

Will the Real Christian Please Stand Up

The five-fold test of authentic Christianity from 1 John

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INTRODUCTION

Despite living in the information age when knowledge has exponentially exploded, this present generation is naïve when it comes to the matter of truth. The Western World has essentially abandoned the search for timeless and immutable truth. Truth is now regarded as something flexible, changeable and a matter of personal choice. This idea about truth is called post-modernism.¹

Post-modernism asserts that all religions are equal – the only thing necessary is tolerance and respect for one another. Therefore, I am free to believe whatever I want to believe, as long as I don't hurt or offend anyone. It is declared to be the basis for a harmonious, multicultural society.

This book stands squarely opposed to the claims of post-modernism. It proclaims unashamedly the existence of eternal and absolute truth that God has revealed in His kindness. Truth is necessarily dogmatic. By defining what is true it must also mean that we define what is untrue. Truth separates light from darkness.

¹ In a strict sense, postmodernism sees truth defined by the community rather than the individual. Nevertheless, as the philosophy of post-modernism plays out in the Western World with the emphasis upon the individual's freedom of choice, it automatically converts to relativism.

Post-modernism is a lie. It does not produce harmony but by unleashing selfishness, sin and strife it causes relational discord. Its' ideal regarding tolerance is erroneous (see box). Most importantly, all religions are not equal as it claims. There is only one true religion, all others are false - there is only one path to God, all others lead to eternal destruction.

Tragically, post-modernism has infiltrated the church. Those who have been deceived and come under its influence regard the Bible to no longer be the source of truth to be investigated and obeyed, but a narrative to be personally interpreted and applied. To them the Bible contains the Word of God, rather than being the

Post-modernism is a philosophy that impacts all areas of life. Its fundamental premise is that all truth is relative. In other words every person can have their own set of beliefs which are equally valid to everyone else's. It necessarily requires that there are no absolute truths binding on all people everywhere and for all time. (Except, of course, the 'absolute truth' that all truth is relative – which demonstrates that post-modernism is intrinsically illogical and therefore irredeemably flawed. On one hand, by its own tenets, I am allowed to believe there are absolutes but on the other hand I am not. In this instance post-modernists handle the blatant incongruity by branding me intolerant and a bigot and, therefore, being intolerant of me. But it is a philosophy championing tolerance for all!)

Moreover, the god of post-modernism – if there is one – is impotent. In reality, post-modernism promotes us as our own gods because we individually have the right to say what is true and what is not true. Post-modernism destroys the claim of the Bible to be truth. It is a frontal attack upon God's Word. It is the perennial lie of the devil.

Post-modernism is now the guiding philosophy of the Western World. Our governments legislate it, our schools teach it and our media celebrates it.

Word of God. Although they call themselves Christians and believers in Jesus Christ, they are *false Christians*.

Accordingly, this book takes up the role of the prophet of old, showing people their error, calling them to repentance and back to the truth. (I hope, however, you will also sense the cry of a tender-hearted pastor who desperately wants the sheep to thrive and to be protected from ravenous wolves.)

Jesus repeatedly declared “I tell you the truth!” Some believed him, most did not. His voice is still heard this day for those who will listen. This book endeavours to set out the message of truth and present the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ.

My parents were ministers in the Salvation Army. I grew up hearing a message that there was only one path to enter into right relationship with God. Eventually I embraced that message and turned to God with overflowing tears of repentance. The churches I was involved with during the 70s, 80s and 90s, maintained a rock solid stance on that gospel: a gospel that separated truth from error, the holy from the profane and the wheat (real Christians) from the chaff (false Christians).

This gospel in its most basic form as I was taught was this: that God so loved this world, that He sent his one and only Son into it, so that all who believed in Him would not suffer eternal death and separation from God in hell, but would receive eternal life, being peace and joy in heaven

forevermore. At first I understood salvation, according to this doctrine, to be the forgiveness of my sins and the assurance of my place in heaven. The sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross was the price paid for the penalty for my sin. That profound sense of having my sins washed away, the nearness of God and the assurance of a home in heaven (I received by faith that night some 37 years ago), I would have gladly given the whole world for.

However, as I grew spiritually and in the knowledge of God I came to understand the truth claims that this gospel was built upon and the power the gospel possessed to radically change a person's life in the present.

As to the truth claims, this gospel is founded upon the Reformation tenets of *Sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone, *Sola Fide*, by faith alone, *Solus Christus*, through Christ alone, *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone and *Soli Deo Gloria*, to the glory of God alone. The Bible (made up of 66 books) must be accepted as the only inerrant and inspired Word of God (not to be added to or subtracted from), and it communicates to us that through faith in Christ alone, and not by works, can a person be saved from their sin. That it is by God's grace that we are saved from God's wrath, and that He alone receives the glory; no-one can boast in what they have done to earn their salvation, or add to what was accomplished by the sacrifice of Jesus. In a broader sense, I came to understand the absolute importance of what we believe to be true and why. That it is fundamental to how we understand who we are, why we are

here, what we should pursue in life and ultimately the eternal consequences.²

As to the transformed life, the gospel embraces an existence in this life which is nothing short of astonishing. Jesus defined eternal life as “knowing the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent” (John 17: 3). It is not just about the assurance of entering heaven when you die. Rather, it is built upon a profound union with the Creator of the universe which you experience now in this life. Almighty God breathes spiritual life into you when you are born again so that you might know Him. And He unites Himself with your spirit, making your body a holy temple in which He dwells. It is an understatement that life radically changes. A continual and abiding communion with the living God orders every step and every breath. To be truly born-again, born of the Spirit of God, is to enter another world. It is to leave the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan of which you were a citizen, and enter the kingdom of light ruled by Jesus and dwelling in His supernatural realm. It is to walk as Jesus walked.³

The whole gospel includes understanding and displaying the new nature God imparts to a believer. It is an all-encompassing view of life and how it is to be lived in righteousness and holiness. Not in a religious sense of mere adherence to law, but in a relational sense with the one true

² This is the topic of Chapter 2 Love for the Truth.

³ This is the topic of Chapter 4 Life of Obedience.

God. The believer walks with God, in love and service for others.⁴

Moreover, the believer is transformed into a child of God whereby they literally become like God, just as it was in the beginning when God first made Adam in His own image, free from sin. This idea is offensive to some because they adhere to the doctrine that we always remain sinners 'saved by grace'; that none of us is truly free of sin's embrace. The writings of the apostles in the New Testament, however, labour the point that we must prove ourselves the children of God by living sin-free lives.⁵

The problem is that many churches have succumbed to the pressure of post-modernism and are teaching another gospel - a false gospel of 'grace'. (Grace meaning tolerance, respect and acceptance, regardless of beliefs or creed or life-style choices. This is not the Bible's definition of grace.) This false gospel declares that God loves and accepts everybody unconditionally. Though we are all sinners and none of us is ever free from sin, His grace looks past our sin. And, that if God loves and accepts us unconditionally, then we should do the same and, therefore, not judge anyone. The god of this false gospel, however, is not the God of the Bible: he is a post-modernist god of 'grace', and not the one true God who is a God of love, truth, righteousness and justice. Consequently, our churches have many members who call

⁴ This is the topic of Chapter 5 Love for One Another.

⁵ This is the topic of Chapter 3 Freedom from Sin.

themselves Christians and are not. They continue to live like anyone else in the world, knowingly or blindly leading sinful lives. They have never genuinely repented, nor been truly born again.⁶

Leading evangelist Ray Comfort writes about this problem:

"...there are many today who name the name of Christ, but who have failed to "depart from iniquity [lawlessness]" (2 Timothy 2:19). They are false converts who have "asked Jesus into their hearts," yet they remain unconverted because they have never truly repented. I cannot put into words the heartbreak of seeing so many spurious converts who have left the Church, and the multitudes of false converts who stay within the Church. Prolific author and pastor A.W. Tozer writes, "It is my opinion that tens of thousands of people, if not millions, have been brought into some kind of religious experience by accepting Christ, and they have not been saved."

"Tozer is not alone in his conclusion. The late pastor D. James Kennedy, of Coral Ridge Ministries, made a similar observation: "The vast majority of people who are members of churches in America today are not Christians. I say that without the slightest fear of contradiction. I base it on empirical evidence of

⁶ This is the topic of Chapter 1 Genuine Repentance.

twenty-four years of examining thousands of people."

"Many of us, if asked which U.S. denomination is most evangelistic, would point to the Southern Baptists. But in trying to determine why there is so much "evangelistic apathy" in their churches, Thom Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, found that the cause could be their "many unregenerate members." Rainer stated, "If our research approximates eternal realities, nearly one-half of all church members may not be Christians." How could this tragic situation have happened? How could vast numbers of people have been led to believe that they are Christians when they are not?"⁷

Compared to the days of my youth there is now much ignorance and confusion over what is genuine salvation. How can we determine what it means to be truly saved? The Apostle John's first letter was written with this very question in mind:

"I write these things to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God *so that you may know you have eternal life.*"

⁷ pp14-15, Ray Comfort, "God Has a Wonderful Plan for Your Life: The Myth of the Modern Message", Living Waters Publications 2010 (available as pdf at www.freewonderfulbook.com)

1John 5:13

John wrote his first letter with the express purpose to reveal those who have eternal life, i.e. who are saved, and contrast those who don't have eternal life. As in the early church so it is today; there are those who are genuine and those who are false. Contained in John's letter there is a five-fold test that prove the authenticity of true believers. It includes these elements:

1. Genuine repentance
2. Love of the truth
3. Freedom from sin
4. A life of obedience
5. Love for one another

The following chapters explain and explore these five overlapping and interlocking criteria.

CHAPTER 1

GENUINE REPENTANCE

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1John 1:8-9

There are three essential elements to genuine repentance that you do – an acknowledgement that you are born a sinner, a pledge to become a different person and a commitment to change your thinking. There is one essential action of God that He performs at the moment of genuine repentance – He imputes His life into you and so you are born again and become like Him.

I am born a sinner

It is fundamental that we must first and foremost recognise we are by nature born sinners, in need of forgiveness and cleansing. We all carry the seed of our natural father, Adam. His sin nature which he took upon himself in the Garden of Eden at the moment of his rebellion, is passed directly on to us all.

In John the apostle's day, as there are today, people fall for the lie that intrinsically we are good people and not sinners. Importantly, they believe that by nature we are good and not evil. (Or alternatively, there is both good and evil in us – the flawed Eastern idea of the yin and the yang. What follows from this lie is that all we need to do is promote the good and suppress the evil which is ever present, through self-discovery, self-belief, self-effort and/or self-denial. That is the essence of the false religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and of the New Age movement.)

Ask people randomly on a busy street if they are a good person and the vast majority will respond “yes”. If you had asked the Pharisees of Jesus' day if they were good, they would also have said yes. The reason they believed they were good was because they rigidly upheld the ‘law’ of God, as they interpreted it. However, Jesus called them blind fools and children of the devil.⁸

People today are no different. They regard themselves as ‘good’ because in their heart they hold to a ‘law’ which they themselves have invented. This ‘law’ basically runs along these lines: they don't intentionally hurt others, and they respect everyone regardless of their beliefs (which are, of course, the fundamental tenets of post-modernism). They, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, are blind fools and sinners

⁸ Matthew 23:17, John 8:44

who are children of the devil. Their own ‘goodness’ is as filthy rags before God.⁹

Continue to ask them a series of questions based upon the Ten Commandments, however, and they readily admit that they are guilty of sin.¹⁰

“Have you ever lied?”

“Yes. Many times.”

“What does that make you?”

“A liar I guess.”

“Have you ever stolen something in your life?”

“Yes, but it wasn’t like robbing a bank.”

“Still you admit you stole something that wasn’t yours. What does that make you?”

“A thief.”

“Do you use God’s name or Jesus’ name like a word of disgust, fear or surprise?”

“Of course. Doesn’t everybody?”

“That’s called blasphemy. And it is a serious offence in God’s eyes.”

“Have you ever got angry at someone and called them derogatory names because they offended you in some way?”

“Yes, of course. I get angry a lot with people who annoy me.”

⁹ Isaiah 64:6

¹⁰ This line of questioning is derived from The Way of the Master materials see <http://www.wayofthemaster.com>

“Jesus said if you get angry with another person, you are harbouring murder in your heart.”

“Here is the last question: have you ever looked upon another person with lust?”

“Naturally. I’m only human.”

“Jesus said if you look upon another person with lust you are committing adultery in your heart.”

“So, by your own admission, you are a liar, a thief and a blasphemer, and you are a murderer and an adulterer of the heart.”

“Now, if were to stand before God to give an account of your life, do you think you would be declared innocent or guilty of sin?”

“Guilty.”

Sadly, many in the church are no different. They think they are good people and yet they are sinners.

Jesus told this parable to expose people who were trusting in their own righteousness:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God."

Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee said just what many people say today: I haven't murdered anyone, or raped anybody or robbed someone. They justify themselves before God on the basis of their own perceived goodness. They are deceived and caught in the devil's trap. They lock themselves out of receiving the forgiveness of God, because they don't think they need it. Therefore, the very first step in order to become a real Christian, is to admit you are a sinner in desperate need of the mercy of God. Given the right environment, as unregenerate sons and daughters of Adam, we are all capable of the most heinous of crimes. Hitler's Third Reich is a testimony to this fact. The German people were 'good' people before they were led astray in the minds and hearts by Adolf Hitler. The Second World War afforded the opportunity for the unleashing of the vile passions and bitter malice of the sin nature. We *all* are born with this Adamic sin-full nature: "The hearts of men ... are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts ...". (Ecclesiastes 9:3)

Our present society is now slipping fast into an abyss of carnality and depravity. Our environment is changing dramatically. For example, fifty years ago it was regarded as murder to abort an unborn child. Now, in Australia a woman

can obtain a legally sanctioned abortion funded by taxpayers' money right up until the very day before birth.¹¹

We now regard as 'good' the right of a woman to kill her unborn child. In one ward of a hospital they are endeavouring to save the life of a premature baby, while in another ward they are killing a child because he or she is now 'unwanted'. A lie has been bought by our culture that a baby in the womb is just a piece of a mother's tissue and she has the right to choose whether to keep 'it' or cut 'it' out. Our hearts and minds are again being manipulated and we are being led away from the truth that life is a sacred gift from God, and murder is sin. The most unsafe place to live in our society is now a mother's womb. The wholesale destruction of

To women who have had an abortion:

If you have had an abortion please understand that you are not any more evil than anyone else. The point is we have all sinned.

You were in an environment that condoned that sin. You were afforded the opportunity, and it seemed right at the time. However, now you understand you are the murderer of your own child. The pain of that thought naturally cuts very deep.

However, your godly sorrow which leads to repentance will act like healing balm to your emotions. God comforts us in all our troubles.

You must forgive yourself. God forgives you – so must you. That open wound will heal over. The scar of the memory remains, but the pain will be gone.

If you still grieve over your loss, release your baby to God and entrust Him to act in righteousness and with justice towards him or her.

¹¹ Specifically, the State of Victoria only allows tri-semester abortions. Other States vary.

human life is an atrocity on a much greater scale than the Second World War Holocaust and it is happening right now! (Globally, 40 million children are aborted each and every year. In the last 25 years that represents 1 billion children.¹² In Australia currently 100,000 children are aborted annually and in total some 3 million children have been aborted since abortion was legalised. At the end of this chapter a comparison is made between Australian deaths in wars since federation with Australian deaths in wombs since 1977.)

If you have never come to Christ acknowledging that you are a sinner, you must stop playing the game that you are a good person. That measure of goodness is your own invention manipulated by your environment and founded upon the lie of post-modernism. It is an abomination before God.

You must first approach God as a contrite sinner, broken by godly sorrow, full of remorse, admitting your own personal guilt. Don't blame your sin on other people, what others have or have not done for you or to you. You are the product of your own sin. Repent! Fall on your knees and cry "God forgive me – a sinner, for this is what I am!"

I promise to change

Together with this first step of admission of personal guilt, comes an equally necessary pledge. When you admit you are a sinner before God, you must be truly sorry for your sin and

¹² http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html

therefore want to be free from the grip of sin. It is godly sorrow that leads to repentance. To just say sorry with no intention of changing your ways is worldly sorrow and a falsehood.

For example, imagine a husband who says to his wife every morning as he leaves for work, that he will be home by dinner-time to eat with the family and help his wife with the children in the evening. And yet day after day he comes home late after the children are already in bed asleep and says sorry expecting that his wife will forgive him. How long will it take before she loses trust in him and his 'sorry' just doesn't cut it with her? He isn't sorry. He only says sorry in an effort to placate his wife. He is just full of self and is blind to his own sinfulness. If he was truly sorry he would mend his ways and keep his pledge.

This change – the power to be free from sin's tight grip - however, cannot be affected through your own efforts. This is the necessity for the new birth. God must change you on the inside otherwise you remain a slave to sin and its passions. When you are truly born again you receive the nature of God which is eternal life. He imputes His nature into you. This is the miracle of the new birth. You were dead in your sins. Now you are alive in Christ. Now holiness is your natural inclination not sinfulness. You are no longer a sinner, you are now a saint. The imperative is that you must grow up in your salvation and become Christlike in all of your thoughts, words and actions.

The key is co-operation with the Holy Spirit. You must adopt an avid willingness to change and become demonstratively godly, offering the members of your body to righteousness and not to sin. (Freedom from sin is fully explained in Chapter 3.) If you continue to live like the world, act like the world and smell like the world, you are not a real Christian. What is on the inside of your heart, what your inner-person is composed of, will be displayed on the outside.

Therefore, you must exercise faith believing God has changed you and made you his child. This is why it is written in John's gospel Chapter 1:12-13

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the *right* to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”

Repentance towards God invokes a right. You must exercise that right by taking possession of it through faith. You must believe you are now a child of God, born of His seed and in a manner of speaking carry His spiritual dna. So you are now made in His image, just as Adam and Eve were *before* they sinned. It is as if you never sinned. You can no longer call yourself a sinner. You *were* a sinner (past-tense) but *now* you are a son/daughter of God (present-tense). It is just not possible to be both at one and the same time.

This change from the old to the new is vividly portrayed in water baptism. In that baptism, your sin nature dies and is buried, and you rise up a new person in Christ Jesus. Your old life has passed away, and all things have become new. You are an entirely new creature. From that moment, you can look back at who you were and boldly proclaim I am not that person any longer. I am in Christ and Christ is in me. My sins are washed away and my heart of stone, my Adamic nature, has been cut out by His Spirit. In its place, God has given me a new heart fashioned after His own. I am not a sinner, I am a son/daughter of God.

If you keep seeing yourself as a sinner, however, and proclaiming yourself as such, you will inevitably remain a slave to sin. It is just not possible to escape the dominion of sin if you persist in perceiving yourself as a sinner by nature. You are in a state of unbelief and have not received by faith what the gospel of Jesus Christ offers you. Therefore, there is no other conclusion to draw but this....you are not a real Christian and your eternal destiny is not heaven. You have not exercised the right to become a child of God that is associated with genuine repentance. You have not adopted the pledge of repentance from acts that lead to death. Therefore, you are an unbeliever and by your own admission you remain a sinner. There are no sinners in heaven. Unbelievers have their place in the lake of fire. Heaven is the preserved abode for those who have believed in His Name and become the redeemed sons and daughters of the living God.

I now actively change my thinking

The third essential element of genuine repentance is an active commitment to change your thinking.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated repent is *metanoeo*. It is a compound word derived from two other Greek words: *meta* which means "after," and implies "change," and *noeo* which means "to perceive"; the latter in turn derived from *nous*, "the mind".¹³ Therefore, to repent means to change your perception or your thinking.

Before we came to Christ our minds i.e. our beliefs, presuppositions, attitudes and desires, were all fashioned by the environment in which we grew up. When we become a real Christian we knowingly and deliberately leave our old way of thinking behind and embrace a new. We humble ourselves, not trusting in the knowledge and wisdom we have acquired, but become as little children again to learn all over again. In order to discover real truth, wisdom and understanding that finds its source in God.

It is very important to recognise the principal sources of information that framed our thinking before we came to Christ. Most of us were oblivious to the pervading influence of the devil and the world, in shaping our attitudes, expectations, beliefs and desires. This does not mean we

¹³ See Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

were totally ignorant of godly morals. The post-Christian Western World still has vestiges of Christian morals and ideals. No-one wants to live in a world totally devoid of morals and ethics. Moreover, our own conscience bore witness to right and wrong behaviour.

Nevertheless, we now recognise “that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). And being born a sinner I now know, however uncomfortable the thought might be, that I was effectively a child of the devil. Sinful living is only a matter of degree. I had a preference for sin and it was evident and dominant.

Here is the fact...we all must serve one of two masters.¹⁴ When I was a sinner I served Satan, I resided in his kingdom of darkness and lived by its dictates:

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

Ephesians 2:1-4

¹⁴ Matthew 6:24

When you become a real Christian, born of the Holy Spirit, you acquire an acute awareness of sin. The Holy Spirit who dwells within you grieves at sin and you sense it. Your spirit which is now alive to God recoils from sin. You now begin to see sin for what it is - an offense against a holy and just God which destroys fellowship with Him - and you learn to hate it intensely. You want God, more than you want your sin. Sin has its roots in the lies of Satan, the perverted lusts of the flesh and eyes, and the overwhelming wickedness of pride. We discover how blind we were to the truth and what abject slaves we were to Satan and sin. We learn in child-like fashion, not to touch those things.

While your spirit is made new the moment you receive Christ your mind is not. Awareness of sin and overcoming sin, therefore, are two separate things. You have old ways of thinking that maintain habits of sin which must be overcome. Your mind is the control centre of your being. You act according to what you think. Your beliefs determine your behaviour.

Your mind is like a computer. There is an old operating system and programs that have to be replaced. You need to understand that when you become a Christian you have an obligation to wipe clean your 'hard drive' and allow the installation of God's 'operating system' and 'software'. God does not renew your mind automatically and with the push of a button at the new birth. You must go through a transformation process, willingly, consciously and

deliberately. Remember the saying "Garbage in, garbage out". You have to replace the garbage that is in your mind causing you to do things contrary to God's will and purposes for you. This transformation process frees you from sinful habits which you acquired when you were a sinner.¹⁵

Therefore, a real Christian will turn to the Bible as the source of right thinking. When someone becomes a real Christian they will crave God's word as a baby craves its mother's milk in order to grow up spiritually (see 1 Peter 2:2 and Hebrews 5:12-13). You cannot be a real Christian and not feed your spirit with real spiritual nourishment. Just as food and water are life to your body, God's word is life to your spirit. You now accept the maxim that "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4) A test of whether a Christian is genuine or not, is their hunger and thirst for the Word of God. A real Christian cannot live without reading and absorbing the Bible. They *abide* in God's Word and, therefore, are proved to be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ as He Himself defined: "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8: 31-32 NASB)

The truth they discover sets them free from sin and Satan, and enables them to be a citizen in God's kingdom. It makes

¹⁵ This process is more fully explained in Chapter 3 Freedom from Sin.

them a whole person and they come into the image of Christ. Their minds are renewed. Their thought-life is arrested as they conscientiously and deliberately "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and ... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5) They adopt an active stance of resistance to the lies of Satan, which remain a threat while they yet live in this world.¹⁶

The Bible received by faith is fully sufficient for life and godliness i.e. for a healthy state of being - spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical. Titus 1:1 establishes that it is "the knowledge of the truth ... (that) leads to godliness". 2 Peter 1:3 declares that "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him..." Sadly, many in the church are turning to humanistic philosophy called psychology to provide answers to mental well-being. They are putting their faith in worldly, man-made principles. It is a great deception and leaves people in bondage to sin and Satan. The Bible and psychology are incompatible and antagonistic to each other. They are competing faiths. In effect psychology presents a false

Again the influence of post-modernism to destroy the truth that the Bible is the source of all truth is evident. The Bible becomes insufficient and, therefore, answers are sought elsewhere.

¹⁶ See Chapter 3 "Love for the Truth" which expands on a real Christian's affection for and adherence to the truth.

gospel.¹⁷ Dr. Ed Burkley writes in his book entitled "Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology":

"If one accepts the logical conclusions of psychology, sin must be reduced to medical dysfunctions and a person can no longer be held responsible for his behaviour, his ethical conduct, his thought life, or his morality. Since man is ill rather than disobedient to God, he does not need salvation, but improved self-esteem.

"If psychology is necessary to transform the human soul, Jesus Christ becomes a quaint relic of religious antiquity and the church must be recognised as an obsolete cultural vestige that man has outgrown. If psychologists can duplicate the fruit of the Spirit, sanctification is unnecessary and the Holy Spirit is irrelevant. If psychological counsel is necessary for solving the problems of life, the Bible must give way to *The New Harvard Guide to Psychiatry*. Pastors should sneak away quietly and find an honest job."¹⁸

Regarding psychology's false teaching, he writes:

¹⁷ See Ed Bulkley "Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology", Harvest House Publishers, 1993, pp 181-206

¹⁸ *ibid* pp203-204

"The problem with much of the teaching in Christian psychology is that it sounds so close to the truth. Integrationists (those who believe the Bible and psychology are compatible and both can be used together - ed.) frequently use Bible verses and Christian jargon to give seemingly biblical support for their psychological counsel ... careful examination of the books written by these counsellors shows that the Scriptures, in many cases, are being handled quite carelessly. And because few Christians today know their Bibles well enough to detect teaching that stands in subtle or even blatant opposition to God's truth, many have actually been led further away from God than closer to Him.

"How does this happen? There are at least nine ways that Christians are deceived by the unbiblical teachings of Christian psychology: 1) Scripture is quoted out of context; 2) Scripture is distorted by poor methods of interpretation; 3) Scripture is denied; 4) statements are added or deleted from the Scriptures; 5) God is redefined; 6) man is redefined; 7) theological terms are redefined; 8) claims of new revelations are made; and 9) the leadership claims unquestionable authority."¹⁹

¹⁹ ibid pp231-232

False Christians will naturally gravitate to psychologists to provide them with answers to life's problems rather than God's Word. They are literally blind to the truth. They cannot see the light of the gospel and be saved. They cannot be led by the Spirit of God into understanding all truth, because He does not dwell in them. In contrast, a real Christian will go to the Bible for the answers to all of life's big issues, and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. They trust God for those answers and find them in His Word.

2 Timothy 3:16 sets forth that "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...*". Righteousness is a state of being right. Righteousness is the image that God originally intended for us all to be made in, i.e. His image. We were by nature sinners and therefore we sinned. We are now by nature righteous and therefore we act righteously. The scriptures are God's means by which He communicates to us what is righteousness (teaching), what is not (rebuking), how to judge between authentic righteousness and that which is false (correcting), and how to put on righteousness (training).

We know who we are and how we are to behave because the Bible gives us that information. It is an incredible gift from God that anyone can access. True Christians template their lives upon this 'Manual of Life'. They are very careful to observe its dictates. Obedience to its doctrine produces a healthy state of mind - freedom from fear, anxiety, depression, eating and sexual disorders etc. (They are

capable of obedience because they have been genuinely born of the Spirit and are empowered by Him as they follow Him. Real Christians are not mere legalists who by their own power and means conform themselves to the dictates of the scriptures. They are partners with the Holy Spirit. We can do nothing separate from God. The point is that they submit their wills to God, and do not lean upon their own understanding.) In contrast, false Christians will deviate from sound doctrine. They will deliberately turn away from the truth and listen to false teachers:

"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Psychiatry - and any other form of worldly teaching that falsely claims to offer real and lasting happiness - does not free people from their sin. Psychiatry is a myth. It does not remove the torment of their mind. It merely delivers them wrongful coping mechanisms. Drugs are pathetically prescribed to dull their pain. However, real Christians are set free by the power of God! They receive a peace and joy which this world does not, nor cannot, provide: Jesus said "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled

and do not be afraid." (John 14:27); and Romans 15:13 says "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." His peace and His joy are ours as we abide in Christ our Saviour and keep in step with the Spirit of truth, trusting in Him alone.

God's part – the impartation of life (zoe)

"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life (Greek - *zoe*), and this life (*zoe*) is in his Son. He who has the Son has life (*zoe*); he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (*zoe*). ***I write these things*** to you who believe in the name of the Son of God ***so that you may know that you have eternal life (zoe).***"

1 John 5:11-13

A real Christian is someone who has received life (*zoe*). John's first letter was written to explain the defining characteristics of this kind of life. If someone received *zoe* there was clear evidence. There would be certain fruits borne out of the nature of *zoe*. (The objective of this book takes up the cause of 1John. To articulate those defining characteristics that 1John enounces.)

John wrote his gospel with the intent to explain how someone could *receive zoe*:

“But *these are written* that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and *that by believing you may have life (zoe)* in his name.”

John 20:31

Zoe is the life which God possesses and from which all types of life are derived. It is zoe which God imparts to us when we are born again. At the moment of genuine repentance a supernatural act takes place whereby God breathes His life into us and we become a living spirit. Before we are born again we are spiritually dead. We are slaves of our flesh, the carnal, Adamic and sinful nature – which in the original Greek is “sarx”.

In the world we observe different kinds of life:

- Microscopic life
- Plant life
- Insect life
- Animal life
- Human life (Greek - “psuche”)

(Note 1: When Jesus died it was this human life which He gave up: “The Good Shepherd lays down His life (*psuche*) for the sheep” John 10: 11.

Note 2: Greeks also had another word for life “bios” from which we get the English word biology.)

These all have set domains – and because of the curse that came upon the world through Adam and Eve’s rebellion, *all* life is subject to *death*.

There is another kind of life – God life – or “**zoe**”. God describes Himself as having or being zoe:

“In him was life (*zoe*)”

John 1:4

“For as the Father has life (*zoe*) in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life (*zoe*) in himself.”

John 5:26

“I am the way and the truth and the life (*zoe*).”

John 14:6

Jesus expressly says that He came into the world in order to give zoe:

“I have come that they may have life (*zoe*)”

John 10:10

“...Jesus looked toward heaven and prayed:
"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life (*zoe*) to all those you have given him. Now this is

eternal life (*zoe*): that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

John 17:1-4

Here is the point: outside of Christ people do not possess *zoe*. Only in Christ are people given *zoe*.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had the choice to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil or, the Tree of *Life*. They had *zoe* and God offered them the choice, either to remain in relationship with him and preserve *zoe* or choose sin, rebellion and death.

When God breathed into Adam he gave him *zoe*. When Adam broke relationship with God he forfeited *zoe* and became subject to *sarx* i.e. he was no longer holy but now sinful. His natural inclination was to sin and no longer to righteousness.

As a consequence every human being born from Adam's line does not have *zoe*. They have *psuche* and are subject to *sarx*. Before we come to Christ we are by nature sinners and objects of God's wrath.

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”

Titus 3:3

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature (“**sarx**”) and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

Ephesians 2:1-3

Here is the terrible state we were in:

- Deceived
- Disobedient
- Slaves to sin
- Lived in malice and envy
- Dead in sins
- Followers of Satan
- Under the wrath of God

The fact is, that everybody who is not born-again is in a state of spiritual death. They are incapable of pleasing God or knowing Him or walking with Him. They carry the nature of the devil himself. This is a most uncomfortable truth, and is denied by all that the present world believes and teaches.

Many people claim to be Christians who have never acknowledged before God their sinful state and their need of

redemption – from the penalty and the power of sin. Consequently, they have not received zoe and their lives demonstrate this fact.

This state of death produces certain results in a person's life – what they want and how they behave:

- the pursuit of possessions, power and passion
- destructive self-striving behaviours of all kinds resulting in addictions and torments
- at a national level, the corruption of knowledge and wisdom; the break-down of the family unit and social cohesion; and debt bondage (enslavement to Mammon)

(When people lose the knowledge of God and this state of death is endemic, they become altogether a debased society – what was known as a pagan and uncivilised society. A nation plagued by poverty and disease, and dominated by the occult/witchcraft. In this state their minds become dull and oppressed. Technical abilities and creativity are absent. People become driven by fear, forced to appease the gods/spirits often through bizarre rituals of blood sacrifice and cannibalism.)

Life after Receiving Christ – the New Birth

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”

Ephesians 2:4-5

When we are born again God breathes his life (zoe) into us. The very first act Jesus performed with His disciples after He was raised from the dead – the same day of His resurrection - was to impart zoe to them:

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that **he breathed on them** and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John 20: 19-21

Just as God had breathed into Adam and imparted life, so Jesus breathed into His disciples and imparted zoe. They were the very first persons to receive zoe since Adam. This is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is only having received zoe that the Holy Spirit can come and dwell within us: “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into

our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"" (Galatians 4:6). (Old Testament saints never experienced zoe. The Holy Spirit could come upon them in power, but never to dwell *in* them. It is only the New Covenant that offers zoe. People could only receive zoe upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.) When we are born again, God supernaturally breathes His life into us. That is the miracle of the new birth. Our bodies are made a temple in which God dwells by His Spirit, as our inner-person is purified. We are supernaturally united to God – spirit to Spirit. At that moment we pass from death to life.

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life (zoe) and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (zoe)."

John 5:24

We are supernaturally removed from one realm to another. We cross over from the realm of death (Adam's race ruled by Satan) to the realm of life (Jesus Christ's race whom He rules over).

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14

Jesus Christ came to create a whole new race of people. There now coexists in the world two races – the race of Adam and the race of Jesus Christ. Jesus is described as another, or last, Adam. Just as those who are of the line of Adam bear the marks and consequences of him, so those who are of the line of Christ bear His resemblance and derive their consequences from Him.

“So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Some early manuscripts "so let us".

When we receive zoe we are born again and receive the divine nature – we become like God. We take on His nature and become altogether righteous and holy. (Note: We still need to grow to spiritual maturity. As in the natural, a little baby is a real person but needs to grow to adulthood to be truly ‘like’ his/her father/mother, so we have to grow up spiritually looking more and more like our heavenly Father.)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life (*zoe*) and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them **you may participate in the divine nature** and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1:3-4

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

So if we are in Christ our old nature has gone - period. "New creation" literally means a brand new species of being. God has not taken your old nature and modified it. He has ripped it out and put in its place an entirely new nature.

This new nature, however, is not independent i.e. it is life in and of itself. It is utterly dependent on an inter-union with God. The "knowledge of him" that Peter writes, is not objective knowledge such as learning about someone by reading about them. It is experiential knowledge. *Zoe* is contingent upon His very Person united with our own. This is why Jesus Himself defined *zoe* in this way:

“Now this is eternal life (zoe): that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

John 17:3

And why He said to His disciples when He breathed on them “Receive the Holy Spirit”.

What a miracle! What an indescribable gift! That God – the Creator of the universe and all life - would deem to dwell in and with you! O the “glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

If you cannot remember a moment in time when you truly repented before God get on your knees this very moment. Don't hesitate.

Openly admit to Him:

"I am a sinner in need of your mercy. I am sorry for the sins I have committed. I deserve your punishment and a place in hell. I now trust that Jesus Christ paid the price for my guilt and shame when He was nailed to the cross. He suffered the judgement of death that I deserved. Please forgive me Lord."

Make this solemn pledge:

"I promise to follow you and love you with all of my heart, all of my soul, all of my mind and all of my strength. Please teach me your truth and your ways."

And believe:

"By faith I rise up now your child, born of Your Spirit, a brand new person in Christ, filled with Your life and free from Satan and the power of sin."

If you are genuinely repentant you will by faith get up off your knees an entirely new person, now equipped with the authority and means to break free of sin's grip. You rise up with a new nature, a holy nature, the very nature of God. You are now born of God, made in his image, just as Adam was before he sinned. You have received zoe. The Holy Spirit now enters your body which is His temple. This radical change which you sense as your sin-guilt is lifted from your shoulders, and the Holy Spirit unites Himself with your recreated spirit, assures you of an eternal home in heaven and has profound consequences for the rest of your life now.

Afghanistan War (2001-present) 41

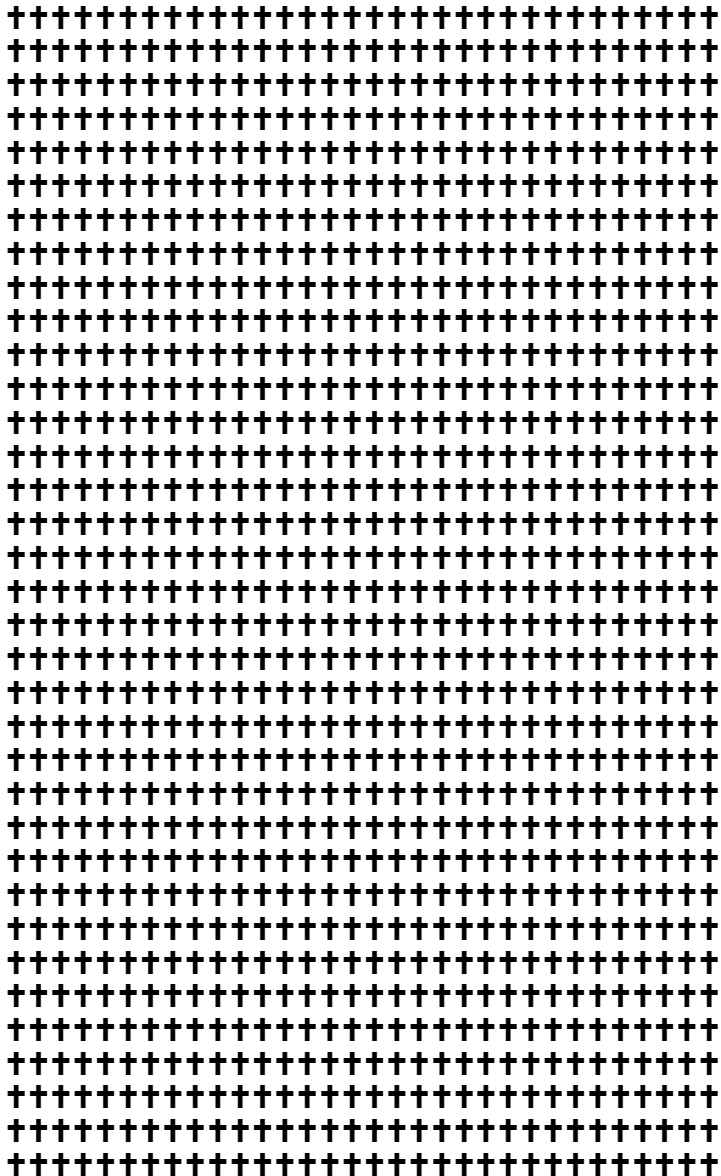
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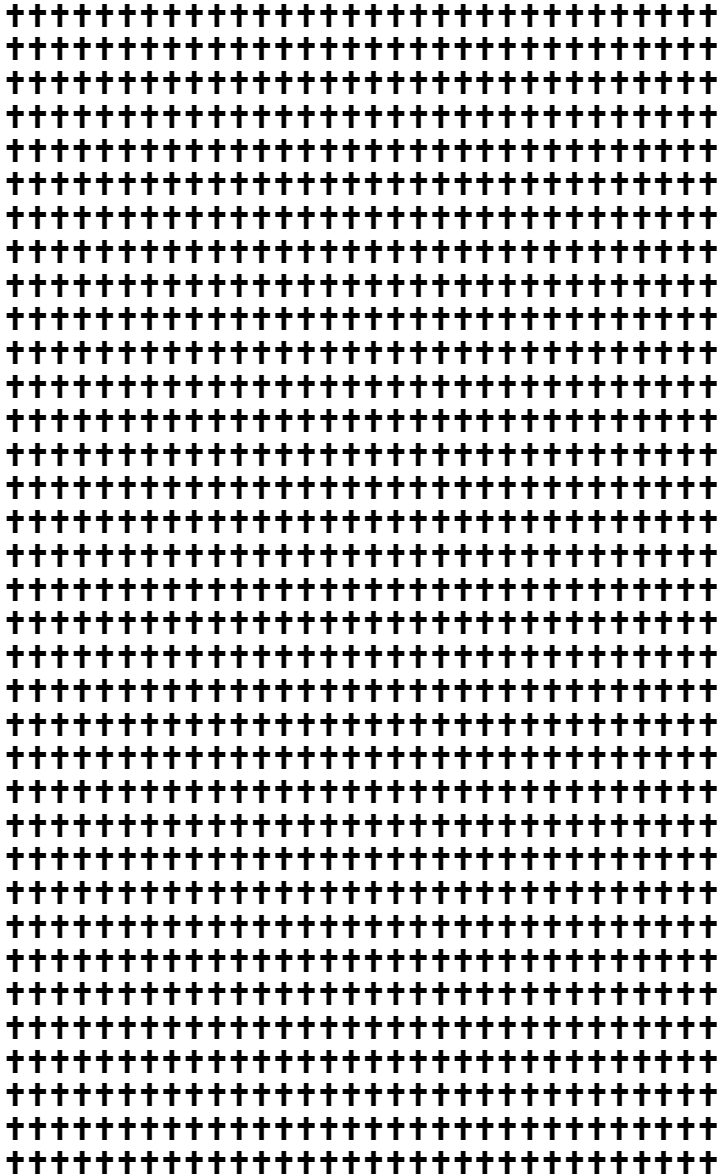
DEATHS IN WOMBS - Australian Abortion Casualties

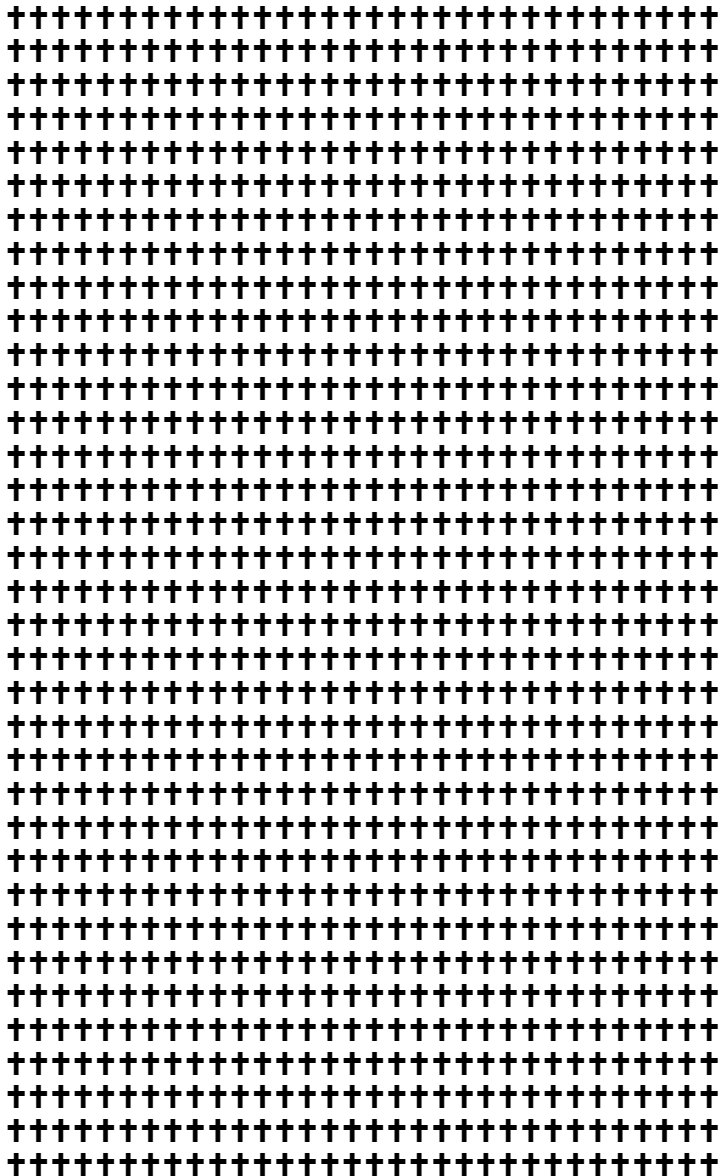
Since 1977 until 2013, over 60,000 abortions were reported per year rising to a high of 100,000 in 1998 - a total of some 2,650,000 unborn children killed. Present average annual abortions, assisted by Medicare, are around 75,000 per year. Including 'unfunded' abortions, i.e. unreported abortions performed in private hospitals, the current annual number of abortions is likely to be 100,000 and the total to be well in excess of 3,000,000.²¹

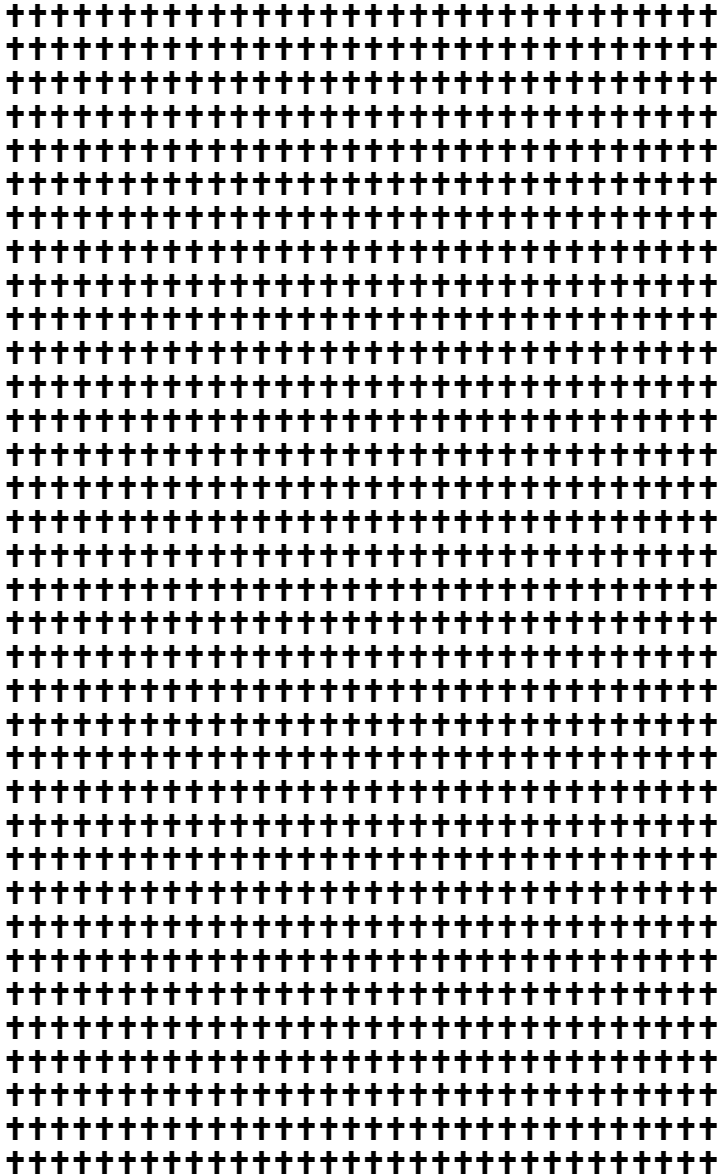
Each cross represents 500 unborn children killed:

²¹ Sources: *Abortion in Australia - Answers and Alternatives*, Anthony Fisher and Jane Buckingham, Dove 1985; Department of the Parliament Library - Statistics Group, Incidence of Item 6469 - Australia, Medicare statistics on pregnancy terminations; *How many abortions are there in Australia? : a discussion of abortion statistics, their limitations, and options for improved statistical collection*, Angela Pratt, Amanda Biggs and Luke Buckmaster, Canberra: Australia. Department of Parliamentary Services, 14 February 2005. (Parliamentary Library Research Brief No. 9).









CHAPTER 2

LOVE OF THE TRUTH

“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”

1 John 1:5-6

Light and truth

God is always associated in the Bible with light. He is described as light itself, and as dwelling in inapproachable light. By way of contrast, sin and Satan are always associated with darkness. So, in God “there is no darkness at all”. This means there is no flaw or falsehood in God. God never lies because by nature He cannot lie. God only speaks truth. He is the sole source of all truth. On the other hand, the devil is described as being a liar from the beginning, the father of lies and that no truth resides in him.

Therefore, light is also used in the scriptures to represent truth. If a person claims to be a Christian and does not adhere to the truth, they remain “in the darkness”. They are a false Christian and they are a slave to sin and Satan. They have not entered the light of truth. They do not walk with God, nor do they know Him. (They may, however, claim to

have experiences with 'God' and even hear the 'voice of God' but these are not from the one true God.)

All sin originates in the rejection of God's Word and acceptance of a lie. The real reason for Adam's sin was that he did not love God and therefore did not also love the truth as revealed by God. Adam did not hold fast to what God had said, but rather bought the lie of Satan. In other words, Adam loved the darkness and hated the light. Adam wilfully chose to disbelieve God. Adam was warned by God that if he chose to break relationship with Him, by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would spiritually die and eventually physically die. Adam chose to believe the lie of Satan that by eating the fruit he would become a god and therefore a source of independent truth and life himself.

Light and nature

When Adam sinned he entered darkness and became darkness. Beforehand he was clothed with the glory of God and shone as the moon reflects the light of the sun. When Adam sinned, God's face was hidden from him – as Adam himself withdrew and hid himself from God - and he no longer reflected that light. Eve also entered darkness at that moment because she had been deceived. Together they made feeble attempts to clothe themselves with coats made out of fig leaves. They saw that they were naked because they were no longer clothed in light.

When Moses returned from the mountain after being in the physical presence of God his face shone with the glory of God. He put a veil over his face to stop the Israelites from looking at it, as the glory faded. In reference to that event, believers are described in 2 Corinthians 3:18 in these remarkable terms: "... we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The glory we display is not diminished, as in the case of Moses, but ever-increasing. We are clothed in light because we have received eternal life and God's Spirit dwells in us. We have stepped out of darkness and into the Light. Something Moses could not do, because Christ had not yet paid the penalty for sin. That is why his glory faded. Moses' experience was a foretaste of what was to come, when the promised Lamb of God would finally appear and take away the sin of the world, permitting God to indwell people and clothe them with undiminishing light.

When we first enter this world we are all born of Adam and therefore we are born darkness. When we are born again, however, we become light because we are clothed with the glory of God as Adam and Eve were before they sinned. Ephesians 5:8-9 declares "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)". That light is the substance of who God is – He is goodness, He is righteousness and He is truth. That is who we are now, 'children of light'. We reflect the very nature of

God, and no longer the nature of Adam. Just as God is called light we, his children, are also appropriately called light.

When Jesus walked upon the earth He declared Himself to be “the light of the world”, by which people could know truth:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life ... If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:12, 31-32

His express purpose in coming to the earth was to reveal truth. When He stood before Pontus Pilate, the last statement He made before being led away to be crucified was “for this reason ... I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37)

Jesus’ coming was the fulfilment of the prophecy: “the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2 and Matthew 4:16). In this regard, John writes in his gospel: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” (John 1:9) This declaration of John not only affirms that Jesus was God but that He would make others like Himself. There are a number of other important references by Jesus to light in John’s gospel. They too

emphasise that those who trust in Him who is the light, will become like Him. We will act like Him and speak like Him. This is necessarily contingent upon us receiving His life and believing what He says. We must believe His word. We are only truly his disciples if we hold to His teaching. In other words, we accept the truth as He declares what truth is, because He alone is the source of all truth. Those who reject His word, reject Him and remain apart from Him. They cannot know Him nor walk with Him. They remain in darkness and their actions continue to be sinful.

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

John 3:19-21

If you live by the truth, it will be revealed in how you live. Your deeds will be righteous as they are done through God. If we are true believers in Jesus then we will reflect His very nature, as a child reflects the nature of their own father. We will have been born of His seed and, as kind produces kind, we will therefore be like God. That is how God has ordered the reproduction of all things from the very beginning. Jesus, again referring to himself as the light, says that we are to become ‘sons of light’:

"You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

John 12: 35-36

It is a maxim that belief determines behaviour. That is why we must choose to walk by the light as God has revealed it. If we love the light it will determine our set of beliefs and in turn order our very steps. If we are truly born again it will be revealed in the truth that we choose to accept and believe, (and the corresponding lies of Satan which we reject).

Foundational biblical truths

You are ruled by what you regard to be true. The course of your life, your reactions to events and your choices amongst various opportunities are determined by your set of beliefs. Out of the heart flow the issues of life. Our heart is the repository of our set of beliefs. This set of beliefs is framed upon answers to the primary questions of life.

Many of us have absolutely no idea about these big issues, however, because of the vacuum that post-modernism has created concerning truth. We have never been encouraged to deliberately and conscientiously examine the questions of

life and consider answers to them. Schools and universities are now steeped in post-modernism and therefore we are all taught there is no such thing as objective truth to explore. Many churches have succumbed to this pressure and now play down the teaching of doctrine and only present principles for successful living.

The fundamental questions of life include:

- Who is God?
- What is He like?
- Can I know Him?
- How did the universe come into existence?
- Who am I?
- What is my purpose here?
- What happens when I die?
- Why do bad things – disease, pain, suffering, murders, rapes, wars - happen?
- How did the nations and their different cultures originate?
- Why are there so many religions?
- Where can I find truth?

Despite the foundational claim of post-modernism that there is no such thing as absolute truth, we all possess answers to these questions. We have to believe something is true. We all must construct a set of beliefs to understand our existence and which guide us in life and help us make decisions. Our

actions and words, the course and outworking of our very lives, are directed by our belief system.

Post-modernism does not alter the need for us to define our lives by what we regard to be true. It just says we can believe whatever we personally want to be believe is true. Truth becomes a matter of personal taste. Like Oprah Winfrey who takes pieces out of different religions, to make her own:

"Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity... I'm a free-thinking Christian who believes that, who believes in my way, but I don't believe that it's the only way, with 6 billion people here on the planet."²²

For the vast majority of people in the Western World, what has influenced the current generation most in building our belief system is Naturalism and the doctrine of evolution. Naturalism and evolution are so pervasive because they are taught in our schools and universities and continually referenced in the media, throughout the Developed World. Everyone grows up from a young age being indoctrinated with these ideas.

²² <http://apprising.org/2012/05/14/oprah-winfrey-is-not-a-christian/>

- Naturalism asserts that nature is all that there is – there is no supernatural realm, no god(s), no such thing as miracles. 'Religion' is man-made, just stories and not real, whereas 'science' is fact. According to Naturalism everything came from nothing (the 'Big Bang') – clearly an absurd and unscientific idea but people believe it! Contrary to the claims of its proponents Naturalism is a religion.
- Evolution presents a false and unscientific method by which we got from that nothing to what we see in our world today. Evolution replaces the creative agency of God with time and chance. It destroys the existence of God. It makes man an animal without eternal existence and no moral obligations. Naturalism together with the doctrine of evolution present false answers to the fundamental questions of life, but answers nonetheless. (Vestiges of Christian influence from previous generations remain. But they are rapidly being eroded with the onslaught of the Naturalism/evolution paradigm.)

It is imperative that we purposively adopt the Bible's answers to these questions. We must consciously and deliberately build a belief system that accords with the truth contained in God's Word. We must now disbelieve things we held true in the past which we can now identify as falsehoods and set our minds only to accept that which is contained in the scriptures. We must turn our backs upon Naturalism and the

doctrine of evolution as we turn to the living God and His Word.

Truth does not lie within us. We all believe things that others have told us. We are born as babies with a clean slate. Truth is external to us and enters our thinking as ideas which we can retain or reject. *Truth only comes from God:* "For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6) Therefore, we must reject the lies of Satan that we were subject to and that we absorbed into our belief system. We must see things as God sees them. We must believe what God says is true. The Bible has very clear and specific answers to the big questions of life that are not shared by any of the false religions of the world – Naturalism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Shintoism – nor the major cults – Catholicism, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses.

In this regard, we must accept and believe the history of the world as God recorded and which is contained only in the Bible. The Bible's answers to the big questions are evident in the history the Bible alone tells. Any deviation from accepting a literal interpretation of the Bible when it relates historical events destroys truth and forces the acceptance of a different (false) belief system.

Moreover, the Bible enables us to see how God has acted throughout history i.e. to understand His nature and behaviour. God is not mysterious nor unknowable. And, because God does not change, the Bible shows us how God will continue to act now in our time and into the future. Therefore, it builds faith and as we live in His truth we too see God act on our behalf:

“Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf

of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.”

Isaiah 64:4-5a

Everyone in the world has faith and exercises faith. Faith is rooted in some 'truth' as we define it. A Christian's faith is built upon the unchanging nature of God and His unchanging Word. An atheist's faith is built upon their own (changeable) perception of existence and (changeable) flawed humanistic ideals. Post-modernism is a frontal attack upon a Christian world-view. Post-modernists invent the god they want to believe in, and they invent the morals/values they choose to live by.

The Bible also demonstrates to us the judgements of God upon the wicked and helps us understand what God will do to those who abandon the knowledge of Him and despise His Word. The passage just quoted above in Isaiah continues “But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry.” (Isaiah 64:5b) God will judge the wickedness of this

present generation which has abandoned His truth and forgotten His ways. His forbearance is to enable those who will, to repent and to come to a knowledge of the truth. He does not want anyone to perish. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. Yet, there is a limit to His patience. Once the sins of a people have reached a certain level his anger flares up in an instant and the arm of His judgement falls swiftly.

In the following panorama of the Bible's account of history and the future prophesied for the world, we see God's judgement upon the multitudes that reject Him and His great love for the few who believe in Him, accept His word, obey Him and walk with Him. Following this account, brief summaries are given for the Bible's answers to the big questions of life.

Creation

God created the universe around six thousand years ago in just six – 24 hour – days.²³ Everything God created was good. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. They were made living spiritual beings capable of a union of friendship with God, and they were housed in bodies endowed with faculties in order to engage the physical world God had made for

²³ See www.creation.org and www.answersingenesis for many articles and resources explaining the evidences for a recent creation in 6 literal 24 hour days.

them. In the beginning, they enjoyed perfect relationship with God and the world in which He had placed them, and had given them dominion over. There was no death, no bloodshed, no pain and no suffering.

Corruption

Eve was deceived by Satan (a fallen arch-angel who had led a revolt against God in heaven and was hostile towards God and his creation) to rebel against God. Adam wilfully joined her in that rebellion, thus they both broke relationship with God. The consequences were disastrous: separation and estrangement from God; immediate spiritual death leading eventually to physical death; the world became subject to a curse and a harsh environment in which to live; and, Satan established his kingdom upon the earth and gained control over the world. (Satan rules over an army of demons who obey his commands to enforce his authority in the earth. They were lesser angels who followed him in his revolt.) Death, pain and suffering now enter the world.

Catastrophe

The descendants of Adam and Eve sink into depravity. By the ninth generation the world is full of violence and the inclination of every person's heart is only to evil. God is grieved over the people He

created. However, there was *one* man – Noah – who found favour with God because he was righteous and walked with God. God informs Noah that He is going to bring a catastrophic judgement upon the wickedness of humankind. He is going to destroy every living thing that dwells upon the land by a world-wide flood. And He instructs Noah to build a huge boat which will save Noah and his family, and to which God will bring two of every kind of land-dwelling animal to repopulate the world after the flood.

(The geological features we observe all over the earth are the result of this cataclysmic flood and the accompanying tectonic upheavals, volcanic activity and breaking up of the continents. Some locations closer to the earth's poles also show the impact of the snap ice-age that immediately followed the flood.²⁴)

Confusion

The descendants of Noah did not walk in his ways. They quickly gravitated towards wickedness once

²⁴ Ibid for evidences for Noah's world-wide cataclysmic flood, which occurred – at the time of the publishing date of this book - just 4362 years ago – see <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2012/03/09/feed-back-timeline-for-the-flood>).

again. At first they all dwelt in a particular region as one community with one language. There they united in their rebellion towards God by building a tower, essentially constructing a stairway to 'heaven', thereby making themselves 'gods' and declaring their contempt for God their Maker.

God chose to break their rebellion by supernaturally confusing their languages so that they were unable to communicate directly with each other. This caused families or groups to disperse from that area, eventually establishing the table of nations. The distinct national marks of stature, facial features and skin, eye and hair colour are the result of 'selective breeding' that occurred as a result of this dispersal. Despite the differences we remain of 'one blood'.²⁵ (Looking back over time, we see the peoples groups across the globe falling into depravity once again abandoning the knowledge of God and His ways, and nations becoming beholden to and identified by particular false religions.)

Covenant

Some centuries later, God found a man (like Noah) who desired to walk with Him and chose him to fulfil His plan in the earth. God asked this man, whose

²⁵ Ibid for evidences of the formation of nations and descent of all people's groups from one set of parents

name was Abram, to cut a blood covenant with Him. This covenant established a powerful and special relationship between God and a man, remarkably bringing them into an inter-union.²⁶ God intended for that relationship to continue with the descendants of a son (Isaac) born to Abraham in his old age. These descendants were the nation of Israel who were to possess a parcel of land God promised to Abraham - the land of Palestine - and live there in community with God.

The focus of national life for the nation of Israel became the temple ('the house of God'), the law prescribed by God to Moses (Israel's prophet/leader who was God's instrument to bring Israel to the Promised Land) and an elaborate system of personal and corporate sacrifices. The latter were necessary to atone for Israel's sin, i.e. the breaking of the law, which represented a barrier to relationship with God. These sacrifices were only a temporary measure and had to be continually performed. They were symbolic of the sacrifice of God's Son ('the lamb of God') who

²⁶ One of the features of a blood covenant is the compounding of the party's names. Abram's name was changed to *Abraham*, inserting part of God's name *Yahweh*, and God became known as "the God of Abraham". (See H.C. Hilton "The Robe, the Ring and the Sandals" for a full explanation of a blood covenant.)

was to appear and take away the sins of the world through his death once and for all, and enable a change of a person's heart from stone to flesh i.e. the new birth.

God wanted the whole of Israel to be a “kingdom of priests” through which all of the nations of the world could have an opportunity to unite themselves to Him. Tragically, the nation of Israel rebelled against God. They failed in His objective for them and despite His patience and continued warnings through a succession of prophets He overthrew them because they irrevocably broke covenant with Him. As a consequence, they were taken out of the Promised Land by the world empires of that era – the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. God sustained a remnant, however, specifically from the kingdom of Judah in order to bring His Son into the world and establish a New Covenant.²⁷ During the Medo-Persian Empire, a group of Israelites from that kingdom returned to the

²⁷ The nation of Israel had divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel to the north and the kingdom of Judah to the south. The former was taken out of the land by the Assyrians, the later by the Babylonians. A remnant of the Babylonian captives returned to rebuild the temple and make way for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was prophesied to be a descendant from the tribe of Judah.

Promised Land. During the subsequent Roman Empire, His Son appeared.

Christ

It goes without saying that the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the earth is the pivotal point of all of mankind's history. The ancients looked forward to His appearance and we look backward to that moment in time. God's unique and only Son was sent by the Father to the earth to offer Himself as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. He made the way possible by which a person could be born-again i.e. to have their sin-nature removed and in its place receive His righteousness and so be spiritually made new, in the very image of God. He alone is the way by which a person can come to the Father, there is no other. We are incapable of changing our sin-nature of our own accord. We are dead in our sins. We need His Spirit breathed into our own to be made alive, which Jesus Christ alone affords.

Moreover, during His time upon the earth, Jesus demonstrated how a person is supposed to live. He is called the 'last Adam' because those who are born-again become members of His race, patterned after Him. Christ is to be formed in us, through the renewing of our minds and leading of the Holy Spirit, so that we act like Him and speak like Him. We are to become like Him in every way. We know what it

means to be a son/daughter of God because of His model. When people come into contact with an authentic mature Christian they encounter one who is literally like God.

Church

The New Covenant cut in the blood of Jesus Christ established a new age – the age of the church. The way in which God acts in the world is now primarily through the church which is the 'body of Christ'. Believers are described as a "royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people belonging to God" (1Peter 2:9). This is the role the nation of Israel possessed and lost because it irrevocably broke covenant with God. The Old Covenant was annulled with the establishment of the New. The present nation of Israel now only performs an ancillary prophetic role regarding the time and location of the return of Christ to the earth.

The mandate God has for the church in the world is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make disciples out of all the nations of the earth. The church is to reveal first, the love of God expressed through a genuine community, secondly, the power of God through gifts of the Holy Spirit, and thirdly, the truth of God by maintaining sound doctrine and exposing all falsehood.

Consummation

The present age will climax with the physical return of Christ to the world. He will establish His rule upon the earth over all the nations. A future time will yet come, however, when all the nations will together conspire and rise up in rebellion against Him. He will then destroy the nations and judge the world with fire, as He had previously judged the world with water in Noah's flood. Heaven will then be united with the earth and the redeemed will dwell with God in a paradise remade forevermore.

The Bible's answers to the fundamental questions of life

(At the risk of repetition, the answers cover material already discussed in the previous overview. The answers are offered as a complete, but succinct, set of the Bible's answers to the fundamental questions of life.)

- Who is God?

There is one God Who is a triune being - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are perfect in unity. He alone is God, there is no-one else. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present although distinct from His creation – He is not *in* everything. He is the Creator of all that comprises both the natural and supernatural realms. Nothing came into existence without His express command. He has always existed - He is eternal and lives

outside of time. God is spirit and therefore invisible in the natural world. The second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, took upon himself flesh and became visible. He was both 100% God and 100% man. While upon the earth, He set aside the attributes of His own divinity and relied solely upon the power of the Holy Spirit, and the authority and guidance of the Father.

- What is He like?

Regarding His character, the Bible shows us that God is patient, considerate, compassionate, caring, tender, gracious, forgiving, just, good, holy, self-sacrificing, steadfast, unchanging, committed, truthful, listening, watchful, faithful, righteous, kind, merciful, sympathetic, generous, strong, wise, mighty and loving. He displays emotion – joy, sorrow and anger.

- Can I know Him?

God has revealed Himself in nature, His Word, His Son and His Spirit. I can discover things about Him through the world and His Word. I can know Him personally through His Son and His Spirit - I can experientially know Him when He makes my body His temple and He unites His Spirit with my spirit. The God-head - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - offers to make His home in every person who loves Him. This has been made possible through the sacrifice of the Son.

- How did the universe come into existence?

God made the universe by His command and His power. He made everything during a period of just six 24-hour

days, around six thousand years ago. Before the world was created God alone dwelt in eternity. Everything that is visible was created by Him who is invisible.

- Who am I?

I am a descendant of the first man and woman God created. They were made perfect, in the image of God Himself, so that they could know God and live in a relationship of harmony and love with Him. They were each created a spirit being, that possessed an individual identity and will, and were housed in a body made of flesh, male and female. They broke relationship with Him choosing instead to live independently from Him and became subject to the authority of Satan. They became fallen beings possessing a sin-nature. Therefore, I am a person, a spirit-being that has a mind and a physical body. I am born with a sin-nature and, therefore, I am at enmity with God.

- What is my purpose here?

I am made expressly for relationship with God, and with others. I can choose that role as designed by God, or I can continue in rebellion. God has made a way possible for me to enter into (covenant) relationship with Him. If I choose to respond to Him and connect with Him, He makes it possible for me to rightly connect with others. He wants me to live in community with Him and other believers - the church. (If instead I choose to remain disconnected, I live with selfish motives my whole life, and am unable to truly relate with others.) God wants for

me an abundant life, full of peace, joy and love, as I live with Him and for the benefit of others. He has commissioned me to present His gospel - to tell of His offer of forgiveness and salvation, and warn of His judgement upon sinners - and to make disciples. As I fulfil this role I will face persecution. (If I remain separated from Him, I will have neither, peace, nor joy nor love. I will pursue self-gratification and the pleasures of sin that are momentary. This sin nulls my pain of hopelessness, despair and shame.)

- What happens when I die?

When a person dies their spirit and soul is released from their body, and they enter into one of two eternal states. Without believing in Christ, a person enters immediately into hell. There is no remedy and no second chance. It is final. Hell is described in the Bible as a perpetual place of torment where the worm does not die nor the fire quenched. In hell, there is the absence of God and everything that is good. It is the haunt of demons. A believer in Christ, enters immediately into heaven forevermore. Heaven is described as a wonderful place of great joy and peace. It is the abode of God and is filled with all that is good. It is the home of multitudes of angels, and redeemed people from every race. (Upon the return of Christ, new bodies are given to believers just like the resurrected body of Jesus. Subsequently, the earth is renewed to God's original plan and believers live in a paradise with God forevermore.)

- Why do bad things – disease, pain, suffering, murders, rapes, wars - happen?

When Adam and Eve sinned, the earth, which they had been given dominion over, came under a curse, and Satan became the ruler of the earth. Before they sinned, everything in the world was described by God as good. There was no bloodshed, no pain, no disease, no enmity etc. Now, violence erupts upon the earth. The very first child of Adam and Eve – Abel - is murdered by his brother – Cain - and by just the ninth generation people had become so corrupted that God destroyed everyone except for Noah and his family. Unregenerate people, sin and Satan are the source of all that is wicked and evil upon the earth. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and bring life - and life in abundance - to those who would turn to Him and believe in Him. However, most people reject Christ and, therefore, Satan remains the dominate influence in the world. The world is a hostile place for believers, they are in enemy territory, and Jesus specifically said that believers would face persecution. He suffered pain, torture and a horrible death at the hands of his persecutors. Everyone who chooses to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, to one degree or another.

- How did the nations and their different cultures originate?

The event of the Tower of Babel forced the separation and dispersal of the different people's groups throughout the world. This created the conditions for distinct racial features to appear and to be preserved throughout the generations. Different cultures arose as the people's groups abandoned the knowledge of God and adopted falsehoods to explain themselves and the world in which they lived i.e. religion.

- Why are there so many religions?

All religions are based in human philosophies which in turn find their source in doctrines taught by demons. Satan is the father of all lies. When people abandon the knowledge of God and persist in rebellion against Him, they still need to find answers to life's big questions. Satan offers them those answers via the invention of religion. Every religion is composed upon claims of truth statements. We are all created with the capacity for faith, and everyone has a set of beliefs i.e. religion. Most people will adopt that set of beliefs which is consistent with the culture in which they live. Culture is essentially defined by the religion of each people group. All religion teaches a path to knowledge, enlightenment, freedom, peace, prosperity, salvation, heaven, perfection, Nirvana, Brahma, oneness, god-likeness etc., as defined by the particular religion. All human religions are based upon lies. There are essentially two groups of religions. First, as occurred in the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel, it is reaching up by personal effort to become 'god'. Or

secondly, it is an endeavour to appease/please a 'god' (including a guru, idol, spirit or ancestor) in order to obtain their favour to satisfy selfish desires, again through personal effort or sacrifice. Therefore, it is either worshipping self or worshipping Satan (who is represented in the god(s), guru, idol, spirit or ancestor). Both groups have fallen captive to Satan's lies. Christianity is unique teaching that God reaches down to sinful man through His own work and His own sacrifice. Salvation is a gift received by faith not earned through personal effort, merit or sacrifice. God alone, therefore, is exalted.

- Where can I find truth?

God alone is the source of all truth. He communicates His truth through two principal means. First, the Bible is His gift to the world which contains the answers to all of life's big questions. Secondly, He has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who would turn to Him. The express role of the Holy Spirit is to lead them into all truth and enable them to distinguish truth from error. Unbelievers are blind to the truth. They are incapable of knowing truth. They reject the truth and live in darkness, slaves to sinful passions and Satan.

Rejection of falsehood

In setting out the criteria to identify real Christians, the apostle John also exposed those who are false Christians i.e.

those who claimed to be Christians and were not: "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray." (1 John 2:26) "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God..." (1 John 3:10)

There are two sides to the coin, if you love the light then you must also hate the darkness. A real Christian must hate all falsehood and the sinful acts that accompany these lies: "The righteous hate what is false..." (Proverbs 13:5); "Hate what is evil..." (Romans 12:9).

The problem is that post-modernism has stripped from society - and the church - its moral compass therefore eventually anything becomes permissible. There is no such thing as right and wrong any more. As a consequence, society is spiralling into a morass of immorality and debauchery, and the church that allows the adoption of post-modern thinking is sinking into depravity too as it accommodates and condones sinners. The descent has been rapid and continues unabated. Even now, for example, homosexuality is no longer regarded a vile practice and the worst that society can sink to, as the Bible declares it to be (see Romans 1), but a valid lifestyle and something to be celebrated. Fifty years ago homosexual acts were a criminal offence. Those laws have been overturned and country after country in the West is now passing legislation permitting homosexuals to marry.

This acceptance of homosexuality has infiltrated the church. Perhaps the most influential person in this regard is the very popular 'Christian' author, Philip Yancey. His book entitled "What's So Amazing About Grace" includes a chapter discussing a very close 'Christian' friend of his, Mel White, who had left his wife admitting he was a homosexual. Yancey argues we are to extend grace to such a 'Christian brother'.²⁸ Yancey's understanding of God's grace is unbiblical and contrary to sound doctrine. Titus 2:11-13 expressly says "For the grace of God ... teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age". The true grace of God liberates us from sin; it doesn't allow us, as Yancey portrays it, to remain in it.

You cannot continue to be a homosexual and a Christian at the same time. You are a homosexual or you are a Christian. A person who declares themselves to be a homosexual *and* a Christian is a false Christian. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul writes to Christians some of whom *were* homosexuals and who had left their shameful ways, reminding them that people who continue to live like that will not enter heaven:

²⁸ See <http://www.philipyancey.com/q-and-a-topics/homosexuality> for a full explanation of Yancey's personal views on homosexuality.

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you *were*."

Other scriptures also point to the same end for homosexuals, together with all who remain sinners and embrace falsehoods:

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

(Revelation 21:8)

"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

(Revelation 22:15)

A person who remains in their sin after 'receiving Christ' has not been cleansed from their sin by the blood of the real Christ. The Jesus they have received is a *false* Jesus. (A false Jesus is presented in a *false* gospel - a gospel which, for instance, does not require genuine repentance from sin; when a person is invited to respond to an altar call to 'receive

Christ' on the basis that he loves them unconditionally and wants to give them a wonderful life.)

We cannot be exactly certain who the apostle John is acknowledging as false teachers when he refers to those who were "trying to lead you astray". Nevertheless, it is quite possible that these teachers are the same who were addressed by Jude: "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." (Jude 4)

John wrote in his letter about living sin-free lives (which is discussed in the next chapter) so it is possible that the men Jude addressed were the same that John was referring to. (In John's second letter he deals with the specific error of Gnosticism.) These false teachers were preaching heresy: a false gospel and a false Christ. They distorted the grace of God into something it is not. The grace they preached allowed people to remain in their sins and be called 'Christians'. It set them free to live their lives however they wanted without condemnation. They were allowed to do whatever they wanted and still God would love them and accept them. Accordingly, Jesus did not judge them and so He was no longer sovereign i.e. He was no longer a ruler who set the laws and stood as judge over them, administering justice when people broke His law. If He is not sovereign and there is no law that can be broken, then there is no need for

Jesus to die as a sacrifice for sin. The cross is emptied of its power. All that Jesus is and accomplished is denied. Therefore, these false teachers were preaching a different 'Jesus'. Their 'Jesus' was a good example to emulate, not a powerful Saviour who could set us free from our sin. Jude described these men as "godless". Although no doubt they claimed to know God, that they were followers of Jesus, and that they taught His word, they neither knew Him nor His truth. They were liars and deceivers who led people away from God and the truth.

It is the same in our day when sin is no longer denounced from the pulpit. When it is not declared to be an assault upon the Person and integrity of God, and a violation of His Word. When, if it is spoken of at all, it is only on the basis that sin will hurt your well-being i.e. a matter of self-improvement and not about breaking God's law, offending Him and standing condemned before Him.

It is the same in our day, when God is described as an all-loving God who accepts everyone for who they are and condemns no-one. When a message is preached that "We are all sinners saved by the grace of God. We are all never really free from sin. His grace is so great He looks past our sin and loves us unconditionally. He condemns no-one and we should do likewise. We have no right to judge others."

It is the same in our day, when an altar call is made on the basis of receiving 'Jesus' who offers everyone a life of

prosperity and abundance. When there are no tears of genuine sorrow and remorse for sin that is an offence against a Just and Holy God.

Doctrine divides v love unites

It is axiomatic that in declaring that which is true, then that which is false is exposed. Doctrine always presents a dividing line. That is the nature of truth, it divides and separates. Truth is intolerant of falsehood. If you love the truth then you will hate that which is false. Condemnation of falsehood is necessary to preserve sound doctrine. We are warned in Romans 16:17-18 (note that doctrine means teaching):

“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching (“doctrine” KJV) you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”

Who and what is the cause of church divisions? This verse tells us it is those who do *not* continue in sound doctrine i.e. the truth. False teachers claim just the opposite. They portray that it is those who promote doctrine above love that are causing division. However, they do not know real love and they despise the truth leading naïve people away from the truth. Genuine, godly “Love ... rejoices with the truth.” (1 Corinthians 13:6) They have deliberately turned their backs on the truth and, therefore, they are the ones causing division. (They are, after all, teaching their own doctrine, so they are liars. To say we should set aside ‘doctrine’ and promote ‘love’, is a doctrine in itself! Teachers teach doctrine. Others listen and either follow or reject what they teach. Harsher judgement is reserved for teachers.)

They also lie about the love demonstrated by true Christians (i.e. those who love the truth and hold fast to sound doctrine). True Christians genuinely and demonstratively love others just as Jesus did. (See Chapter 5 "Love for One Another"). False teachers

Just as in our post-modern society when those who believe in absolute truth are ostracised being accused of intolerance and bigotry, so it is in the church. Those who stand firm upon doctrine (i.e. absolute truths) are treated in exactly the same way. They are wrongly accused of being intolerant, judgemental, having no love, legalists and Pharisaical.

just deny it and refuse to see the evidence because it doesn't fit within their belief system. In fact, they redefine love. Their love is neither godly nor sincere. Their love is a distorted social justice viewpoint.

In a church where a false teacher achieves a position of authority and pulls the church in the direction of falsehood, those who love the truth (and the church) are forced to take a stand against the apostasy and to leave if their voice is not heard. They are typically condemned for placing doctrine above unity and causing division. But again, it is not those who love the truth who are causing the division in the church. It is the false teachers, those corrupters of the word of God, who turn the grace of God into a license to sin!

Consequences for following falsehoods

Whenever you hear it taught that “we are all sinners saved by the grace of God and none of us is ever truly free from sin” you are listening to a false teacher. Whenever you hear “God loves us all so much irrespective of our lifestyle, His love is unconditional” you are entertaining a distortion of God’s word. It is a false gospel of universalism – that God accepts everyone regardless of lifestyle or creed. In Hebrews 10:26-27 we are warned

“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

You are a false Christian if you deliberately continue to sin. You are an enemy of God and you are destined to spend eternity in hell if you do not repent. This is the truth.

In Hebrews 6:4-8 we are further warned

“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they *fall away*, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.”

If a real Christian is to “fall away” from the truth that they were once “enlightened” with, they have become a false Christian and *cannot* be redeemed again. (A real Christian struggling with sin has not rejected the truth. They need to understand how to defeat sin and apply it. In this instance, Galatians 6:1 informs us “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.” A real Christian will be revealed because they will always overcome

sin. To be caught in a sin and to reject the truth are two very different circumstances.)

In 1 Corinthians 5:11 real Christians are commanded not to join with false Christians:

“... (we) must not associate with anyone who *calls himself a brother* but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.”

Light and darkness cannot dwell together. God will not participate with sinners. Tragically, with the wrong interpretation of the grace of God, many in the church are left with sinful habits that persist year after year as they are not taught how to overcome sin. At best, they are baby Christians who have never “overcome the evil one” and stepped into the freedom their salvation affords them. (Freedom from sin is discussed fully in the next chapter). At worse, they are not saved though they think they are, and remain dead (spiritually) in their sins and destined to spend eternity in hell. (Churches that go down the path of apostasy and embrace falsehood are emptied of true Christians, though their congregations could remain quite large.)

Ecumenism²⁹

Again, post-modernism rears its ugly head in the promotion of ecumenism. Ecumenism is the belief that all 'Christian' denominations are equally valid. Specifically, it is the attempt to unite the Catholic and Protestant churches. (Another form is the push to unite the 'Christian' and Islamic faiths called "Chislam".) Everyone who calls themselves a 'Christian' and a 'believer' in Jesus Christ is to be accepted as a brother or sister in the Lord.

Historically the divide between Catholics and Protestants was well understood. The Roman Catholic Church was, and remains, an apostate church. Protestant leaders who form associations with Catholics are linking arms with the devil. They are either terribly naïve or indeed false teachers. It seems hard to accept the former. They must know church history and the monumental impact of the Reformation and the reasons that it occurred.

Catholicism preaches a *false gospel* – salvation is through works (the sacraments) and not through faith in Christ alone. It presents a *false Christ* – the eucharist, where magically the body and the blood of 'Jesus' appear, transformed from the wafer and the wine. It practices a *false baptism* - only those who submit to the Pope and are baptised into the Catholic Church (not Christ) are declared saved (provided, of course, if

²⁹ See bereanbeacon.org and understandthetimes.org

they live past infancy into adulthood that they dutifully perform the sacraments). It believes in a *false 'scriptures'* – the Catholic Church defines the 'Word of God' to be the Bible together with the 'Traditions' of the church. (The Traditions are completely antagonistic to the Bible and form the basic directives for most of the corrupt practices Catholics.) It operates under the control of a *false priesthood* – the Papacy, archbishops, bishops and priests who stand between God and the people. It worships a *false Godhead* – the Catholic Church deifies Mary; they worship her and pray to her, declaring her to be the Mother of God, a title never found in the Scriptures.

You cannot be a Catholic and a real Christian. In the past, real Christians renounced the Catholic Church. During the reign of the papacy in the Dark Ages, millions of real Christians were killed by the Catholic Church (not dissimilar to the persecution and slaughter under the Roman Empire). A Catholic converted to Christ had to depart from the Church, they could not remain a willing participant of its corrupt beliefs and practices. This was the historical position of the Protestant churches. Protestants protested against the corrupt beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church, and left establishing the Protestant churches. A hallmark of revival in the Western World has always been the denunciation of Catholicism from the pulpit whereby falsehood was explained, exposed and contrasted with the truth.

Appallingly, many Protestant churches themselves have fallen into apostasy, denying the Bible to be the inerrant

Word of God, nullifying the blood of Jesus and tearing down the gospel. The Evangelical and Pentecostal movements now may be regarded as the only Protestant churches that remain faithful to the truth of the Bible. Sadly, many in them are being seduced by false teachers to embrace ecumenism as they defile the teaching of sound doctrine and promote a false unity. Perhaps the persons most influential in swaying Evangelicals and Pentecostals to accept Catholicism as a legitimate expression of authentic Christianity are Billy Graham, C. S. Lewis, Mother Theresa and Pope John Paul II.³⁰

³⁰ For Billy Graham see

<http://www.wayoflife.org/database/grahamandrome.html>
and http://www.chick.com/reading/books/153/153_08.asp

For C.S. Lewis see J. Saunders, "C.S. Lewis: A Bridge to Rome",
bereanbeacon.org and

<http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/22-contemporary-issues/542-cs-lewis>

For Mother Theresa see

<http://www.scionofzion.com/teresa.htm> and
<http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/007/pluralism-4-teresa.htm>

For Pope John Paul II see

http://www.biblebelievers.com/bennett/bennett_john_paul_2.html

Hand-in-hand with the ecumenical push is the rise of an ancient mysticism which originated in the Catholic Church. The “catholic mystics” comprise a number of people who lived during the 11th to 18th centuries.³¹ The mysticism they practiced is being revived and is most commonly referred to as ‘contemplative spirituality’ or ‘contemplative prayer’. Its premise is pantheistic (God is all) and panentheistic (God is in all). Modern mystics who have been most instrumental in reintroducing and popularising this form of spirituality include Brennan Manning, Richard Foster, Henry Nouwen, Dallas Willard and Thomas Merton.

³¹ The Catholic Mystics include: Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), The Cloud of Unknowing (anonymous monk), Richard Rolle (c. 1300-1341), Julian of Norwich (1342-1423), St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), Brother Lawrence (1611- 1691), George Fox (1624-1691), Madam Guyon (1647-1717). During the third century, a group of people known as the "desert fathers" also practiced Eastern-style meditation incorporating it into their brand of 'Christianity' which is referred to as hesychasm.

Contemplative prayer³²

A falsehood making significant inroads into the Evangelical/Pentecostal churches is the teaching of the practice of contemplative prayer (also called “centering prayer”, “breath prayer” or “Christian meditation”). It is a central component of “the spiritual disciplines” also known as “spiritual formation” or “spiritual exercises”. It is an occultic practice that produces an altered state of consciousness and opens a person up to demonic influence.

It is a means by which the mind is stilled. A verse of scripture, or single word, is repeated like a mantra for a period of time in order to produce an altered state of consciousness. Effectively the mind is disengaged like putting a car into

³² For more information on the errors of contemplative prayer see the following sources:

Ray Yungen, "A Time of Departing", Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2nd edition, 2006.

Roger Oakland, "Faith Undone: The emerging church - a new reformation or an end-time deception", Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2007.

www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com is a website dedicated to exposing and explaining the new mystic spirituality invading the church.

neutral. In that state a person experiences the spiritual realm. A 'stillness' is achieved where, its proponents claim, a person encounters 'God'.

This form of prayer is entirely absent in the Bible – although its teachers will inappropriately use a verse of scripture to beguile their listeners. It is not what Jesus taught when the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-4). It is a well-known practice throughout the centuries in occultism and shamanism to contact the demonic realm. 'Christians' who practice it are not encountering God; they are meeting with the devil who masquerades as an angel of light. What they hear from him are lies and corruptions of the Word of God. The voice they hear speaks words of wisdom, love and peace, but it carries with it a viper's sting, which they are oblivious to. They inevitably embrace a universalist message, and deny the true gospel of Jesus Christ. People who call themselves 'Christian' and deliberately engage in contemplative prayer are false Christians. They worship at the feet of the devil. They feast at the table of demons.

Nowhere in the Bible are we taught to empty or still our *mind*. To the contrary, we are instructed (1) to meditate on (i.e. think upon intelligently) the Word of God, day and night (Psalm 1) (2) to think upon things which are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8) (3) to take captive every thought and make it subject to Christ. (2Corinthians 10:5)

Our will is never to be *disengaged* as in contemplative prayer but rather always *submitted* to God - these are two very different states.

The extent of its infiltration into main-stream churches is breathtaking. Many influential church leaders endorse it. Most Bible colleges and seminaries promote it, having established spiritual formation departments and incorporating into their degree programs a subject on spiritual disciplines/exercises. Evangelical authors now invariably quote the Catholic mystics and recommend their ancient practices as the means to experience God, to grow spiritually and to achieve spiritual maturity."³³

³³See www.lighthouse Trailsresearch.com for a list of U.S. church leaders and seminaries.

See appendix for a list of Australian Bible colleges.

APPENDIX

In Australia, Bible colleges that teach spiritual formation/disciplines/exercises include:

- Alphacrucis (the leading bible college for Pentecostal and Charismatic churches; Hillsong has partnered with Alphacrucis and direct their members who want to undertake a degree in theology/ministry to enrol there) has a core subject in their ministry and theology degrees, *MIN102 - Christian Spirituality*. Its description reads: "Ever wondered if there were other ways to express faith, apart from lifting your hands during worship? Would you like to deepen the spirituality of your local Christian community, but find yourself hesitating, uncertain of the appropriate boundaries? Students with these questions and more will find themselves challenged as they partake in this foundational unit, designed specifically to introduce charismatic and Pentecostal Christians to the broader history of Christian spiritual approaches. In doing so, students will have a chance to connect with their heritage and participate in a broad range of spiritual exercises practiced by the wider body of Christ throughout history." The references for the course are a litany of false teaching on the spiritual disciplines.

- United Theological College has an elective in its Bachelor of Theology degree *THL216 Christian Spirituality*, the description reads: "This subject introduces students to the history of Christian spiritual traditions, and considers how those traditions are related to the contemporary interest in spirituality. It focuses particularly on Western spiritual traditions, including the desert fathers and mothers, the monastic and mendicant traditions, Reformation spiritualities and mysticism. Orthodox, Pentecostal and further contemporary directions in spirituality are considered briefly. The subject also addresses questions concerning the relationship between spirituality and Christian doctrine, interfaith understanding, feminism and theologies of the body. In addition, the subject provides students with the opportunity to encounter key Christian spiritual disciplines or practices."
- Melbourne School of Theology: *PC327/527 PATTERNS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION* "Theology and practice of worship is introduced through a study of the Old and New Testaments. You will be equipped to practise the disciplines of the inner life, lifestyle disciplines and corporate disciplines leading to maturity in Christ."
- Alliance College of Australia: *CMT11SF - Spiritual Formation* "Through the centuries Christian people

have longed for their lives to be formed into the image of Christ. Students will gain an overview of several avenues for spiritual formation and ultimately be challenged in regard to their own spiritual journey and maturity."

- Stirling College of Theology: *DS2/3/9010S.15 Spirituality for Life, Work and Community* "This unit explores the integration of spirituality with the reflective practice and theology of ministry. Using a range of educational tools, it will introduce the student to crucial elements of the inward or contemplative and outward movements of the spiritual journey, the role of vocation and discernment, and ten important spiritual disciplines and resources for ongoing effectiveness and health in Christian service."
- Kingsley College: *Spiritual Formation* "Through the centuries Christian people have longed for their lives to be formed into the image of Christ. Students will gain an overview of several avenues for spiritual formation and ultimately be challenged in regard to their own spiritual journey and maturity."
- Perth Bible College: *S502 – Christian Spirituality* "This graduate course unit develops a comprehensive introduction to, and overview of, the topic of Christian Spirituality focussing on its biblical,

theological and historical premises and practice from a denominational perspective. At the end of this unit students will be able to: Construct a developed understanding of what is meant by the term 'spirituality' in light of contemporary pursuits in spirituality; categorise and critique the historical and cultural influences upon the development of Christian Spirituality; substantiate the specific nature of Christian Spirituality and personally formulate its primary characteristics at the service of leading others in spiritual formation; interpret various historical and contemporary kinds of spiritual disciplines or practices within the Christian tradition within their biblical and theological frameworks; and apply insights from a variety of expressions in Christian spirituality to their own spiritual formation and practice.

- Sola Ministry College: *INTRODUCTION TO PERSONAL FORMATION* "The student will need access to a small group facilitated by an experienced and mature Christian leader for this subject. This subject is an introduction to Australian College of Ministries' personal formation process and is designed to develop student character through a personal walk with God. This course is a personal journey based on a reading assignment, small group discussion and personal reflection. The text for this course is *Revolution of Character* by Dallas Willard and Don

Simpson. Students will read this text and reflect on it as part of their small group. Small group discussions will include personal stories and processing of life as a group.

CHAPTER 3

FREEDOM FROM SIN

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God...”

1 John 3:9-10

There is perhaps none more contentious issue in the church than whether a Christian remains a sinner all their life (though saved and relying upon God's continued grace toward them), or whether they are able to live a sinless life (because of God's grace). It evokes strong emotions as it touches a fundamental belief and either side looks at the other with extreme caution. Those who believe we remain sinners consider those who believe we don't, as being spiritual kooks and cultish; of claiming the impossible and living in self-denial. In the converse, those who call themselves Christians yet continue to deliberately sin are seen by those who believe we are to live sin-free lives as false Christians who are unsaved and “children of the devil”.

Those who believe we remain sinners usually justify their position by quoting the following passages from 1John and Romans 7:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

1 John 1:8-10

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I

delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am!"

Romans 7:14-24

These passages read on their own would lead to the conclusion that we are never free from sin. Though tortured in our minds at our enslavement to sin and though we try to suppress the carnal urges, we are and always will be slaves to sin. The best that we can do when we fall (and we will fall) is to continually acknowledge our sin and keep confessing our sins in order to receive God's forgiveness. To rely steadfastly upon the grace and the mercy of God.

However, taken in context i.e. interpreting these very passages within 1John chapters 1-3 and Romans chapters 6-8, these passages must refer to the state of a person *before* they become a Christian *not after*. Both John and Paul (the author of Romans) were writing to expressly explain that a real Christian is identified by a person who lives free from sin. That is the power of the cross and the new birth that Jesus Christ alone affords. He receives a sinner and turns them into a saint.

We will deal with Romans first and then come back to 1John.

Here is Romans 6 (which must be read *before* Romans 7 in order to correctly interpret Romans 7) with particular points emphasised:

1 What shall we say, then? **Shall we go on sinning** so that grace may increase? 2 **By no means! We *died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*** 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.**

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that **our old self *was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should *no longer be slaves to sin****— 7 **because anyone who has died has been *freed from sin.***

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, **count yourselves dead to sin** but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body** so that you obey its evil desires. 13 **Do not offer the parts of your body to sin**, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For **sin shall not be your master**, because you are not under law, but under grace.

15 What then? **Shall we sin** because we are not under law but under grace? **By no means!** 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether **you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?** 17 But thanks be to God that, though you *used to be slaves to sin*, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 **You have been set free from sin** and have become slaves to righteousness.

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as **you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.** 20 When **you were slaves to sin**, you were free from the

control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that **you have been set free from sin** and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6 plainly teaches that our sinfulness is *past tense*: “we **died** to sin”; “our old self **was** crucified”; “we **were** slaves to sin”; and “you **have been** set free from sin”. It presses home this point over and over again. This is what we were then, but not who we (as real Christians) are now. Through the new birth our sinful heart has been made removed and replaced with a righteous heart. We are therefore under the control of righteousness as we have been enabled to be subject to God, and this naturally leads us into holiness and away from sin. This is an accomplished fact.

The point is this: if you are a sinner by nature you will sin. We were all born in sin and held in bondage to our sin nature therefore we automatically sinned. We could not possibly live free from its influence and power. But now we are set free from sin. Our old sinful nature has been crucified. It is dead so we are dead to sin. In its place we have a new nature, like the nature of Christ, made in true righteousness

so that we can live our lives free from sin in obedience to God and pleasing to Him.

This is a truth that you must accept. You must believe by faith that you have been made righteous and that this is now what constitutes your fundamental nature. If you continue to believe you are a sinner the results are disastrous: you remain in your sins and “the wages of sin is death”. There are no sinners in heaven. You remain separate from Christ and you do not know Him. How can Christ be united with sin? Your body remains a house of evil and not the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The passage in Romans 7 quoted earlier – the well-known “I do what I don’t want to do” - describes the situation of a person who knows God’s law, and is trying to live by the law, but is *not* born-again and therefore incapable of keeping the law. Paul is describing what he was like *before* he became a believer in Jesus Christ; *before* he was dead to sin and alive to the Spirit. He writes using the present tense in Romans 7 as a teaching device: “*I am* unspiritual, sold as *a slave to sin*”.

Paul is again emphasising in Romans 7 the necessity for the new birth. He writes in verse 1 of Chapter 7 “... I am speaking to men who know the law ...”. He is explaining to such men how impossible it is to keep the requirements of the law, without first having died to sin and being made alive in Christ. These men thought they were righteous because they kept the law. This was the position Paul himself had been in -

he claimed faultless adherence to the law before he met Christ (see Philippians 3:16). But Paul is explaining to them that they cannot attain righteousness because without Christ they are slaves to sin, and incapable of freeing themselves from sin. (Note: Paul acknowledged that before he became a Christian he himself “...*was once* a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man” (1 Timothy 1:13). If Paul had remained a sinner – ‘though saved by grace’ - would he have been a legitimate apostle of Jesus Christ?).

Earlier in Romans 2:17-24, Paul set about to expose their inability to keep the law:

7 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

The law was never given to set people free from sin, but to show them their sin. The sin nature which they were powerless to escape from was in them. Only spiritual surgery that took out their old sin nature and replaced it with a new righteous nature could free people from their enslavement to sin. And this is only possible through the work of Christ and His transformative power accomplished through the new birth. This is the wonderful work of the true gospel of Jesus Christ – “...the gospel ... is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

The Romans 7 description is not what normal Christian living is about – though some church leaders believe it is and teach that it is so for all believers. When they declare “We are all never free from sin; we are just sinners saved grace” it is a great error. Romans 8:15 -16 declares the very opposite:

“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under *grace*? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, **you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”**

Therefore, their interpretation of scripture is a great evil that keeps people in bondage to sin and estranged from God. It produces false Christians not real Christians. The true grace of God sets us free from the bondage of sin:

"For the *grace of God* that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to *ungodliness and worldly passions*, and to live *self-controlled, upright and godly lives* in this present age..."

Titus 2:11-12

Jesus said he came to give us life and life in abundance, not to bring us to a place where we see ourselves as "wretched", remaining slaves to sin, burdened down with unrelenting guilt and shame. In reality, if we continue to sin we will remain estranged from God. We all hide from the God when we sin. It is an automatic response just as Adam and Eve did in the garden. It is impossible to have a relationship with God while you remain a sinner. You might have a relationship with 'a god of love and grace', he might talk to you and tell you nice things, but it is not the God of the Bible.

Romans Chapter 7 must be interpreted in hindsight with Chapter 6 and going forward with Chapter 8. When Chapter 7 finishes with the question "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" the answer is stated in the very first verse of Chapter 8:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because **through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life (zoe) set me free from the law of sin and death."**

Romans 8:1-2

I am free from the power of sin. I am no longer a slave to sin. I am no longer trying to hopelessly obey a law written on stone which I cannot keep and must continue to offer sacrifices to atone for my sin. Jesus Christ has atoned for my sin once and for all and liberated me from its iron grip and placed me under a higher law – the law of the Spirit and life – which is written on my heart (because His Spirit is united with my renewed spirit) and leads to righteousness!

Chapter 8 of Romans goes on to compare and contrast the two different states, and *how to* live free from sin.

3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, **4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who *do not* live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.**

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor

can it do so. **8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

9 You, however, are controlled *not* by the sinful nature but by *the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.* **10** But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. **11** And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

12 Therefore, brothers, **we have an obligation — but it is *not* to the sinful nature, to live according to it.**

13 For **if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.** **15** For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." **16** The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that **we are God's children...**

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew

he also predestined **to be conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, **he also justified**; those he justified, **he also glorified**.

Therefore, if you continue to live according to the sin nature, you are not a real Christian; you do not belong to Christ nor do you have the Spirit of God. If you are still under the control of the sin nature you remain under the curse of Adam. You are dead spiritually and you do not know Life. You cannot know God nor walk according to His will. You are not born again, you have not received life (*zoe*). If you are born again and have received His life and His Spirit lives in you, you will put sin to death. That is the evidence that you are truly His child. When you received Christ you were given the power not to sin. You walk in that power as you submit your mind to Him and maintain an intimate relationship with Him. You no longer live according to the law of sin and death; you now live according to the higher law of the Spirit and life, as you are “led by the Spirit”. You are a child of God, and you are justified and glorified.

Leaving Romans behind for the moment (we will return to Romans to examine more carefully *how* to live free from sin), let’s look at some key verses from 1 John Chapters 2 and 3 concerning real versus false Christians and the issue of sin.

2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that **you will not sin...**

3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called **children of God!** And that is what **we are!** ...

4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 5 But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 6 *No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*

7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 **He who does what is sinful is of the devil,** because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 9 *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.* 10 *This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God...*

In John's concluding remarks to his letter, again it is emphasised:

18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin...

These verses are clear setting forth a defining characteristic of those who are real Christians (“children of God”) and those who are false Christians (“children of the devil”). They echo what we understand from Romans. If you are a true Christian you will not sin because it is not in your nature. You are born of God, His seed is in you. You are an entirely different species from those who remain in this world apart from God. If you continue to sin you are not one of His, you are a child of the devil. Even though you may claim to know Him, you haven’t even seen Him. You are blind and you dwell in darkness. You are a false Christian.

In light of this, how do we interpret 1John 1:8-10: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” In exactly the same way as we do Romans Chapter 7. It applies before a person becomes a Christian. You must see yourself, before coming to Christ, as a sinner who needs saving. People who regard themselves as good don’t need a Saviour who will free them from their sin. Genuine repentance will unleash the power of

God “purifying us from all unrighteousness”. If you are made pure, it will be revealed in righteous living i.e. sinless living.³⁴

If 1John 1:8-10 describes a state of being *concurrent* with the verses quoted above from 1John chapters 2 and 3, the Bible disagrees with itself and is illogical. ‘A’ and ‘non-A’ cannot exist together simultaneously in the same individual. You cannot be a sinner and righteous at one and the same time. It

³⁴ For the record, Peter also teaches the same freedom from sin as Paul and John:

1 Peter 1:14-16 "As obedient children, **do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance**. But just as he who called you is holy, so **be holy in all you do**; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 4:1-5 "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body **is done with sin**. As a result, **he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires**, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time **in the past doing** what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you."

2 Peter 1:3, 10 "His divine power has given us **everything we need for life and godliness** through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness ... Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, **you will never fall...**"

is an impossible state of being. Moreover, such an idea it is an affront to efficacy of the blood of Jesus, making it powerless and ineffective. It destroys what Jesus accomplished through his suffering and death upon the cross: **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21) He was made sin, and His sacrifice purchased our freedom from the penalty and the power of sin. If you continue to sin, therefore, you are still a slave to sin and you must still face the judgement of God. (See Hebrews 10:26-31 and Romans 2:5-11 below.) You have an unrepentant and unbelieving heart. You have not been born-again and formed into the image of God.

This chapter opened with the observation that there are two camps: those who believe we *are* sinners and remain so even though accepting Christ, and those who believe we *were* sinners and are set free from sin by accepting Christ. Where do you stand now? If you persist believing the former and disregard what the true gospel of Jesus Christ offers are you not rejecting the truth and deliberately choosing to sin? What are the consequences of your choice? Regard very carefully Hebrews 10:26-31 and Romans 2:4-11:

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of

Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. **How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?** For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

"... do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? **But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.** God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. **But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.** There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil ... but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good..."

How to live free from sin

God has done His part now what is my part? How do I work out this new life that I have received? The fact is that my free-will remains intact so I am in a perpetual situation of choice. Paul is explaining (and John is stating) how to submit my will to God in order to live a sinless life.

There is a crucial point to understand. Despite your nature being made righteous you still have the capacity to sin, because your *will* remains in control. God does not coerce or force. He only invites and you must respond. He doesn't make you a robot with only automatic responses, when you are born-again. You must constantly submit yourself to Him. You must take up your cross daily, dying to self and committing yourself to follow God unconditionally.

You must go through a process of transformation from the old to the new. A righteous lifestyle is learned; it is contingent upon, firstly, your mind being renewed, and secondly being led by the Spirit. Both Romans and John's letter contain these two keys to the transformed life. (We will deal with the renewing of your mind in the rest of this chapter, and the next chapter takes up the topic of how to be led by the Spirit.)

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have **their minds set** on what that nature desires; but

those who live in accordance with the Spirit have **their minds set** on what the Spirit desires.”

Romans 8:5

How is your mind-set changed, so that it is in line with what the Spirit desires? Let's consider some other key verses written by Paul:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...**”

Romans 12:2

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Ephesians 4:22-24

“**We demolish arguments and every pretension** that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and **we take captive every thought** to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:5

So, is it an act of God to change your mind-set (i.e. your beliefs and attitudes) that He performs the moment you are

born again, or is it your responsibility to change it? Quite clearly, it is your responsibility. When you are born again and your spirit *is* renewed you do not automatically and immediately change your lifestyle, because your mind has yet *to be* renewed. Your transformation into the likeness of God is a process that is completely dependent upon a change in the pattern of your thinking. Only as you submit your thinking to God's truth will you undergo change. You must demonstrate your faith in God and love for Him by submitting your will and mind to Him.

Before you became a Christian, strongholds of sinful thought patterns and habits had already been established. You learned these when you lived your life independently from God. Your non-Christian environment taught you to think about and respond to life in a particular way, and those thought patterns and responses were ingrained into your mind. Your mind contains your beliefs and attitudes which direct your choices and therefore the outcome of your life. When you became a Christian, however, your mind was not automatically renewed. Your old sinful thought patterns and habits were not erased. Therefore, your beliefs and attitudes must be adjusted so that you can make the right choices, and change your life to that which God desires for you.

So how is this transformation process accomplished? Let's look at a passage from 1John and bring the truths expressed by the two apostles in this regard together to understand the process:

"I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and **the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**"

1 John 2:12-14

John expresses the transformation process as a person grows from a little child (Greek *teknion* = infant) to an adult. The transitional stage ("young men") contains this key: "the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one". By inference, therefore, there is state that exists for a Christian *before* the word of God dwells in them richly and they have conquered Satan. This state is described as a little child. When a person first becomes a Christian, they are born-again

and have received a righteous nature, their sins are forgiven and they know the Father, however, they are still influenced by sin and Satan because their minds have not yet been renewed. They are still under the influence of their past sin nature, *in their minds*. What are they to do? They must willingly submit their mind, intellect and emotions to the Word and the Holy Spirit. A baby Christian must devour the Bible craving its life and its truth, and grow-up spiritually. They must subject themselves to its light and defeat the lies that they had believed before they came to Christ and that persist. By so doing they will overcome they evil one.

Your mind is like a computer. It is the control centre of your being directing your actions and reactions. Your mind has already been programmed *before* you became a Christian. Much of this programming took place during your early childhood. Because you live in a fallen world ruled by Satan, it is his lies which were embedded in your mind. Your pattern of thinking has gone on for so long and is so ingrained it appears to be the core of who you really are. But this is not true.

We were all manipulated and brainwashed by satanic lies. Godly influences – a Christian home and church attendance – may have afforded some of us safety from Satan’s onslaught. However, sinfulness is only a matter of degree. While I live without Christ, I will automatically gratify the lusts of the sinful nature and my mind will be led astray to accept Satan’s lies. I cannot see the truth because I am blind. The god of this

world has blinded my eyes so that I simply cannot see who I really am – a wanton sinner whose heart is as black as night, and whose mind is filled with evil thoughts and wicked selfish intentions.

Now that I am in Christ, these evil thoughts and selfish desires which were erected in my past life must be countered, overcome and demolished one by one with the truth of God's Word. The real Christian will engage the Bible in such a way as a builder constructs a new house from a set of plans, while demolishing the existing dwelling. Our minds are the building and our thoughts are the components of that building. We (our will, our choosing) are the builder who directs the construction process. What we previously allowed onto the building site were workers who carried evil materials. Now we must stop them, remove the work they have already accomplished, and allow in only workers who carry materials of truth and righteousness. The portals by which those workers enter our building are our eyes and ears.

What then are the primary sources of information you allow into your mind through your eyes and ears? A real Christian will constantly guard their heart and mind. They will feed upon the Word of God daily. Not out of religious duty, but to feed their spirit which craves pure spiritual food. A real Christian understands the abject wickedness of the world. They know that the systems of the world are corrupt, that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. They stop watching movies and listening to music that offends the

Holy Spirit within them. They stop reading books and viewing web-sites that are contrary to truth and purity. They take captive their thoughts and make them obedient to Christ.

Our minds are open to hear the spirit realm. Our minds receive information from the physical world through our physical senses and the spiritual world through our own spirit. Our minds hear three distinct voices from the spirit world: the voice of our own spirit, the voice of God's Spirit and the voice of Satan. (As an unbeliever my spirit was tuned only to hear Satan's voice. I was dead to the voice of God. The conscience I was endowed with only allowed me to sense the reality of the existence of God, my estrangement from Him and shame resulting from my sin.) God's Word together with the leading of the Holy Spirit, comprise the filtering device which allows me to discern which is which.

The real Christian learns to judge the voices of the spirit realm, submitting themselves only to the Holy Spirit, and allowing only God's voice to influence their minds and direct their words and actions. They are on constant guard watching vigilantly over what thoughts to retain and temptations which they know now to resist and repel. It is not as if our minds though are in a constant state of tension. Satan came to Jesus in the desert to tempt Him and then left Him until another opportune time (Luke 4:13). We are not peppered with temptations which dominate and overwhelm us. What we are to do is not present the devil an opportunity. If he does come, however, when we are

perhaps in a physically and or emotionally weakened state, we are to resist him and, when we do, he must depart and stop his attack. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

The point is this, *you* must take the fight up to Satan. You have to adopt an active stance against Satan and his purposes for you, which he seeks to accomplish through infiltrating your thoughts with his thoughts. He wants you to believe his lies. In that way he keeps you in bondage to sin. Satan has access to your mind. Your mind is the principal spiritual battleground.

This is a war that you simply must engage in. You must do what the scripture tells you to do: “*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*”. (2Corinthians 10:6) The fight for the supremacy of your own mind is the most important battle of your life. The thoughts Satan introduces are lies to counter God’s truth. If he can get you to believe a lie then he can control your behaviour, and cause you to be impoverished and ineffective in your Christian walk. You will remain a baby Christian incapable of fulfilling God’s will for your life. When Jesus encountered Satan in the desert they did not engage in an all-out brawl or shoot-out! Jesus defeated Satan’s lies with the truth of God’s Word (see Luke 4:1-12). We must do the same.

Overcoming Temptation

Real (immature) Christians can still struggle with areas of sin because they have never understood how temptation operates, nor have they been equipped to stand against it. They remain oppressed by Satan, living defeated lives. They want to obey God, because they love God, but the ability to do so eludes them. They must learn to recognize and defeat temptation if they are to mature into the image of Christ, bear the fruit God intended for them, and be filled with inestimable joy. This is what God wants for all his children. He has promised that when temptation comes to us, he will always provide the way of escape.³⁵ In order to find that way of escape, and to have and to hold that joy - the joy of obedience and fruitfulness - we must deliberately and continually resist the devil.

The basis, purpose and nature of temptation

All temptation finds its basis in legitimate needs. These needs include our bodily appetites - mostly for drink, food and sex - and our emotional desires to be loved and to feel significant and secure.

God created us with these needs. It was His design and purpose. This is a fundamental fact of our humanity. God never intended us to fulfil these needs independently of Him and the way He intended them to be satisfied. Sin is, in

³⁵ 1Corinthians 10:13

effect, our efforts to meet these needs in ways contrary to God's order and design.

When Adam and Eve sinned they became disconnected from God and therefore were unable to fulfil their needs in the right and proper way. Instead of looking to God they were forced to look to themselves and the world in which they lived. However, these things could never satisfy them fully and looking to those things instead of God would become a destructive force. Sexual bondages, workaholism, alcoholism, drug dependency, intellectualism, worship of false gods etc. etc., are all the consequences of man's disconnectedness from God.

The purpose of temptation, therefore, is to get you to disbelieve God so that you will live independently of Him. When we take our eyes off God and look instead to ourselves and the world we automatically lose our capacity to walk in righteousness. Righteousness is that intrinsic quality that enables us to live the life God desires for us.

Temptation works through three areas. These are listed in I John 2:16 (NKJ):

“For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.”

The lust of the flesh refers to appetites, cravings and bodily passions. The lust of the eyes has to do with pleasures of the mind. The pride of life relates to the selfish acquisition of people and things for a person's own self-indulgence, or self-promotion and self-exaltation. These three distinct elements are evident in both the temptation of Eve in the Garden, and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.³⁶

You must take a stand against Satan and his purposes for you, which he seeks to accomplish through infiltrating your thoughts with his thoughts. Satan has access to your mind. Your mind is the principal spiritual battleground. Temptation, which comes from Satan, appears first as a thought in your mind. Many Christians simply are not aware of his activity in this regard. They think all of their thoughts are their own. Satan is cunning. Often-time, he will speak into your mind in the first person, so that you will accept the thoughts as your own.

If you don't conquer Satan's temptation right at the threshold of your mind, you will begin to mull his thought over, consider it right, justified or the only alternative, and choose to act upon it. Repeated acts form a habit, and that sinful habit over time turns into a full blown stronghold. Once a stronghold is established, it becomes an automatic response; you have lost the ability to control your behaviour in that area.

³⁶ Genesis 3: 6, Matthew 4: 1-10

The way to defeat these strongholds is not to attempt to stop the behaviour but to change your thinking. You can't stop that sinful activity just by trying to stop, or telling yourself to stop. This is not what the Bible tells us to do. You don't attack the fruit, you attack the root. If the root remains, the fruit will reappear. You must change your pattern of thinking by accepting and applying the truth. If you see yourself as a hopeless addict you will never be free of your addiction. But if you see yourself as a victorious child of God, for whom God and all his resources are available, how can you fail?

Proverbs 4:23 says "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." We have to learn to guard our heart and protect it from Satan's attacks in order for our lives to be conformed to the pattern God desires for us.

When I become a Christian I bring the baggage of past patterns of thinking and behaviour with me. Now I must deliberately and conscientiously change them. I now have an obligation to walk not according to the old patterns (the flesh, the sinful or Adamic nature) but to walk after the Spirit. The fact is that a Christian can still walk according to their old nature. They can maintain their past pattern of thinking. Such a person is a 'baby' or 'carnal' Christian. They are born of the Spirit but are not living by the Spirit. On the other hand, a 'mature' or 'spiritual' Christian has renewed their mind and is led by the Spirit. A real Christian will not remain in a defeated state. They will rise up in the victory that Jesus

has obtained for them and conquer sin and Satan in their lives.

Only the mind controlled by the Spirit reflects love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). A carnal Christian will not exhibit these spiritual qualities.

It is possible for a Christian to have changed some areas of their thinking but remain bound to Satan's influence in others. The solution remains the same. They need to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Breaking free of the past - renunciation and forgiveness

In the early church, when a person accepted Christ they were taught and helped to break free from Satan's dominion over their lives. In the records of the early church we learn that new believers made this confession: *"I renounce Satan and all his works and ways."* They understood that they had lived in the kingdom of darkness and that they had been under Satan's control. It was therefore necessary for them to deliberately break free from his control as they entered the kingdom of God. This was achieved by renouncing him and his influence upon them.

Satan and his devices have not changed. Although belief in Satan is ridiculed in our society he is as active as he ever was. It is most important that you recognize that he had power

over you and that you deliberately choose to break free from his control and influence. The first step is to renounce sinful habits and to forgive everyone you have a grievance against.

Renunciation

You must deliberately renounce every sinful practice that you have engaged in over the course of your life, when you lived without Christ. You must come to Christ and you must leave Satan. You must enter the kingdom of God and you must leave the kingdom of darkness. You must put Jesus on the throne of your life, and take Satan off that throne. You must announce Jesus the Lord of your life and denounce Satan who was your lord.

Many people come to Christ but because they never renounce their past lives, they continue to be oppressed by Satan. They still choose to sin because of the momentary pleasures that sin affords. Thus, they allow Satan to continue to have access to their lives through these sinful practices. However, they must now see sin for what it is, and the consequences it produces. They opened doors to their lives to Satan in the past and now those doors must be shut. They must deny him access and defeat his influence and control.

For example, if you were an alcoholic and enjoyed the taste and feeling from drinking, you must now renounce alcohol and oppose thoughts of desire for alcohol by confessing that you now hate alcohol because (1) it puts a barrier between you and God, (2) the consequences for your family

relationships are disastrous, and (3) it is destroying your own body which is now the temple of the Holy Spirit. You must accept the truth and confess that you are now a son/daughter of God, and that you are not an alcoholic; that you are a victorious saint and not a helpless victim. When you purposely place God and your loved ones above your desire to drink, your life is transformed. You are offering the parts of your body to righteousness and not to sin. God grants you the grace to overcome as you choose Him and His will over your own flesh, which you decide by faith is rendered powerless.

Forgiveness

We all experience hurt at the hands of others, and sometimes even ourselves. The hurt may or may not be deliberate, but the effect is the same. It produces anger, an emotional sense of being wronged and that the person who offended us should pay for their offence.

Unresolved hurt is evident by a state of emotional woundedness. It produces a weakness in our being that will cause us to falter in our relationships, both with God and others. One or more of the following will be evident:

- ungratefulness – we are never fully satisfied or content
- bitterness – we are harsh and angry
- unteachable – we are unyielding and stiff-necked
- critical and judgmental – we look down upon others

- manipulation – we try to control others
- withdrawal and isolation – we distance ourselves from others
- possessiveness – we hold onto things and people inappropriately

Jesus taught much about forgiveness. He likened it to releasing a person from a debt.³⁷ Unforgiveness, therefore, means an unwillingness to release a person from the 'debt' they incurred when they offended us. We want them to somehow pay us back for the hurt they have caused us.

Unforgiveness produces deep-seated feelings of anger, bitterness and revenge in the offended person. It is an emotional wounding which does not heal. These feelings may be suppressed, however, they can surface when we are vulnerable or the wound is touched i.e. when we are reminded of the offence by something which triggers the memory of the offense.

You may feel that you can't forgive because the pain you felt (and still feel) is so strong. However, forgiveness is a decision of your will. It is not an emotion. Contrary to what many are led to believe, you don't wait till you feel you can forgive someone for hurting you. You will never feel like forgiving them because you carry extreme pain that was caused by

³⁷ Matthew 6:12-15, Matthew 18:23-35

them! You simply choose as an act of your own volition to forgive.

This is not to deny that the event(s) happened nor is it an attempt to push it out of your mind. But when you forgive, the power of that sin over you will be defeated. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, the consequence of his choosing not to forgive meant he was placed in the hands of jailers to be tortured.³⁸ Satan has access to people's lives through their unforgiveness. Only when you forgive will you be released from his driving influences upon your life and the healing power of God allowed to flow into your being. If you choose not to forgive, however, Satan will continue to have power over you to torment you.

When you forgive someone this does *not* mean that you must now *trust* them. They may still be as evil as ever. Forgiveness and trust are two very different things. Trust is only given to people who are proven faithful and true, not to those who are abusive and sinful.

Forgiveness may not always reconcile us to the offender as they also individually have the right to choose between good and evil. We cannot make another person accept us or love us.

³⁸ Matthew 18:34

Just as our sins must be renounced, every person we hold unforgiveness against must be named and their offences against us released, in order to render Satan's power over us broken and extinguished.

Living free in the present - victory over temptation

The scriptural remedy to gain victory over sin and temptation is a simple one - embrace the truth of God and reject the lie of Satan. The key verse is James 4:7

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

We have a duty to actively resist the devil. This means that we cannot be passive or dismissive. We must continually guard our minds by judging our thoughts according to the Word of God. We cannot entertain any thoughts that stand opposed to the truth expressed by God. We must act like custodians of a city who watch over it to keep it and protect it from hostile forces that surround it. That city is our mind. We are the custodians and the kingdom of darkness is the surrounding hostile enemy. We must be constantly on alert to Satan's attack and learn to thwart him at every point.

Satan is aware of your background. He knows what circumstances you have been through, your family upbringing, the times of your life when you were emotionally wounded. He preys upon the weaknesses that are evident from your past. He pushes your buttons in order to get you

to take your eyes off God and operate out of your old natural self. Many types of sinful practices arise as coping mechanisms to ease the pain of emotional hurt, or to gain acceptance from our parents or our peers. He will prod you in those areas in an attempt to get you to trust in your old defences. In other words, he will endeavour to get you to again take up your past sinful practices or your offences, by once again believing lies about yourself. For example, he will introduce seed thoughts into your mind such as

- “I really need this ...”
- “I can’t live without ...”
- “He hurt me so much, I haven’t forgiven him and I can’t forgive him.”
- “I deserve this ...”
- “This would be so much fun ...”
- “Just a little, just this once more and then I will really stop ...”
- “I’m just made this way, I’ll never change ...”

These thoughts do not originate with you, though they appear to be your own! They are Satan’s invention.

Moreover, his attacks will often come when you are vulnerable and weak. He does not fight according to Queensbury rules. He will kick you when you are down. When current circumstances are adverse, when you are emotionally tender, when you are under pressure and tired that is when his attacks will be the most ferocious. (Some

people are vulnerable when they experience blessing. When they are on an emotional high because of spiritual, financial or relational success they can be affected by pride.)

It is at this point that you must rise up and stand against him. He cannot sustain his attacks indefinitely because the promise is that when you resist him he will flee from you. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is a model for us. It lasted only a short time. Satan targeted the three areas of vulnerability but found no opening. Jesus resisted him every time by quoting from the Word of God. They did not engage in a *power* struggle, nor an *intellectual* debate, but rather a *truth* encounter. Jesus overcame Satan by the truth, not by argument or force. Satan had to leave when he was denied access. He would try again later returning at another opportune time.³⁹

We are to follow Jesus' example. When an attack comes we are to stand firm upon the truth. In this way we are submitting to God. We are accepting the truth as expressed by Him. As we do this we are simultaneously rejecting the lie of Satan. As we resist him, we are set free from sin and he must flee from us.

³⁹ Luke 4:13

Conclusion - some evidences of true salvation

If you are truly saved, you will crave God's Word knowing that a person doesn't live by food alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. If your spirit is alive to God, it will desire spiritual nourishment. You will love His Word, and cherish it. It will become an object of desire and fervent attention.

If you are truly saved, you will take your eyes off the pleasures of sin, and see what sin really is through God's eyes. God is holy and He hates all sin, therefore, you choose to hate sin too. He has determined what is right and what is wrong, by the yardstick of His own Person. To entertain sin is an act of defiance and idolatry. It is to thumb your nose at God, and demand that you are going to do it your own selfish way. But if you have genuinely died to self and sin, how can you live in sin any longer? Sin becomes abhorrent to you, and you hate even the clothing stained by sin (Jude 23). You will not continue to engage in a sinful lifestyle. It will be repugnant and unacceptable to you. You will hate sin because it puts enmity between you and God. Your relationship with him is your most treasured possession, and you will allow nothing to jeopardize it.

If you are truly saved, you will be convinced that sin always produces bad consequences - that this is an eternal law. Sin may be fun for the moment, but the next day, month, year, lifetime, eternity, it produces devastating effects. Galatians

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

If you are truly saved then you will be convinced that if you can live free from sin for five minutes, then you can live free for sixty minutes; if an hour then a whole morning; if a morning then a day; if a day, then a week; if a week, then a year; and if a year, then for the rest of your life. Whom Jesus saves, you know He saves to the uttermost.

If you are truly saved you will persistently resist temptation, and not give into it. You will take captive every thought and make it subject to Christ. You will not give the devil an opportunity but constantly guard your heart and mind.

If you are truly saved, it will be demonstrated (once you have reached spiritual maturity) by a holy lifestyle. You will no longer be like the world, but rather you will be like God. You will act like God, and speak like God. You will have become like your heavenly Father. You will appear as a brother/sister of Jesus, for you resemble Him.

If you are truly saved you will learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. It is only those who are “sons (Greek *huios* – a fully grown-up son, not an infant) of God” whom Paul refers to in Romans 8 as being “led by the Spirit of God”. *Huios* means a

mature son who reflects the nature of their father, being intimately connected with him. Having followed in his footsteps they have become like him. They are fully mature sons who know their father and his will; no longer little children who only experience his acts. They do the things their father does. These "sons" in Romans 8 are the same "fathers" that John refers to in 1John 2: "I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning." They have known what it is to have walked with the Spirit of Christ. They have come to spiritual maturity, to the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

In conclusion, the Christian walk is a two-step course of action. First, you must bring your mind into subjection by reprogramming it with the written Word of God; accepting the truth as revealed by God in the Bible. This is the initial and necessary step but it is not yet complete. It is not enough to just know the Word and apply it in our lives, casting off sin. Together with our minds being saturated with the Word of God, we must now walk in obedience to the Living Word. We now offer the parts of our body to righteousness, therefore, we must become responsive to the voice of the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, is not a silent partner in our journey. He is a constant companion leading and guiding us, in order to fulfil God's plan and purposes in this world. It is the topic of obedience we now examine in detail.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE OF OBEDIENCE

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”

1 John 2:3-6

We all have to serve someone. That is the status of every human being. No-one is free to do their own thing. That is a very great deception. Post-modernism again rears its ugly head deceiving people into believing that they can choose to do what they want to do independently and of their own volition. Not so. We all obey one of two masters according to desire that is ignited by either *worldly passions* (“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” 1 John 2:16 (NKJV)) or *spiritual passion* (love for God).

It is in the realm of worldly passions that Satan rules. People who give themselves over to fulfil worldly passions are serving their master Satan. It is in the realm of spiritual passion that God rules. Therefore, every living soul will obey either God or Satan. It is an inescapable truth. If we obey God

then we are free from Satan's control. If we obey Satan then we do not know God nor are we one of his children. We are either in Satan's kingdom, or we are in God's kingdom. We are either darkness or we are light. You cannot be both part darkness and part light at one and the same time. You cannot have a foot in both kingdoms.

In the garden of Eden Eve submitted herself to Satan and obeyed him when she believed what he told her. She bowed down at the altar of deception and walked away with a conviction to follow a certain course of action. Eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, became an attractive proposition that would fulfil worldly passion which had been ignited when she entertained the devil's lie:

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food – *the lust of the flesh* - and pleasing to the eye – *the lust of the eyes* - and also desirable for gaining wisdom – *the pride of life* - she took some and ate it.”

(Genesis 3:6.)

Generally, in the Western World, people are tricked into thinking that they are free to serve only themselves when in fact they are serving Satan. For false Christians there is a similar deception. They are convinced they are serving God, when in fact they are serving Satan. (A very small minority of people – Satanists - knowingly and expressly give their lives over to worshipping and obeying Satan.) False Christians are

serving Satan when they bow down at the altar of deception and allow sin to continue to dominate their lives. Again it manifests itself in one or more of the three realms:

- The lust of the flesh – desires of the body for food, drink and sex
- The lust of the eyes – desires of the mind for that which is pleasing; excitement; alcohol/drug-induced euphoria; meditation-induced 'peace' (via an altered state of consciousness)
- The pride of life – desires of the (fallen) human spirit for ownership; control; power; accomplishment; superiority; independence

False Christians may think they are free from Satan's power because some areas of their lives are different to how they once lived. For instance, some people may have been alcoholics before they 'became a Christian' and, encouraged by their decision to become a 'Christian' and wanting a fresh start to life, they attend a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. Despite successfully completing the program and overcoming their addiction, their lives are still dominated by Satan in other areas. Their sin nature has not been crucified. (And they remain in bondage to the desire for alcohol and restrain themselves through their own effort.)

In particular, any change in lifestyle when a person 'comes to Christian faith' without a genuine conversion of the heart, is normally predicated upon religious observances. 'Christian religion' is antagonistic towards God and truth. 'Christian religion' is the denial of what Jesus really accomplished on the cross and the true gospel of salvation through faith. 'Christian religion' uses biblical words and themes but it is a false gospel. It is salvation through self-effort; the reward for works done in human strength. It is the wicked desire for self-accomplishment and self-justification. Therefore, though such people restrain themselves in satisfying the lust of the flesh/eyes, they are still trapped in the pride of life.

Colossians 2:23 says of religious observances:

“Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

Sensual indulgence means the worldly passions. Religious observances do not indicate a real conversion experience, though they appear to offer a person a way to find God and overcome worldly passions. They alter a person's lifestyle in three areas:

(1) a form of worship (e.g. church attendance, prayers, singing, tithing, sacraments, liturgies, rituals, candles, icons etc.)

(2) false humility (e.g. "I am a sinner just trusting in the mercy and grace of God. " That mercy and grace being defined by human philosophy not scripture.)

(3) asceticism (self-denial, renunciation of riches/marriage/pleasures, solitude, penance, fasting, sleep deprivation, body mortification etc.)

The sin nature is not dead, it is still very much alive and active. A particular sin maybe subdued but the lust remains, its power not broken. The truth remains that such a person is still a sinner. They have not become a child of God and they remain under His wrath and destined for an eternity separated from Him.

Galatians 5:19-21 declares:

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”

The sinful nature manifests itself, therefore, in one or more of the three realms. Selfish ambition is as much of a sin as

idolatry. A factional spirit (e.g. believing and promoting a particular falsehood as truth, and separating from others to form a 'church' identified by its brand of doctrine) is as much of a sin as witchcraft. Not all of the "acts" are necessarily engaged in simultaneously. False Christians will always be revealed in their captivity to some sin, though their actual sin(s) they commit may vary over time. In other words, when a person 'comes to faith' or 'adopts religion' they may have a façade of conversion and a changed life, but they remain a child of the devil.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day are a good example of this. Jesus said of them:

"You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

(Matthew 23:15)

So a person could leave a pagan lifestyle and become a Pharisee: adopting Jewish laws, customs and practices; appearing to have renounced 'sin'; changing their appearance, their lifestyle and their habits; and yet they remained a captive to sin and now even more so.

The apostle Paul said that his personal adherence to the law was "faultless". He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. But when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus his sinful heart and his selfish ambition was exposed by the light of Jesus. He was

knocked from his horse and made blind. His physical blindness powerfully revealed to him his spiritual blindness. He now saw himself for what he really was: he was not wonderful but wretched; he was not a saint but a sinner. He realised his need for a Saviour to rescue him from his sinful state. Jesus alone was that Saviour and he believed in Him. Before meeting Christ, Paul had a personal agenda thinking he was doing the work of God by persecuting Christians. He believed that they were heretics and blasphemers who had to be stopped and/or annihilated. His agenda though justified according to the scriptures, as he interpreted them, was antagonistic to God's agenda. He thought he was fighting for God, and yet discovered he was fighting against God.

Personal agenda v God's agenda

Obedience to God necessarily requires the renunciation of a person's own agenda and commitment to God's agenda. When a person holds to their own agenda, though that agenda has noble ideals and has the appearance of being godly, it is an abomination before God. This sin perhaps more than any other sin, deceives people in the church and enslaves them. Though they attend church week after week, sing worship songs and tithe; though they appear to be very nice people who even give of their time to help others; or they stand behind the pulpit faithfully preaching and teaching the 'Word of God' as they understand it; they remain captive to sin. They are seeking to fulfil their own agenda. Yet exactly like Paul had been, they are spiritually blind. They think they are real Christians and obeying God

but they are not. They cannot even see what a true Christian is. And exactly like Paul had been, they malign and persecute true Christians.

The contrasted examples of Judas and Peter help us see the difference between a person who holds to their own agenda and another who gives up their own agenda and takes up God's agenda.

Judas

We can't be absolutely certain why Judas joined up as a follower of Jesus. There is no special encounter recorded between Jesus and Judas like that of Peter, James and John or Matthew. We do know that there was a large entourage that accompanied Jesus - no doubt attracted to Him by the miracles they saw him perform and thrilled at the things they heard Jesus saying which challenged the religious elite. Judas was a member of that throng. He was selected out of that group as an apostle, along with eleven others. He was elevated to a special position to be personally tutored by Jesus.

We can glean from the gospel records a personal agenda of Judas for personal gain. It became evident over the years that he accompanied Jesus. We are expressly told that he was a thief. He was the designated treasurer of the twelve, who was charged with the responsibility of carrying the common purse. He would take money out of that purse for his own personal use, without authority from Jesus. The night

he betrayed Jesus, some of the others thought Judas had left because Jesus had requested him to give some money to the poor. This is likely to have been a regular practice and, therefore, an easy conclusion for the others to draw as they watched Judas leave after an exchange between Jesus and Judas at the table.

When Mary came and poured oil upon Jesus' feet some days prior, Judas was livid because it was worth a significant sum of money, a whole year's wages. He protested that she should not have been permitted to perform this act, but rather that the oil have been donated to them and sold, so that the proceeds could be used to give to the poor. His interest in charity, however, was a lie. His outward display of indignation masked a dark hidden motive. He wanted the funds in order to steal some. Such a large sum given at one time would afford him a great opportunity to steal handfuls of coins out of the purse, without others noticing.

Judas was driven by an agenda of 'What's in it for me?' The pride of life had him in its grip. He saw his association with Jesus as an opportunity for personal gain. We don't know what he was doing with the money he stole. Nevertheless, the love of money had clearly seduced him and he was given over to it. This is the motive for Judas' betrayal of Jesus. The price he was given by the religious authorities – thirty pieces of silver – was to be bonus money for him. He was an insider with an opportunity that presented itself and he took hold of it with both hands.

How things played out the night he betrayed Jesus, however, was not what he expected. Jesus wasn't supposed to have been condemned like some criminal. Again, we don't know what was going on inside Judas' mind just prior to this point in time. We all justify ourselves; why we do the things we do. Judas would have justified himself in some way. Judas did not want to hurt Jesus. He did not display any anger towards Him; there was no obvious offence from which had sprung a bitter root. He just wanted the money. Perhaps he had reasoned that Jesus would once again evade His opposition, as He had always done up until this time. He had probably witnessed the scene when an angry mob had pushed Jesus to the edge of a cliff, ready to throw him off, and He simply turned around and walked through them. Judas knew the authorities despised Jesus and he had seen how Jesus had confidently handled them, always getting the better of them. Whenever they had tried to trick Him in order to have grounds to seize Him, He had always countered them brilliantly and silenced them.

Jesus seemed invincible to Judas. It is even possible that he thought Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah who had appeared - it was (wrongly) believed - to free Israel from the shackles of Rome. (Jesus had specifically revealed Himself to the twelve that that is indeed Who He was, though he told them not to tell others that He was the Christ. (See Matthew 16:13-18.)) The promise of God was that Abraham's descendants would not be subjugated by their enemies but would overcome them. Israel had a divine right to rule others

and not to be subject to a Gentile overlord. With its worship of Caesar, its pagan practices and its disregard for the scriptures, Rome was an unholy and Godless master.

Israel had suffered a long persecution under Rome, not exactly the same but the parallels with Israel's enslavement under Egypt were inescapable. Just as Moses had been sent by God and supernaturally delivered Israel from the cruel tyranny of Egypt, many were waiting for the promised Messiah, the Son of David, who would do the same they believed under their current circumstances. Moses himself had prophesied that a Prophet like himself would appear (Deuteronomy 18:15). Many things indicated that Jesus could well be this conquering Messiah that they had been waiting for. In Judas' mind, therefore, perhaps he was expecting Jesus to begin the overthrow of Rome's rule at any moment. Being now in Jerusalem itself, the seat of power and the location of the temple of God, and having entered the city with the adoration of Jesus proclaimed by the crowds as the "Son of David" and the "prophet from Nazareth", maybe this was going to be the moment when Jesus would rise up. Therefore, there was no way that Jesus could be overpowered. He was the conquering Deliverer sent by God.

For whatever reason Judas entertained, it didn't go exactly the way Judas had thought it would. Because we are told that "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

(Matthew 27:3-4) There is no way that Judas imagined that this is what would happen to Jesus. A nightmare was unfolding before his eyes and he had started it. He wanted to stop it but it was out of his control. Very importantly, the remorse he felt was not godly sorry. There is a very real difference between the two. He was only sorry for the way things had turned out. He did not demonstrate godly sorrow because he did not repent. He did not lay down his life before God in humble submission begging His forgiveness and cleansing, turning away from his sin. Admission of sin is not necessarily the desire to be free from sin. He still loved money and he wasn't wanting to change. His sinful nature was still master and he remained devoted to it. He never submitted himself to God though he had had ample opportunity every step along the way and if ever there was a crossroad for Judas this was the moment. Yet he took matters into his own hands and went out and hung himself. Suicide is the ultimate act of selfishness and defiance against God.

Our society now wrongly regards people who suicide as victims. They are not victims but rather criminals who have performed the heinous act of self-murder. Attempted suicide was once viewed as attempted murder, and a criminal offence. This law was based upon the biblical view that life was sacred, i.e. a gift from God, and that murder was prohibited by God. Whatever the reasons that drives a person to such a dreadful end, to take life is ultimately a sin against God with eternal consequences:

“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the *murderers*, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

(Revelation 21:8)

If you have personally attempted suicide you should not excuse it by blaming your past or some mental condition. You must accept personal responsibility and repent of your sin before God, begging His forgiveness and trusting in His cleansing power to free you from all unrighteousness.

(If you are having suicidal thoughts, you must recognise these as Satan’s temptation and stand opposed to them with God’s Word.)

Peter

Peter was especially chosen by Jesus right from the very beginning, before he was even designated an apostle. He had been a simple fisherman. Not a learned person who held a high office but a commoner from a poor region of the country, Nazareth. He probably dreamed as many do of winning fame and fortune and freeing himself from the

smallness and drudgery of life. The offer of Jesus to make him a “fisher of men” spoke to his heart’s desire for something greater. His hidden motive driven by that desire is revealed by events that unfolded - just as Judas’ was.

Peter quickly assumed the position of leader of the pack. He was the chief spokesman amongst the Twelve. He was always the first to speak and the first to act. His devotion to Jesus seemed unquestioning but there was a sinful hidden agenda. Peter wanted to be above everyone else and rule over them.

Peter was Jesus’ right-hand man and his path to power and influence, to be a ruler served by others, now seemed assured. Somehow he had been chosen by God to walk side-by-side with the promised Messiah, the Son of God. He knew this is who Jesus was and the first to confess it was so. Though others didn’t see it Peter understood it by special revelation, hearing directly from God on heaven, and Jesus applauded him:

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for

this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”

(Matthew 16:13-18)

However, when Jesus started to explain to the Twelve that He was going to be persecuted and placed into the hands of the religious authorities and be killed, this is not what Peter wanted to hear. This did not fit into his personal agenda. He had to convince Jesus not to think and speak this way:

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

(Matthew 16:21-23)

Jesus addressed the true state of Peter’s heart. How confused Peter must have been. One minute he is hearing God speak and announcing the identity of the Messiah and now he is directly being rebuked as Satan. Peter did not yet see the connection. Jesus was committed to God’s agenda and was following through the task He had been assigned by God. Peter was committed only to his own.

Fast forward to the night of Jesus' betrayal. While they were gathered together for the Passover meal in the upper room, Jesus wrapped himself in a towel and proceeded to wash the filthy feet of the disciples – the job normally assigned to a lowly servant. This was too much for Peter and he exploded. Watching Jesus perform the task on others as his turn arrived brought things to a head:

“He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."”

John 13:6-8

Peter could not entertain the idea that Jesus was reduced to doing the task of a menial servant. Not because he loved his Master – if he did he would have jumped up offering to help – but because it completely contradicted his own agenda. Peter remained gripped by the pride of life. He wanted to rule and thought he was next in line to Jesus, the Messiah. Others were supposed to do this kind of job. If Jesus was doing it, what might be expected of him? He hadn't signed up for this sort of thing. The worst day fishing was better than getting down on your knees with your hands in muck.

Later that night again the true content of Peter's heart was revealed. Standing around the fire with others in the

courtyard near where Jesus was being held and tried by the ruling counsel, Peter disowned Jesus three times. Though he had boldly proclaimed his willingness to die with Jesus just hours before, he really couldn't go through with it. He remained committed to his agenda of personal advancement. When Jesus looked at him as the cocked crow, the awful state of his sinful heart was exposed like the noon-day sun. He was filled with remorse though not yet repentant.

Days later after Jesus rises from the dead, He appears to Peter who had gone back fishing. Peter must have thought it was all over. He had disowned and deserted Jesus. Jesus addresses the core issue - Peter's personal agenda versus God's agenda:

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love (*Greek - agape*) me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love (*Greek - phileo*) you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love (*agape*) me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love (*phileo*) me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus

asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love (*phileo*) you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.""

John 21:15-17

In this exchange between Jesus and Peter there is a very important meaning revealed only in the original Greek. *Agape* means self-sacrificing love. It is the putting away of self and serving others, at personal expense and no strings attached. *Phileo* means brotherly love. It is a pact between two people that guarantees mutual gain from their relationship. Peter's agenda didn't allow for the first kind of love, only the second. Peter wanted the rewards for effort he put in, as he saw it. He did not want to commit himself to Jesus without qualification and die to self. Jesus challenged him with the putting away of his own selfish agenda and taking up God's agenda commanding him to feed His sheep.

Peter does set aside his own agenda shortly thereafter, because he once again and now finally leaves his nets in obedience to God. By faith he rises up in the new nature as a son of God, and dies to his old sinful nature. No longer the slave to the pride of life, he joins back up with the rest of the disciples in Jerusalem, and lives out the rest of his days in humble service to God, shepherding and feeding the flock of God.

In summary, both Judas and Peter were disciples of Jesus. They were both chosen to be members of a select group, the

Twelve. They were designated apostles and underwent special training. According to the instruction of Jesus they both went out into the various towns, “and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” (Mark 6:12-13) Judas was called by Jesus "a devil" and Peter was addressed as "Satan". Both deserted Jesus at the hour of His trial. Subsequently, they both felt intense remorse for their actions. Here is where they part company: Judas never let go of his own personal agenda and died in his sin. Peter on the other hand repented, died to his own agenda, committed himself to the service of Christ, surrendered his life to His will, fulfilled that which Christ had called him to, and subsequently was received into glory.

A Judas'spirit

A spirit like that of Judas, might be more widespread in the church than what appears on the surface. Paul makes some insightful statements in his letter to the Philippians identifying this Judas' spirit:

“It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love... The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition...

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than

yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others...

“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:15-17, 2: 3-4, 19-21

Paul addresses head-on the problem of commitment to a personal agenda by members of the church. When we are driven by our own interests, it is out of selfish ambition for personal gain. Even though we may appear to be ‘serving Christ’, ‘living for Christ’, and even ‘preaching Christ’, we are still captive to the pride of life. We have become a ‘Christian’ for what we can get out of it. We are using Christ, or the gospel of Christ, for personal advantage. Every time we try to fit Jesus into our own personal agenda we betray Him, just like Judas.

Galatians 5:19-20 records “selfish ambition” as one of the acts of the sinful nature. Ecclesiastes 4:4 shows that our world, driven by the quest to succeed, is captive to selfish ambition:

“And I saw that all labour and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

Those who claim that God wants you to be a success – success measured by worldly wealth and riches - can mask evil desire. Our drive must spring from a desire to benefit others, by the leading and through the power of the Holy Spirit, not to feather our own nests.

Therefore, a Judas' spirit produces a false Christian. On the surface they may look genuine, but they mask an evil unrepentant heart. Real Christians have given up their own agenda to live for Christ, and serve others out of genuine love.

Obedience revealed

1 John describes how obedience to God's agenda is revealed in this way:

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands ... This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him *must walk as Jesus did.*”

The apostle's declaration that we are to “walk as Jesus did” is interpreted in a variety of different ways. What you believe to be the right interpretation will lead you to see others that don't share your view as, at best, misinformed and

misguided, and at worst, liars who have no truth in them, who don't know God nor do they demonstrate the genuine love of God. What you choose to believe will have tremendous ramifications for you in this life, and potentially for the life beyond. It will determine the justification for your conduct now (you only do what you think is expected of you), who you associate with (the church you attend), and your hope for eternal rewards.

Taking the first letter of John as a whole, he was not presenting an ambiguous ideal. He was certain that a real Christian would be identified by a life of obedience to God that would be revealed in speech and conduct. Both Judas' and Peter's sinful motivations, while they were members of Jesus' team, were ultimately revealed in this way. Peter's change of heart was also demonstrated in his obedience to Christ's command. (I personally hold to a particular view and it is impossible for me not to attempt to persuade you towards it. All teachers discharge this duty. Teachers only teach what they believe to be true.)

Here are three interpretations that dominate church pulpits regarding "obedience" and to "walk as Jesus did":

- (1) The Bible is the complete Word of God that contains the whole counsel of God and all of God's commands. We are to understand those commands and strictly apply them in our lives.

- (2) The (red-letter) words of Jesus are more important than anything else written in the Bible. What Paul, John and Peter write are only their interpretations of the life of Jesus and what He came to communicate to us. Jesus was mostly concerned about loving others and embracing the sinner without judgement. The 'grace of God' provides the sinner, therefore, the license to remain in their sin, though being loved by God and unconditionally accepted by Him. The mission of the church is to mimic this grace and do likewise; accept others as they are and do good deeds i.e. engage in social justice causes.
- (3) The Bible is the Word of God that reveals truth to us and shows us how to enter into a vital relationship with Him whereby He communicates directly and personally with us. We do not just rationally engage God through His Word but encounter God experientially through His Spirit. Our lives are guided by the written Word, and the Living Word; and the two are in agreement.

The first two views represent the common errors that the church is always in danger of falling into: legalism or license. These errors were apparent very early on in the church and were directly addressed in the New Testament. For example, Galatians deals with the error of legalism while Jude confronts the error of license. The second view is becoming

increasingly prevalent because of the impact of post-modernism.

The correct view finds its fulfilment in the same position that Jesus adopted, whereby He constantly placed Himself in subjection to the moment-by-moment guidance of His Father, while submitting Himself unreservedly to the authority of the scriptures (which is His Word that He wrote i.e. He is God who keeps His Word!):

Direct Guidance

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert...”

Luke 4:1

“At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

Luke 10:21

“For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

John 12:49-50

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

John 5:19

Scriptural Guidance

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 5:17-20

"Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?"

Mark 12:24-25

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

John 5:39-40

“Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken..."

John 10:34-35

The true Christian does likewise. They are led by the Spirit, listen to the voice of the Spirit and willingly obey the Spirit. They love the Word, feed upon the Word and are guided by the Word. The Spirit and the Word are in agreement. Error arises when one is promoted above the other or excluded by the other. The error of legalism promotes the Word above the Spirit. The error of license promotes the Spirit – or a person's own spirit - above the Word. Both errors fail in their endeavour because the Spirit and the Word are One. Both errors will cause a person to remain a slave to sin. In the error of legalism people will conceal their sin from view. In the error of license they will parade it publicly like a badge. Both will justify their sin in some way. Both will think they are serving the Lord and have His Spirit but they are blind fools. On the day of judgement their hearts will be exposed and their deeds shown for what they were. They lived out their lives and used their religion for their own agendas. They never perceived God's agenda and laid down their own.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

There is a defining moment in Jesus' life which points to the necessity for the anointing of the Holy Spirit in order to be led by the Spirit. Jesus went down to the river Jordan just before He began His public ministry. There He was baptised in water by His cousin John, and at the very same moment He was baptised in the Holy Spirit by His Father from heaven:

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:16-17

The very next verse in Matthew says "Then Jesus was *led by the Spirit* into the desert..." (Matthew 4: 1). Luke also records the event saying that now "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was *led by the Spirit* in the desert..." (Luke 4: 1). After which "Jesus returned to Galilee in the *power of the Spirit*..."(Luke 4:14).

The point is this: Jesus was born of the Spirit but He needed to be baptised in the Holy Spirit in order to be led by the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit. If Jesus needed to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, so do we. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the Christian life. It was prophesied by John the Baptist that Jesus would baptise all true believers with the Holy Spirit:

"I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

John 1:32-34

Jesus himself prophesied

""Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

John 7:38-39

The purpose of the anointing of the Holy Spirit is this:

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

Acts 10:38

True believers are to demonstrate the same supernatural anointing. They should fulfil the great commission with supernatural signs following:

(Jesus) said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Mark 16:15-17

The Holy Spirit is God and He does not change. Christ's commission has not been rescinded nor the demonstrative power that accompanies the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Genuine Christians will be filled with the Holy Spirit, they will obey the great commission and expect to see the signs that accompany it.

In summary, a true Christian who is internally motivated by the leading of the Holy Spirit and submission to the Word, will demonstrate this outwardly by

- a life lived free from sin and self-serving, and
- dedication to God's agenda which is standing for truth and the cause of Christ, ready always to present the true gospel in power, done in loving service for the benefit of others.

CHAPTER 5

LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him...

"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous...

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him...

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material

possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth...

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love...

"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us...

"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

1 John 2:9-11, 3:11-12, 14-19, 4:7-9, 12, 19-21

A most emphatic statement that John makes in his letter is that we should love one another. Importantly, it comes with this proviso - one another is defined as our "brother", that love is to be purposely directed towards our "brother". There is a distinction we need to observe. A "brother" is different

from a "neighbour". A "brother" is another Christian we know and relate with on a regular basis, whereas a "neighbour" is an unbeliever we know or someone we happen to encounter in the world who is in desperate need of help as Jesus defined in his famous parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:30-37). (Jews and Samaritans generally despised one another and did not associate. The Samaritan in Jesus' parable happened upon a Jew that had been beaten up, robbed and left for dead. Other Jews passed by their fellow Jew who was in obvious desperate need and unable to help himself. The Samaritan went out of his way and at personal cost to help.)

John was repeating and stressing the specific instruction that Jesus gave in John 13:34-35:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

While we are to love our neighbour and indeed our enemy, John is pointing out in accordance with Jesus command that our first priority and commitment should be to our fellow Christians. This makes a lot of sense when you recognise that church life should be a prelude and precursor to life in heaven. The only thing we take with us into heaven is our relationships. Our life in eternity will find its substance and context in relationships with God and our fellow Christians,

our brothers and sisters in the Lord. How can we expect to even see heaven if we have not first loved one another here upon the earth?

God's plan for the church was for it to be a family of His sons and daughters, who lived in harmony with one another, as they each individually and collectively walked with Him. The veneer of post-modernism with its objective of achieving harmony in a multi-cultural society *without Christ* will never be achieved. It is man's attempt to accomplish what God realised only for His church. God directly opposed 'multi-culturalism', i.e. man-made unity in defiance of God, at the Tower of Babel.

The heads of leading European countries - the English Prime Minister, the French president and German chancellor - have all recently stated that multi-culturalism has failed.*

In Australia, however, multi-culturalism remains at the forefront of politics.

*<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1355961/Nicolas-Sarkozy-joins-David-Cameron-Angela-Merkel-view-multiculturalism-failed.html>

What does it mean to love one another? Clearly, as John wrote, if we see a fellow Christian who has material needs and we have the means to help them we should do so. However, there are many more scriptures in the New Testament which give additional insight as to what it means. These are quoted below with a discussion for each. Bear in mind, these biblical injunctions are written in the context of people who knew each other very well, who lived near one

another and saw each other regularly and who were intimately involved in their lives together. Moreover, their church life, when they met together for that purpose, was participatory. Typically, everyone was involved. A very different church community than what most of us are familiar with in the Western World. Church life for most now is more a spectator experience. Church is an event which we watch while sitting in the stands (pews). We don't have to really connect with others. We don't really know each other. We live away from each other and travel some distance by car to church. We live very separate lives without regular contact. Authentic church community should permit close relationships and participation of all.

How to really love one another

- *Romans 12:10*

*"Be **devoted** to one another in brotherly love. **Honour** one another above yourselves."*

When you devote yourself to someone, they become the object of your attention and affection. A husband is devoted to his wife, or a mother is devoted to her children. Football fans are devoted to 'their team'. They give time and money to the game. They talk about it, wear clothes that identify them with it and make sure they never miss a game. Devotion is always displayed. You are revealing right now what you are personally devoted too. What do you do with

your time off work at evenings and weekends? What is your favourite thing to do? What do you sacrifice your time and money for? We all devote ourselves to someone or something. That is the nature of a human being. We are built with the capacity for devotion. We are told to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love". We must direct our capacity for devotion to our fellow Christians.

When you honour someone you attach high value to them, you esteem them as being someone who is important to you. You offer your services to them. In this verse we are to honour fellow Christians above ourselves. So, just as we value ourselves and take care of our personal needs, we are to value fellow Christians and place them above our very selves. You give them the best seat and the best piece of meat. You look out for them and make sure they are okay. You let them go ahead of you. When we honour someone above ourselves, we place their needs above our own needs. Again, what is a defining characteristic of being a human being, is that we choose what we will honour. We can personally and volitionally choose what we will attach high value to and prize. We can attach high value to things - jewellery, sports car, antique furniture etc. - or to people - rock stars, movie stars, sports stars, war heroes, kings, presidents etc. How would you treat the Queen of England or the President of America if they came to your house? A genuine Christian will intentionally honour their fellow Christians and obey this scripture, giving of themselves and

their best for them. Not out of religious duty, however, but rather out of "brotherly love".

- *Romans 12:16*

*"Live in **harmony** with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."*

When a harmonious chord is played on the piano the different notes sound good altogether. When a dischord is played on the piano it grates on your ear. When discord happens in the church it grates on God's ear and His blessing is withheld. When there is discord we become self-oriented looking out for our own needs. We become proud, thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. We become conceited, thinking we are better than others. Specifically, we are instructed to cast off pride and conceit, and to willingly walk side-by-side with fellow Christians who are poor. Generally, the poor are less well educated and, in the Western World, are regarded as members of the working-class. Therefore, Christians both rich and poor, educated and uneducated, should freely associate with one another. James 2:1-4.9 says:

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also

comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ... if you show favouritism, you sin..."

Real Christians will not distinguish amongst themselves. They will not prefer one ahead of another. They will happily associate with one another. This is a characteristic only of the church of God. In the world people only associate with their own 'class'. Church revivals in the past were noted for destroying the divisions in society and bringing people of all walks of life and position together. This again fulfils Jesus' command to love one another, proving to the world that we are truly His disciples.

- *Romans 13:8*

*"Let no **debt** remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another."*

We are to live as free people. This is true of bondage to sin, and it is true of financial bondage. Proverbs 22:7 states that "... the borrower is servant to the lender." In general, Christians are to live free of debt. Debt should not be a way of life, as it is now for so many people in the Western World. Christians should free themselves from debt and financial

commitments so that they give themselves in love to one another. We are not to pursue wealth as everyone in the world does, rather we are to pursue love. Therefore, if we do have to go into debt, for example as many of us do to buy a house, we should borrow the least we can manage and pay it off as fast as possible. We should never borrow to buy consumer items, for example, televisions, computers, fridges, furniture, clothes etc. We make do with what we have, or buy second-hand with the money we have.

Christians should never have a negative balance on a credit card. You should only buy what you can afford. You don't borrow in order to buy now and pay-off later. You wait and save up, and then buy. Life does not consist in the abundance of things. We don't live like the world does, looking to acquire possessions. We learn to be content with what we have.

When it comes to borrowing from a fellow Christian the obligation is even more apparent. We should live frugally and pay out our debts to one another as quickly as possible.

From the lenders point of view, we should lend to a fellow Christian in need without charging interest on the money:

"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him ... Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live

among you. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit."

Leviticus 25:35-37

"Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a brother ..."

Deuteronomy 23:19-20

- *Romans 14:1, 13*

*"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters ... Therefore let us stop passing **judgment** on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."*

Paul gave two examples of disputable matters, eating food sacrificed to idols and keeping a day special to the Lord (typically the Sabbath). As to the first, this was an issue in his day because amongst the Gentile nations most meat that was sold in the markets was from animals that had been used in sacrificial worship to an idol. Some Christians regarded eating such meat, therefore, as participating in some way with demons. Paul calls these Christians "weak". Christians who were strong in their faith - who understood the meat when bought for food was no longer a part of a pagan

ceremony - were not to look down upon the weak. Therefore, the strong were not to judge the weak, i.e. distance themselves from them or stand over them and force them to do something contrary to their conscience, but to uphold them. If they ate together, the strong were not to tempt the weak by putting this kind of meat before them. Such action was guaranteed to produce contention and division within the church. This was unnecessarily damaging to the life of the church, and a display of pride rather than love. Paul adjures those who are strong in faith:

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up."

Romans 15:1-2

Note carefully the subject is about disputable matters. It is only in regard to these matters that we are not to judge one another. However, when it comes to matters about truth and error, judgement is vital. We should not be fooled by false teachers who extrapolate from Romans 15 to mean we should never judge another Christian. That is a great error and a destructive force within the church.

- *Romans 15:5-8*

*"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a **spirit of unity** among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Accept** one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."*

A spirit of unity is a wonderful thing. To be amongst a company of people that agree is to transform the individual from a separate entity to be a part of a living organism. And that of course is what the church is, the "body" of Christ. He is the head and we comprise the elements of His body, and so we should be united and co-ordinated when it comes to the affairs of the church. Though we are each an individual part, we are joined together and so with one voice we collectively offer up praise to God. We are of one heart so we are driven by the same pursuit which is the glory of our Father. To change the analogy, we are "living stones" that are built together to be a "house" in which God Himself dwells. There should be evidence that God is indeed the inhabitant of a church. As He dwells amongst His people, His blessing rests and remains. And so the transformative power of the Holy Spirit is present in demonstrations of His fruit and His gifts. A spirit of unity is a supernatural thing. It brings the Head and the Body together. Thus heaven descends upon the earth:

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

(Psalm 133)

The oil and the dew both symbolise the Holy Spirit. The oil poured upon Aaron's head is representative of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Aaron was anointed to be a priest in the house of God. And so we are anointed with the same Spirit to perform the same role as Peter writes:

"As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 2:4-5

Dew settled on Hermon which was the highest mountain in north Israel which attracted moisture and so refreshed the

mostly arid regions with rivers flowing from this source. The Holy Spirit is described as living water, Who would become a fountain of salvation for the believer and Who would flow through the believer like mighty gushing rivers (see John 3 and 7).

The church was prophesied to come into existence upon the basis of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Joel 2: 28 and Acts 2:17). He was to come in power upon believers who had been born again, i.e. already born of the Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth" and He was prophesied by Jesus to His disciples into "all truth". Therefore, true Christians will be identified by their agreement upon that which is truth, for they will be led by the Holy Spirit to know and understand truth. Moreover, it will be evident that God is dwelling by His Spirit amongst His people, by the role all of the believers perform as priests, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and manifesting His Presence. Church life, therefore, should be the real experience of the love, wisdom and power of God. Lives should be transformed, bodies healed, people freed from demonic powers, marriages empowered, material needs provided - blessing upon blessing upon blessing. There should be the sound of great joy and the sense of great peace, and the absence of strife and disunity.

Finally, regarding acceptance, this is one of the greatest expressions of love we can bestow upon another person. Because we live in a fallen and cursed world, we all suffer

from rejection to one degree or another. All of us are driven by the need for acceptance, however, before we come to Christ that need could never be truly satisfied because internally we sensed rejection and outwardly it was affirmed. This is the direct result of the sin nature. When Adam and Eve sinned they hid from God. They felt shame and rejection. They had become sinful in nature - defective, broken and darkened. They were no longer righteous and they knew it. Adam blamed Eve, refusing to take responsibility for his own actions and thereby causing Eve to feel rejected by him. They were both thrown out of the Garden of Eden which powerfully demonstrated their rejection by God.

All of us as children have experienced rejection by parents, siblings, teachers, other relatives, our peer group and/or ourselves. How many girls look at their appearance and think there is something wrong? How many boys look at their underperformance in school, sport or with girls and sense there is something wrong with them? How many girls have given themselves away inappropriately because they were driven by the need for love and acceptance? How many men have committed crime or climbed the corporate ladder in order to prove themselves a man, craving acceptance by others?

Acceptance is a powerful, spiritual force. When we accept one another we are affirming what Christ has already accomplished on the inside. We are made righteous. We are made whole in our inner person. We are accepted by God for

who we are, His child loved and adored by Him. We accept one another not because of our appearance or performance, or what we can get from one another, but because we recognise each other as a child of God to be honoured and esteemed. We understand that we have become members of a very special, spiritual family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ whom we will spend all of eternity with, sharing our very existence with one another as God intended it to be.

There are two additional references regarding unity that provide additional insight:

1 Corinthians 1:10

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

If God who is the source of truth, makes his truth known to us, and that truth is timeless and unchanging, then it directly follows that the individuals that comprise the church would be "perfectly united in mind and thought". This unity is not regarding some worldly matter such as passing a motion in a board meeting amongst a directorship in charge of a corporation. It is about the church. And within the true church comprised of real Christians there is a mindset that pursues truth, lays hold of truth and champions truth.

In this way a unity is achieved based upon, around and in truth that is actively agreed upon. Therefore, where there is a deviation from the truth there will be a division. The source of divisions is a factional spirit that in turn is finds its source in pride, which is the wicked root of the sin nature. A person driven by a factional spirit will take an element of truth and twist it even just slightly that will separate them from others and promote a following. We are told in Romans 16:17-18:

"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

The 'teaching you have learned' is the laying out of a body of truth in a coherent and cohesive fashion. "Naive people" are those who are wantonly ignorant of the truth; who do not love the pursuit of truth as they should. It is those who are on the periphery of the truth and the church who are prone to be deceived.

True Christians will always take a stand for the truth. If they see error creeping into their church they will take a stand against that error and expose it. If the church listens to them then they have been successful in maintaining unity, which is based in preserving truth and conversely shunning falsehood. If the church will not listen to them, then they must leave lest

they themselves succumb to heresy. Light and darkness cannot dwell together in unity. Where darkness has set in, the light will be shrouded and eventually extinguished. They will obey the instruction to “keep away” from those “who cause divisions”. When true Christians are placed in the position of having to obey this injunction and separate from their church, they invariably are accused by those who remain as the ones causing division! But it is not them who are causing division, because they have not deviated from the truth. They have not walked away from the truth, it is those who have been beguiled that have left the narrow path.

Ephesians 4:2-3

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

The laying out of truth is a progressive thing. When a person comes to Christ the truth is not immediately downloaded onto their minds. It takes time to be instructed in the truth and comprehend it. Those who teach the truth must be very humble and gentle, and not arrogant, dogmatic and harsh. They must be patient allowing new converts to take hold of the truth. This takes time and lessons learned in the course of life. Therefore, we must bear with others and be peace-makers as they find the truth.

New Christians must be sheltered and shepherded with great patience and endurance. They will face troubled circumstances, of course, if they do not love and obey the Word and the Spirit as they should. God will discipline those whom He loves. The wrongful choices they are making, allowing worldly influences to continue to dominate their lives, will have detrimental consequences – a person reaps what they sow. If their hearts are right with God, eventually they will free themselves and be united to Christ with an undivided heart. (False Christians, on the other hand, will continue to justify their sin and never find freedom. Their sinful deeds will bring judgement upon their heads on the day they stand before the throne of God.)

- *Romans 15:14-15*
*I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to **instruct** one another.*

- *Colossians 3:16*
*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you **teach and admonish** one another with all wisdom, and as you **sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs** with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Typically, church is an environment where members attend a meeting to be taught by a pastor. These verses, however, portray a very different environment. How is it possible that

we instruct, teach and admonish one another? And what becomes of the role of the pastor?

Ephesians 4:11-13 defines the role of the ministry:

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The fundamental role of the ministry is threefold: to train new believers for service, to expound the truth in such a way to them that they are able to understand it and retain it, and to bring them to spiritual maturity. Once believers have been prepared, once they have come to the truth and once they have reached spiritual maturity, they are in a position to be able to teach, instruct and admonish one another. It is that simple.

Ephesians 4:14-16 goes on to say:

"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

We are to teach, instruct and admonish one another with the truth, spoken in love. If the church is set up with one pulpit filled by one person who is always teaching the silent majority, this is a recipe for failure. This system will keep believers in spiritual infancy, they will never reach maturity. Believers must not be always hearing the truth from someone else. They must come to the truth, and from there be released to speak the truth to one another.

Therefore, church should be organised in such a way to accomplish this purpose. Pastors will still teach but with a different mindset. They will train with purpose and intent, to equip and release believers for the work of the ministry. An environment must be provided where believers can teach, instruct and admonish each other. One large congregational meeting is not going to achieve that result. Small groups that make that possible are an imperative, in which everyone participates and speaks. Also, in this environment we can also sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs *to one another*. This singing will also have the objective of teaching, instructing and admonishing one another with the truth: Ephesians 5:19 says "*Speak to one another* with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."

Again, the typical church has everyone singing at the same time i.e. with one another. This is not a moot point. Congregational singing has its place - not to the degree that it has become - but the verses here are portraying something different. Just as we speak to one another we should sing to one another. In this regard, often-time worship is portrayed as the singing that occurs at the beginning of a church service. Jesus defined worship in this way:

"...the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

John 4:23-24

When we speak or sing the truth to one another we are worshipping God. Romans 12:1 adds this insight to true worship:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship."

Worship is a lifestyle whereby we live every day in humble submission to God as we walk in love, abiding in the truth and relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

- *Romans 16:16*
*Greet one another with a **holy kiss**.*

Touching one another cements relationships. We all need non-sexual physical touch. If new-born babies are not held and cuddled their mortality rate rises significantly. If we are not touched affectionately by another person later in life our mortality rate again rises significantly. Touch reveals an attachment to another human being, like nothing else can. In our culture we normally only kiss another person on the cheek who is a close family member when we meet and depart; and then only the opposite sex. In keeping with cultural norms, therefore, close relationships amongst members of the church family are appropriately and powerfully cemented with a holy kiss - for the opposite sex - together with warm hand-shakes and shoulder hugs - for the same sex.

- *Ephesians 4:32*
*Be **kind and compassionate** to one another, **forgiving** each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*
- *Colossians 3:13-14*
*Bear with each other and **forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Loving families display kindness and compassion for one another. You can tell if a child is raised in such a home. They are emotionally healthy and well-balanced. The opposite sadly is also very apparent. In the same way, the church will only be healthy if its members are kind and compassionate to one another. We must look out for one another especially when a fellow Christian is needy or going through tough times. If you truly love someone you want to help them and protect them, and go out of your way to do nice things for them.

Forgiveness is a huge issue for the church. The reason that relationships break-down is because of offense. Conflict resolution is perhaps one of the most lacking of skills in our culture. Whenever you take offense because of something someone has said or done which has hurt you in some way, you automatically distance yourself from them. The number one reason people leave a church is because of offense. We have to fight to preserve our relationships with one another. It is true in families and it is true in the church. Forgiveness is essential. We must learn to look over casual offences: "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." (Proverbs 19:11) For a serious offence we must apply the Matthew 18 principle. Jesus mentioned the "church" on only two occasions and this is one of them. This matter is so important for the well-being of church life:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to

you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Matthew 18:15-17

We are talking about some serious offense - for example, theft, wilful insult, lying etc. - not something minor - for example, being late for an appointment, choice of clothes (although women in the church should dress modestly not provocatively), feeling overlooked and ignored, words said innocently that hurt etc. For the latter we should just learn to forgive and not take offense. For the former, we have to act but not in revenge nor are we to gossip! We must go to the person who has offended us first and confront them face-to-face in love. The objective is to bring them to repentance and restore relationship. If they do not receive you, then we need to bring in an independent third party (elders in the church) to help resolve the issue. The objective again is to restore relationship. However, if they are still hardened and unrepentant they are to be removed from the church. It is just so vital to protect the church from destructive forces.

Ephesians 5:3-7 advises:

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore *do not be partners with them.*"

We cannot be partners with false Christians. People who call themselves Christians but continue to act like they would and remain bound to sin, are to be brought to repentance or removed. It is first for their own salvation and, if they persist in resisting correction, then for the salvation of the church.

- *Ephesians 5:21*
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- *1 Peter 5:5*
Young men, in the same way be **submissive** to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

To submit to one another is to defer to each other's ideas, not imposing our own particular point of view or opinion upon another. It is finding the way forward upon common ground. It is a skill to co-operate with one another. It is something we learn to do. However, outside of Christ the sin nature dominates and our focus is upon ourselves. Life is all about me. We have to first submit to God and then with the new nature we can submit to one another. Ideally, if we came to Christ as children and we grew up in a loving God honouring environment we would have already acquired that skill. However, for many this is not the case and as adults we have to learn to humble ourselves, die to self and submit to one another, as we submit to God. When we submit to another person, we are taking their desires, needs and wants into consideration. We are thinking about them, not about ourselves.

Nonetheless, there are times when decisions have to be made in the life of the church which all may not understand or agree upon. This is where God's line of authority is essential. In these situations, it is then typically those who are older who take precedence. Again, they do not think only of themselves in such circumstances, but consider the best for all. Leaders in the church should not rule dictatorially and with an over-bearing attitude. They are leaders who serve rather than bosses who bark orders and others serve their wishes. Church is not a corporate structure with management at the top and workers at the bottom. Church is a to be a body made up of parts that cooperate with one

another, all being of one mind and striving for the same purpose, motivated and empowered by love for God and for each other.

Humility goes hand-in-hand with submission. Humility is the quality of lowering yourself and not asserting or promoting your own self, or of taking matters into your own hands. It is the exact opposite of pride. Moses was acknowledged as being the most humble person in the world. He only thought about others and, after God's call in the wilderness, always submitted himself to follow God's commands without qualification, questioning or hesitation (except once for which he was disciplined.) The Israelites on the other hand whom he led were always thinking about themselves (especially their stomachs), and they continually resisted God. Self-orientation is a great evil. It is a mark of Satan not of God. Within the church there should not be a hint of self-promotion (me first) or self-exaltation (look at what I have done) or self-determination (I'm going to do it and the way that I want to do it). Humility is fundamental in God's kingdom and it is a defining characteristic of true Christians.

- *1 Thessalonians 5:11*
*Therefore **encourage** one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

- *Hebrews 3:13-14, 24-25*
*But **encourage** one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness... And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage** one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Encouragement to the soul, is like air to the body. We all need encouragement. We all need building up to press forward to do the things we know we ought to do. We all need affirmation that the steps we are undertaking are the right steps. When we encourage one another we literally impart courage to do the things we find difficult or impossible to do on our own. Therefore, we need to spur one another to obey God in the things we sense He is calling us to do. The "love and good deeds" are obviously acts done with others in mind. In this way we help each other stay in God's will and protect each other from falling into sin's deceit and back into Satan's trap of serving only ourselves.

Encouragement is best received in an environment of people we know and trust. Encouragement is birthed out of intimate relationships, both in the giving and the receiving. We have to know each other's circumstances, challenges and opportunities, and each other's strengths and weaknesses. Note the injunction is to encourage one another "daily". Regular communication is essential for relationships. We

have to have time for one another and not be dominated by our own personal pursuits.

Encouragement is particularly important when we face persecution and opposition from the world, because of our Christian beliefs and practices. Like children at school who feel picked-on and laughed-at, who need to come home to a loving, affirming and empowering family. We need a loving church family to come back to, in order to gain strength to rise up again against our opposition. All discouragement comes from the devil. It sucks the life out of us. It causes us to be weak in our faith and give up. We should never give up. And it is so much easier when we have others supporting us and pressing forward with us. When we are discouraged we feel all alone. This should never happen inside a healthy, loving church environment.

James 4:11

*"Brothers, do not **slander** one another."*

When we slander someone we speak evil of them. We stand opposed to them and bring false accusations against them. Slander has its basis in bitterness and/or envy. It causes the break-down of relationships and divisions in the body of Christ.

Absalom slandered his father David when he accused him of not doing his job as king properly, and stole the hearts of the

people away from David by promising them that he would do a better job. He envied his own father's position and was bitter over his sister's rape. It caused division in the nation of Israel. David was forced to flee for his life, and eventually brother fought brother in order for David to be restored to the throne (2Samual 15-18).

The Pharisees slandered Jesus saying He was demon-possessed, and that He was performing miracles by the power of Satan (John 8:48). They envied the favour He had with the people. Like Jesus, true Christians will be opposed and slandered:

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

1 Peter 3:15-17

Slander has no basis in truth. Slander is a false accusation. (Slander has nothing to do with exposing false Christians and separating from them, which has its basis in truth and which we are biblically instructed to do – see above and below.)

- *Galatians 5:13*
*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, **serve** one another in love.*
- *1 Peter 4:9-10*
*Offer **hospitality** to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to **serve** others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

What are we to give our lives for? This is a huge question that very few seriously consider. Outside of Christ we automatically serve the passions of the sinful nature - the lusts of our flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We think we are living for ourselves but really we are slaves to sin. When we come to Christ we must cease serving ourselves and serve Him but how? It is not as if Christ Himself needs anything. We serve Him when we serve our fellow believers. This pursuit clearly can only happen in a defined community. It requires close communication and opportunity with one another.

Romans 12:4-8 contains a list of the various gifts to be employed within the life of the church:

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form

one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

Apart from serving one another in the life of the church, we all have the responsibility to actively evangelise and disciple others. This is what we are trained to do by apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. (They are 'gifts' to the body of Christ whose job is bring believers to maturity, and to equip believers for the

Once again, note the problem of a conventional church structure in this regard. A typical church meeting in which the ministry team speaks and others watch does not permit the operation of these gifts. Church is not to be like attending a football match where the vast majority watch and a few perform. Small groups that allow intimate relationships to be formed and active participation with one another are vital. We all should be part of a small team and understand our function, and happily serve one another.

propagation of the gospel and for making disciples.) The gifts we all express within the body of Christ as listed in Romans 12 come 'naturally' because we are endowed with them by God according to His grace. It is to His glory and a delight to Him when we function according to His design and pattern. It

is His choice that He has arranged us in this way. It is a purposeful structure just as we see design and co-operation throughout all of creation.

Our lives, therefore, should not be viewed in a career sense. We should not see ourselves as lawyers, nurses, accountants, sales persons, concreters, school teachers etc. etc. These are only our jobs that provide money to buy the necessities of life and to help others. When we enter heaven we will not remember the activity we engaged in to make money, nor how much money we made! We are to give our lives now in service to one another and not for mere financial gain. We are to engage in hospitality without grumbling. We should not view one another as an intrusion and distraction as we pursue our life's goals. We should be devoted to one another much more than our own jobs. We need to keep the role of making money in a right perspective. Jesus warned concerning the pursuit of wealth and said that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 12:15).

Consider what it was like before the industrial, scientific, technological and information revolutions. The vast majority of people down through the ages were tied to living off the land. All economies were agrarian based. We live now in a very unusual and exceptional age – only a very small fraction of people in the developed world, work in the agricultural industry. If you visit remaining agrarian based communities – such as some Pacific Islands – you will witness how most

people throughout history have lived out their lives, providing for all of their needs from the land. They have no vocations or careers. Therefore, we should not view our vocations as the reason for our existence, nor should we look to them for satisfaction. Job-satisfaction is a myth. Our life is Christ is the sum total of our existence and we are to give of ourselves in serving each other. If we have God, we have everything - period. My joy comes from knowing Him not in achieving a record sales month! And it should be my delight to serve my fellow Christians.

- *1 Peter 1:22-23*

*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, **love one another deeply**, from the heart.*

- *1 Peter 3:8*

*Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, **love as brothers**, be compassionate and humble.*

Love is the sum total. The express command of Jesus for us, His church, is to love one another (John 13:34-35). The "one another" discussions above explain the various elements and expressions of that love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is often read out during a marriage ceremony and is a very familiar passage of scripture, but think of it now within the context of the church:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." This is how we are to be to one another."

(I cannot think of a better place to live out my life here in this world, than in a community of brothers and sisters in Christ who genuinely love one another, deeply from the heart, and express their devotion and commitment to one another in acts of kindness, care and compassion. Can you?)

In 1 John agape love and hate are juxtaposed three times. Hate is the opposite of agape love. To hate someone is not just to have feelings of animosity towards them. We hate others when we live for ourselves, thinking only of ourselves and what we can get. For this reason, everyone of us hated others before we became believers in Christ. It is only when we are truly saved and have put to death the sin nature that we can genuinely agape love. Titus 3:3-5 explains:

"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and

pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, *being hated and hating one another*. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit..."

It is impossible to agape love others until God's agape love is poured into our hearts. Another proof that a person is a real Christian, therefore, is the expression of that agape love. In a church made up of real Christians we love and are loved - the opposite of what we experienced in the world. Note however that false Christians (or for that matter people who do not regard themselves as Christians but adopt a social conscience) can do acts of kindness and appear to be demonstrating the agape love of God, however, their motive is still a selfish one for they are trying to prove themselves by obedience to religious law which cannot save. They are still acting selfishly looking for what they can get out of their service to others. In reality, they are still hating others and, therefore, according to 1John they are liars, they are still in darkness, murder is in their heart and they do not know God. These are characteristics of the evil one and they remain his child. They are not a child of God though they might superficially appear to be because of sacrifices they make and their service to others.

People sacrifice themselves for religious purposes. That is the demand of every religion. All of the world's false religions -

Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism - proclaim the need for forms of abstinence and self-abasement but they are powerless to change the sinful heart of a person. They all define certain rules and regulations, and "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." (Colossians 2:22-23) Sensual indulgence is evidence of the sin nature, which can only be put to death through Christ. Without the death of self, i.e. the sin nature, we cannot know God nor love others. Without Christ even if a person pays the ultimate sacrifice with their very life out of religious duty, they will not see heaven.

False Christians may claim they are giving of themselves for 'the cause of Christ' and 'in the name of Christ', but they are liars. They still are filled with hatred because their sin nature has not been put to death. Therefore, do not put up on a pedestal those who gave of themselves in acts of mercy but did not have Christ, such as Mother Theresa.⁴⁰ Do not praise and want to emulate those who stood against oppressive regimes and paid the ultimate sacrifice but did not have

⁴⁰ See <http://www.scionofzion.com/teresa.htm> and <http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/007/pluralism-4-teresa.htm>

Christ, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer.⁴¹ They were acting out of religious duty, hoping to make themselves acceptable to God, by their own good works. It was all for personal vain glory.

Judging and separating from false Christians

The tests of 1John provide the criteria to judge whether a person who calls themselves a Christian is true or false. The power of post-modernism and its sweeping influence across the church has meant that most Christians are led to believe that we should all accept one another and therefore not judge one another. This is a great deception and has led to the corrupting of the church. Let's examine some key scriptures regarding judging others.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will

⁴¹See

http://www.fundamentalbaptistministries.com/archives2/DIETRICH_BONHOEFFER.htm

see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus is addressing the religious hypocrites. Hypocrites say one thing but do the opposite. When hypocrites judge, they judge by their own standards, condemning sin in others while condoning and justifying their own sin. Jesus spoke a lot about hypocrisy and false teaching. He continually warned His disciples to watch out for the yeast (i.e. false teaching) of the Pharisees: "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees ... Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:5-6, 12) In other words, Jesus was teaching them to become discerning and judge between that which was true and that which was false.

False teaching makes you blind to the truth. The Pharisees were unable to see the Truth, Who was standing right in front of them. False teaching makes you comfortable in your sin, thinking that you are justified and bound for heaven, when in fact you are on the road to hell. Jesus' instruction in Matthew 7: 1-5 is directed at those who are false, not to those who are true. The judgements of those who are false are misguided. They cannot know the truth and they cannot perceive their own hypocrisy. They are spiritually blind. He is warning such hypocrites that they in turn will be judged in a higher court, on the Day that they must bow and give an

account of their lives before Him! And He is exposing their sin to be even greater as a plank of wood is immensely larger than a speck of sawdust.

The Pharisees despised Jesus because He told the truth. They judged Him as being a wicked blasphemer. Likewise, those who were religious hated Paul and wanted to kill him. This pattern continues to the present. Those who call themselves Christians yet are false will despise true Christians. Anyone who lives for the truth will be hated by those who call themselves Christians and are not. Satan hates the truth and opposes it at every point. He is a liar and there is no truth in him. He is the father of lies, the source of all falsehoods. False Christians reveal their heart when they oppose the truth and are antagonistic towards real Christians. False Christians are children of the devil who hate the truth (though they would claim otherwise). False Christians will distance themselves from the truth and therefore will disassociate themselves from real Christians. They will speak against true Christians even using scriptures (inappropriately) in doing so.

This particular teaching of Jesus regarding hypocrites and judgement is echoed in Romans:

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"

Romans 2:1-4

Again, it is the religious hypocrites that Paul is addressing. He is pointing out to them their captivity to sin in order to show them first, their need to repent - for *the forgiveness of sin* - and secondly, the imperative for the new birth - *for the power to overcome sin*. He goes on to say (the new birth is called in the following passage the "circumcision of the heart"):

"Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you

rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

"Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."

Romans 2:17-29

Paul is showing those who brag about keeping the law which is a religious code of conduct, that they are hypocrites and liars. They look down upon others for breaking the law when they themselves do the same thing. The centre piece of the whole book of Romans is to demonstrate that it is impossible to fulfil the law because we are born sinners. We are bound

to sin and cannot escape its power, unless and until we are born of the Spirit. Once we are born again we are set free from the bondage of sin and now have the power not to sin, as we are led by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit and not according to the sin nature which is now dead.

Therefore, the warning not to judge is addressed to religious hypocrites. In contrast, true Christians correctly interpret the scriptures that specifically command us to judge.

First, we are commanded to personally judge ourselves: "*Examine yourselves* to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5) If Christ is indeed in you, you will walk as a child of God and you will be free from sin. The fruit of the Spirit will be evident and the works of the sin nature absent. Our own conscience will either acquit us or expose us.

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. *A man ought to examine himself* before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if *we judged ourselves*, we would not come under judgment. When we are

judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.”

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

When we do not fulfil the command of Jesus to love one another we come under the judgement of God. His blessing and hedge of protection is lifted from us, therefore, in the church people suffer illnesses and afflictions, and some die prematurely. In other words, Satan's attacks are unable to be repelled and he oppresses members of the church. This should not be so. If we recognised the body of the Lord, which is the church, and genuinely loved one another which was demonstrated even by the simple act of waiting for one another when we come together for a meal, God would pour out His blessing upon us, and His presence amongst us would be evident. We would live in divine health, and live out our days in vigour and in fullness. Satan would not be given any opportunity. We would fulfil God's desires for us and ministering His manifold grace in this world as we should, first to one another and then to others.

Secondly, we are commanded to judge amongst ourselves to determine those who are false and separate them out:

"I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must *not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother* but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you.""

“1 Corinthians 5:9-13

A person "who calls himself a brother" but remains a captive to sin is a false Christian. Make no two ways about it, we are to judge them and disassociate ourselves from them. Be careful though, this command comes with provisos.

Proviso No. 1 - We should extend grace to new converts as they grow to spiritual maturity. It takes time to be transformed into the image of Christ. Putting of the old nature (acts of sin) and putting on the new (acts of righteousness) requires a progressive change of mind. The lies that we had believed as unbelievers must be overturned with the truth. Our minds - our thoughts, beliefs, presuppositions and

assumptions - must be brought under subjection to Christ. We learn to overcome sin, Satan and world as we submit ourselves to God and His truth. It is a process rather than being immediate and automatic when we first are born again.

Proviso No. 2 - Every effort should be made to warn such a person before we shun them. Galatians 6:1 advises "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." We should therefore apply the Matthew 18 principle, not out of a harsh and judgemental spirit, but out of love and compassion with gentleness for the one caught in a sin. 1 John 5:16-17 adds this advice: "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death." A brother caught in a sin that does not lead to death, we should pray fervently for them, and we should warn them. What is the sin, however, that leads to death that we are cautioned by the apostle not to even pray for them, let alone warn them? In other words automatically shun them. Hebrews 6:4-8 sheds light on what is this "sin that leads to death":

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned."

Sin that leads to death is the rejection of the truth which was once accepted and believed. Christians can lose their salvation. They can despise their birthright as a son/daughter of God and return to their life of sin. John goes on immediately to say "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin..." (v18) A person who returns to their sin, having once repented, is like a dog that returns to its vomit. They have lost all hope. They show no remorse. They justify their sin and enjoy it. They love their sin more than they love God. They no longer regard the Bible to be truth that they frame their life upon. They look to

other sources of human philosophy to understand their existence and eternity. They are no longer a child of God and without opportunity to once again receive grace. They walk as one who is eternally condemned. They are dead in their sin without remedy.

1 Corinthians 5:1-6 helps us understand the purpose and hopeful result of the last recourse of disassociation from a Christian brother/sister who is trapped in sinful living (yet who has not rejected the Bible as truth):

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

"Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?"

It is to their benefit that they stand apart from the blessing of the church. To leave such a person within the body is detrimental to them because they will live under a false sense of security. They appear to be in the 'body of Christ' when in fact they are not. It is also detrimental to the church. Any compromise with sin is disastrous. It is like yeast that works through the whole batch of dough. It is like poison that is carried by the blood stream to all the parts of the body, making it weak, sickly and ineffective. God cannot dwell where there is sin. We must hate all sin if we truly are to love God with all of our hearts.

There is a common saying which no doubt you have heard "We should hate the sin but love the sinner". The two elements of the statement are true, however, how it is often explained and understood is wrong. It is typically interpreted to mean we can't judge one another and that we should accept one another regardless of our sinfulness. This is an improper interpretation. According to what we have just examined, if we love the sinner we will judge them and put them out of the church, in certain circumstances.

Thirdly, we are commanded to watch out for false teachers/prophets and to test those who teach from the pulpit. We are to judge for ourselves those who stand in

leadership so that we will guard ourselves from evil men, from Satan's schemes and from deception. There are numerous scriptures that warn us and give us keys to recognise false teachers/prophets. Much of the New Testament was written to correct error that had entered the churches through the agency of false prophets/teachers and to instruct true believers to reject these workers of iniquity.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."

Matthew 7:15-20

A false prophet/teacher will at first be difficult to distinguish because outwardly they will appear to be God's servant. They will emerge amongst the flock and look as if they are godly. They will appear to say the right things and speak God's word, and they will appear to exhibit spiritual gifts and be anointed of God. They will gain acceptance and people will listen to them and follow them. However, the wickedness that resides within them will not be hidden indefinitely. Jesus explains here one of the keys that identifies a false

prophet/teacher. Very simply, a tree is known by its fruit. Eventually 'fruit' will appear that will reveal to us that they are false. Their 'fruit' is the result of their teaching upon their own lives personally and upon those who listen to them. If they remain in bondage to sin and their teaching permits those who listen to them to do the same, then we can only come to the conclusion that they are a false teacher. We are to judge, therefore, whether a prophet/teacher is true or false. We are to examine their personal lives and consider the outcome of the lives of those who have listened to them.

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"

Acts 20:29-31

A false teacher/prophet will twist the scriptures in a subtle and devious way. This will distinguish them apart from others and people will follow after them. Their objective is to build a church around themselves. The very successful ones will have very large numbers. They will be charismatic leaders who say things that people like to hear.

The methods by which they twist the scriptures are various including misquoting, taking out of context or elevating some scripture above all other scripture (for example, the "words of Jesus" are declared to be more important than anything

else written in the Bible. It is a great evil that many Bibles now have the words of Jesus displayed in red. Jesus wrote the whole of the Bible!) Naive people who do not know the scriptures will be led astray by them. They will take a multitude of people along the broad way to destruction with them.

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

Galatians 1:6-9

The Book of Galatians was specifically directed at false teachers who promoted religious duty. They were instructing the Galatian church that to be really saved a person had to practice circumcision. It placed people once again under the law, by which they were incapable of escaping sin. Jude and Peter addressed the other form of apostasy, the license to remain sinners - see below.

The gospel of false teachers/prophets is really no gospel at all. It doesn't free people from their sins but keeps them enslaved. The gospel they preach will either promote religious duty or grant license to sin. It is a perversion of the truth. It will mix scripture with falsehoods. Nevertheless, it will have a veneer of appeal and (naive and ignorant) people will be attracted to it. We are to strongly hate their vile and wicked work. We should publicly expose the error of their 'gospel', as they have publicly taught it, and denounce it. (The Matthew 18 principle does not apply here. It is not a personal offence but rather a corruption of truth and an offence against the gospel.) The apostle's eternal condemnation stands as testimony against them personally:

"For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord...

"Woe to them! ... These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm — shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted — twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

"These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage... These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit."

Jude 4, 11-13, 16, 19

Jude deals with false teachers who "change the grace of God into a license for immorality". They teach that God loves everybody and accepts people regardless of who they are or what they do. They teach that God wants everybody to be prosperous and successful in life. They teach a gospel of universalism that everybody will go to heaven. Their lies cause division because those who are unaware of the wickedness, and who are attracted to their teaching, will follow after them. Whereas those who see through them will remain firmly committed to the truth. Though these teachers act and sound spiritual, they do not have the Spirit. They will be powerless and the genuine fruit and gifts of the Spirit will be absent. They will adopt worldly principles and ideas as the scriptures become insufficient. Again we are to pronounce judgement upon them - "Woe to them!"

"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on

themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

...(they) follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority....They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood!

These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of

the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

2 Peter 2: 1-3, 10, 12-14, 17-22

False teachers have always been in the church, right from its inception until now. Apostasy is an ever present threat which demands constant and abiding vigilance. This is not fault-finding, which false Christians accuse real Christians of doing. The truth will always be opposed from within and without the church. The former is more dangerous because it is more subtle and devious. As is described in this passage "they secretly introduce destructive heresies".

Peter again points out a key characteristic of the same false teachers that Jude addressed - they never stop sinning and they openly allow their hearers to gratify the lustful desires of sinful human nature. (In contrast, whilst the legalistic false teachers also never stop sinning, they demand religious observances rather than offering freedom.) Two particular sins are targeted, greed and sexual sin. We should not entertain leaders who demonstrate these sins. A leader who

has committed adultery should not be permitted to return to the pulpit, as so often is the case today. We should avoid churches that predominately promote prosperity teaching, where the churches finances are not transparent and the leader displays and boasts in his/her wealth.

Again they stand adjudged - "an accursed brood!". We must agree and side with the judgements of God. We must stand up and actively resist false teachers, exposing them and their apostasy. This is a very important part of living for God and His truth. Something we cannot turn a blind eye to or ignore. It is never easy but very necessary. Jesus went around doing good - preaching and teaching the truth, healing and setting people free from demonic powers etc - and he also confronted the religious hypocrites of his day who were leading people astray. We should do likewise. While Jesus trained His disciples in kingdom principles and kingdom living, He also publically demonstrated his judgement upon false prophets/teachers, and he often privately warned His disciples to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. This is something we too should follow.

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the

spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

1 John 4:1-3

"I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false."

Revelation 2:2-3

We are to test those who stand in leadership by examining what they teach. If you test someone you judge them by a set of criteria. As explained above, we must watch out for the red-flags of scriptural error i.e. the subtle twisting and distorting of truth. And we must examine their personal conduct and the effects of their teaching.

In his second John also addressed another group of false teachers who are known as Gnostics:

"Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or

welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work."

2 John 7-11

Gnosticism promotes the idea that there is secret knowledge that is hidden from view, and that only a select few will find. They believed that the material world was inferior and separate from the spiritual world. Salvation was found in freeing oneself from the material world and discovering the secret keys to the spiritual world. In the Gnostic worldview it was impossible for Jesus to be both 100% God and 100% man. The material and the spiritual were entirely separate entities and God who is spirit would never take upon himself flesh which was base matter. These false teachers, therefore, particularly targeted the "teaching of Christ" i.e. they did not "acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh". In other words, they opposed who Jesus truly was and consequently what He was sent to accomplish. Although Gnosticism is a historical movement, some current false teachers – in the Emerging Church movement - in like fashion destroy the uniqueness of Jesus declaring us all to be divine (if we could only recognise it) and they denigrate the cross, denying the substitutory sacrifice of Christ and His work of atonement.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13

This book has taken up the same objective that the Apostle John set out to achieve in writing his first letter, to explain the identifying marks, the pattern, of a true Christian. This criteria provides the assurance that we have received eternal life i.e.

- we have been truly born again
- we have the truth about salvation
- we know the real Jesus
- we have received the right Spirit, and
- when we die we will be present with the Lord.

However, we just cannot assume that because we responded to an altar call and we regularly attend a church that we have received eternal life and that accordingly we meet this criteria:

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?"

And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test."

2 Corinthians 13:5-7

Do you meet the criteria of being a real Christian? Do you pass the test?

1. Have you genuinely repented,
2. do you know and love the truth,
3. are you free from all sin,
4. do you walk before God in humble obedience and
5. do you genuinely love your fellow believers in Christ and lay your life down for them?

Examine yourself before the searching eyes of God. If you pass the test, rejoice in what God has done for you and in you! If not, then you stand this moment at a fork in the road. One way is marked obedience and faith. The other is marked rebellion and unbelief. Walk into obedience and faith now and take hold of the promise which is available for those who believe. Repent and receive the real Jesus. Receive eternal life. Exercise the right to become a child of God. Throw off the sin that so easily entangles. Love God and choose to hate sin. Do not hesitate a moment longer, for the person who hesitates is lost.

Final Warning

Every generation of Christians has to fight to preserve the truth of authentic Christianity. There has and will always be false teachers, false prophets and false apostles who will dress up deception with Christian garb. In the present generation, falsehood abounds and the test of authenticity is paramount.

Paul spoke disparagingly about “super-apostles” and their wicked work, and he lamented that the Corinthian church willingly accepted them and believed them:

“For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.”

2 Corinthians 11:4

He declared “... such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (v13) and yet the Corinthians were oblivious to their wicked work.

Is it possible there are “super-apostles” in the church today going undetected by many? Is it possible they are secretly introducing destructive heresies that beguile many and lead them away from the narrow way? Don’t you want to be sure that you yourself are not being led astray to embrace

another gospel, to receive another 'Jesus' and to be led by another spirit?

All the apostles – Paul, John, Peter and Jude – wrote letters prompted to respond to the work of false teachers, false prophets and false apostles.

A tsunami of false teaching is sweeping over the church in this current time. Many are caught up in its strong current. The influence of post-modernism has entered the church with force. No longer is it accepted that we can know God through truth. No longer is the gospel of repentance from sin preached. Now it is a gospel of acceptance through (false) grace. Hand in hand with this false gospel is a false spirit. That spirit is accessed through mysticism. Practices are being taught – contemplative prayer, lectio divina, 'Christian' meditation - which produce an altered state of consciousness. In that state the demonic realm is experienced. This occultic practice was a defining characteristic of all pagan religions throughout history but never in authentic Christianity. The message heard from the spirit in that realm points to pantheism, that God is already present in everyone. It nullifies the need for the new birth and destroys the work of the cross. No longer is it necessary to receive Christ, because 'Christ' is already in everyone.

If you are in a church which accepts and promotes this teaching then you cannot remain silent. You must warn others. If they listen to you, you have rescued them from the

path to destruction. If they won't listen to you, save yourself and leave. Compromise is a slippery slope. Find a church that resists the present apostasy and remains committed to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.”

Philippians 3:17-20

APPENDIX

LIST OF AUTHORS PROMOTING CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER (THE CORE PRACTICE IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION/DISCIPLINES AND THE EMERGING CHURCH)

Historic

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Brother Lawrence (1611- 1691)

Eckhart, Meister (1260-1327)

Fox, George (1624-1691)

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

Julian of Norwich (1342-1423)

Law, William (1686-1761)

Madam Guyon (1647-1717)

Rolle, Richard (c. 1300-1341)

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591)

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

The Cloud of Unknowing (anonymous monk)

Present-day

Babbs, Liz

Barton, Ruth Haley

Bell, Rob

Blanchard, Ken

Boa, Kenneth

Borg, Marcus

Boyd, Gregory

Burke, Spencer

Burns, Jim

Campolo, Tony

Collins, Jill

Crabb, Larry

Erre, Mike

Ford, Leighton

Foster, Richard

Fox, Matthew

Gire, Ken

Greig, Pete

Griffin, Emilie

Hirsch, Alan

Hybels, Bill

Johnson, Jan

Jones, Alan

Jones, Tony
Jones, Laurie Beth
Keller, Timothy
Kimball, Dan
Lucado, Max
MacDonald, George
Manning, Brennan (1934-2013)
McCracken, Brett
McLaren, Brian
McManus, Erwin
Merton, Thomas (1915-1968)
Miller, Don
Monk Kidd, Sue
Moore, Beth
Mooreland, J.P.
Nouwen, Henri
Pagitt, Doug
Rhodes, Tricia
Robbins, Maggie and Duffy
Rohr, Richard
Scazzero, Pete
Schuller, Robert (1926 – 2015)

Sweet, Leonard

Talbot, John Michael

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre (1881- 1955)

Thomas, Gary

Underhill, Evelyn (1875-1941)

Viola, Frank

Warren, Rick

Webber, Robert

Wilber, Ken

Willard, Dallas

Winner, Lauren

Yaconelli, Mark

Young, William Paul