombs of egotistical kings. When the king died he was buried with much treasure and even living servants who would be sealed inside with him. Once the pyramid tomb was sealed there was absolutely no light inside of it. The only way to have light inside would be the artificial light that men would have to carry in. The same is true inside of the Constantine structure. Because it lacks the true light of relationship, men have created the artificial light of programs, like Sunday school, children's church, teen church, (yuk), etc... These and many other programs offer some opportunities for relationship under the strict control of the church leaders. Those leaders fear relationships because they know that the strength of a relationship is more powerful than their ability to control by fear. So they keep tight grips on the programs so no one gets too strong relationally and becomes able to strike out on their own and start

another church. That's why everything that is sealed inside of the pyramid will die with the egotistical king, because it has no light.

Walking in the Light

The relational structure of the church that the apostles' built was much different from that of the pyramid. The apostles didn't try to lord over the people. They set the people free to spread the light of God's love. They didn't get over the people. Instead, they got under the people, so they could serve them and help them succeed in spreading the gospel. They welcomed the strength of relational authority because they didn't try to control by fear. They rejoiced when someone was able to build more relationships and start more churches.

In the gospel of John 1:1-14 the apostle John said, *"1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh*

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and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Creation began with light and so does the re-creation. John skillfully tied these two thoughts together. In the beginning God spoke His Word (Jesus) and created light, the first principle of creation. The Word (Jesus) was with God in the creation. John goes on to say that in the Word was life and that life was the light of men. In other words, the life of Jesus is the light of men.

John the Baptist came to bear witness of the Light of Christ our Creator. To all that receive Christ, He gives us the power to become the children of God. That power is the new birth or being born again by faith in Christ. I pray that the Word would become flesh in you dear reader, and the light of this truth would set you free from religion and bring you into the new birth.

Can you see how the apostles' doctrine and fellowship shaped a structure much different than the perverted one of Constantine and Augustine? As we continue to examine the four pillars of the Biblical Church it will become more and more evident of the powerful role that relationships played in the early church.

9

THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE BIBLICAL CHURCH, PT III

Breaking Bread

Now that we have a better understanding of the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, it will be easy for us to see how the early church applied this relational doctrine. It is clearly seen in our next pillar of the early church which is "breaking bread." Let's review our text so we can continue our study. Acts 2:42, *"42And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

Transubstantiation

One of the greatest arenas of church life that Constantine and Augustine cheated us out of is the early church practice of breaking bread.

I grew up Roman Catholic and I know firsthand that the centerpiece of the Roman Catholic Church service is the "sacrifice of the mass." Roman Catholic's believe that during the sacrifice of the mass that a little wafer and a small amount of wine turn into the actual body

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and blood of Jesus. They believe that Jesus is put to death again each time the mass is performed, thus the "sacrifice of the mass." This false doctrine is known as transubstantiation, where one substance supposedly turns into another substance. It would literally be a form of cannibalism. There is absolutely no Biblical precedent for this ritual. It is totally a man made tradition.

This became a huge point of contention during the reformation. It is clear that Martin Luther never changed from the Roman Catholic position. He interpreted the passages where Jesus says, "This is My body," literally and never moved.

Do This in Remembrance of Me

In I Corinthians 11:23-26, the apostle Paul discusses this, "23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

The theological battle that has raged for centuries is whether the Lord told us to literally eat His body and blood or told us to hold a memorial of His body and blood to remember His death. I believe it is the latter. Let me share what God showed me.

My Testimony of Breaking Bread

As a “traditional” pastor, I always did my best to keep our churches Biblically sound. When I would read about the Lord’s Supper or the Communion Table as many call it, I was grieved that so called “Protestants” largely neglected this service. At best most non-Catholic churches reduced this down to a similar ritual as our Roman counterpart. Non-Catholics eat a little wafer and drink a little cup of grape juice and call that the Lord’s Supper. Once again we have no Biblical precedence for such a ritual. It’s just another man made tradition.

Early on in our traditional churches I attempted to right this wrong. We incorporated the Lord’s Supper into our weekly service. I took this very seriously but I was still in error. There is no Biblical evidence that the Lord’s Supper was a little cracker and a cup of juice. Actually the Lord’s Supper was a full meal that He enjoyed with His disciples.

One day I was reading my Bible and came across this verse in Acts 20:7, *“7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”*

When I read the words, *“7 Now on the first day of the week,”* the eyes of my understanding were opened. The first day of the week is Sunday! The centerpiece of the early church’s Sunday gathering was to break bread or eat a meal together. This was known as the agape feast or communion, and was a common practice in the early church.

I know that the apostle Paul was there and that he preached until midnight, and they even seemed to be in

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a large building, but this was not the norm. Paul wasn't present everywhere at once. When he was in town it would be quite proper for him to preach to as many of the saints as he could, but this was not the normal pattern of the early church. The fact is that when the early church gathered, the normal pattern was to share an intimate meal in a home to remember the Lord's death until He returns.

When God revealed this to me I realized all that we did on any given Sunday was WRONG! Our problem was not that we needed better sermons or more accurate doctrine, we needed to correct the structure of the church. The congregational environment that emerged out of Constantine is our problem. That environment is conducive to religious rituals but not to the relational practice of Christian living!

I settled it in my own heart right there. I was determined from that point on to bring our churches back to a Biblical pattern. We would quit the traditions that Constantine gave us and return to the Biblical precedent. I would soon find out that Constantine's giant actually makes Goliath look small.

It's not easy to say that the traditions practiced by most people are wrong, but if it's wrong, it's wrong. We have to settle the issue of authority concerning this. Is tradition our authority or is the Bible our authority? If you choose tradition then keep doing what you are doing. But if you choose the Bible then you must repent of the Constantine and Augustine error. I told my congregations that I was wrong and would be moving back to the Biblical Church. I asked for their forgiveness and most of them followed me into repentance from the Constantine model to the Biblical model of church. Since then God has opened my eyes so much

to this relational understanding that the Bible has become brand new to me as I apply it in the house church setting.

The Lord's Supper

I love to read Luke's account of the Lord's Supper found in Luke 22:13-20, *"13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. 14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.'"*

I want to point out a few things concerning this Passover Celebration. First, in verse 15, He said, *"With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."* Jesus has a burning desire to share this meal with His disciples. He did then and He does now! Even with His crucifixion looming large just ahead of Him, He was still passionate about sharing the agape feast with His followers.

In verse 16 He gives us the reason why we should still share in this meal today, *"16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."* We are living in the age of the Kingdom of God, and the King of the Kingdom is still passionate about sharing

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this meal with His followers. They ate together with Him before He suffered and we should eat together with Him as the rewards of His sufferings.

The third thing that I want to highlight about this meal is found in verse 19, *“19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”* I have often considered what actually happened when His body was broken on the cross. Then one day I read what had been revealed to the apostle Peter concerning this.

In I Peter 2:21-25, 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22“ Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

In verse 24 Peter tells us that, *“24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.”* Jesus carried our sins in His body on the cross. He suffered in excruciating pain as His body slumped down in exhaustion, causing the nails in His hands to support His entire body weight. To breathe His next breath He would force His weight up by pushing against the nails in His feet. Then our vile sins were placed on His sinless body as He hung on the tree adding all the weight of the sins of the world to His suffering. Verse 24 goes on to tell us that this revela-

tion should cause us to die to sins with Him and then we should live for righteousness. Let His broken body heal you as you consider that your sins were part of the weight that caused our Lord to suffer.

The last point that I want to show you in the Lord's Supper is concerning what was accomplished in His blood, *"20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.'"*

Just as Peter had a revelation about what took place in Jesus body, the apostle John had a revelation about His blood. In Revelation 1:4-7, *"4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."*

In verse 5 we find the key, *"To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."* The love that Christ has for us caused Him to wash away our sins in His own blood!

His body carried our sins and His blood washed them away. Whenever we eat the meal, our memories should come alive with the powerful understanding of all that He did for us on the cross.

The Road to Emmaus

One of the most profound revelations concerning breaking bread that God has shown me is found in Luke 24:13-35, *"13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15 So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. 17 And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" 18 Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. 22 Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. 23 When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. 24 And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." 25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." 28 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29 But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is*

toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. 30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread."

With the crucifixion fresh on their minds the countenance of Cleopas and the other disciple reflected their grief. This was evident to Jesus as He drew near to them but they couldn't recognize Him. Even as He expounded on all of the Old Testament Scriptures that told about Christ, His identity was still hidden from them.

When they came to a parting in the road Jesus would have gone on until they constrained Him. This should be a lesson to us, He will pass on without us unless we ask Him to stay.

But when He sat at the table with them and He took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them, then their eyes were opened. Eating with Christ is an eye opening experience. Once they knew Him, He vanished from their physical sight but their spiritual sight was restored. Now they knew Him in the power of the resurrection and they rushed back to tell the other disciples about their experience.

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I love the way Luke communicates this in verse 35, *“35 And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.”* Jesus was revealed to them in the breaking of bread, and I have witnessed many who receive the same revelation as we break bread in the house church. Oh that we would restore the agape feast today.

You Have Left Your First Love

In the book of Revelation, Jesus warned those in the Church of Ephesus of a problem that they needed to repent of. In Revelation 2:1-7 we read the entire issue, *“1 To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 ‘I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.’”*

In verses one through three, the Ephesian Church seemed to have things going great. But in verse four Jesus tells them of a serious error in their church. What was it that had them in this fallen condition and in jeopardy of losing their lampstand? They had left

their first love. What does that mean? Had their hearts cooled from their passion for Jesus or was it something else? Could it be that the church as early as 100 A.D. had stopped eating the agape feast? I once heard Dick Ruben from the Brownsville, Florida revival make a strong case for this and I agree with him. I believe that we too should take a warning from this and repent by returning to the agape meal. We should quickly make every effort to restore this "first work" before we lose our first love.

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THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE BIBLICAL CHURCH, PT IV

Prayer

By now you should easily see the differences between applying the Scriptures to a relational structure versus a Constantine structure. I hope you have a fresh understanding as we studied the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, and breaking bread in the light of relationship. Keep this relational understanding in mind as we come to the fourth and final pillar of the early church, which is, prayer.

Prayer Power in the Church

While Jesus was on the earth, He only said the word "church" three times in two chapters. The first is found in Matthew 16:13-19, "13When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,

but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

In verse eighteen, Jesus proclaims to Peter that He would build His church upon the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He further proclaims that the powers of Hades could not prevail against the church that He is building. Then He gave the church "the keys of the kingdom" which is the power to bind and loose anything!

The second time that Jesus used the word "church" is found in Matthew 18:15-20, "15 *Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

In verses 15-17, Jesus uses the word "church" twice. It is used here in the context of resolving relationship conflicts. As a matter of fact, all of chapter eighteen is dealing with the subject of offences, not just putting a blanket of pseudo forgiveness over the offence. He

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teaches us that we must resolve all offences or be put out of the church. Relationship is the foundation of the church. With relationships come conflicts and the propensity for offences. We must resolve all offences in the church or we forfeit the great promises associated with Christ's presence and power.

In verse 18-20, Jesus repeats the binding and loosing promise that we just examined in chapter sixteen. Now we come to the main point. In verses 19-20, in the context of binding and loosing, He promises that whatever we ask agreeing in prayer will be done! The smallest expression of the church is two or three gathered together in Jesus' name. Jesus promises that He will answer any prayer of two or three in agreement. The only condition is if those two or three have their relationships void of offence with one another. Where two or three come together without offences Jesus promises first that His presence will be there. Then, whatever those two or three agree on in prayer shall be done.

The promise of Jesus' presence and power are the greatest of all of the promises to the church. Yet, these have been forfeited in the Constantine congregational model of church. It's challenging enough to get two or three in a right relationship to agree on anything. Can you imagine trying to get two or three hundred or even worse, two or three thousand to agree?

House of Prayer

Jesus taught us how to undo the errors of the Constantine structure if we will be bold enough to follow Him.

Mark 11:12-26, *“12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ And His disciples heard it. 15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, ‘Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’ 18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. 19 When evening had come, He went out of the city. 20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.’ 22 So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. 25 ‘And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.’”*

The day after Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He went to the temple. On His way He was hungry and He noticed a fig tree. When He found that it had no fruit, only leaves, He cursed the fig tree. This always

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baffled me until I understood the errors of the Constantine structure.

After cursing the fig tree, He went into the temple and drove out the merchandisers and the money changers. When He got them out He preached a short but powerful sermon *"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"* Jesus called the temple "God's House". He goes on to declare that God's house will be called, *"...a house of prayer for all nations."*

In the New Testament, we are God's temple, and prayer for the nations should go up from us continually. Constantine's structure causes the New Testament Church to become as much a "den of thieves" as the Jews in Jesus' day. If we are going to right this wrong, we must drive the merchandisers and money changers out of our own hearts. To all of us that have been exposed to the Constantine structure we must understand that these thieves won't go easily. We must get as angry as Jesus at these mockers, and drive them out of our hearts by force!

The next day when they came by the fig tree that Jesus had cursed they found it dried up from the roots. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? Could it be that the fig tree was what Adam used to try to hide his own nakedness after he sinned? Religion is man's way of attempting to hide his sins and the fig tree represents religion. Jesus cursed religion and its thieving practices!

While the disciples were still marveling over the miracle of the cursed fig tree, Jesus immediately taught them what it meant. He said, *"Have faith in God."* His lesson on faith would reinforce the promise of the power

in prayer, the kind of power that would move mountains! Then He would also reinforce the fact that we must be relationally clean through forgiveness or we forfeit this great promise.

If we are going to recapture the power of prayer that the early church enjoyed, we will have to curse our own fig trees and cleanse our own temples. Then we will see the restoration of the powerful promise of all prayers being answered in the church of our day!

Effective Prayers

My heart has cried out for revival in the church for the last twenty years. I want to see the church walking in all that God has for her. I want to see the presence and power of Jesus in the church, in Biblical proportions. I have preached a message of revival but now God is showing me that we have to address the structure to hold the harvest that will come in the next great revival.

There is one passage of Scripture that seems to capture the essence of prayer in the light of relationship. We find it in James 5:14-20, *"14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders*

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from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

One of the obvious manifestations of Jesus' presence and power in the church would be divine healing. In this passage we taught two ways to be healed in the church.

First, in verses 14-15, the sick are instructed to call for the elders of the church, (we will define who those elders are in a later chapter). The elders are to pray over the sick person and anoint him or her with oil in Jesus' name. And the "prayer of faith will save the sick..." Notice the last part, if the person has committed sins, they will be forgiven. It seems that there are particular cases of divine healing that calls for those in authority in the church to get results. I believe that those elders will have to thoroughly search out that person's life to see if there is a sin involved that brought sickness in. That sin must be properly dealt with through confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Then the healing will come.

The second method of divine healing in the church is the one that excites me the most. In verse sixteen James says, *"16Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*

Confess your sins to one another! This is so foreign to most in the traditional church. Those in the Roman Catholic Church are used to confessing to the priest. But those in the Evangelical camp think that this is a totally private matter. I believe this is the norm in the relational model of church of the New Testament. It was normal when John the Baptist preached for those

being baptized to confess their sins. And in this passage, James talks about confession here like it was a normal part of early church life, and it was. This will only be restored when we create the same type of relational environment where we can learn to love and trust “one another” with our hearts! When we’ve walked through conflicts together and resolved all of the offences and still love each other we build that kind of trust. Then we have a safe environment to share our deepest issues in.

Pray for one another, that you may be healed! This is for ALL in the church! There are some in the church that truly have the gifts of healings, but the norm is that EVERYONE in the church prays for the one needing the healing.

Effective, fervent prayer! Effective, means that it produces the intended results! Fervent, reflects the burning passion contained in the prayer! Have you ever had someone you hardly know ask you to pray for someone that you don’t even know? We all have. I have actually made it my habit when this happens to pray right then and there for that issue because otherwise I forget- just being honest. On the other hand, when someone that I am in a relationship with informs me of a need for prayer, all of my heart goes into that prayer. The burning intensity or fervency comes from all of our shared experiences, so it’s not just duty driven or hyped-up.

The Error of His Ways

Let’s re-read James 5:17-20, *“17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the hea-*

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ven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

James uses an illustration of the prophet Elijah to emphasize his point about effective fervent prayer. Elijah was a man just like us, yet his prayers were powerful. His prayers were so powerful that the weather was affected for four years by them!

After highlighting Elijah's prayer ministry, James says something very unusual. He then begins to talk about wandering from the truth. Did James change subjects? I don't think so.

Elijah's ministry can be divided into three parts. The first part of his ministry was the one described here by James. Elijah's prayers brought Israel to a national repentance! However, Elijah was a loner. He knew great men like King Ahab, and Obadiah, but he had no relationships. The only continuing relationship that we have evidence of was the one with his hired servant. He even left this servant behind when he ran for his life after being threatened by Jezebel (I Kings 19:3).

The second part of Elijah's ministry was totally relational. He devoted the last years of his life on earth with his disciple Elisha. It was in those years that he transferred his burning heart that made such effective prayers into Elisha. This relationship was so strong that when God took Elijah to heaven Elisha cried out, "*My Father, My Father...*" (II Kings 2:12). Elijah's relationship with Elisha would cause his ministry to live on even after he was taken out of the earth.

The third part of Elijah's ministry was prophesied in Malachi 4:3-6 and embodied in the ministry of John the Baptist. John was the first one to make disciples, but certainly not the last. Jesus made disciples and then left us a commandment to go make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20). The relational part of Elijah's ministry is still alive in all who would obey the commandment of Jesus to relationally make disciples!

I believe the error that James spoke of would be to take only the first part of Elijah's ministry and reject the relational part. I pray that this revelation would call many in the non-relational Constantine structure back from this error. I pray that it would save many from death and hide multitudes of sins!

The Four Pillars

The four major pillars of the early church were the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. We examined each of these in the light of relationship. These pillars are a macro-view of the early church. What we will do next is take a micro-view of what took place when the early church met.

11

WORSHIP IN THE HOUSE, PT I

Warning!

I want to begin this chapter with a couple of notes of caution. First, it would be a great mistake to try to define “house church” by our meetings. I stressed the importance of relationships throughout the chapters concerning the “four pillars of the early church.” In Biblical Church our relationships go far deeper than what we do on Sunday (or whatever day we meet). As a matter of fact, our relationships during the other days of the week define what we do on Sundays!

One more note of caution. Please don’t try to transfer the Constantine and Augustine program into the house. So many churches were birthed in a house, including ours, but then they revert back to the traditional model.

I remember in our early days of starting our traditional church. Every Sunday, we would arrange all of the furniture in our home into rows and would follow a traditional worship agenda, (I’m embarrassed to even

tell you that!). Our goal was to quickly find an affordable building to rent, so that we could become a “legitimate” church. I have heard this story repeated many times by other church leaders. I pray that as you read the rest of this book, you would repent of that type of thinking and let the Bible define your churches.

Whenever You Come Together

There is only one place in the New Testament that describes an early church worship service. It is found in I Corinthians 14:26-39, “26 *How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. 39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.”*

Each of You

The first thing that I want to point out is found in verse twenty six. Paul said *"Whenever you come together, each of you..."* The King James Version of the Bible says, *"Every one of you..."* It was expected that every one participate in the worship gathering!

Notice in verse 31, *"For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged."* I underlined the word "all" to emphasize the point. All participated in the New Testament Church service.

The idea of everyone contributing to what is said and done in a worship service has two major effects. First, it lowers the demands placed on the "pastor" to set the agenda, and do all of the speaking. I am not saying that leadership is not important, but it is not the "traditional" pastoral role. We'll talk more about that in a later chapter. The second effect is that it places the responsibility on the entire body to hear from God and bring words of encouragement to the church.

We have a saying in our churches that comes from the Book of Acts 4:13, *"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."* The only training that Peter and John had was spending time with Jesus! Those are the only kind of people that I want to hear from. I don't care how educated someone is or isn't; there is no substitute for spending time with the Lord. We like to tell the people that they should bring evidence that they have been with Jesus.

A Psalm

The word psalm means to make music in any fashion. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he said in Ephesians 5:18-20, *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Paul encouraged the Ephesians to speak in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This could have a wide range of meanings. Many times in our gatherings we read a psalm or portion of a psalm from the Book of Psalms. Sometimes we have prepared hymns on a c.d. or someone leads with an instrument. I believe that it should crescendo with the spiritual song, which is, a spontaneous song from the heart. If you have a background in the Charismatic Church, please don't try to force this; just let it happen, or not.

Most of the music portion of the traditional church has become soulish. It is nothing more than entertainment. True worship only entertains the Lord, not men! We are worshipping Him, not trying to stir people's feelings (soulish).

A Teaching

The teachers should be prepared to teach. That doesn't mean that the person teaching has to be a polished pastor. It only means that he or she has some Biblically sound word that can bring the knowledge of the Word of God to the body.

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The house church MUST have some substance in its content. It is not a platform for mindless rambling. Neither is it a platform where a person can hold the whole group hostage while they talk endlessly about themselves. There is a time when someone may have a heavy heart or a testimony to bring to the church. But we should take care that our weekly gatherings don't become a self-help session.

The Bible MUST have its place when the body comes together. The Bible is the objective Word of God and prophesy is the subjective Word of God. Spirit and Truth must come together here. The Bible is absolute truth! Prophesy, on the other hand, is subject to Biblical scrutiny and must be judged. However, one without the other is incomplete.

A Tongue

Someone may bring a message in tongues. If they do the Bible requires that a message in tongues must be interpreted. If there is no interpretation, that person must not be allowed to continue to prophesy in tongues.

I also want to point out that bringing a message in tongues is different from praying in tongues. Messages in tongues must be interpreted, but praying in tongues requires no interpretation. When we pray in tongues we are not talking to men, we are talking to God.

Look at what Paul said in I Corinthians 14:1-4, "1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort

to men. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church."

This clearly shows that when we pray to God in tongues we are speaking mysteries. But, when we bring a message in tongues followed by an interpretation, the tongue is no longer a mystery. A tongue, with an interpretation is equal to prophesy.

There are many who say that tongues, and other Biblical teachings, are not for today. To those I would ask, which other parts of the Bible do you wish to omit? A huge part of Augustine's problem was that he claimed that some of the Bible was no longer pertinent for his generation. We should not follow his error.

A Revelation

As I said before, prophesy is subjective and must stand up to Biblical scrutiny. When the revelatory gifts of tongues, revelations, interpretations, and prophesy are being manifested, those present must judge the content of the message.

Jesus said that He would build His church on the "revelation" that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:13-19).

The apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus that his prayer for them was that God would give them the "*...spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened...*" (Ephesians 1:17-18).

We need to see these revelatory gifts employed so that people will have spiritual understanding.

An Interpretation

Try to see how this works. Someone brings a message in tongues. God reveals the meaning of the tongue to another in the church. That person in turn gives the interpretation to the body. Someone might say, why not just prophesy? But we need to understand that God uses tongues to work on unbelievers.

In I Corinthians 14:22, "22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe."

Remember, tongues plus an interpretation equals prophesy. If God wants to bring a miraculous message, to bring conviction upon an unbeliever, we should be willing vessels.

Edification

Paul said in verse twenty six, *"Let all things be done for edification."* The Greek word for edification is, oikodomeo, and it means, to build a house. The root word in oikodomeo is oikos, and it means the whole of a person's possessions, not just his residence. The end result of edification is that the house is built up. Not the buildings we live in, but our lives are built up.

The epitome of successful house church gatherings is that EVERYONE contributes to the EDIFICATION!

Prophesy

In verses 29-31, Paul addresses how to have order when people are prophesying. Let two or three prophets speak and let the others judge what is being said.

Notice that a dialogue begins as God reveals something while one is speaking, another chimes in and contributes to the message with what God is showing them.

All can prophesy but not all are prophets. I have never been in a house meeting when there are more than three actual prophets present. But I have been in many meetings when all who are present prophesy. If you ever experience this flow of prophesying it will make every sermon you ever heard pale in comparison to the Holy Spirit preaching through everyone present!

What about the Women?

In verses 34-35, Paul seems to muzzle the mouths all of the women in the Corinthian churches. *"34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church."*

The women in the Corinthian churches were dominating the meetings and Paul was fixing this problem. As a matter of fact, the entire book of I Corinthians is fixing one problem after another. But it seems that this "correction" has become doctrine for many today. Paul addresses sectarianism in chapters 1-4 of I Corinthians, yet sectarianism is very much alive in our modern churches. It is the seedbed for all denominations. He addresses fornicators in chapter five, yet our modern churches are filled with fornicators. I could go on but I hope your getting the point. Why do so many adamantly stand on this verse to say that women have no place to participate in the churches?

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He says something very similar to this in I Timothy 2:11-15, *"11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in child-bearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."*

I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-15, have become the main verses to argue against women in the ministry. I believe this is a great error to take passages that are correcting a problem to make a doctrine that undoes the Biblical precedent.

The precedent was set on the Day of Pentecost. Peter preached the first message of the church age using the text from Joel 2:28-32, *"16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. 21 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on men and women. Menservants and maidservants alike were given the gift of the Holy Spirit to prophesy. Why would we make a doctrine that would stop half of

the church from using their gifts? Actually, it would be more than half, because there are more women than men in most churches!

Women had a prominent role throughout the New Testament. The first evangelists were women. Mary Magdalene and the other women were first to proclaim, "*He is risen.*"

What about Priscilla the wife of Aquila? She helped to teach Apollos about the Holy Spirit (Acts 18:26). They also had a church that met in her house in Ephesus. Her name precedes her husband's in four out of six times that they are mentioned in Scripture.

Consider Phoebe. She was a servant (deaconess), in the church of Cenchrea, which was in a port in Corinth of all places. So there were women in the ministry even in Corinth.

Lydia was from Thyatira. She was a prominent business woman. Her home became Paul's headquarters in Philippi. Two other women from Philippi were Euodia and Syntyche. They were fellow workers with Paul in communicating the gospel.

I hope you are getting the point. I believe that the Scripture supports women being having active roles in the church. I could write a book on this subject alone. There is definitely place for women in the house church!

Order

Paul closes his discussion of the house church meeting with a strong charge.

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In I Corinthians 14:39-40 we read, *“39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.”*

Paul actually encouraged the churches to *“desire to prophesy.”* He goes on to warn that the churches should not forbid people to speak in tongues. Why are there so many churches today that forbid these wonderful gifts? Many say that these gifts could lead us to error, or even into becoming demon possessed. But I have never seen an average “tongue talker” on the news for leading an entire congregation astray. On the other hand, I have seen the “acceptable” gifts of pastor, teacher, and evangelists, filling the headlines with their errors.

Remember, we are talking about restoring the “Biblical Church.” I want all that the Bible gives us today. As we restore the relational structure to the church, I pray that God will restore every gift to us!

12

WORSHIP IN THE HOUSE, PT II

Breaking Bread

In chapter nine we discussed the third pillar of the early church which is breaking bread. I want to revisit a verse that we covered in that section.

Acts 20:7, "7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

Breaking bread is the centerpiece of the New Testament Sunday gathering! In chapter eleven we discussed how everyone in the church should participate in edifying the body through psalms, teachings, and prophesying. In this chapter I want to discuss the other side of edification- communion.

On Any Given Sunday

Most of our churches gather on Sundays. All throughout the week our ladies are calling and emailing one another to see who will bring what for the meal. With great care they plan a menu, and with greater care they prepare the meal. We live in Louisiana where cooking is a form of art. The meals are cooked with the finest ingredients available, but the key ingredient is love. Truly it is an agape feast!

Usually around ten o'clock on Sunday morning the people begin to arrive. Each one is carrying their portion of the feast; I love to see who's bringing what. The aromas fill the house and the fellowship begins. There is joy and laughter; everyone is hugging each other hello, like we haven't seen each other for a long time. We are best of friends and can't think of anywhere else that we would rather be.

Sometimes I step back and just watch the people interacting. Then I remember what Sundays used to be like when I pastored traditional churches. Thank you Jesus for delivering me from the Constantine model of church Hallelujah! I say to my fellow pastors who are still in bondage to Constantine, "Come out of her my people."

The worst job in the world is trying to stop the people from fellowshiping and get the meeting started. I have never been so ignored as when I say, "Let's get started," no one pays any attention. And I'm okay with that. In the old way of "doing church," I would have had a nervous breakdown if we didn't start on time. But now, time seems to be thrown out of the window when the church gathers. We start late and

end even later. Nobody wants to go home, and we don't want them to.

Then the meeting begins. The people are ready. I ask if anyone has a word from the Lord, and that's all it takes. Words, testimonies, and spontaneous interaction begin. We may or may not sing. We may pray a while or we may have a Bible teaching. We may minister to someone who is going through a problem or confessing a fault. You never know what is going to happen next. But the Holy Spirit always has His way. When the meeting comes to a close, we're really just getting started. Now it's time for the meeting (that's how some in house churches are spelling meeting these days)!

The ladies put the food out and an assembly line begins. It is the communion table of the Lord. We treat the meal as a holy thing, because it is. The fellowship aspect quickly resumes as everyone is served. Some are still talking about the topics discussed earlier. Others may be discussing how their week went or what's coming up in the week ahead.

The Greek word for communion and fellowship is "koinonia," which means to share in or participate. The koinonia we experience on a continual basis in the house church surpasses all that I ever experienced in our best traditional services. I will never go back! I can't go back! Taste and see that the Lord is good.

On The Downside

As I said earlier, the Corinthian church was loaded with problems. And those problems were manifesting at the communion table. I want to address those issues here so that we can avoid the pitfalls that marred the Corinthian's gatherings.

I Corinthians 11:17-33, "17 But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. 18 First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. 19 But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God's approval will be recognized! 20 When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. 21 For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. 22 What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this! 23 For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread 24 and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." 25 In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it." 26 For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again. 27 So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. 29 For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. 31 But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. 32 Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 33 So, my dear brothers

and sisters, when you gather for the Lord's Supper, wait for each other." (New Living Translation).

Divisions

In verses 17-19, the problem of divisions is dealt with. Division usually means to split apart. But in this case the division is in heart and mind. This does more harm to the church than for someone to actually leave. When our hearts are divided, unity is out of the question. This condition totally undoes the promise of Jesus' presence where two or three gather in agreement.

Paul told the Corinthians that because of the divisions their agape meals were doing more harm than good. Does that mean that we should not have agape meals? Certainly not! Many in the early church did cease from having the agape feast. Jesus rebuked them for this in Revelation 2:4, *"4 But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first (New Living Translation). Jesus solved the issue in Revelation 2:5, "5 Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches." (New Living Translation). The answer was to turn back to Jesus and do the meal correctly.*

I served in the traditional model for about twenty five years. Now I have served in the house church for five years. I can tell you without reservation that I would rather deal with the possible relational conflicts in the house than the religious program problems of the traditional church!

Greed

In verses 20-22, Paul addresses the second issue of the Corinthian's agape feasts- greed. The people were more interested in filling their bellies than in truly reflecting on the Lord's Supper. They would hurry and eat before anyone else could get what they brought. Some were even bringing alcoholic wine to the services and getting drunk!

Many in today's churches think that there is nothing wrong with having alcoholic beverages, I TOTALLY DISAGREE! To make alcoholic wine, you must add yeast to begin the fermenting process. I can assure you that NO YEAST was ever present at the Passover Celebration because it was strictly forbidden in the law. (Exodus 34:25; Numbers 9:11; Deuteronomy 16:4; Ezekiel 45:21). So let's not even try to build a case for drinking fermented wine when we gather.

Paul took this idea of leaven even further than just products containing yeast. He compared yeast to sin. In I Corinthians 5:1-13, Paul is telling the Corinthians how to discipline a person who was living in sexual immorality and still participating in the church. In verses 6-8, he makes the parallel that I want you to see. *"6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* We too need to purge all leaven from our agape feasts!

The other issue concerning greed was that they were not considering the poor. They wanted to eat

their expensive food instead of the poorer member's humble food. Paul said that this brought disgrace to the church and shame upon the poor.

Look, if you are given to appetite, you need to repent. Don't come to the church to make a pig of yourself. Eat at home, and then eat modestly at the gathering. The focus is about the Lord, not the menu.

The Lord's Supper Proper

In verses 23-26, Paul teaches us how to properly eat the Lord's Supper. He pretty much repeats word for word what Jesus said during His last supper with His disciples. Verse 26 in particular gives us insight to the meaning of the meal. When the meal is done properly we keep everyone in remembrance of the Lord's death and His return. It is a constant reminder that if we participate in the meal we must be true to our covenant with Him and with one another.

Eating Unworthily

Verses 27-30, warn us of serious repercussions for eating in an unworthy manner. There are two ways that we can interpret this idea. First, to eat in an unworthy manner could mean to eat the meal while in an active sin. The second interpretation is to participate flippantly or irreverently. I think that both ways of interpretation should be applied to our participation in the Lord's Table.

Self Examination

Verses 31-32, teach us to examine ourselves to be sure that we are not unworthy to participate in the communion table. In order to keep from sinning

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against the body and blood of the Lord we must judge ourselves. Remember that the church is the body of Christ. To participate unworthily brings judgment upon the one who does so.

Paul said that we should examine ourselves and then partake. This means more than just discovering that we are not right with the Lord. This means that we do something about our undone condition. I have seen people who choose not to share in the meal because their life is not in order at that time. I believe that there is a better way. We should repent and then participate.

Wait for One Another

In verses 33-34, Paul ended his teaching concerning the communion table with an exhortation to “wait for each other.” You won’t starve to death if you wait a little while for the others to arrive, especially in America. The people are more important than the food. This is a very holy time and we should treat it as such.

Jesus Wants to Share this Meal with Us

To close this chapter, I want to share a couple of passages concerning Jesus’ feelings about the Lord’s Supper.

Fervent Desire

Luke 22:14-16, ¹⁴ *When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.* ¹⁵ *Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”*

Jesus was just about to be crucified, and he knew it. Yet with the horrors of the crucifixion awaiting Him, He shows us His heart. He had burning desire to eat the meal with His friends, and He still does! He said that He would not eat it again until the Kingdom of God comes. We are in the Kingdom of God. Our hearts should burn with the same desire to share this meal with Him today.

I Stand at the Door and Knock

Another passage that shows us Jesus' heart concerning the Lord's Table is found in Revelation 3:20, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*" Jesus told the Laodicean church that He was standing at the door knocking. He still desired to come into the house and share a meal with His friends.

I believe that we are living in the Laodicean church age. Our wealth has made us lukewarm. We should zealously repent and open the doors of our homes to Jesus by building intimate relationships with His people.

13

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING

One of the most exciting aspects of the house church model is using Jesus' method of evangelism. Following His pattern of evangelism will cause us to simultaneously plant churches. Jesus said, *"I will build My church..."* If we want to stay in the will of our Lord we must join Him in this mission.

Plentiful Harvest...Few Workers

In Matthew 9:36-38, "36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Shepherdless Sheep

The spell check on my computer is mad at me for making up the word "shepherdless." But the phrase

“sheep without a shepherd” just had to have a word, so I made one up.

Jesus’ compassion for the multitudes moved Him into action so that they could be ministered to. First, He recognized the harvest which was sheep that were not being cared for. This would include almost all people in the churches of our day. Preaching a sermon to people in a building does not mean that a person is being ministered to or discipled (another made up word). The multitudes in Jesus’ day had synagogues they could go to and hear sermons, yet He still considered them “shepherdless sheep.” They were shepherdless because they were void of loving spiritual relationships.

Lift Up Your Eyes

In John 4:34-38, Jesus taught His disciples a lesson about the harvest, *“34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. 35 Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! 36 And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37 For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”*

There is a harvest ripe and ready right now, but we must “lift up our eyes” to see it. The harvest is the mass exodus of people from the churches in our day. They know about Jesus but the religious system failed them. It’s time for those who have a relationship with Jesus to invite others into their homes and to go into the homes of others to share the love of God with them.

More Apostolic Laborers

Jesus knew that all men were limited in their capacity for relationships, including Him. There was no way that He could meet the relational needs of all of the multitudes. The answer was to multiply Himself. He told His disciples to, *“Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*

If you pray to God and ask Him to send out laborers into the harvest, how do you think He will answer that prayer? He will tell YOU to GO! Just like when Isaiah heard God, I Isaiah 6:8, *“8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” 9 And He said, “Go, and tell this people...”* If you ask, He will send you! God is not looking for professional pastors; He is looking for a workforce of loving laborers that truly care for His people.

Graduation

Immediately following His instructions to pray for labors, Jesus had a graduation ceremony for His twelve closest disciples.

Matthew 10:1-2, “1 And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these...”

Notice in verse one He called His twelve “disciples.” Then, in verse two, we get a list of names of His twelve “apostles.” Jesus disciplined His twelve closest friends then He gave them power to minister to others. After that they were called apostles. Discipleship is not an

end in itself. We must grow up and make disciples of others. He had harvested some “shepherdless sheep,” then He discipled them, and finally, He sent them out to do the same for others.

The word “apostle” means sent one. The Constantine model of church is totally geared to try to get people to come to their building. Jesus commands us to GO! We need an entire generation of apostles in our churches today. Let’s abandon the superstar mentality of what we think an apostle is. Apostles are just workers who lay the foundational work of the churches. They build people’s lives together with Jesus at the heart of their relationships.

Jesus’ Method of Evangelism

Matthew chapter ten records Jesus’ instructions to His newly graduated apostles. He told them what to say, what to do, and what to watch out for. In Luke chapter ten, Jesus graduates another class of seventy disciples who were sent out on the apostolic mission. He gives the same instructions to these that He gave to the twelve. However, Luke gives us some greater details that I would like to point out here.

Luke 10:1-9, “1 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. 2 Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. 5 But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. 7 And re-

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main in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. 9 And heal the sick there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

Sending is in Our DNA

Jesus appointed another seventy apostles just like the first twelve. Do you know the names of any of these seventy apostles? Neither do I and that is a great point. Not all apostles are superstars so get this out of your thinking.

Notice that He sent them into every city that He was about to go to. Like John the Baptist, we too, are the fore-runners for Jesus. We prepare the way of the Lord.

He taught all of His disciples/apostles that there is a great harvest and that they should pray that God would increase the laborers for the harvest. This **MUST** be in the DNA of our house churches.

The Beginning of Creation

When parents have children they immediately understand that someday that child will leave their house and start a family of their own. We **MUST** think this way in the house church model. This is actually a principle found from the beginning of creation.

In Genesis 1:26-28, " 26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man

in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In creation, God commanded that the male and female should be fruitful and multiply. He gives more detail to this in Genesis chapter two.

In Genesis 2:21-24, "21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. 23 And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

This passage is actually quoted by the apostle Paul as an illustration of the relationship that Christ has with His church in Ephesians 5:31-32, *"31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

The principles of marriage found in the creation totally apply to the New Testament church. In normal marriage, a husband and wife have a loving relationship just as God ordered it. Then they have children who go out and repeat this very natural process. But Paul clarifies that he is not talking about a marriage, he's talking about the church. WE MUST RESTORE THIS PROCESS TO THE HOUSE CHURCHES!!!

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In marriage, “fruitful” means to have children. To multiply means for those children to start new families of their own. If our children are still living at home when they should be having families of their own something has gone woefully wrong. Our children must be trained to start their own families. This is the expected end.

This is yet another realm that the Constantine/Augustine error has cheated us in. It is totally unnatural to try to keep everyone “under” the pyramid’s leader.

Go Your Way

In Luke 10:3, Jesus said, “*Go your way...*” In Matthew 10:7 He said, “*As you go...*” I believe that Jesus sends some to specific places. But I believe in general He expects us to do the work as we go along our way in life. I believe that the Constantine/Augustine model places an undue weight on the clergy being “called” into the ministry. This is largely due to the idea of Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum. That Augustinian error separates “clergy” from “laity,” but the Bible does not.

Jesus commands all to this task not just a select few. There are some who are extremely gifted that have unusual anointing. But that is not the norm. Jesus commands us to make disciples. He expects those disciples to grow up and do the work. He commands us ALL to be fruitful and multiply.

Can you imagine if we applied Augustine’s Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum to marriage? Only a select few could actually be worthy to reproduce. A few mad men throughout history have actually tried to

impose this selective breeding on people and Augustine is on that list. The churches must reject this error and return to the Biblical understanding that ALL are expected to be fruitful and multiply.

Whatever House You Enter

In Luke 10:5-7, we get to the heart of Jesus' method of evangelism, "5 But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house."

Jesus told His disciples to go into the houses of those they are trying to reach. Many (including me) have tried going house to house knocking on doors to share the gospel. This is not what Jesus meant here. As a matter of fact, in verse seven He specifically says, *"Do not go from house to house."*

The Greek word for house is "oikos," which describes people in relationship with one another, not just the structure they live in. Jesus sends us "as we go" to enter into a circle of relatives or friends, and bring the message of peace to them. This is why we must "lift up our eyes" to make sure that we don't forget this as we go. We have to stay aware of the harvest around us.

Son of Peace

Once a new group of people know that you're all about living for Jesus and they still accept you, then you should look for a special person in that group. Jesus calls this person "a son of peace." That is, a person

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who is looking for peace. That person may be trying to find peace in alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity, food, money, etc. The list goes on and on about how so many are trying to fill their need for peace. Just because someone is deeply involved in sin does not mean that they are not seeking peace. The key is if they know you and your message and still want you around that means they are open.

When you find that person who is truly seeking peace, that's the one you should begin to disciple. Spend time with them, build a friendship, and pastor them as though they were already saved. They will get born again as you disciple them. Don't try to pluck them out of their "oikos," stay in there as long as they will let you and make as many disciples as you can. In doing so, you are planting a new church, in their house!

Heal the sin sick souls and their hurting bodies; this is a time for miracles. Just as John the Baptist, Jesus, and all of His disciples/apostles, teach them that the Kingdom of God has come to them.

If people reject you and your message, then get away from them. Find those who are seeking peace.

The Return of the Seventy

I have to include the triumphal return of the seventy when they finally reported back to Jesus. In Luke 10:17-24, *"17 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' 18 And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*

20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." 21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. 22 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." 3 Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; 24 for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

In verses 17-20, the dialogue between Jesus and the unnamed seventy is nothing less than jubilant! The apostles were overjoyed due to their effectiveness over the demons. But Jesus said the real reason to be overjoyed was because their names were in the Book of Life!!!

In verses 21-22, Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit. The word "rejoiced" means to jump up and down and twirl around in circles. Jesus went into a dance that would put King David to shame. The cause for His elation was that His disciples were doing the work!

Then He immediately blurts out a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father. His prayer was simply that it wasn't wise and prudent professionals doing this work, but those who had childlike faith in Him! His disciples began with a revelation that Jesus was Christ, the Son of God. Now they had matured and become apostles that planted churches that overcame the powers of hell!

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The Vision of Evangelism and Church Planting

I believe that we will see the same result as we remove ourselves from Constantine and Augustine's errors and restore the Biblical pattern of Church. When God revealed these things to me I was immediately filled with the vision of the New Testament Church. I pray that this same vision for planting relational churches through relational evangelism would fill your heart.

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MISSION, THE BIG PICTURE

Little Flock

Up to this point we have discovered how through Constantine and Augustine the churches came to be what they are today. After that, we retraced the steps of how the church functioned in Biblical times. We examined the early churches four pillars- apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. And then we looked at what took place when the early church gathered. Finally, we rediscovered Jesus' model of evangelism. I hope by now you can see that the Biblical Church model is totally "doable" in our generation.

Many are "doing" house church in our day. More and more this will become the acceptable norm. But what I have discovered is that most of these groups remain just that, a little group. House churches by nature will be a "little flock" and that's okay. But, there is a bigger picture. We must see the way that the early church worked to advance the kingdom house by house, community by community, city by city, and nation by

nation. We must not despise the day of small beginnings. But on the other hand, we must remember our mandate to go to the nations.

Paul's Method of Mission

The apostle Paul was without a doubt one of the most effective New Testament workers in his day. He seemed to run circles around all of the rest of his contemporaries when it came to church planting. Paul said that he did not “beat the air;” he was not swinging with wild punches. No, like a skilled boxer he hit exactly what he was aiming at. There is one place in the Bible where the apostle Paul gives us great insight to his mission methodology.

In Titus 1:4-9, “4 To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

Father/Son

In verse four we gain a great insight when Paul called Titus a true son in the faith. Just like Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist and his disciples, Jesus and His men, Paul and Titus developed a father son relation-

ship. Their relationship was more than a teacher to a student; a deep spiritual kindred was developed as they walked together. If we miss this point we miss the key ingredient of the relational church. We MUST turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the sons to the fathers if we are to escape the Constantine/Augustine curse.

Crete

Crete was an island in the Mediterranean Sea with about one hundred cities within its coasts. The well defined boundaries on this island are perfect to illustrate how Paul worked the mission in his day.

Paul gave Titus the task of making sure that this island was thoroughly evangelized through church planting. The work was two-fold- set order in the churches, and ordain elders in every city.

Order

Titus' first job was to bring order to the existing churches in Crete. The word order in this sentence means to proceed in correcting or setting in order. Paul's letters reflect that he was continually correcting the churches that he had planted. Just like with raising children, correction is a continual process.

I believe that in our generation this could take on a dual meaning. The first work of setting in order would be to restore the church back to its original Biblical pattern. Once the Biblical pattern is back in place, the second work of order would be the normal work of continually correcting the areas that lack order.

Elders

The second part of Titus' work in Crete was to ordain elders in every city. Defining the role of an elder is a great task. When Constantine and Augustine perverted the church's structure and theology, they also perverted the offices. Undoing this perversion is what makes the definition of elder so complicated. When we apply the Biblical term elder to the un-Biblical model that Constantine and Augustine concocted we have an error. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches "priests" are the dominant role in their local churches, in the rest of the denominational churches "pastor" is the main figure. Both of these applications fail to represent the Biblical role of New Testament church leadership. As always, when relational Biblical terms are applied to non-relational corporate pyramid churches it perverts the term. The words are the same but the meaning is totally different.

The New Testament declares that all of us are to be priests unto the Lord. I Peter 2:1-5, *"1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

Peter told the churches that all of the members are a "holy priesthood" that offers up spiritual sacrifices to God!

He repeats this in verse 9, *“9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;”*

Unfortunately the Roman Church tries to mimic the Old Testament priesthood. Those Old Testament priests were responsible for sacrificing animals. The Roman priests are charged with re-sacrificing Jesus every time they perform the sacrifice of the mass.

The rest of the denominational world is equally in error as their Roman counterparts. The word “pastors” only appears once in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11), yet it is the most common word to describe church leadership of our day. The “pastor” has become the top of the pyramid that Constantine and Augustine created. The Greek word for pastor is “poimen” which means someone who cares for the sheep.

On the other hand, the word “elder” is used sixty four times in the New Testament. Titus was to ordain elders in every city. So let’s see if we can Biblically define and apply the term of “elder.”

Four Levels of Elders

The Greek word for elder that appears in Titus 1:5 is “presbuteros” and it means to be an older man. The elder is not necessarily an old man but he is further along spiritually than the ones that he is discipling. Look at the case of Timothy in I Timothy 4:12, *“12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”* Timothy was a young man but he still occupied the office of an elder leading the Ephesian Church. It is quite ob-

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vicious in Timothy's case that he was not advanced in years but he was advanced in spiritual maturity.

Peter defines the first level of elder and gives us great insight to the character of those occupying this office in I Peter 5:1-5, "*1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*

Notice that Peter said that he too was a "fellow elder." We know that Peter was an apostle to the Jewish believers. We know that his apostleship was widely honored and accepted. Yet he called himself an elder. Consider how he was still impressed with what he witnessed when Christ suffered. He then exhorts his fellow elders to shepherd the flock, and to serve them willingly, not as money hungry lords, but as humble examples.

The apostle John also applied the term "elder" to himself in II and III John. Paul included himself in the "presbytery" that laid hands on Timothy. The first level of elder is that of an apostle that seems to operate without any geographical boundaries. Their office is recognized wherever they go.

The second level of elder would be defined by Titus. Titus was given the whole area of Crete to operate in. When the word “churches” is used in a plural sense it is always speaking of the churches in a region such as, “the churches of Asia.” This is a good example of the term “bishop.” The Greek word for bishop is “episcope” and it means to watch over and visit the people! Titus had a clearly defined work and a clearly defined region.

Timothy would be a good example of the third level of eldership. He was over the church in the city of Ephesus. When the word “church” is used in the singular sense it is speaking of a church in the city or the church that meets in someone’s house. Timothy was a city elder. Titus’ job on the Isle of Crete was to ordain elders in every city (we’ll come back to this later).

The final level of elder that I want to point out is the house church elder. This is defined by those who have a church in their home. In Acts 20:17-38, the apostle Paul calls all of the elders from the Church of Ephesus to come to him in Miletus. We know that Timothy was the city elder of the church of Ephesus. But Paul called for the elders of Ephesus to come to him. That plurality of elders represents those who hosted churches in their homes in the city of Ephesus.

We should take great care to avoid the trap of sectarianism when recognizing these levels of eldership. We do not want to become “respecters of persons” but we need to recognize that the New Testament has a structure. These are the terms that help us to define that structure. But each of these levels of eldership had to meet the exact same qualifications to be eligible to serve in this office.

Qualifications for Elders

I want to point out that when Paul was describing Titus' work he used the words elder and bishop interchangeably. In Titus 1:5 he told Titus to ordain elders in every city. In Titus 1:6-9 he goes into the qualifications for the elders but then in verse seven he calls them bishops. This is further proof that we every level of eldership should meet the same standard of character.

Let's reread those qualifications, "6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

Notice that almost everything mentioned has to do with personal integrity and the ability to have a good family. He does have to be able to teach what he has learned but the overwhelming emphasis is on his character. The Constantine/Augustine error puts the emphasis on the ability to speak while character is largely ignored.

Paul taught Timothy the same thing in I Timothy 3:1-7, *"1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his*

own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

We have already established the fact that Paul used bishop and elder interchangeably. Once again we see Paul placing the weight of qualifications on their ability to live as a Christian personally and as a family. He even emphasizes this in verse five when he says, *"for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?"*

Notice that he only gives a small amount of attention to the person's ability to teach. I'm not trying to imply that teaching is unimportant. But I've had it with great preachers who live pathetic lives. The overwhelming charge is that we are able to live with personal integrity and see that our families live the same. The Constantine/Augustine model is a family killer. Roman priests are not allowed to have a family. Then the other denominational world pastors are so consumed by the church that many end up in divorce or adultery, while their children run amuck. The family should be the proving ground for ministers yet today's un-Biblical churches turn a blind eye toward wayward preachers whose homes are failing. A man with a good marriage and a well behaved family is more qualified for eldership than a man who has gifts to speak and power to do miracles!!!

Identify, Equip, Ordain

Paul told Titus to appoint or ordain elders in every city. This meant that he would have to first identify those who meet the Biblical qualifications. Then he would have to build a relationship with their family while he discipled them and starts a church in their home. Finally, when he was sure about that person's love for Jesus and love for his family, he would lay hands on him ordaining him to the office of city elder. Titus was then free to repeat this work in another city. The newly ordained elder would continue to do the same work in his own city. He would in turn find a person, build a relationship, start a church in that home, and then ordain a house church elder. This would set the city elder free to start a new church while staying relationally connected to the churches in his city.

The Big Picture

Let's consider Titus' work on Crete. After he planted a church in a city he would ordain one or two elders to continue the work. That meant that anywhere from 15 to 50 people were in the church in that city when he left it. But don't forget that the city elders kept planting churches. Then Titus would go to the next city, and the next, until all one hundred cities on the Island of Crete had interrelated churches that were planting more churches. Just Titus' work alone could have between one and two hundred churches with five to ten thousand people! Not to mention that every church in every city was continuing in the same pattern!

The exponential expansion of the early church literally turned the world upside down in their day. I believe that as we recapture this Biblical strategy of

relational church planting that we will do the same in our day.

15

TRANSITIONS

In these brief chapters I have presented three major things to you. First, I retraced the history of how the church came to be the way it is today. Second, I showed you how the early church operated before it became tainted by Constantine and Augustine. Third, woven throughout this book is my testimony of how these things have affected me and my ministry.

In this final chapter I would like to teach you how to transition into the relational model of house churches.

My Transition

When God revealed to me the things that I have just shared with you in this book, I repented of following Constantine (I never followed Augustine). Let me say first of all, it took a lot of time for this to soak into my heart and mind. Remember, I was a successful traditional pastor with three strong congregations; I was entrenched in the Constantine model to say the least. So changing my heart and mind was a slow process.

As I began to repent of the Constantine model, I was faced with a great challenge. I had to be able to COMMUNICATE to others the things that God was showing me. I remember some of the early conversa-

tions that I had with my wife, Diane concerning this. I would share a history lesson with her, then kind of fumble around trying to talk to her about it. In my heart I wanted to run away from the Constantine model but I had to give others the same “space to repent” that God had given to me. I also had to find the words to describe these things to others so I could give their minds the catalysts for repentance. I remember one day I shared with Diane that when the early church met on Sundays it was to share a meal. She could sense that I wanted to change something so she point blank asked me, “What are you saying we should do?” Her heart was in relational ministry, but her head was still in the Constantine model. I said boldly, “We should cancel what we do on Sundays and let our “cell groups” meet on Sundays.” She was so not there. But she then had a Biblical and historical truth to begin to meditate on concerning this. Little by little she warmed up to what God was showing me. I knew that if I couldn’t convince Diane, I couldn’t convince anyone. On the other hand, I knew that if I could convince Diane it would make communicating with others much easier.

With Diane on my team, I began to share these things with our cell group leaders, they were easier to persuade than Diane and I. I think it was because they were sick of sitting in church listening to me preach. I was sick of it, so I know they had to be. Once they were buying in to the house church model, I began to disciple them to lead house churches. I began simultaneously to communicate from the pulpit to all of the people.

Finally, on January 15, 2006 we took the plunge. We cancelled Sunday services and everyone met in homes on SUNDAY MORNING! Our plan was to alternate every other weekend until all of the people became accli-

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mated to house church. Part of our plan was to meet in homes on Sunday mornings, then come to the building on Sunday night to discuss how things went. When we came back on that first Sunday night all of the people said we don't want to have church in a building any more. So we have been in house church ever since. Hallelujah!!!

To Pastors

I was harder to convince about house church than the people that I was leading. My wife was next to the hardest. After that, our staff, cell leaders and congregations were the easiest. Pastors, we are the problem. I talk to pastors and upper level church leaders all of the time who are in the same state that I was in while in the traditional church. They love Jesus but don't love what they are doing. We have to change. If I can do it so can you!

There are several things that you will have to deal with as a traditional pastor to make this transition. First, if you are not in a relational ministry, you will have to become relational. This will be your biggest challenge. Start having your leaders come to your home for meals to discuss (dialogue not monologue) the Word of God. Go to their homes get in one another's lives. Here's a concept- become friends.

Second, you too will have to communicate these things to your spouses, leaders, and congregations. I hope that this book helps you but please search these things out for yourselves. This has to be YOUR REVELATION or you will fail!

Third, you will have to re-identify yourself and your ministry. This takes time and you shouldn't force it. Once you have sat on the top of a pyramid you will find

that it's awkward to sit on a level playing field. This is a great exercise in humility and it'll do you good! God really does speak to other people and you should learn to listen to them. If you think that they are rambling or not saying something as good as you could, remember how many hours they sat listening to you, and repent!

Fourth, your income comes from the church, and it still can. The Bible gives much teaching concerning compensation for full time workers. I want to point out that in the early church, money came to the "apostles' feet" (Acts 4:32, 37 and 5:1-2). God made sure that the "sent ones" were in charge of the finances so that the mission would be fully funded. Later, this work was delegated to administrators (Acts 6). But the receiving and moving of funds was the work of the apostles. Just make certain that you only fund Biblical things, like worker's pay, feeding the hungry, quenching the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners (Matthew 25:31-46). Also, make concerted efforts to minister to widows and orphans, (James 1:27). It's wonderful the things that you can do when the building and programs are not robbing your ministry of its finances. We have partnered with our friends at Heaven's Family who are on the cutting edge of ministering to "the least of these" overlooked people.

Fifth, get rid of your buildings and never go back! They are your problem not your solution. Remember, your building is not "the house of God" you are! Sell that thing and use the money to start house churches.

Pastor, please return to the pattern that God gave to the apostles of the early church.

To All Who Want to Transition

Perhaps you were a member of a church and just quit going. Maybe you grew up in church then lost interest. You might still be attending traditional church services but your heart is no longer in it. Whatever your case, there are millions of people like you out there and I want to help you to transition into house church.

First, you too must have the revelation of relational ministry. Get this in your heart and head.

Second, quit thinking that you need a professional pastor. God wants to use YOU! If you have a heart for Jesus and you love His people, you can do this.

Third, invite your family and friends over for a meal, and apply the principles of I Corinthians 14:26-33 to your gathering. You may even read this passage to them and get them to discuss it together. Then plan your next meeting encouraging them to bring something from the Lord.

Fourth, apply the four pillars of the church to all that you do. Remember they are the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. If you gather in a home or some other natural setting and apply all of these principles, the Holy Spirit will meet you there.

Fifth, remember the mission and keep planting churches!

Sixth, if you need help use our contact information found at the back of this book and we will do all that we can to help you succeed.

The Beginning

The conclusion of a book is normally called “the end.” In this case I hope that it is only the beginning. I pray that what I have shared in this book will help you on your journey out of Babylon and into the apostolic pattern of house church. We have learned so much since God began to move us in this direction and we have much more to learn. I am sure that God will show you as much and hopefully much more than He has shown us. I love what we are doing now. I am in a personal revival! Our churches are in a revival, and we are beginning to see a harvest. I believe that it is truly just the beginning. House Church will be a normal term in the next decade. We will no longer have to explain why we are having church this way. Anyone who remains in the Constantine/Augustine heresy will have to explain why they choose to do so.

To all who have left that error, walk with confidence into this dawning of a new day for the modern churches. The way forward is backward, as we return to the roots of the Biblical Church!

God Bless Your Journey.

16

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Other Books by Teryl Hebert:

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