

THE GOSPEL WITHOUT RELIGION

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Experiencing and Living the Gift of God

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You can find links to several video commentaries on essentials of the faith at <http://www.youtube.com/user/cornetcharlie> These are not sermons (a religious term). I regard them as one person sharing in a manner which is casual and personal.

The purpose for this book

I have discovered that the part of the Christian faith that most people find unappealing, pertains to its expression as an institutional organism. If someone is considering 'going to church' he or she might think, how can it really benefit me or make a difference in my perplexing and pressure-filled world that I live in? Nothing seems to mark church attenders as different from the rest of the world except possibly the fact that they are more out of line with modern thought or more judgmental to a large part of society. Don't Christians, after all, believe in an unkind God who evidently doesn't mind smiting and wiping out entire populations? And what about that Bible? Isn't it obsolete, outdated and filled with superstitious fables? - - *We do not worship the book. We worship the Word of Truth that is expressed within its pages. We do not suffer a consequence for marking or damaging this book. We suffer a consequence if we fail to receive the promises and admonitions imparted from its pages.*

My answer to all of this is that the faith that has stood for nearly two thousand years does not have to be dead or cold. It does not

have to be legalistic or formalistic. There is a vitality to this faith given to the original believers in the days of the apostles.

Christianity was never meant to be 'religious' or complicated but men have turned it into such over the years. Too many Christians have never really experienced the gospel and the true Christian life that comes to us as a series of supernatural Spiritual gifts.

The indispensable, supernatural component of Christianity seems to be all but missing today. If there is any one revelation to impart to you as readers is that Christianity is entirely that. It is a supernatural God-thing throughout. The first supernatural element is the experience of *salvation*. Jesus, *Yeshua the Messiah* was born to be the Savior of humankind.

Therefore when we see those signs along the highway that shout at you, "Jesus Saves," you have a choice of reactions, being offended or receiving the message as a fact. Accepting or rejecting this message will place the reader in one of two camps. It all boils down to two. Those who are being called to the experience of redemption and those who have not yet been called.

God does not operate as the world as he is outside of the world in wisdom and operation. His manner of working is more subtle and more hidden. Yes, God does hide himself but he rewards those who are willing ask, seek and pursue His gift in faith.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Did You Know that human beings in their natural state are not

interested in God. They are really not interested in learning about deeper spiritual matters. It is not part of our natures that we are inclined to live in Godly ways or to seek after Him!

HOW DOES ANYONE BEGIN TO DRAW CLOSE TO THE ALMIGHTY, HOLY, GOD OF HEAVEN?

HOW CAN SOME DARE SAY THAT WE CAN PERSONALLY KNOW HIM AND HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM?

What do you think it means to be a Christian? How does Christianity differ from other religious beliefs and worship practices? Are you a Christian? What is the basis for making this claim?

Perhaps you are among those who has rejected Christianity because you have concluded that the forms and rituals of the institutional church empty or uninspiring. Have you searched for proof that God is real? Where will that search take you? What will be the end of all of this? What will be the ultimate destiny of your soul? To what extent do you feel that religion impacts eternity for you?

Anyone who has ever entered a book store knows that there are thousands of books written to address the questions above. Hundreds more are produced and sold each year adding to the already glutted archive called RELIGION. The motivations of such writers, will likely focus upon an insight into traditional doctrines, sharing a new precept or insight that may have arisen through study or self discovery.

I believe that what I share here will echo other voices who are beginning to view the "spiritual life" as something that can and should exist and flourish in an unformalistic way **outside of religion**. But, make no mistake, I am one who became a Christian

through the grace and power of God, and my testimony is to affirm my belief in Christ the Messiah and the infallibility of the Word which attested to his coming the first time and the promise of his coming again to fulfill every prophecy spoken and recorded in scripture. I became a lover of the Word of God only by God's leading and calling.

But there is a history here to my discoveries. I have been led to faith and believing through a process. Life's experience brought me to place and time of decision and reaching out for the mercies of God. Prior to this time my life was that of a nominal believer. I was a life-long participant in traditional, and **institutional** Christianity.

**In The Gospel Without Religion,
I will examine some of the topics below:**

Varieties of doctrines and expressions of Christianity

The Search For God

Understanding the Gospel of Christ

Redefining: How does someone become a Christian?

The true church has no physical address

The nature of fellowship in Christ the Messiah

Understanding the doctrine of the Messiah

The Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God

Features of the True Gospel?

First, may I say that I do not wish to overly discredit traditional forms of Christianity throughout the history of the USA. Even with its defects or deficiencies it has sustained the foundations and moral backbone of a this blessed and great nation. For generations the values system of Christian teachings and beliefs have provided

a positive moral framework and influence to the world. It is apparent that *Christianity as Religion*, even despite its detriments, has provided the goodness and righteous moral foundation to millions for generations.

Children are blessed to be nurtured in a home where the Bible is taught and modeled. A Bible believing home is a model for a righteous society that teaches love of truth and personal accountability before God.

Unfortunately, we have seen the fundamental Bible-based foundations of Christian values rapidly being thwarted as this nation speeds toward secularism. Today, Truth is a matter that no one seems willing to pin down to anything absolute. The media for some reason has chosen to discard the morality of past generations. Tolerance is the new benchmark of compassion through acceptance. Christianity it would appear by today's enlightened spokespersons is the impediment to social compassion and enlightenment.

With the passing years, fewer affirm, "I am a Christian believer." I believe that too few even understand what that means.

Church houses are losing membership and seek new strategies to attract congregants. In so doing, churches tend to move further from the essentials of the Gospel preparing what is called a "seeker friendly environment."

Knowledge *about God* cannot replace knowing God. *Those who know God may testify that they've personally tasted of the Grace and goodness of God through Jesus Christ the Messiah. (John 7:29 - I know him, I am from Him, He sent me.)* Those He calls are

qualified to make this statement.

Today, tens of millions of nominal Christians might be called faithful church goers, but how many are really passionately interested in God. We see too little evidence that their lives are different from the secular-unbelieving masses. The fact that few understand is that no one turns to seek God unless God personally draws him/her by His Spirit. (*John 6:44* -

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.)

There are so many wonderful stories of so many who were converted dramatically. Each has an amazing testimony. Though they are all unique one thing is common to all; they were once blind but now they see; they were lost but now they are found; they had a self focused life which was filled with fears and doubts but now they are confident and have found the peace of God that passes understand.

I found God or should I say God allowed me to find Him - at a time in my life when I was experiencing a spiritual emptiness, great anxiety, a desperate need. It seems that is at such times that we make our first **serious** effort to seek God, to ask, and to knock, to call out in desperation! The quickening of this inner desire to know God may well be the result of another believer's prayers on our behalf.

The Grace of God is set in motion by these prayers. It is this Divine Grace (an enabling gift) from God which brings us to a new human state of *awakening*. It only takes a moment for God to answer our heart's cry and bring us from darkness into light; but, in my case, it took years to prepare my soul to be ready for this to occur. Pride

and idolatry have many forms that first need to be addressed. As the parable of the prodigal son expressed it, he finally came to the end of himself.

God's Love for Humanity

God has always loved us. John 3:16 is often used to prove God's love toward us: *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, That whoever believes in Him should not die but have afterlasting life.”* Yet, not all will acknowledge and receive this redeeming love. (They are left with the consequences of this decision, (John 3:18 *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

The Messiah Jesus is love personified. He loves us all. He grieves humanity's darkened understanding and human weakness. The Lord God has made a way of rectifying this fallen and benighted state. The way is through Jesus the Messiah who died for the sins of all. When Yeshua Jesus rose from the tomb power was granted that whoever would come to him, he would not cast out.

Since this grace has been applied for all, It is God who provides the necessary '*measure of faith*' to help those who seek to come to him find the answer to their spiritual hunger. This measure of faith is what draws us to him and gives us the power to believe. A supernatural transformation is available once someone believes in the Gift of God with assurance. If you believe in the Yeshua (The Hebrew name of Jesus meaning Jehovah is Salvation,) God's Son will open your eyes. He will speak to you. It is through him and him only that you will partake in the wonders of the world to come. But even in the here and now we are given a down payment of the great things to come. We receive the promises of experiencing a

new life and a new nature with new potentials all provided by the Grace (free gift of God.)

We experience that supernatural event, the miraculous change in our spirits called regeneration into "the new man, the regenerated spirit, or *the new creation*. So re-quickened by Almighty God, we are inwardly compelled to grow in the knowledge of this life giver and lover of our souls. We seize the life ring thrown to us. This is the beginning of the Spiritual life. We have opened the door of the *Kingdom of heaven* and begin gradually discovering our status as a Son or Daughter of God.

From this supernatural beginning we new believers, are as tender saplings and can be bent many ways: Since we have so little understanding of the **Word of God**, we can be easily be taken prisoner by those who preach other gospels. We can be snared by an incomplete "Gospel." There are in fact other gospels. The true gospel has its defined parameters. It must have the right Jesus, the right Gospel and the right Spirit. All of these criteria must be in place or we have a false teacher or a false gospel.

As we follow the spirit of Christ there is a spirit of liberty. We are not driven or compelled to suffer burdens as some religions would impose upon us. The spirit of gentleness and meekness is shown in those who are mature. Love and kindness are the hallmark of Christian fellowship. Holiness and purity such as is not seen in the world sets Christians apart from others who are outside of Christ.

The Word of Truth can be found through proper mentors who have spiritual experience and knowledge. The best of these are those who wrote to the first believers at the time the Gospel was first being taught and demonstrated. Mentors available today can be found not only in churches but in the media and online through

internet ministries as well.

Those who are 'young' in the faith would be cautioned to test the spirits and to see if they resemble Jesus the Messiah. Though he came into the world was not in any way like the world. The love of Jesus was not like the world. The wisdom of Jesus was not like the world. Self acclaim and lust of the eyes, pride of life, or lust of the flesh could not be found in him. He did not judge by outward appearance but by knowledge of that which was inside human beings.

For those who come to the Savior, there is a whole new spiritual world OF LIFE to discover. There is a life of blessing and hope to access. For savior he is, for such was his purpose, to be savior of humankind. (His name was given to his parents by angels who declared they should call his name Yeshua (Yehovah is salvation.)

The true Gospel hasn't changed. This gospel, however, has been dangerously distorted or in some cases nearly lost to speculative theology or religious tradition. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God remains that which was first taught to the disciples by Jesus Christ. I will attempt to restate it to you in simplicity. I consider that simplicity will make accessing the Christian life easier.

Although there are unlimited mysteries and depths to apprehend we will allow God to reveal those to us in his own time. I believe that historically 'religion' has made believing in Christ into matters of theology and formalism. Such things need not be so. Paul told the believers in the church at Corinth that he was going to avoid oratory or even theology and merely preach Christ crucified and risen and proclaim the gospel as the power of God to totally alter a human life.

The teachings I share on these pages might appear didactic,

meaning that they are presented as factual. My precepts and understandings are the result of my own study of the Bible and Spiritual experience as a believer. I have of course heard countless excellent teachers such as Derek Prince, who brought forth important insights into God's word. One must always compare what is taught with your own study to verify whether it be supported by the Bible. It is not wise to merely parrot another person's teaching, even when these authorities have lofty credentials or reputations. Precepts and understanding come from serious study of scripture and experiences that *bear witness* to the realities of Christ and His "Kingdom." Study of Scripture illuminates the believer as the Holy Spirit brings light and understanding. The "amen" of God occurs when our spirits bare witness to His Spirit.

I have made every effort that the precepts and understandings in this writing reflect the truths revealed by the apostles and prophets of Israel who proclaimed the True and Living Way. These writings may be regarded as simply another contemporary 'witness.'

Theological commentaries abound. Yet each of these is subject to error and will reflect some kind of limitation in the writer's knowledge of the truth. Bible scholarship delves deeply into history, geography and sociology and at times can miss the spiritual nature of the original text. You can trust the veracity of the Bible. The Lamb of God purchased our liberty by his own blood and delivered us from the wrath to come.

Do not confuse church life with life in the kingdom of God. This is where the demarcation exists between being a saint called into the kingdom and merely being a part of another worldly institution. Our faith must align to "the faith first delivered to the saints" - - the faith for which we must contend. (Jude 3) *Who do men say that Jesus is but more importantly, Who do you say that Jesus is?*

Matt.16:13

Worldly Viewpoints

Today, modern societies have grown to reject a world of facts in favor of a cornucopia of opinions. Black and white facts are rejected in favor of a blend of nuanced points of view. The Gospel however, is born out by first hand experience but more importantly the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah is verified by reliable witnesses. These witnesses are the holy and long standing apostolic voices of the Christian faith, recorded in Scripture. These Biblical witnesses are a more sure testimony and become the litmus test of any doctrine or experience that anyone might promote.

Most professing believers have some insights into the truth of God. However too few are taught that they can and must themselves grow and mature to be witnesses of the resurrected Jesus and his working through them. Millions attending churches are victims of religious paradigms that have guided our thinking over the past 17 centuries. Christian theology today increasingly repudiates apostolic doctrine. Apostasy is a very real threat among Christians today.

The “religious paradigm” is now being challenged by many seekers who seek to return to a the form of spiritual fellowship, participation and liberty practiced in the first church. Traditional religion has been led by a clergy class and the church members function as observers and support of the church. Most of us would prefer formalism be replaced by the living presence of God. Simply being a spectator in a church service (program) is being replaced by the desire to participate directly as a disciple following the Spirit of God.

Any change in the status-quo will be challenged by *experts*, theologians and academicians. The institutions of leadership who train men and women that make their livings from religious ministry. People respond vehemently to any message that assails their religious paradigm or status as leader or overseer. Here is a profound Gospel fact, shared by the apostle called Paul in his first letter to Corinth, "Man through knowledge cannot know God." But the Spirit of God can turn ordinary people into instruments of His Glory!

Awakening Faith and Belief

Is God an interesting subject? Yes, Infinitely. Do questions about the reality of God affect us or impact our lives? Yes, absolutely and eternally! Is the subject one that we should resolve within ourselves? Yes, absolutely! Religion abounds in the societies of the world. It is inextricable in the cultures of every nation. It is a full time concern to many who see religion as a life style or a career path. My definition of

Religion is a codified belief system. It is the platform from which debates and disagreements launch with the result too often being from vehement disagreement to genocide.

Thousands of books continue to be written about God in an attempt to offer spiritual answers to those who are seeking a spiritual life. Subjects might range from World Religions, Comparative Theology, Biblical Study or Analysis, and of course prescribed pathways to enlightenment by self promoting gurus. This is not a book about theology. I am not a theologian, I have

none of the required credentials, nor do I have any desire to become one, to seek certification or to be validated or approved by theologians. I am, therefore, one tiny voice in the marketplace of ideas.. another voice, crying out in the wilderness, So now I give thanks to God the Father for allowing me to experience His living presence and guiding hand. This is a testimony of God's interaction with the human race we call '**grace.**' Moreover, his love and grace have empowered me both to **seek** him and to **know him** and draw wisdom from His Word. Moreover, I believe that this message can encourage and aid those thousands who, like myself, were never given answers to deep spiritual questions but who remain hungry, asking, "Is there is a God, and if He is, how can I get Him to notice me."

Reared in Dead Religious Tradition

My questions and curiosity about spiritual matters was not answered in the denominational churches that I attended from my youth to adulthood. The services and ceremonies I experienced during those years is the same that I see on every church meeting day today. From my place in the wooden pew, I heard little offered from the pulpit on those meeting days that revealed God's reality nor demonstrated his 'presumed' love and power.

The day came however, that I was to meet this hidden and secretive God in a personal and dramatic encounter, that would forever impact my life. The eternal, supernatural God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, would draw me to the knowledge of the Savior and the Son of the highest. This encounter was not the result of an altar call or the follow up of a dramatic sermon, but it was an encounter **outside of religion**. I hope sharing these experiences will bring hope and assurance to others who want to believe.

Receiving this message

I don't know how you will respond, whether with indifference or interest. Some who are perfectly happy with their beliefs may register mere disinterest, indifference; Others who have already established their own theological conclusions, particularly through formal theological training, may register disdain believing that my assertions are un-scholarly, presumptuous, misleading or even dangerous. Yet there may be some who have been looking for a spiritual life without the flimflam of religion who will receive this account with gratitude.

The Gospel (*good news*) has always been gentle and peaceable, it none the less, has always been met with resistance even "offense." It appears that a simple gift is too often rejected even when wrapped in the promise of hope, love, peace and comfort. Religion is very likely the reason for this message to be discounted or rejected.

Opposing belief systems do not give up without a fight. Our highly charged human egos are born and nurtured within the domain of materialism, worldliness, and self-absorption. Religious institutions today, are deeply imbued with values derived from **worldliness**, worldly power, worldly recognition, and earthly reward. The world's religious systems have their own vested interests. To be blunt, religion as we know it represents a significant economic and political power.

This book is written principally for **unbelievers**. Unbelief is still rampant in one form or another. There is unbelief among churchgoers to the extent that they remain blinded by orthodoxy. Unbelief is the enemy of God's people as much as for the unchurched 'unbelievers.' The adversary sows unbelief. He

continues to plant the idea in our minds, "Did God really say...?" Faith struggles against the foe of unbelief. For church house Christians, both laity and clergy it is a terrible thing to know only religion and not God! The Lord declares, "*Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord -, but I will say, "Depart from me I do not know you."*" Matt. 25.

Among all the billions of people upon the face of the earth, it is ultimately a matter of knowing God. Scripture teaches that everyone will eventually be confronted by this reality as every knee will bow before Him, the Lord of all life. But for millions this knowledge will come too late and the door of life will have been closed. There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God.

Confusing Disparities of Christian Religion

The world of religion, What a world! Almost everyone is in their own place regarding a search for a personal belief system. How would we graph our place as a believer or an unbeliever? Do you know what you believe? Do you know why you hold these beliefs? Some have a belief in a **God** of some description, others may not. Some pray, some believe in an afterlife, while others have no faith in any God nor any life following this one. There are so many religions inside and outside of Christianity. There are so many named Gods and paths to appeasing them. Within these myriad forms of belief or worship some have developed a set of moral values in accord with these beliefs. Indeed many of these values promote peace and brotherhood toward the greater community. Meanwhile, other religious beliefs may generate hatred and intolerance toward those outside of that faith. Now some religions compel its followers to convert the world to their viewpoint and to, in a word, cause the whole world to believe according to that

religion.

Religion may be an intellectual study for some, a career indoctrination for others. From an anthropologist's point of view, religion simply revolves around the belief in "spirits" as defined by Margaret Mead. Religions lead to wars and conflict. The crusades were a demonstration of **wrong Christian beliefs**. Inhumanities were executed by a form of religion and not in conformity to the Gospel of Christ. The crusades and the inquisition were chapters in Catholicism that further demonstrated an abuse of power that is presumed when the *rule of God* on earth is already manifest in a *political church* on earth.

Christianity in the age of grace presents a message of love, acceptance and forgiveness. **There is never violence or reprisal taught or allowed in the practice of Christianity.** Believers in Christ would not practice judgment against unbelievers but we believe that ultimately God only will exercise judgment. Historically when this has occurred religious authorities were not in conformity to Bible teaching. **In the Gospel of Grace**, there is an invitation to come freely and receive. We partake in the power of Jesus' love, and forgiveness. There is no sword to convert the unbeliever, but rather the demonstration of the supernatural power of God motivated by Love. It is this power that converts the heart and persuades each that there is a loving God in heaven. This is the loving Father who desires that no one dies under condemnation. "God so loved the world - - ," John 3:16 is the often quoted basic text.

**Discernment is to reveal those who you can pray for.
Condemnation never comes from the hand of a believer who is commanded to walk in the same love and forgiveness that Jesus modeled to all.**

There is still great ignorance and confusion about Christianity. Christianity is something that has come to be viewed within the limiting frame of institutional religion not its true spiritual aspect which is both simple and profound. The world knows Christianity as a system of belief but more than that as traditions and lifestyles which surround particular churches. America was founded as a Christian nation as our founding fathers made clear testimony. The United States has a history of goodness founded on the belief in, and standards of, Biblical truth. But at the present time, if the truth were known, I believe that we would have far fewer who would qualify as Christians than census documentation reveals. Those who are called Christians in polls and surveys most often reflect an involvement with church organizations through membership and activities. This, I assert, is quite irrelevant to the nature of being or not being a Christian. Among those who profess to believe in Christianity I denote three distinct breeds:

**Christian as a Label;
Different Kinds of Christians**

Political Christians: This category designates to distinguish them from other ethnic or cultural sects. We see these referred to frequently in the media to designate the sects within countries or political regions. Most of the time these are contrasted with contrary ideologies; often at war, or embroiled in strife with other groups. Typical of political religious rivalry is that of the current 1990s conflict in the former Yugoslavia, dated back to the factional disputes of the 15th century. Here were three ethnic factions, Muslims, Serbs and Croats, religious- political groups seemingly without true knowledge of a spiritual life that brings peace. In Ireland divisions remain after generations of religious and political strife, Irish Catholics in hatred and strife continue to war against

Irish Protestants and Protestants against Catholics. In the decade prior to World War 2, so-called German Christians began to commit outrages against German Jews in the name of racial purity. A practice that was totally UN-Christian spirit. In Earlier in the 12 and 13th centuries 'Christian' crusaders waged Holy Wars against the Muslim Turks in the Holy Land and at the same time thought it was pleasing to God to torture and destroy any called Jews.

Religious Christians are actively involved with some form of institutional Christianity. Within this group are tens of millions of churchgoers who fill the pews in myriads of church congregations each week. Each of these religious 'churches' or denominations follows long-held traditions of their respective denomination. Christian denominations have extensive power and interests both social and economic. The *business* of religion founded in an orthodoxy that is morally well founded and righteous. These traditions are rarely questioned within the established tradition.

The clergy, religious leadership, has long been esteemed has a high and noble calling, although an occasional skeleton may turn up in the closet of some clergy person now and then. The lands and real estate assets of churches are immense. Each denomination builds great

buildings as centers of worship and strictly supervise and train their clergy to act *as priests or overseers of the faith*. The sad reality is that the denominations of today are little different from any ancient priesthood, the Scribes, and Pharisees of Jesus' day, of whom the Lord Jesus had little good to say.

Today I believe that institutional *religious* Christianity may be the single greatest hindrance to experiencing God in this nation as well as in all the nations where that institutional Christianity has

been exported. **Why?** Because the Gospel is not philosophy nor an intellectual concept. It is rather the Power of God that impacts lives at the deepest possible level; transforming a man or woman into an adopted son or daughter of God. Church is not meant to be a place where Christianity is practiced and administered by priests but a means of growing through sharing your life and experience with others as our knowledge of God increases (edification by/of the body.)

Religion: a metaphor: *It seems as though religious Christians have been injected with something, call it religious formalism, which seems to make them immune to experiencing the authentic Spiritual Life of the Kingdom of God. Let me hasten to say however, that there are believers among the denominations, these men, women and children have received the knowledge of God through the Lord Jesus Christ in a profound and intimate way, not because of their religious affiliations necessarily, but in spite of that affiliation.*

The kingdom and the power of God are not the domain of any brand of religion but work around and through it.

Third Category: Authentic Christians

What characterizes a True Christian?

Are we born Christians, Are we Christians because we were not born Buddhist or Muslim? Are we Christians because our parents were Christians? Are we Christians because of a religious rite? The Bible reveals that we become Christians not by a religious rite, but by a spiritual encounter with God. God receives us in "friendship" and extends fellowship to us. This fellowship is granted in the name of **the only begotten son of God**, Jesus, Yeshua of Nazareth. This knowledge is one thing but the actualizing power of Grace is quite

another. The Gospel is a gospel not only conceptual fact but actualized in power. It is a life-changing, spirit-renewing power, that sets on fire the love and life of God within a believer. This life-changing encounter is central to what I hope to present in this writing, and I will cover it broadly in the following pages. A believer, in actuality, has no religious rites or obligations or rules to follow in order to win God's approval. A believer's job is to believe. Faith is choked by unbelief! Through faith we gain access to the scriptural promises of God. These promises are awesome and spectacular and when apprehended can lead us to experiencing the kindnesses of God and entering into our divine inheritance. That is the long and the short of it. Religion in any of its many aspects has entered in obtrusively to complicate or confound the simple way and truth that Christ has declared and made known for all; that each man, woman, and child can know God and experience wholeness through Him.

My hope and prayer is -- May those seeking truth, both religious and non religious, Christian and non Christian, continue in the Word which can open the door to the Kingdom of God, with its power and glory. May the God of all creation reveal Himself to you, draw you into His family, and bring forth his kingdom, his love, his life and liberty in your life.

Reconstruction of the Human Spirit

Spiritual Christians are created and established only by Divine will and action. We, before the work of God in our lives, are unredeemed and lost. Prior to conversion, we are 'dead' in our sins, and we can honestly be called "sinners." Although some of us may appear quire moral and fine in character we are in the

semblance of fallen humanity. God himself must prepare our 'hearts' to believe, since we are 'dead in trespasses and sin.' We are able to hear the "Good News" through another's testimony or teaching. It is in this moment that "a call" has gone out. Many will not regard this call in any way, for others the time of our responding to this call may be yet a long time off. We say 'Yes' to God he continues to supply us with faith and grace. Grace is that which is supplied by God himself. Therefore it is spiritual in nature and God-empowered.

Those who constitute the membership of the Kingdom of God, without regard to any earthly institutional affiliation. The true church is a spiritual body, it is called the "Body of Christ." This body is universal, apart from any designation of race, creed or nationality, it is without any denominational labels and without sectarian or geographical boundaries.

The Bible reveals that we become Christians not by a religious rite, but by a Spiritual encounter with the person of God. God receives us in "friendship" and extends the fellowship of his family to us. This fellowship is granted in the name of the Begotten son of God, namely Jesus, Yeshua of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah. Acknowledging this doctrine is one thing, the actualizing power of it is quite another. The Gospel is a gospel not only of religious and historical fact but of **power**. It is a life changing, spirit-charged power, that sets on fire the life of God within a believer.

"Religion" is an admixture of human wisdom that infuses the gospel. It works to confound the simple truth which states that Jesus Christ has made a way for each man, woman, and child to know God and experience redemption and wholeness in Him. A new perspective and a new reality come into our experience. Though hard to put into words, peace, joy and liberty along with a

meaningful life follow the transformed life.

My hope and prayer is that those seeking truth, both religious Christian and non Christian will continue to draw life from God's living word. The spirit of Truth in the word opens the door to the Kingdom of God. May the God of all creation reveal Himself to you in order for you to continue to bring forth His kingdom.

Searching For God

Highways and Byways in the Quest Some of us, in our individual quest for truth, look for a religion that will accommodate our own world view or moral viewpoint, though in our natural state we are all morally distorted and unregenerate in nature. Some others search for a religious form which promises personal power and influence over others. This power quest has one end; corruption of the soul. Personal aggrandizement leads toward corruption and pride, the domain of the enemy of God, Lucifer. Power to control or influence others, power to get wealth for its own sake is as witchcraft, a rebellious snare. Some search for a religious program which accommodates fame, personal notoriety, adulation or self-worship. Self enhancement is acquired at the expense of coming under God's dominion.

For many the search seeks to find personal healing or inner contentment to salve the aching of their souls. In Him we find solace, peace, love and wholeness. There are numerous motivations which lend themselves to religious choices. While we say we search for God are we really sincere or insincere? In the final analysis it is we who must conform to God's book and acknowledge His rules and plan for ourselves and not visa-verse

Beginning a Spiritual Search

While we are shopping this smorgasbord of religion there are many

choices. How will **you** choose? What are your resources and criteria to make these choices? Can we choose using our own intellectual equipment? Those who are proud of their intellectual achievements will probably choose wrongly; since they will choose to remain in control of their own lives through the exalted faculty of reason. The wise of this world say, "Only a fool denies reason."

Some religions make no demands upon us to give up anything, idolatries, pride, sin, hatred, etc. When we are well satisfied with who we are; when we are pleased with ourselves, with our name, rank, and achievements; When we are puffed up with our own sense of superiority, looks, talents or strengths; How can we choose to believe something which asks us to, "*deny yourself, take up a cross and follow me?*" How do we choose a belief system which states, "*In myself, I can do nothing;*" or " - *unless a seed falls and dies it abides alone, but if dies it brings forth much?*" Is there any beauty in sacrificing our selves? How can we as 21st Century beings, choose to decrease to ourselves and choose that which is *meek and lowly of heart*, not arrayed the outward trappings of finery; not displaying intellectual cleverness, nor personal flamboyance. "*He had no beauty that we should desire Him.*" (Isaiah 53:3) So we seek. We shop and we look and we ask about. When does the seeking come to an end? Is there a priceless pearl to be found? What is the nature of this pearl which beyond price? How do I begin my quest for God?

Scripture asks this question, "*What does a profit someone to gain the whole world but lose his or her soul?*" There is a risk associated with a spiritual quest. There is a risk associated with choosing a counterfeit; to choose something tainted with corruption and death over the 'living way.' There is indeed a true Gospel, having the right Jesus, the right Gospel and the right Spirit. (2Cor 11:3)

Distortion & False Gospels

We must be aware that there are **counterfeit gospels**.

These await any who choose a message that doesn't conform the previous three criteria. It is here that deception distortion, and possible destruction may result. By this I mean that a person remains in his or her sins. There is but one mediator *between God and man, it the man Christ Jesus*.

In this process of seeking, some who hear the message, come to believe in the Yeshua of Nazareth called the Messiah or Christ to be the way. The Word of God declares, "Those who seek will find." Those who seek and continue seeking, will find that pearl of inestimable value. It remains hidden to those who are lost. Great hunger is rewarded with satisfying '*manna*' from God and great thirst is rewarded with a satisfying drink that Jesus called 'living water.'

Many others never come to believe in or profess biblical Christianity but another belief system. The way of the Christian life once discovered provides a feast for the body, soul and spirit. This feast that brings eternal satisfaction, the knowledge of the friendship of Jesus is thirst satisfying indeed. In John 4 we read, "They who drink of this water will never thirst again."

The Way, however, is always a narrow one. It limits choices. It does not accommodate those who wish to take their own intellectual baggage in, this burden of extraneous stuff must be unloaded. Who among seekers is really sincere and not looking on a merely superficial level. Jesus has counseled us to walk the crucified life. To daily carry our cross is to dye to self, and to turn from the raucous voices that would distract us in this world.

I am reminded of the interview which King Herod of Judea attempted to have with Jesus on the occasion of Jesus' trial and Pilate's attempt to dispose of this matter of legality.

What possible interest could this powerful, worldly, self indulgent, sensuous monarch have in questioning Jesus? Herod had indeed heard of Jesus. He had heard of his influence upon the people and heard of the signs and wonders worked by his hand. Herod probably was reminded of John the Baptist whose head was the price paid for his stepdaughter Salome's sensuous dance performance. Vain curiosity was probably the motivating factor. Herod may have had some guilt, even fears associated with destroying the non conformist, unyielding prophet, John the Baptist.

Herod interviews Jesus: The world against the spirit

It was time for a confrontation though perhaps not yet a showdown, It was a face-off between two kingdoms, the kingdom of this world where sensual opulence, and temporal power are exalted against the hidden kingdom of God that few know. It was flesh against the Spirit. What happened in this confrontation of flesh and spirit? How did Jesus respond to the queries of the coarse and curious Herod? Did they share an intellectual discourse? Yeshua Jesus remained silent throughout this interview. Not a word was offered.

What place does the kingdom of God have with worldliness or idolatry? None. There was no dialogue. There was no effort made to plead the case for a religious or political agenda. The kingdom of

God and Herod's world were irreconcilable, worlds apart. You see, Jesus will not respond to those whose lives are filled with surfeiting, self importance or with insincere curiosity.

A doorway to repentance

I had reached a crossroad in my middle years that led to 'an end of myself:' When my need was greatest, ground down to nothing, I finally believed, and was willing to take the next step to cry out, "*Jesus, have mercy on me!*" So?

Where the inquiry will take you? Will you be led into the wilderness (outside of the distractions of worldly distractions, where intimacy with God is finally revealed? Or will you be lured into the another kind of wilderness imbued with worldly values having no intimacy with God, having no power to fulfill Christ's hope and calling.

"The Gospel Without Religion" is a series of commentaries compiled from my own study of the "Word of God. " It records my spiritual insights and experiences. I was not always a believer. What was I before I became a believer, before becoming a Christian? I was like many of you are. I practiced a *form* of Godliness; I was religious. I was actively involved in institutional forms of Christianity with its many traditions, forms, and flavors and yet without *knowing the Lord*.

Before becoming believers, we called ourselves by any of hundreds of denominational names, not realizing that Christ is One and cannot be divided. In this state, we had no true witness of the reality of God; We may not have known that God is real or that He rewards those who seek him with wonderful gifts. Before becoming a partakers in the "*gift of God*", we *called ourselves Christians*, not knowing that being a Christian means more than just attending church. It is more than learning a catechism, more than going

through a rite of membership. *Being a Christian is not an intellectual ascent to a doctrine or belief* where you can say, "Yes that sounds like it might be true, I guess I'll join a church and become one of those. "Unlike other institutions you don't just join up, rather, you are "translated" into becoming a son or daughter of God. You are translated into a different kingdom and a different reality. You become a new order of being. You are translated from death into life, from darkness into light. We who once cared nothing for the life and properties of God now share in that life and are consumed by it. It is a work *that God does* in us and not one that we do on our own.

Remember to discern the true Gospel, There are three factors to consider: determine its authenticity:
(2 Corinthians 11:3)

The right Jesus: Jesus the Messiah is not an angel, not a mere prophet; not a great man, not merely a teacher of moral excellence; Not a highly evolved illuminate; but The only begotten Son of God, the Jewish Messiah.

The right gospel; The Gospel is a gospel of good news; that humanity may come to the giver of life to receive a supernatural gift; eternal life and forgiveness without cost, without the mediation of a priest; It is not a gospel of works, nor is it a gospel of faith and good works; the door is open to any who call upon the name of the Lord. The source of truth and understanding of this gospel is the Holy Bible.

The right Spirit; There are many spirits manifesting in the world, some of God, others demonic. Spirits abound in the atmosphere in individuals they affect communities, and nations. The church houses of religions can nurture or teach a doctrine which has a

wrong spirit, any un-Christ- like one.

Such spiritual influence has existed for thousands of years leading people away from the God-life.

The reality of the kind of demonic spirits addressed by Jesus and his disciples are still present to seduce, impede, and steal from the life, liberty and spiritual potential of all.

The kingdom of darkness has this agenda; to steal, to kill and to destroy. Lucifer hates all humans created in the image of God, *especially a believers*.

The spirit that predominates in this world is a spirit of self exaltation and pride. Of course modern thought and psychology discredits any belief in spirits as a primitive and obsolete belief system.

It is to be noted according to scripture, that Jesus the Messiah came to "*destroy the works of the devil*," Satan, the god of this world, rules over fallen beings, unredeemed humanity. It is God's ultimate purpose to restore the proper line of earthly rule under the dominion of Jesus Christ. In due time, nations will recognize him as the Holy One of God, appointed Lord and heir of all things. Evil or wrong spirits affecting human behavior include, pride, rebellion, witchcraft, defilement, sensuality, gluttony, drunkenness, etc., etc.

A common Politically Correct, Secular Argument: One god equals any other.

The *broad-minded*, ecumenical world would like to assert that any god is essentially on a par with any other. Human wisdom declares that there are many paths and they all eventually lead us to the sublime higher *One*. Today,

I am a Christian believer, but was not always so. I was disillusioned

by religion, sensing its superficiality, the hypocrisies, and lacking any proof of the God of the Bible.

I went on searching and doubting, and trusting that I was *good enough* not to fall into condemnation in if and when I came face to face with my Creator.

I had heard the term "Good News" referring the Gospel of the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). But my experience in Christianity was valued only in a sentimental way. I had many pleasant memories of church life with my family in my youth.

During these days I was full of questions. I yearned to touch and experience something that was real, powerful and persuasive. This, I believe, is exactly where so many seeking people are at today. Hopeful, wanting to believe, but without proof that God is real or reachable. My religious experience offered no proof of God's reality. Any Gospel expressed as *the Power of God* able to transform human life, was outside of my religious experience.

According to the apostle Paul, the Gospel, is denoted as *the power of God*. 1Corinthians 1;2.5 powerfully persuades us to believe, in a God of love who can impact human lives in remarkable life-changing ways. Alas, most often these exist outside of the realm of church life.

The true Gospel is not a shallow, tradition-ruled religion. Rather it teaches that we can know God who reveals himself as Savior and Sovereign of the universe. Even more amazingly, the Bible proves itself to be entirely believable and consistent in spite of its *progressive* detractors!

Today we find theologians who work continuously to discredit any belief in Biblical accuracy or consistency. Bible "literalism" is belittled.

Today when I hear of a God who walked with man in a spiritually perfect world, called Eden. I believe it; when I hear of a God who did wonders in the days of Moses or the prophets I do not doubt that fact for one moment; when I read the infallible prophecies of appointed men of God who declare the end from the beginning I have no doubt in the veracity of any of those words.

God spoke through prophets with inerrant accuracy to declare the coming Messiah and his mission to redeem fallen humanity and all these prophecies came to pass. Jesus as the lamb of God came to close the divide between God and humanity. The resurrection of Yeshua, as irrational scientifically unsound it sounds on the surface, remains the foundation of Christianity.

Resurrection establishes the "Power of the Gospel" and enables any believer to partake in Christ's divine nature.

Religions of the world may vary in name and beliefs but all seek to establish a worldly kingdom. They aspire to have a launching pad to promulgate their beliefs and in many cases, beliefs that are contrary to the Gospel.

Christian religions sects, including, Catholicism, LDS Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and most of the protestant denominations distort the simple Gospel. They bring forth errant doctrines, formalism, and *human authority*. (See the characteristics of Religion in book two. "The attributes of Religion")

Churches (buildings with congregations) are what people usually think of when we imagine Christian practices. When ceremony and ritual are the practiced, and where obligations or extraneous demands are taught, these are contrary to the original Gospel, e.g. the Apostolic epistles found in the New Testament.

Chapter 2

A BRIEF LOOK AT PARADIGMS

3 Paradigms of Wisdom: Worldly, Religious, & Authentic Christian

"Paradigm" is word that not everyone may know. We are nevertheless all powerfully affected by our paradigms. There are paradigms which guide our thoughts and understanding in art, culture, religion and technology in every age. We become victims of these understandings which we come to accept as laws or "facts." These are the commonly held beliefs and accepted by teachers or leaders. A Paradigm is a system of accepted understanding that attempts to answer 'the way things are.' They are principles that answer questions about essential facts. We rarely question or think outside of these to escape from the paradigms that are set in place for us. It takes imagination and even courage to reexamine paradigms critically. Thinking outside of a paradigm is where invention and discovery occurs. Paradigm break-throughs lead to advances in science, art, or religious thought.

- Paradigms: define our understanding. They are pre-suppositions of how things are or how things have to be.
- Paradigms: limit our ability to function outside of that paradigm - or receive understanding outside of the paradigm. They are in a sense glass walls or ceilings in the domain of that paradigm.
- Religion is among the many domains where paradigms exist
- People who are **paradigm breakers** may be considered radical, even blasphemous or heretical

- Paradigms of science or cosmology have often been in conflict with religious teaching and dogma. Religious authorities were frequently intolerant of new ways of thinking. Whether about the earth and solar system as envisioned by Copernicus or Newton or teachings that are outside of their own orthodoxy.

Old ways of thinking do not receive a new paradigm without resistance and tension.

Examples of religious paradigms

1. The Church is the "house of God"
2. A Church is where you go to worship.
3. All human beings are the children of God
4. Religious (spiritual) knowledge is the domain of the clergy or priesthood
5. Heaven is the place one goes when they die
6. Believers should submit to the headship (covering) of a church authority or pastor
7. The saints and disciples are religious personalities from another by-gone age
8. Signs, wonders and miracles have passed away in modern times
9. God does not speak to human beings in the He way did in the early days of the church.
10. The new covenant excludes the root and foundation of of Judaism.
11. Priests or sacramental rites provide a guarantee of good standing with God.
12. Duties in the form of 'good works' will help us to win favor with God and give us spiritual stature.

Biblical Support A Contrary View to the Above Paradigms.

1. The church is comprised of each person who believes and has been born into the kingdom of God. Each believer is described as a '**living stone**' that forms the greater house, also known as the **body of Christ**

2. We do not **go to a church** rather each believer is a component of the the Church (*ekklesia* Christ's called-out body.) You and others are called to come together and associate in Jesus' name.

Whenever two or three gather in His name, we become an assembly of believers. Christ the Messiah is manifested among us. The Ekklesia. He has called us OUT of darkness into the glorious light of the sons and daughters of God.

(See link: [Why Should Christians Gather](#))

3. The Jews sought to stone Jesus when he inferred that God was **his father**. There was no such designation as 'children of God' until Jesus announced this doctrine on our behalf and taught his disciples to pray, " *Our Father... " Furthermore, no man comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ, the door. Others in the world are not children of God. Jn 1:12* - for those who believe on His name he gives the power (*exousia* = authority) to become the sons (children) of God

4. The priest hood has been eliminated in the new covenant Gospel. In the days of Moses, the people of Israel rejected God's plan to become a nation of kings and priests (Exodus 19:) and demanded that Moses and Aaron become the intermediaries before God on their behalf.

After the birth of the church (the day of Pentecost) the fire of God fell on each believer and they received *the dunamis power* to be witnesses of the *wonderful works of God*. The priesthood insinuated itself back into the world and held common people in bondage until this time. The Ecclesiastical traditions of formal religion dominate the whole world of Christendom today.

5. Heaven. Jesus' prayer was about connecting the realm of heaven (The Kingdom of Heaven.) Heaven is the realm of the Spirit we can know in this world. Let thy Kingdom come. Let Thy will be done. On earth as in Heaven! This revelation of the Kingdom can be experienced in various degrees in this present age. Those '**called**' are '**in Christ**' and live as people 'born of the Spirit.' We have overlooked that which is most fundamental in the religious experience. (The Lord's prayer or the Disciple's prayer.) Heaven is a continuing reality but on a Spiritual (non intellectual) plane. Heaven was presented by Jesus as an accessible reality. How can heavenly things become accessible but through a Spirit-transformed life in which the natural man with his natural limits is subdued and crucified. Access to heavenly things is acquired through the power of God. Believers under grace begin to lose the self-identity and develop a greater concern for others. *Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also.* Another verse notes: - "*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord - I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day - I heard - and behold - I see.* Physical death is the ultimate loss of self control. "Carrying the cross" is about losing our preoccupation with self so that Christ's life may manifest within us.

6. The concept of pastoral authority (or covering) is a feature of the tradition-bound institutional church. From early times priests were labeled clergy and the general congregation of listeners was designated laity. With this system the laity function primarily as a personal support system to the institutional church. (The ownership of a flock of God permitted the overseers to make merchandise of them.) (*Nicolaitinism. See.. Rev. 3*) *The Lord is my shepherd - My sheep hear my voice - - There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.*

7. We who believe and have received the gift of *New Life*, are called

to be Saints, for we are all called to be "in Christ Jesus", seated in heavenly places. We must grow up in the knowledge of Him until we reach the fullness of Him. (*Ephesians 4:13.*)

How do we grow and how are we disciplined? The pastoral discipleship paradigm is only partially effective as it does not prepare all brothers and sisters for leadership and full participation in the things of God. Discipleship is best realized through Koinonia meaning mutual participation and sharing of the God life in fellowship. (It is my position that there is no *ekklesia* without *Koinonia*!) Those called out of the world into the body of Christ have within them the essence of Jesus' love. These believers are drawn to value and share their fellow brothers and sisters that make up the body. A number of authors are adding to the same message that I promote here. We see liberty in the body being promoted by writer Frank Viola with his "Pagan Christianity" and other writers who acknowledge the trend to come out from institutional religious systems." Mega Shift" by James Rutz and other web published writings teach the full gospel message free of institutional religious connections featuring home centered fellowship.

8. Signs and wonders and miracles are either part of your religious experience or they are not. Those who exclude this from their doctrines do not participate in the reality of the faith that was first delivered to the saints. (*Jude 3*)

Miracles and the supernatural became part of the Pentecostal awakening that began in the recent century in 1906. Spiritual revival or awakening have always been fueled by tears of repentance and a hunger to touch the heart of God.

The supernatural move of God seems to be on the decline, among Evangelical Christians today. If denominational teaching does not allow for the supernatural it not likely to occur because you are essentially saying “no” to the experience. Today supernatural signs and wonders are in evidence but it is happening where the gospel is presented to people who have never before heard the message especially in cultures that are poor and wanting.

9. The most amazing thing any believer can ever discover is that God can and does reveal himself to us individually. The miraculous and revelation awaits any who through the power of the Holy Spirit seek first the kingdom and knock at heaven's door.

10. The paradigm that Old covenant (Judaism) is the root and foundation upon which Christianity has sprung is clearly proclaimed in scripture. *The doctrine of Christ, Messiah* is the message imbedded throughout the Law and the Prophets. Christianity is actually Messianic Judaism in which we see the fulfillment and completeness of God's promise culminating in the realization of the “*one new man.*” Jew and Gentile joined to become one in the Messiah.

It is unfortunate that the New Testament terminology of Messiah was traded for the Greek term *Kristos* (the anointed one.) This designation enhances the notion that Judaic foundations have been erased and replaced by Christianity with a rejection of anything Jewish.

We Gentiles by the grace of God have been grafted into the vine of Israel. To disregard the heritage of our root and foundations is unbiblical and subject to judgment. The ingathering of the *Gentiles* as *the church* is a distinct chapter (dispensation) and expression of God's time table in restoring the physical kingdom and rule of the Messiah upon the earth.

11. Religious studies have prepared scholars for ordination to qualify to become priests and overseers. The formally trained clergy teaches the laity that these shepherds possess a particular power and authority that the average churchgoer does not have. Thus for generations the accepted paradigm places our faith in a priest or pastor to communicate with God on our behalf and to act as a go-between. The Christian world would do well to realize that there is but *“one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”*

The great questions of life that philosophers ask:

“Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Where will we go to seek wisdom and answers to these mysteries? Do we inquire according to secular wisdom, or religious teachings? Or is there another? How does Godly Wisdom contrast to secular wisdom? How does Godly Wisdom contrast with “religious” wisdom?”

CONTINUED:

3 PARADIGMS OF WISDOM AND TRUTH

The Paradigm of Worldly Wisdom Contrasted to Godly Wisdom

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. (1Cor:1:19:KJV) For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

(-1Cor:1:21:KJV)

THE PARADIGM OF WORLDLY WISDOM

Worldly wisdom extols and rewards self-exaltation and individuality. Godly wisdom (known as The Truth) says, deny

yourself take up your cross, die to yourself.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom no man is "good" Worldly wisdom is based upon observation and the appearance of things. Godly wisdom acknowledges the unseen things that are eternal and have another kind of substance not known by human reason.

Worldly wisdom is based upon "scientific" principle and measurable phenomena. Godly wisdom (the Truth) teaches that if you believe by faith in the unseen you by faith will see the results manifested. Worldly wisdom is characterized by the domination (rulership) of the strong and the mighty over the weak.

Godly wisdom (the Truth) teaches that God chooses the weak and the insignificant to triumph over the wise and strong.

Worldly wisdom devalues humans having few personal assets such as, the poor having childlike meekness, living in simplicity. Godly wisdom (the Truth) reveals that the greatest in the kingdom of God are like children. Humble, trusting, and meek.

Worldly wisdom values and rewards intellectual brilliance, academic achievement. Scholarship play a key role in leadership attributes.

Godly wisdom (the Truth) teaches that the wisdom of man is foolishness to him.

Worldly wisdom recognizes some classes of people as being of inferior or superior rank. This is called by the Lord as having 'respect of persons.'

Godly wisdom (the Truth) teaches that those who are poor shall eventually receive the greater blessing, possessing the kingdom.

"The proud and the mighty he scatters and turns away."

Worldly wisdom, when it views the "vast timeless universe" diminishes or negates the need of a savior.

Godly wisdom (the Truth) teaches that God created the heavens and the earth by *wisdom* and all things that are in it, and He continues to sustain it through his power.

Worldly wisdom values "self preservation" as a principle.

Godly wisdom (the Truth) speaks of self sacrifice as a divine virtue; "greater love has no man - - than that he would lay down his life for a friend."

Worldly wisdom believes that our lives may well be over when one dies. Godly wisdom (the Truth) we are eternal beings who retain our own soul's personal identity forever. Moreover in eternity, some will inherit eternal blessings and others will inherit eternal condemnation and separation from God.

Worldly wisdom presumes that God regards any and all religions or faiths as equally valid. Godly wisdom has limited our choices to "*the way*" and that way is a narrow one. There is one narrow way and one name only by which sins may be atoned and we may be saved. That name is Jesus Christ.

"There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." This Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah, the king of the Jews.

Worldly wisdom presumes that God does not favor any one nation over another. Godly wisdom (the Truth) reveals that one nation has been designated as the chosen people of God. The Bible has established upon infallible promises, Godly wisdom (the Truth) reveals that one nation is the chosen people of God. *"Israel shall be a praise among all the nations."*

Worldly wisdom would suggest that whichever God we name as supreme is the same divine being but simply designated by many names.

Godly wisdom (the Truth) affirms that though there are many gods, there is but one God who is above all and we can hold no God

higher than He. *There is no other God above Him.* Those who name other gods are idolaters and their fate is judgment and destruction. This judgment is not administered by any individual or human action, *"for Judgment is mine says, the Lord."*

Worldly wisdom presumes that God is essentially impersonal. Godly wisdom (the Truth) says that we can become sons of God. "For those who believe on His name he gives the authority to become the sons of God."

(John 1:12) Adopted into the family, we are called to inherit the blessings and partake in His divine nature. Worldly wisdom (allowing religious belief) believes that all of the human race are automatically "children of God."

Godly wisdom (the Truth) Whoever believes on the Son of God, Jesus Christ, shall have eternal life. Whoever has not the son has no life but the condemnation of God remains upon them. (John 3:18)

Paradigms of Religious Wisdom:

In the religious paradigm the religious life centers around a "*church house*"

In the religious paradigm the church building is called the "Church"

In the religious paradigm the traditional church features such elements as: *pulpits and pews, stained glass windows, organs and 'sacred music' solemnity and formalism, Ecclesiastical garb, robes, orders of service, ritual, - - designated ranks of clerical authority.*

In the religious paradigm a formally trained priest or clergy "officiates" over the "services"

In the religious paradigm a formal address or sermon delivered to the faithful is called "preaching"

In the religious paradigm one or two hours a week meet one's religious requirements, involvement

In the religious paradigm only the professionally trained clergy are qualified to "minister"

In the religious paradigm there is "respect of persons"

- - a hierarchy of spiritual rank or authority

In the religious paradigm members may be mentally disassociated in worship or prayer

In the religious paradigm a person's spiritual life is largely governed, directed or sustained others

In the religious paradigm the exploits of God and Saints are in the dim past

In the religious paradigm people are taught how to please God by performing certain rituals, deeds or obligations

In the religious paradigm there are may be particular duties required to attain "good standing"

In the religious paradigm one often does not experience God but only *hears about* God

In the religious paradigm one often doesn't really know if he/she qualifies for a heavenly reward (is saved)

In the religious paradigm Bible doctrine *plus* traditional teachings form core doctrines

Paradigm of Godly Wisdom, (Modeled by Jesus)

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom teaches that there are paradoxes contrary to the natural instincts or wisdom of man e.g. the least shall be greatest;

The first shall be last; many called but few chosen; we must die (to ourselves) in order to live;

We as people of God must hate the things of this world;

We must receive the promises of God like a child;

God has hidden wisdom from the wise; Unseen things are a greater reality than the seen. etc.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom, man, using his natural abilities can not avail himself of the heavenly things.

I can do nothing of myself - - nothing of value for the kingdom of God.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom, the spiritual man is totally dependent upon the guidance of the Spirit

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom we are in a perpetual spiritual battle waged against the uninformed. But we have authority to survive the assaults of the adversary, and power over him in the name of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom there is eternal life, these promise rewards for believers and consequences for those who choose not to believe.

Jesus knew those who were his own. About these he states that it is given to *them it is given to know* - - deeper, mysterious things of God; to the world and to others it remains hidden.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom only those who are born of the Spirit and led of the Spirit are denoted as the Children of God.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom all those who are called to believe are disciples. Disciples are nurtured, matured and prepared to use their gifts for ministry.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom, ministry is enabled through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom true worshipers worship in Spirit and in Truth. They know who and why they worship.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom, wisdom and insight is hidden from the double minded and the unredeemed.

In the Jesus, Spirit-led model of wisdom we could memorize the Bible and not fully comprehend God or the truth- only the Spirit reveals it.

Chapter 3

RECOGNIZING ATTRIBUTES OF RELIGION

It takes a long time to understand the Scriptures recorded in the Holy Bible. Not many even those who call themselves Christian believers desire to spend much serious amount of time studying the Bible and become grounded in the truths and promises of the word of God. What about this Bible? To you Is it history or fable? Is the Bible partly true and partly fable? Does it meet the criteria for truth or not? Is the Bible the *Word of God* and entirely relevant to life in the 21st Century?

Opening the Word of God. God's Holy Book

We do not worship the book. We worship the Word of Truth that is expressed within its pages. We do not suffer a consequence for marking or damaging this book. We suffer a consequence if we fail to receive the promises and admonitions imparted from its pages.

The apostle Paul tells us that spiritual matters are absurdities to the person without the Spirit. Such may follow any wind of doctrine or demonically conceived teaching that parades as truth. It is only after we have taken the first steps that bring us to redemption that we even have any desire to understand this mysterious book and can begin to glimpse its consistency and focus. The Bible has been called many things, such as the "Makers users manual," and "A love letter from God." Amazingly, it also describes prophetically things that have come to pass as well as future events that are yet to come to pass. Theologians and academicians dig into the study of Scripture. Sometimes they leave with a lot of facts but too little understanding, known as *precepts*.

The apostle Paul academically brilliant, was highly educated and

well situated as a Pharisee in his Jewish religion. Later he declared that scholarship, philosophy and theology does not lead one to knowing God. Neither theology or human knowledge is a sure pathway to knowing God. Truth and wisdom is a Spiritually derived gift. Spiritual life is outside of religion. For it is only God himself who, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit imparts the necessary understanding and revelation of the [Mysteries of God](#).
(Read *1Corinthians Chapters 1 & 2*)

There are many sects and denominations who do not hesitate to call their faith practices "religion." Other groups, notably the evangelicals, like to say that the version of Christianity they practice is not religion.

I will explain in the course of these writings, take a more critical look to identify attributes of Christian tradition that make it entirely that, religion.

Christianity and church life are filled with religious 'trappings.' In the pages that follow I will describe some practices that are more of human authorship and tradition are ingrained in what many will call *the normal Christian life*.

RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES HINDER THE MANIFESTING OF GOD'S KINGDOM

- Schisms and division in the body of Christ from denominational boundaries
- Schism and division result from the designation of clergy and the subordinate laity
- Some form of priesthood remains as the controlling voice

in fellowship

- Human headship, A Hierarchy of authority controls its followers and imposes demands and obligations
- Formalistic rituals or orders of service prohibit God interacting with the body
- Religious services become a form of performance or entertainment
- Congregations (the laity) undervalued and serve mostly to support institutional mission
- The members of congregations become as "sheep" to be exploited
- The institutional church is focused primarily on maintenance, continuance and growth
- Religion becomes imbued with worldly aims, values and methodology
- Doctrines of institutional Christianity often at variance with scripture
- Individual believers are not disciplined to mature, minister and assume leadership
- Traditional religious practices lack a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acknowledgment of our Jewish roots and antecedents

Christianity is the outgrowth and fulfillment of Judaic roots. Yet, there is little acknowledgment of these foundations among those in churches around the world. Someone has said that there is one

page that needs to be removed from the Bible and that page separates the Old Testament from the New.

In the following chapters, I will take some time to examine these topics more thoroughly.

THE PERILS, PITFALLS, PROBLEMS OF RELIGION & RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTES

An important caveat:

There are degrees of spiritual faith, Godly understanding and God-honoring activities in traditional churches today. Individuals have remained faithful within these institutions have sustained the values that laid the moral and social foundations of our nation.

There has been a noble and historic inheritance of Christian Churches in America as well as other countries. In the United States the nation was founded upon the faith in the living God who is the father of all creation and moral rule.

Unfortunately there is a disturbing tendency for America to follow a course of casting off these commonly held views of a nation under God.

There are multitudes who practice the faith of their fathers even with shortcomings inherent in these traditions.

So I will proffer no condemnation toward those faithful and morally upright people who continue to regularly attend such 'Churches' and find community and fulfillment there. These believers serve as the salt of the earth and have been virtuous and upstanding pillars of the best upholders of American culture.

God, certainly knows how to find His way into the churches who

worship in more formalized ways. To the extent that the Word is taught and valued and *true worship* of God is encouraged, there is fruitfulness.

Yet, sadly, a growing number of institutional churches are departing from their fundamental roots allowing the tenets of worldly thought and values to enter to their detriment.

The principle premise of these writings is that there is more. There is always more to be known and to be experienced. These untapped experiences are entirely Scriptural and consistent with the apostolic teachings in the Bible.

The more freedom and liberty is given to the Holy Spirit, the more spiritual life and growth will be "experienced" when those believers gather together. More discipleship serves to activate the 'gift of God' within individuals so that they may bear evidence of The Kingdom of God does the work of the Kingdom until He comes.

Traditionalism in Christian meetings may not perfectly reflect the great commission, discipleship or freedom in worship. Negative attributes of the Religious paradigm described throughout these writings are the elements which impact faith in negative ways and in fact actually keep individuals from experiencing the life of the Kingdom of God even God's Gift of salvation.

In order to escape the restraining power of religious paradigms, it is time to rethink our presumptions of Christian religious traditions. We will examine these topics further in following chapter s.

- How does religion become a dividing force? - - Denominational empires
- Examining Jesus' Final Exclamation: "It is finished" What

was brought to a finish?

- The Clergy-Laity doctrine- How Biblical is this traditional form
- Religion: What does Jeremiah's stale cisterns parable speak to us?
- Phariseism: What behaviors of the Pharisees are seen in religious practices today?
- Religious emulation, church house behaviors we learn and practice.
- We learn and follow ritual and acceptable mannerisms
- Looking at externals
- Performance frames church programs; performing to entertain, showmanship infuse successful ministries;
- Personality cults build upon a single leaders gifts.
- Vines, True Vines and others . . . If Christ is the true vine, what are the counterfeits
- The pattern of Jesus Christ's ministry. Jesus life, the supernatural spiritual nature is a template
- Jargon and religious Terms: often heard phrases that have become spiritually empty

Chapter 4
RELIGION, A DIVIDING FORCE
A House Divided Cannot Stand

What Subtle Spiritual Forces Work to Separate us from the Gospel Truths?

There are [two active spiritual forces](#). The first bears the influence of the Kingdom of God, of which Yeshua (Jesus) is Lord and ruler. The other bears the influence of the kingdom of darkness which has another ruler, Lucifer or Satan. Satan is called 'the deceiver' of the brethren', 'prince of the powers of the air', 'the lord of this world', and 'the enemy of our souls'. The Lord of heaven, Jesus, is a gathering power. He gathers together, restores the broken-hearted, delivers the captive, brings liberty and hope. He saves. He heals. He delivers. Satan, conversely, is a dividing force and a devouring force. His strategy is to divide and conquer as well as deceiving and destroying.

Satan is continuing at work to cause strife and division among the people of God. It is Satan's purpose to also divide us from enjoying peaceful relationships with one another. The devil beguiles and encourages self will and vanity. This was the sin that caused his fall.

Biblical Adam who was introduced in the opening Chapters of Genesis as the being who transgressed God's command and suffered expulsion from paradise. Since that fall of man experience, the Adamic offspring which includes every human soul remains separated from God. Intervening millenia have transpired with God's plan of redemption being formed throughout. The Bible chronicles the dispensations of time until the time we live in. Since the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus, we are invited to call upon a Savior to rescue us from our own inevitable destruction.

The un-redeemed person habitually serves self in vanity and ultimately whether he will cease to follow the self directed life which keeps him/her from knowing God.

For many who are *the called*, in a time of God's choosing, our life's purpose and orientation reaches a certain cross road of time and experience, and we begin to *experience God*. These God-ordained times are of special significance (*Gr.kairos*) in God's timetable.

It is at such times God's hand reaches forth in [grace](#) and begins to strengthen a man or a woman and raise them up with a testimony and a voice that bears witness of redemption. Until such times we remain in a kind of inertia both as individuals and as institutions.

There are times of spiritual **revival** that occur when men or women of God are [empowered by the Spirit. At these times there is a](#) break through in the malaise of tradition. Men and women receive something from heaven. The fire of God begins to consume their spirits. They break forth proclaiming that *God truly rewards those that seek him*. In the face of such revival a sleeping church awakens to refresh the world in hope. religious belief systems are probably born in a time when spiritual power was in evidence, widely experienced first hand. Then, eventually in the course of time people become complacent and God's presence in a real sense departs.

A person growing up in a religious tradition has been told that there is a God but they personally have Not experienced Him. They may have been told that God answers prayers, but they've never experience answered prayer. They are told that God once spoke to people but he doesn't speak anymore. But, God is a God of the living not of the dead. God is a right now being. He is the same, today as yesterday and will remain unchanged forever. Religious traditions tend to turn the reality of God's "now-ness" into God's "then-ness." Religion for all intents and purposes becomes a kind of "oral tradition," and no more.

We see the situation where one group's understanding of the practice of Christianity comes in conflict with others and the house divides further. And thus we have come to a place today where hundreds of denominations or sects contend for their own view of truth. Professing Christians are for the most part, divided from others in the body. My experience with traditional denominations is that few enjoy the "now-ness" of God; and even fewer who see themselves as the "disciples" for whom Jesus prayed for in John 17 when he commissioned us all to be as He is in the world.

Fellowship is bonding power of unity.

Agreement is the power of faith.

Fellowship is the bonding power of unity among a people.

Agreement adds the power of faith.

Regardless of who we are we all share an area of interest or interests. It is natural to seek those who share your interest, whether it be an interest in playing cards, playing golf, collecting stamps, fishing, or drinking beer at a honky tank. We seek people who like what we like. We find ourselves stretched when we are around someone who has little or nothing in common with our interests. We all crave fellowship, belonging and acceptance.

We see that religion of any sort divides humanity. How unfortunate that there is such division among Christians. Division weakens and hinders the purposes of God to partake in his Kingdom. Jesus' prayer for believers is recorded in chapter seventeen of John's Gospel asks for unity among all that the Father has given him.

This “high priestly” prayer as it is called was prayed for all his 'then' disciples, but also included ourselves the disciples who would follow in coming generations who also would know him as Redeemer and Deliverer. This prayer is the perfect will of God and the road map of ministry for any who believe and follow him in generations to come.

Even the Jew and Gentile are eventually to be one, perfectly one in Himself. Oneness (unity) in Jesus Christ means to have the same fellowship with the Father as Jesus knew and experienced. In addition, Jesus also prayed that we should partake of the same glory which had been given to him. Later in the prayer, the Lord expresses that it is his will for us to share in His commission and ministry upon the earth. He Jesus, foresees in his prayer that he be replicated in each disciple to continue his own life and ministry. This charge to serve (minister) that Christ received from the Father was turned over to the disciples.

Every petition in Jesus' prayer was expressed with the assurance that the Father would bring it to pass. Everything Jesus prayed was in the Father's will. After the resurrection and the launching of the 'church age' we see these principles and promises restated and amplified by the writings of the apostles in their epistles.

To much of religious tradition evidently contradicts the intentions spoken by Jesus in his high priestly prayer. Today most of us are instructed by our religious mentors in matters of faith and living our Christian lives. Since most of us are taught by others, we have as much or as little of the truth of the Gospel as is understood by our mentors and expositors of our tradition.

The apostle Paul exhorts us *not to be ignorant about Spiritual matters but you are brought forth into a kind of idolatry by our*

leaders - - (1 Corinthians 12:1 paraphrase) .

We have been mentored not to practice the dynamic life of disciples in practice of the Christian faith. Thus we cannot avail ourselves of the spiritual life or have faith to move into these dimensions though they are established as spiritual promises in the Word. Any and every believer *is an inheritor of all of God's promises.*

Chapter 5

DENOMINATIONAL EMPIRES BECOME WORLDLY KINGDOMS

When Religion Becomes a Worldly Empire

Jesus when asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, answered;The kingdom of God is not coming in a way that can be observed; (21) nor will they say, Look, here it is! or there it is! For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you. (Luke 17:20 - Luke 17:21 20)

Church denominations are the best known expressions of Christian religious institutions. Why were holy wars or religious wars fought? Why did reformations and counter reformations occur that saw nations pitted against nation, and men and women pronounced heretic to be imprisoned in chains, and executed as infidels?

Worldly power and dominion were absolutely NOT how Jesus planned to actualize his kingdom. Jesus clearly stated to Pilate the Roman governor, just before he was crucified, "*my kingdom is not*

of this world, if it were my followers would fight."

A future time is coming when **the perfect** will have come. In that day the perfect will include the personal physical rule of Christ over an earthly kingdom. Jesus reiterated to Pilate, "*But Now, my kingdom is Not Of This World!*"

Yet, earthly kingdoms have always been contrary to the purposes of the Lord. The growth of institutional Christianity as a political, economic and social power began very quickly after the earliest years of the faith. The life of God, that portrayed the truth and simplicity of the Gospel began to dissolve. Individual centers of fellowship were once Spirit led and non formalistic. The immediacy of first hand Holy Spirit revelation and Spiritual fellowship gave way to religious structure and formalism. The *Ekklesia's* form and power of chronicled in the Book of Acts church gradually faded from existence. When the Gospel drained of spiritual understanding, and spiritual power, it becomes a political force. Political religion does its ugliest, most evil work.

That house formed in the bond of unity, became divided and raged against itself. "The Spirit of Truth was exchanged for a lie. The 'Right Spirit' was exchanged for the spirit of pride, self exaltation, vengeance, retribution and the very spirit of murder.

Satan is a spiritual opportunist seeking opportunity to usurp rulership of the church. Demonicly inspired doctrines creep in as the house is divided. Vanity lifts up men who reign in gaudy splendor. Individuals enforce their power over others and rule as *Nicolaitins* over the ordinary believer.

Religious empires defend their power in an orgy of blood-letting. Men come against others, perhaps even their own brothers, to destroy one another in the name of God.

As worldly religious empires grow the wisdom and counsel of God's Word is set aside when men began to create worldly kingdoms and called them God's kingdom?

The Kingdom of God and Truth was exchanged for something carnal and perishable, without eternal substance.

"My kingdom is not of this world, if it were of this world my people would fight. *But now* my kingdom is not of this world."

Denominationalism continues to build its own worldly kingdoms. They foster their own "princes and nobles" and rulers of states. They have multitudes of lesser nobles and greater multitudes of serfs who continue to serve the fiefdoms, while receiving nothing more than spiritual gruel that can neither nourish the "inner man" nor set him free.

Among the manifold religious traditions that of which we are so familiar, there are too many who departure from truth. These produce detriments to our hope of an authentic spiritual life in which there is liberty, power, and fruitfulness.

Chapter 6

THE DAY RELIGION DIED

"IT IS FINISHED"

Words spoken from the cross:

What actually was finished?

What was finished?

What were the meaning of the words Jesus cried aloud from the Cross? Was it more than an agonizing cry of a dying man? It was, in fact, to announce to all of the earth and the heavens that he had accomplished his earthly mission.

At this divinely appointed moment, the Lord became "The Seed" who, was planted to bring forth a mighty harvest.

What Was Finished?

[A life of alienation from God.](#)

What Was Finished?

[A Life Without Access to Intimacy in God's](#)

What Was Finished?

[No person could call God Father.](#)

What Was Finished?

[The Requirement of Keeping Religious Laws,](#)

What Was Finished?

[The Old Covenant Priesthood](#)

Human life of alienated from God.

Before Jesus said, "It is finished, " There was no real intimacy possible between God and humanity . The life that was given upon the cross that day opened the door of relationship to every man, woman and child upon the face of the earth. The sayings of the angels in the fields near Bethlehem would now come to pass, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will (blessings) extended toward all men of faith.*" (paraphrased, Luke 2:14) If you would like to do some interesting research in the Bible look up any references which refer to "justification." Justification refers to the idea that God Almighty sees us **believers as being made perfect** in the eyes of God the Father. Jesus Christ's goodness (or right standing) was allotted for our own. One scripture to point out this application of access to God is the first verse of [Romans chapter 5](#), "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

A Life Without Access to Intimacy to God's Presence.

In the hour when Jesus cried out, "*It is finished,*" the veil of the temple was rent in two. This veil was a woven fabric curtain of great size and weight which separated the Holy Place from the place called the Holy of Holies, it was within the Holy of Holies where God would manifest physically meeting with a priest had sufficiently prepared with rituals of cleansing and with blood sacrifices. God Almighty in the time of temple worship manifested physically in but one place for the covenant people, the Jews. Jehovah was revealed to Israel as **their God** and other kindred, tribes and nations, the Gentiles were excluded from fellowship and from covenant. The Messiah was proclaimed in prophetic scripture as the one who was to come and rule and reign as King of the Jews. This scriptural doctrine contradicts the beliefs of a Universalist or Deist who maintains that God has always been a god known by every people and religion.

Until this moment no person could call God "Father."

After Jesus' sacrificial death, he was seen by Mary Magdellene moments before he was to ascend to the throne, (John 20:17) Jesus spoke to Mary saying, "*Don't touch me, for I have not yet ascended, but go to my brothers and tell them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and their God.*" (paraphrased.)

Do not assume in reading that the word "brothers" applied to the Lord's friends and disciples *before he made a way for them* to become true adopted *sons* of God and share brotherhood with Christ.

Jesus spoke with such an emphasis that when Mary was to announce his message, it made it very clear that there was to be a

brand new kind of relationship which was to be known among the disciples or later to all believers. We could now be considered family to Jesus Christ and to be children of his Father. Christ was now our brother. God was now our Father. **It was only now** that we could actually pray the prayer which Jesus taught, saying, "Our Father, in heaven - -." Jesus is called, "- - *the first born of many brethren*," in Romans 8, verse 29.

Further Requirements, Keeping Religious Laws, Rituals, and Ordinances

According to Mosaic law *righteousness* was contingent upon keeping religious laws and ordinances. The Ten Commandments were the principal framework for righteous living, but you will note with any casual reading of the Book of Leviticus that the laws became extensive, detailed, covering exhaustively matters of every day life ranging from diet to social practices. There were covenant blessings resulting from keeping the Laws of Moses, but there were also curses associated with failure to keep the law even in the most minute detail. (Refer to Deuteronomy chapter 28.)

In the perfect time, the promised Messiah, Jesus, one sinless man, fulfilled the law. Thereafter, it was as though we were given permission to borrow the test paper of a brilliant classmate who scored a perfect 100 on an achievement test and we were given the legal right to use his score.

Where does scripture verify this statement? Read the third chapter of Galatians, especially verse 13 and 16. This chapter is foundational reading to understand God's provision for receiving acceptance through one man's merit. It establishes the nature of God's blessings as a free gift rather than a reward for personal effort. Read it again and again then compare it to any church

doctrines you may have been taught that would place us in bondage to an works or performance gospel!

The Old Covenant Priesthood

When Jesus declared, "It is finished." It also brought an end to the necessity of having a priest-class whose job it was to communicate with God, and to offer redemptive offerings on our behalf. The Levites were the tribe of Israel whose soul purpose it was to minister to the Lord, to prepare sacrifices that made atonement for sin. Priest today still assume the task of declaring people free and absolved from sin and to talk to God on our behalf. Priests have been assigned to hear from God and deliver His Word.

If you were a Levite you were automatically a priest, and could only be a priest. Priests were of the order of Aaron, the Levite. These priests were supported by the provision of the "tithes" of the people. Thus the work of God through the priest class could be sustained. The priests talked with God on behalf of the people of covenant. The priests were those who were trained from their youth to know the Word of God and study the text of The Law.

When Jesus cried, "It is finished." it would come to pass that, "*the old would pass away and all things would become new,*" (2 Corinthians 5:17) The old priesthood would pass away and a new priesthood would come. Jesus himself would become the high priest over a new covenant, a better covenant. (Hebrews 8) It was to be an eternal, never perishing priesthood. Yeshua having ascended would sit at the right hand of the Glory of God, "*ever after making intercession*" on the part of His children in the earth. The risen son of God was appointed heir and ruler over all things. This appointed, heir, king and high priest The Lord has all things at his command and all things under his feet. At the utterance of his

name ever spiritual and physical knee will un due time have to bow. Praise be unto our God for He is Great and His mercies are wonderful!

Now at last, people who once were outside of the covenant of Israel could not know God could be joined into the root and branch of Israel. A people who could never enter within the veil of the Holiest place of the temple could enter in freely enter into a heavenly Holy of Holies, having been justified and purged from an evil conscience by the blood of the Lamb. (Read Hebrews 10:2, Hebrews 10:22)

With the resurrection a miracle happened! We believers were each invited to become priests unto the God of all creation. We ourselves can now enter in behind the 'veil.' Herein we can minister to Him. He will freely receive sacrifices of praise that we would offer. We being partakers of his "divine nature" can hear His voice. We can now proclaim the Words that He will speak to us. We can speak on His behalf. We can speak as an oracle of God. We were given authority to minister in His name, the Name Jesus commands every Spiritual Power and every authority, every name and every condition. When we study His Word we can hear His voice (the rhema voice of God) speaking in the Scriptures. It is now revealed to us *"to know know the Wisdom of God, even the secret wisdom."*

We became Kings and Priests unto our God. (Read about the first Pentecost in Exodus 19 to see what is the full plan and intention of God that became actualized in Acts Chapter two. We receive the promised *"Spirit of Truth who could lead us into all truth and we would need no man to teach us"* about God.

All of us can now be Taught by God. (Read John 6:45 and Hebrews 8:10, 11) also (1John 2:27) and from the prophet Jeremiah

(31:3) This is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel in those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, saying know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest."

Chapter 7

THE CLERGY and LAITY TRADITION

When will the kingdoms of this world give way to the Kingdom of God?

Probably the most notable feature of institutional religion is its oversight by a single prophet or a priest class. We have seen religious rulers pursuing what they believe to be God's will, who attempt to introduce a theocratic kingdom to the world.

When men attempt to rule God's kingdom using human authority we see dangerous alterations to the Gospel. Such religious enterprises fall short of the Glory of God. Most of these efforts are founded upon good intentions including an skewed interpretation of scripture. Formal theology and systems of ministry most often result in some variance with divine purposes.

Where did the clergy and the laity doctrine come from?

Historical information exists to chronicle the transition of the first ekklesia to a religion already by the 3rd and 4th centuries. In my own experience of studying the word and watching religious

scenarios play out, I have observed how worldly values and methodology gradually alter a Spiritual Christian life and practice.

Jude exhorts us in his short epistle to contend for the faith first presented by the apostles lest it be lost or corrupted. (Jude vs 3.) In light of the gospel, we see a clear pathway that leads away from any doctrine of a priesthood. "The ministry" as a clergy-centered activity must be viewed in the light of apostolic exhortations. Peter tells us, "For all those who have received a/the gift to minister that gift to one another," There remains of course, the need to continue to address the need for discipleship to mature those who come out of the world and enter the life of God. Those who have matured carry Spiritual experience and knowledge of the Word are called 'elders.' They are best qualified to mentor those who are new to the faith.

Priesthood by definition is any system in which a person (a leader or person of authority) intervenes with God on behalf of others. The revelation of the New Covenant *Gospel* points to a new dispensation: ***a priesthood of all believers.***

Further, in the book of The Revelation, John receives a vision of the churches and among these we find reference to the doctrine of the Nicolaitins. (Rev.2:6) Nicolaitinism is a doctrine that God despises. Nicolaitinism is the religious system in which a leader takes control over a body of common believers and essentially take them captive, ruling over them. I believe Diotrephes is an example of this kind of control. These kind of religious controllers dispense whatever teaching they deem necessary to retain their power and make merchandise of the sheep.

Cults such as Jim Jones and the Jonestown group, and David Koresh of the "Branch Davidian" are recent examples of leaders who function in accordance with this label.

A Number pastors who exert a stifling control of their own congregations, I feel also fit this application.

We find it hard to compare the forms of worship or discipleship described throughout the Epistles to the worship services found in most formal church practices today.

In the early days of the church there was no formalized ministry. There were no going to church for an hour and leaving until the next session later in the week. Through apostolic leadership believers were disciplined and released to lead and minister in their own communities. There were no theology schools, nor accreditation agencies to credential ministers. There were only *believers* who through preaching with the power of the Spirit were experiencing the reality of the good news, the free gift of salvation. Called and converted by the power of God, they were disciplined in matters of the Spiritual life. The Holy Spirit afforded the believer an ongoing revelation of their station of child of God.

To these disciples it was given to *experience the powers of the world to come*, (The Kingdom of Heaven.) These first century believers were not graduates of Bible schools, but all experienced the mighty works of God on a day to day basis. All learned that Jesus (Yeshua the Messiah) made it possible for any and all who believed to become adopted children of God. Believers then as well as now became *new creations* by acknowledging that Jesus' died for the sin of all humankind.

With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit each was led to understand that they could partake in the exploits that replicated Jesus' ministry.

A Dispensation that Proclaims a New Status of Humanity

In the ancient times following Eden, mankind had lost their status as children of God. Thus it remained until Christ the Messiah was manifested in human form. Certain men were set apart for God's purposes called to be a prophet. These men or women were called to speak for God.

For the most part humanity and the world *could not know God*. It was rare that a man such as Enoch, Moses or Elija could meet with him for fellowship.

When Adam lost his dominion over the earth, Satan became the default 'god of this world.' He was acting in this capacity when he tempted the Lord Jesus in the desert Lucifer said, "All of these kingdoms are mine-" Satan was willing to make a deal with Jesus, offering these kingdoms with the stipulation that Jesus would still worship and give homage to him.

Jesus Christ came to fulfill his mission as the "son of man" and the lamb of God. In this role, He prepared the way for us. Crucified and raised from the dead, Jesus became more than Messiah King of the Jews. He became "Savior" of all who would believe and call upon him. Every human being since that time could know Him, meet with Him, have fellowship with Him, and even call Him Abba, Daddy. This is **the** Good News! *For those who believe he grants the power to become the children of God.*

Throughout the earliest days of the Christian faith the question has been asked and must continue to be asked, "*Should we obey God or man?*" How can we discern the difference? In order to distinguish between these two voices something is required of us:

Faith Comes to believe the Bible is the Word of God

To begin, each of us must acknowledge that the Bible IS the Word of Truth and trust it to be the single valid source of truth and doctrine. Too few in the modern world have actually discovered this and acted upon it.

Secondly it is required of us to listen to the voice of inner witness which God has given to all his children.

Those seeking truth are subject to some expert, theologian, or cleric explain to inform us what is written.

About new believers:

We as newly born believers experience a spiritual infancy. At such times we are open and eager to grow in the knowledge of God. The grace of the Lord causes this. During these times we find that God is always close at hand. He is quick to reveal himself and to answer prayers and to support us as we grow. But this is also a precarious time because in our eagerness to learn the ways of God we can be taken captive easily by ingesting wrong doctrine or falling into the trap of religion. (1Corinthians 12v1-2)

New believers require time to renew their minds and their lifestyle and habits. A lifetime of beliefs, habits, and behavior formerly held to be reasonable and true are now subject to revision. Renewing of the mind is achieved more or less quickly as we absorb the words recorded for us in scripture.

The epistles written by the first apostles describe the nature of the spiritual life and the parameters of community and discipleship as believers living in a world with contrary values.

The Holy Spirit baptism is the prerequisite first requirement for discipleship and growth. This baptism opens our eyes to heavenly

things. The Spirit within witnesses Truth that the world cannot receive nor comprehend.

If any expert tells you, that the gifts of the first century apostolic church have disappeared, do not believe them.

It would be unwise to associate with any such authority. For these have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.

Jesus addressed the Pharisees in numerous confrontations. Jesus walked in the power of the Spirit with wisdom and understanding. The religious authorities came against him having their own religious traditionals but without spiritual understanding. These religious authorities resisted the Holy Spirit. Matt 23: 15 *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”* (also see Acts C.7:51, Stephen's testimony)

We begin our spiritual path as spiritual infants who crave “the milk of the Word,” Too many who God has called to be established as a new born child of God become infected with religious doctrine. Our understandings can be poisoned and corrupted by evil doctrine. As a result, many receive the wrong Jesus, the wrong spirit, or the wrong gospel. (1 Corinthians,11;3) Discerning truth is a constant challenge and impossible without the Holy Spirit resident within us.

Religion presents teachings or stipulations that present the Christian life as having obligations upon its followers. We as faithful members of a church fellowship are expected to submit and follow the teachings of clerical authorities? Are we to question the doctrine of our church or church leadership? Yes, prove all teachings with scripture. There are many in pulpits, who qualify as nothing more than “blind guides.”

Some who question will be shunned, or dismissed as heretical. Even if we suffer condemnation it becomes the path to liberty.

(See the online pdf publication called "A Disciple's Handbook by the author)

WHAT IS MINISTRY?

What is a Minister?

In the New Testament texts, the word translated "ministry" is translated from **service**. The term ministry comes from *Greek Diakonia*. Thus *ministry means to serve*. The Book of Acts introduces us to terms for believers; disciples, apostles and those who served. All that were added to the church were disciples, the original disciples were named apostles and men with particular spiritual character were described as *diakonein*, servants. Biblically, all service for the Lords sake is defined as ministry.

Through generations of religious practice, ministry has come to mean something else, something formal and liturgical. Spiritual *gifts* or anointings were bestowed upon believers for service or for leadership. These eventually become designated as a religious office.e.g. Pastor, Deacon, Bishop, or Cardinal, etc.

Within the context of "church house" practice, ministry has redefined and restricted ministry to that which is done behind a pulpit and performed only by the few with proper "credentials."

Discipleship is for all believers.

According to the Scripture, discipleship is the keystone of the gospel. Yet, discipleship it is rarely emphasized in church congregations. Certainly we don't see ourselves to be equal in status to that which Jesus gave to his own disciples.

All believers are trainees to function in the Kingdom of God. And all disciples are expected to minister what he has been given by the Holy Spirit (A particular gift of God.) *"As every person has received the (free) gift, so minister the same to one another."* (1Peter 4:11)

To grow in the Spiritual life of God we are instructed that we can be transformed into the pattern of Jesus the Son of God and through him becoming partakers of the Lord's ministry and his spiritual attributes. These attributes include the gifts of the Spirit, (Galatians 5:22) love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All demonstrate the character of compassion and the ability to serve in kindness, (charity) through the spirit of love.

Through such ministry we see human lives restored and perfected.

The Tradition of the Professional Clergy

Many experiences in the institutional church are positive. It is a source of social activities and relationships. It is also a source of teachings and Biblical moral precepts. There is a limited form of worship and praise. In spite of this, deeper, more intimate social relationships rarely occur. Individuals are not likely to experience deeper levels of discipleship or grow to experience heavenly things. The body has little cohesion which causes intimacy as well as growth.

Institutional religion has remained a long standing stronghold that is resistant to change and resolute. Institutional religion in some ways is in descendency as numbers who participate gradually decline. But old habits and traditions die hard. The inertia of

centuries of social tradition is hard to alter.

We have learned to accept the role of a professional clergy person. Many of these men and women have wonderful natural gifting. Many are brilliant communicators, possessing compassion and dedication. I believe they will see their heavenly rewards according to the fruitfulness in their calling. Pastors and Teachers who carry the love and zeal of God are beloved by those who they touch or disciple.

The gift and calling of a Spiritual shepherd bears good fruit.

The well-functioning pastoral gift enables mentor-ship and, encouragement. The pastoral call may just as easily minister that gift outside of the parameters of religious formalism. But this may be a call without a salary or a congregation. The shepherding gift forms caring relationships. It brings with it a necessary compassion and wisdom to minister hope, encouragement, wisdom to strengthen the 'flock.'

Leadership is based upon experience and depth of understanding of the Word of God and the True Gospel. It should not be imagined as a mere career calling. I know very few who fit these criteria.

Conversely, I believe it is safe to say that there are others among the certified clergy who don't even know God.

What is the result of preaching without faith and without the respect for the word to have certain promise and power.

The apostle Paul said, "I determine to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ crucified - " and to demonstrate the reality of his rulership by the power of God.

Among those *in the ministry* preaching eloquence and persuasive speech and the ability to hold an audience in awe is a prerequisite for clerical success.

I believe that most in professional clergy presume their own pre-eminence owing to their credentials. Sadly spiritual credentials are often turned into a tool of personal gain and control over others.

Examining The Clergy and the Laity

The Clergy-Laity doctrine actually *divides the flock into two disparate parts*. The good shepherd story described in John's gospel, chapter 10, describes the characteristics of a good shepherd. It lists among the virtues, intimacy and closeness of the shepherd to the flock. The shepherd knows each of his charges and calls them by name; he will sacrifice his personal comfort and life for the flock. Finally we are told that Jesus is this shepherd. The psalmist has written almost a thousand years before, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Jesus Christ remains the true shepherd, the *true bishop (overseer) and shepherd (pastor) of our souls*."

Jesus modeled correct shepherding, in his ministry process of preaching, teaching and leading with care and compassion. The Lord demonstrated his Spiritual credentials not only with Godly character but with miracles, signs and wonders, as well as deliverance from the demonic. To those who did not know of the Father's plan to extend the Kingdom of God **he Preached** the Gospel of the Kingdom; To his closest disciples, he gave more intimate insight and he taught them through dialogue in questions and answers. It was through dialogue with his closest disciples that he expounded deeper truths and unraveled his parables.

Jesus came and ministered with authority and yet with the meekness of a servant. He was a friend to sinners. He came to seek and to save and to serve. Modern church members tend to exalt leadership and place them on unrealistic pedestals and grant them

unusual authority. Jesus taught us about those who lead: (Matthew 23) *"Who is the greatest among you, Jesus said, shall be a servant to all."* Moreover, *Jesus instructed his own disciples not to place one man over others. He required that they were not to give titles to these 'masters' saying call no man master, No man teacher, No man father.* This ought to qualify as a template by which to measure the character and role of those in the role of pastoral leadership.

THE BODY : Edified by a multiplicity of gifts

One individual with a pastoral gifting most probably does carry all of the ministry gifts. A multiplicity of ministry gifts are needed to fully edify the body. (Ephesians 4) *God in fact has more than one finger on his hands. There is something called the 5-fold ministry, which includes apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, and evangelists. We might also consider the other hand as a body has two hands; consider additional gifts or, 5 other ministries which serve the body in a less formal or visible way. So called apostolic movements tend to reintroduce the hierarchical structure and a network or associations of high profile, highly paid Christian 'celebrities' all eager to provide seminars or conferences to garner large offerings and expand their ministries .*

Guidance by Spiritually wise and experienced

Throughout the apostolic letters we are told that mature men of God were to guide and direct and to maintain purity of doctrine and practices. These were designated overseers (Gr. *presbuteros*) of the local flocks (fellowships) of God. These bodies met in a form and setting having little resemblance to church houses that are the norm today.

Overseers need spiritual experience even more than theological

credentials! The apostolic intention was to keep our faith and traditions accurate and steadfast. This model must continue to stand. What was written by the apostles was delivered with the intention of providing guidance and knowledge of the kingdom for believers in perpetuity. Maturity in faith and spiritual understanding encouraged the guidance of elders or overseers. These men and woman having depth of experience in ***the Spiritual life*** we called to provide balance and correction so that true doctrine be maintained and enforced among the fellowship:

In the early days of Christianity, elders, pastors, or overseers evolved into an office that assumed the whole responsibility of "ministry." This evolved into the clergy roles of today. Interesting things regarding the form of the early church are in evidence today revealing a return to New Testament forms of *Koinonia*, ekklesia (Christians assembling together) See recent publications by Frank Viola and George Barna, regarding the Open Church, etc.

Chapter 8

RELIGION PORTRAYED AS A CISTERN

Jeremiah's Parable of a Cistern

Cistern Water is stored, stale Water, Not "The Spring of Living Water"

God is not a God of the past but of the Present

The waters of God flow down from the heavenly "Throne of God."

They flow forth to flood and nurture our innermost being.

These waters are not a pond or a puddle.

They provide spiritual rivers in depths to swim in.

*The picture of refreshing streams of God are also spoken of in
Psalm one
and in the stories of Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel, prophets of God.
Come and drink of the waters and be refreshed,
For in these you will taste of heaven's glory.*

RELIGION: LEAKING CISTERNS

"A God of Past Glories"

The title term cisterns comes from God through Jeremiah the prophet, He states, "my people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and they have hewed for themselves cisterns which do not hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). What kind of meaning does this have for us in relation to religious detriments? Viewed in a shallow way, we may think the prophet is giving a discourse on the best kind of water supply to have, flowing wells versus stored water; but it has deeper meaning. Speaking figuratively, God expresses that the worst thing which God's people can do is to forsake the fellowship and intimate closeness of God's presence. God declares that He is the fountain of living waters. To exchange that intimacy with something a memory of another time, without freshness and vitality of God's presence is a grave mistake.

Stored water is water but God does not prize it. It has become stale in time and has lost the zest of freshness. Religiously speaking cistern water might be yesterday's fresh water, or last year's water, or even water of many generations past. Moreover though staleness is bad enough, God says further, that those cistern leak and are drying up.

The cistern allegory has a wide range of application to religious

tradition. The question might be, "How long has the water been allowed to stagnate?" Was it a year ago, a generation ago, or multiple generations ago that the presence of God was manifested and alive in the midst of the congregation of His people. If there is no sense of God living and moving in the center of our lives or our church fellowships, we have evidence that He has been excluded by a religious people. Traditionalism thrives on memories of some bygone day, or accounts that God had come by and left an historical token of his glory "way back when." That however, is not enough for the people who have deep spiritual needs, who have been wounded, bound, afflicted, imprisoned, enslaved by the lash and oppression of the enemy. What force can set us free, what force can soothe our pains and sorrows? What power can touch and save the wounded spirit? It must be something full of divine life, power and compassion. It is that fount of living fountain which flows from God. God is always a God of now, not of yesterday nor of decades past. He is the I am who is the present tense now God. A grave danger of religion is that it risks the separation of the believer from the present manifestation of a living God. A Heavenly Father who wants to continue to make His presence known to His special people. As Jesus spoke to a woman at the well of Samaria, "*- I would give you living water!*"

God has always desired to close the gap between himself and the human family upon the earth. The story of how God addresses this purpose becomes the substance of scripture -- the Bible. It is written that God was at work in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to himself.(2 Corinthians 5:19) There remains another side of the equation regarding the matter of knowing God; the fact that there is a spiritual power and authority resisting God's program. This resistance is unseen, but remains potent in its effects. Just as God uses human resources and requires "a yielded vessel" to minister

His grace to others; so also does our adversary with his own spiritual hierarchy. The adversary, Satan, is a spirit being who also displays supernatural powers. God's adversary has a long established agenda. His agenda is never beneficial to humanity! Our adversary is a killer and a lying deceiver. As an enemy of God, there is no good in him. He is the king of all rebellion and rules over a dominion of unseen spiritual beings who follow his orders. Just as an earthly army has a chain of command, with a strict protocol of duties and responsibilities for every layer of authority; so is it with these spiritual armies. I remember taking an undergraduate course in college in anthropology. I liked the class. It was about all the divergent cultures in the world, how they lived and how cultures and societies were unique to their in their own environments.

Religion is a part of every culture. Margaret Mead a revered name in cultural anthropology, defined religion as, the "belief in Spirits." Ancient or primitive cultures show more insight of the spiritual than we in the 'civilized' world where spirituality and belief in the supernatural has all but disappeared, even from religion. I mention the world of the spirit here because religion which does not acknowledge the spiritual forces arrayed in the heavens is dangerously ignorant of spiritual matters. (1Corinthians 12:1) A religion which does not recognize active spiritual forces is powerless to deal them. In this spirit realm forces of evil are in operation to steal from, to kill, and destroy people like you and me.

Our being ignorant of spiritual forces, does not negate their reality or the consequences of recognizing them in our lives.

The first of the two spiritual kingdoms is the Kingdom of God where our King of glory is enthroned in a heavenly place; The second, the kingdom of darkness, where the "God of this world –Satan, the

prince of the power of the air, the great deceiver, reigns as king. Because we live in a Spiritual world we need spiritual knowledge. A secular religion limited to material interests and understanding, speaks to the natural world and natural human potential.

Secular religion does not adequately deal with the forces which will impact us for an eternity. We need more than teaching about "goodness" as positive choices or positive social attributes and evil as bad choices which have bad consequences. God is not a God of psychological wellness and feeling good about ourselves, He is a God of spiritual restoration and reconstruction which is forged not by human will, nor human wisdom but by the power of Spiritual life generated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. When God does the work of renewal it is deep and eternally effective. How many have tried to reconstruct themselves through psychological rigors or acts of the will. Self discipline to change our fleshly impulses is good only as long as our own energies prevail. But when God's hand is set to work in the human soul the result surpasses anything that counseling or self-will could ever achieve, Joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Chapter 9

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

PHARISEES ARE STILL IN EVIDENCE IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

HERE ARE SOME CHARACTERISTIC BEHAVIORS

References to these behaviors are addressed by Jesus

Pharisees:

- [judge Godly spiritual things to be evil and devilish.](#)
- follow codes of legalism

- ❑ set themselves to destroy those who differ with them.
- ❑ behavior is contagious
- ❑ hinder or prevent the acquisition of true faith
- ❑ present themselves with pomp, pretense and self exaltation.
- ❑ miss the spiritual meaning of the word and the law.
- ❑ separate themselves from common people - sinners.
- ❑ turn what should be a spiritual life into burdensome rules.
- ❑ see God formally and far off from man.
- ❑ lack knowledge or experience of the intimacy of "son ship."
- ❑ status - their official ecclesiastical position is pre-eminence.
- ❑ judge from externals, presumption based on outward form and appearance of things,
therefore they do not judge with righteous judgment
(Isaiah Chapter 11)
- ❑ do not recognize Spiritual anointing, they contend with the anointing, try to stop it.
- ❑ expect privilege, power, status, and gain through their titles and leadership.
- ❑ forget the true nature of ministry: mercy, sharing and serving others.

Pharisees judge things which are from God to be evil and devilish.

"But the Pharisees said, He casts out devils through the prince of the devils." (Matthew 9:34) "But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." (Matthew 12:24)

There is a class of religious people who know only the ritual, the letter and the doctrine of their institution. These individuals are quick to react to the person who comes with a doctrine or revelation that does not coincide with their own. They do not recognize the revelation of the Spirit of God and in fact do not even know God or his attributes. In the case of Jesus, they ascribed his anointed works to that of Lucifer.

Pharisees follow codes of legalism

"But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day." (Matthew 12:2) "And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness."

(Luke 11:39) "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." (Luke 11:42)

Conformity to religious rules or "legalism" marks the religious behavior of the Pharisees. Doctrines are judged right and correct because they follow "*the way of the fathers.*" It is the tradition. Tradition is sacrosanct and cannot be violated. Jesus saw past the tradition into the moral and spiritual foundations of God.

Pharisees vehemently oppose any they perceive to be contrary to their doctrine.

Pharisees set themselves to destroy those who differ with them. *"And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him."* (Mark 3:6) *"Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him."* (Matthew 12:14)

Tolerance for another viewpoint not evident in the doctrine of Pharisees. We see the immediate response to opposition which threatened their power-base is that of reprisals, sanctions, or worse. It is dangerous to confront a religiously grounded person especially one who has a vested interest in the status-quo. No congregation wishes to be threatened in way which impacts their power base or the economic interests of their congregation.

The Pharisee's behavior is contagious

"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." (Matthew 16:6)

When there is no spiritual core in religious life everything done is based upon the accepted form, going along with the status-quo adhering to traditional behavior. Regardless of the times or era, once so conditioned it is very hard to break free. Jesus called the unyielding tradition-bound people of his day, *"children of hell."* (Matthew 23:15)

Pharisees hinder or prevent the acquisition of true faith

Mat 23:13 *"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."*

Mat 23:15 *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."*

Pharisees present themselves with pomp, pretense and self exaltation.

Mat 23:14 *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."*

Pharisees miss the spiritual meaning of the word and the law.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tith of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." (Matthew 23:23)
"And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." (Luke 11:39)

Those who are of the world and those who are connected with the vine of religion fail to hear Jesus' words and they fail to believe. Jesus told these religious persons that if they belonged to God they would hear and recognize that Jesus spoke for God. Jesus concluded that they did not belong to God but to their father the devil.

Pharisees do not follow the laws they teach; hypocrisy.

" - he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." (Luke 12:1)

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." (Matthew 23:25) *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within*

full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

(Matthew 23:27) "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." (Matthew 23:3)

Pharisees separate themselves from common people and sinners.

"And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" (Mark 2:16)

"But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" (Luke 5:30) "And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." (Luke 15:2)

Pharisees turn what should be a spiritual life into burdensome tasks.

"For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matthew 23:4)

There are still religions today who bind their people with obligations and burdensome tasks. To fail at the task is to risk spiritual repercussion of God's wrath.

Pharisees see God formally and far off from man; have no knowledge nor experience of the intimacy of "son ship."

"And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21)

To Pharisees the "status" of their ecclesiastical position is self

exaltation and pride.

"Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets." (Luke 11:43)

"And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." (Luke 16:14)

"But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments," (Matthew 23:5)

"Pharisees judge the externals, see only the outward forms and appearance of things, therefore they do not judge with righteous judgment (Isaiah Chapter 11)

"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:" (Luke 17:20)

Righteous judgment is described in Isaiah Chapter 11. It states that Lord, the righteous Judge will not judge by the external evidence of the things which are seen by things revealed in the Spirit.

Pharisees do not recognize the anointing, they contend and compete with the anointing, using any available argument to stop it.

"The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true." (John 8:13)

"Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him." (John 11:57)

Any person who is spiritual in the midst of religious non spiritual

people is at once suspect and accused of many kinds of evil. Whether by reason of jealousy or of fear that they might be exposed as spiritually deficient charlatans. In such situations, the true man or woman of God is singled out for persecution and eventually suffers legalistic reprisals from the priestly leadership.

Pharisees flaunt the status of their religious titles, which are used to "lord it over" the simple.

"And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." (read Matthew 23:7-10)

From these scriptures it can be interpreted that any names which exalt clergy or human leadership is unscriptural. Whether "Rabbi," "Master," "Father," "Excellence," "Eminence," "Your Grace," "Reverend" or "Pastor," or any other.

The apostles forbid such obsequious fawning and we should not become so phony and egoistic as to require it. These kinds of men may be our brothers if they are believers but they are no more than a brother who shares the same testimony that, *"We have nothing that was not given to us"*.

Pharisees expect privilege, power, status, and gain through their titles and leadership.

"And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues," "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."

"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." (Matthew 23:6,8,9,12)

Clergy as a privileged class is assumed widely within contemporary

tradition. Leadership, some presume, has the privilege of living in a kind of exalted manner, with lavish attention to their every need. Of course there are some poor churches who barely support their pastors and might well do more, many of the clergy class "lord it over" the parishioners essentially expecting a high standard of comfortable living to be supplied by the gratuities of others.

There is something about the picture of a fat, self indulgent preacher that the world does not trust. The Broadway musical production "Cabaret" typifies this view as it features one song which was called "Money." In it there is just such a reference to a fat money-grabbing preacher. While fat and affluent business men seem perfectly Okay by worldly standards the world does not really want to see Christians among the materialistic and self indulgent. While I do not normally see the world as having much spiritual enlightenment, this is an interesting insight.

Pharisees forget the true nature of ministry: mercy, sharing and helping others.

"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 23:11,12)

The Kingdom of God is not about ourselves. The Kingdom of God is not about wealth or comfort though it would be good if want and suffering were banished. The Kingdom of God is about realizing a life where God is a reality and his presence is a continual comfort and strength to any of us in this world, regardless of our status or situation. God is a reality and his blessings are real and new each day. Those who know God are aware of this reality, those who know only religion are still waiting to connect to the real thing.

Chapter 10
RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS AND EMULATION
Religious Behaviors and Mannerisms That are Learned and
Affected

True Worship is a matter of the heart.

In chapter 4 of John's gospel we learn about an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Even though Jews traditionally had no dealings with Samaritans the woman at Jacob's well learned some profound secrets dealing not only with the Messiahship of Jesus but also about the nature of true worship. Worship is not about anything outward nor is it about going to a place to meet God. True worship is ultimately a matter of knowledge of the Truth; who Jesus is; and what he has done in sharing the "Gift of God" with us.

Emulated Behaviors, following the God life, is not learning how to talk Christian talk and act with religious behavior:

It is easy for anyone even an unbeliever, to appear good and righteous by affecting religious behaviors. All religions have familiar forms of worship; When in a place of worship we observe behaviors and attitudes that mark an individual as devout or pious. Any practitioner can appear devout regardless of what is the object of their worship. When worship becomes something that can be expressed by mere physical postures we are easily removed from the focus of the heart. We find specific kinds of actions in our religious practice. Sometimes this involves bowing, kneeling or gestures – a purely external matter. But God judges the inner man of the heart. *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."*

As Paul said in his epistles, "Be imitators of me, as I imitate Christ." There are some who we discover of worthy of emulation. These men or women truly; know who they worship; There is a place for conformity and imitation and there is a place where conformity is a hindrance to knowing God. "Are we to follow God or man?" was a sound bench mark for belief and behavior from the beginning.

Most of us have had a time in our lives that we tried to keep up with the latest fashions and trends. We kept our eyes on trendsetters and tried to emulate those fashions and fads. Teenagers are tuned in to the issues of "being cool" or being in and staying in. In contemporary media expressions and fashions or behaviors that are "in" today blast our minds and emotions. It's message tries to persuade us to conform to the things which are "hip" or "cool." Fashionable-ness whether in the "look", in language affectations, or owning material toys and accessories that are presumed to make life fulfilling. Media trends have the power to turn our minds away from things which are true or eternal. While we may quickly condemn conformity we still find ourselves being its victim.

Conformity is also relevant within Christian institutions. Religion models and promotes its own kind of behaviors to emulate. One can learn how to be appear pious or religious with "Copy-cat" behavior can promote a perception of one's status in the church community. Practically everything about church life can be seen, demonstrated or modeled, and replicated. We are exhorted to be sincere in our expressions of compassion and humility and not merely put on an act.

Preaching style can also become affected or stylized. It is not uncommon for preachers to sound like they were cut out of the same mold. The preaching voice is really not like men or women

talk a certain way among themselves but when they get inside a church they use a different voice, or mannerisms, or inflections which seem somehow more "spiritual?" How is it preachers sound like preachers? Where do they learn this "preacher voicing" and emphasis? No doubt from one of their preaching heroes.

King James English the language of Shakespeare, does not make us more Godly. But the religious tone often reverts to this out dated synthetic language by which to affect spirituality and appropriate reverence. This affectation has no more power to influence God than for you and I to simply talk as ourselves. God knows who we are, he knows our weakness and sees we are dust. Do we think that we can persuade him that we are something we are not: That we can "fake anything" with him. Because of this kind of praying many simply don't attempt to pray since they can't intone Elizabethan English well enough.

In a recent television broadcast featuring music and religion I enjoyed seeing the contrast of many kinds of musical traditions including "high church" and "low church" and all sorts in between. Music has a way of preserving things which are good and Godly even when the glory has for the most part faded. Among the musicians featured were a young black evangelist whose name I cannot credit. His Spiritual gifting was obvious. After this evangelist's conversion, he used his gift to minister the Gospel and the power of God through Rap Music in the mean streets of a major city. The fact that God was using him was unmistakable, his strength and anointing and transparency to God was strongly evident. The difference between this man's street music and the highly intellectual liturgical music of a high church musicologist did not hinge upon natural ability but supernatural *anointing*. I can't

say I'm a fan of rap music, but I confess that I would rather listen to Rap Music enabled and anointed by God, than a performer with a degree in performance, practiced in their method but who does not know God in the power of his Spirit.

What a shame that church gatherings should become an environment where anyone has to put on an act? In the pulpit there can be all manners of affectations which may or may not be sincere. If a pastor is charismatic (naturally gifted) many will begin to talk like him, gesture like him, or pray like him. It is too easy for us to emulate a man. Oratory and persuasive speech can hold an audience in rapt attention, with speaking skills. Even when the message is mundane an hour can go by more quickly when the pastor adds a few jokes or anecdotal commentary about his life or someone else's life.

Paul the apostle, wrote to the people of Corinth that he did not come to present stories, or teachings, with rhetorical drama, affectations, or oratory. He said rather, that he came to "demonstrate" the Spirit of God and demonstrate the "power" of the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 2:4). This manner of presentation is what I call the transparent messenger.

When the unbelieving world looks at these peculiar affectations of church life they soon begin to mock or make caricatures of them. There have been too many films portraying preachers or evangelists as conniving con-artists, usually out to deceive gullible folks at a "revival meeting" into giving their last dollar. Just about anyone especially those outside of the fellowship of God can do perfect imitations of a drawling evangelist pretending to heal a person by laying on hands to heal some gullible mark thus ridiculing Jesus, his gifts and salvation .

Copying Christ and the Apostolic Models

Not all role models are bad. God made each of us "originals." There is no need to copy anyone else unless what they know about the Kingdom of God 'works' and also conforms to the model of Scripture. Emulation of a human role model is understandable in the fact that we view our own abilities as inadequate thus we feel a need to copy another. Success in human terms probably motivates us to be like others who we call successful. In church circles any person who imagines themselves as great, powerful, or successful in a very real sense is self deceived. A key distinction is the kind of "role model" we chose to emulate and the correct kind of behaviors which we see modeled. The Bible has some very important things to say about copying others. It even suggests, believe it or not, that we do copy others, but we are never to compare ourselves with others. There is a distinction.

The Bible states, "Be ye followers (imitators) of God as dear children." (Ephesians 5:1) "Be followers (imitators) of me even as I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 11.1.) What makes it possible to imitate the apostle? It is because he is imitating Christ.

In apostolic ministry the apostle diminishes so God increases in him. Human gifts are surrendered to God's use and the vanity of personal achievement is discarded. Personal name, rank and reputations become irrelevant. The messenger must never overshadow the message with any affectation of ego or worldliness. Human character and the human flesh is the natural enemy of the Gospel. I have heard a spiritual man say wisely, "I have one great enemy to my ministry, myself." Human pride, (being

somebody important) is an enemy of the Gospel. Being yielded is of primary importance. A person must cast aside his desire for self exaltation before God can do much with him. This is something that only God can do and does, as he prepares and disciples us. It is part of the task we call "learning Christ." The body of a fellowship suffers when hierarchies are established.

God does not want the world to see an ordinary man or woman when a Christian is presented. He wants the glory of God to be revealed through a messenger who is as transparent as possible. When believers come together it is not to exalt any person but to reveal His glory. Those who are struggling to find a Spiritual life often have limited choices about who might be an appropriate role model. Someone may choose to model themselves after a person whose attributes or credentials reflect personality affectations or performance gifts, such persons may be totally without spiritual insights and knowledge of God. Paul states again in 2 Corinthians 10:12, *that we should not make ourselves like any who tend to compare themselves to others, he says, to make such comparisons is "not wise"* (paraphrased.)

We need to be grounded in the beliefs and understanding of the Christian life. Mentors with authentic maturity come into play as we gather in *koinonia* (fellowship.) But the active force that causes a believer to grow mentors is principally met by God, through the Spirit of Truth. We listen to preachers, teachers and friends in the faith and some understanding may instruct a listener in a certain way. But our growth must also come through prayer and study of Scripture. Through the Spirit God constantly teaches us individually. Most of yearn to experience the goodness of God, the power of God, or the transforming mind-restoring Wisdom of God.

Failing to find a Spiritual mentor we may proceed to ask God to

instruct or direct us. If any has faith and believes God will respond to us, we may ask him to meet us where we are. He can then direct us where you can find our "Annanais" The man who spoke by the Holy Spirit's revelation to the newly converted Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9:10-17.) At this moment you may not have the faith that God can and will, reach down and touch you, in answer to your request. But I have perfect faith that He will do just that.

Chapter 11

RELIGION: FIXATED ON EXTERNALS

Religion Plays Out in Costume

All institutional religions develop some formalism and ceremony

Among all of the first principles to be emphasized is that God and his kingdom are not within the realm of the material world.

The Kingdom of God is not measured, touched, seen, nor reached through travel. *Any practices which turn the focus of believers from the spiritual to any material thing is a misunderstanding of the gospel.* Traditions which emphasize or protect doctrines which

externalize elements of faith ought to be subject to revision. I am speaking more about elements of worship in religion which might be externalized and less about the behaviors which express living out one's personal faith.

Costume does not make the man or the woman! Neither does costume portray true spiritual character or authority. It is the life within that person that distinguishes him/her.

Movies and television routinely portray "men of God" costumed in special religious garb. Religious garments is a tradition and tangible way to denote rank or authority within the religious institution, just as in the military. The world goes along with this thinking, because it has been nurtured for centuries as part of religion (a religious paradigm.) But this attribute of religion is shallow and erroneous. I assure you, priestly garb would find no acceptance with Jesus or any of his apostles.

Within **religion**, clerical garments (costume) is used to separate and denote those of various spiritual ranks. When men or women are able to wear spirituality as an ecclesiastical garment they are clearly saying to the world that they have superior spiritual status and knowledge of God which sets them apart from the rest of us. Whether or not they believe they need to wear these kinds of costumes in order to be true to their calling, or perhaps honor God, I do not know. I do know, however, that Jesus never commanded for spiritual men to dress up in order to point to their status. This contradicts the principle of external things being less important than the internal. One of the things that Jesus noted about Pharisees was that there was pride connected to both their offices their costume. They wore them publicly and expected deference to be given to them.

Professional Performance

Worship should never become performance, but a communication of the heart. It is less for human approval than God's approval. It is directed only to the person of the Almighty. Preaching should not be performance, but speaking the mind of Christ to persons in need edification. A man of God yielded to the Spirit, may well *appear* dramatic, persuasive and captivating but these qualities will not be achieved on account of rhetorical skills.

Religious performance is born out of practiced rituals. Activities that occur in church houses consist of a series of programs, also called orders of worship. Each part in an order of worship, whether done by one person or several, can be viewed traditionally as either sacramental or performance. In sacramental worship it does not matter too much whether the details are performed well or not. Ritual stands for itself from beginning to end. It is not so important to introduce any personality or interpretation into it. Ritual is as relevant or inspiring as we wish it to be. Ritual, in my opinion is a kind of counterfeit substituting priestly rites for revelation.

Ritualism in Christian religions bears a strong relationship to paganism or shamanism. **Ritualism** is actually a **magic rite**. In it through a particular rite or ceremony using "sacred" elements or ingredients, God or gods are supposedly invoked and appeased. In highly stylistic ceremonies the congregation is fixed upon watching and hearing within the natural world. Today in the New Covenant, God is not found in the material realm or ritualistic forms.

Entertainment enlivens church performances

There are other kinds of 'worship services' in particular those that Protestant denominations follow their own 'orders of worship.' These are not meant to be sacramental. In such worship services every part of the order of service hinges on an individual's performance. Those congregations who have a more spiritual awareness make less of performance and stress the inner spiritual message. Part by part the elements of the Sunday or Sabbath ritual unfold. The congregation is kept entertained a little or more. If the choir sings well it is a good performance. If the soloist is doing a special number all of the congregation (audience) carefully scrutinizes every aspect of the performance, of course it is usually sub-par and amateurish but we tolerate sub-par because church does not normally have quality entertainment available (unless they are a very affluent church who can pay professionals.) Of course, it is the dream of most mega-churches to have all performances of professional quality.

The pastoral sermon or teaching is the high point of the order of worship in evangelical churches. Leaders are challenged to keep the congregation interested or tuned in for a certain amount of time. The best performers are the most sought after in ministry as they have the gift of communication and persuasion and know how to enhance an otherwise dry message with the right amount of drama or emotion to keep the congregational audience responsive. Modern teachers are faced with a similar challenge competing with professional entertainers who have the eyes and ears of the kids outside the classroom.

From the opening prelude to the closing of the recessional with the organ pulling out all stops, the church has completed another program; another in its own religious ritual. The performers have performed upon their respective stages, the audience has

'spectated' from their pews.

The less spiritual the church, the more the emphasis remains upon performance and show. The more the demand for performance the greater the performance pressure. The greater the self awareness, the less the ability to sense God in the parts. Conversely the more spiritual the ministry the less there is a sense that was performed. A transparent minister is God conscious and less self conscious.

What is the purpose of Christians coming together? I believe that it is to engage in what Jesus calls "True Worship." True worship enhances the spiritual life and experience of all who participate. It does not depend upon one man or one woman's performance. All are edified. All are encouraged. They will be able to say, " - of a truth God was present among us." It should not be forgotten that a greater part of each coming together is to solicit God's manifestation among them. God wishes to reveal his glory but this will not occur with our focus and attention of vain religious performance. See: "Why We Gather" by the author.

Chapter 12
THE TRUE VINES AND THE UNTRUE VINES
RELIGION VS. THE TRUE VINE
RELIGION & OTHER VINES

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." John 15:1"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and

every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." 15:2 "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." 15:3 "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." 15:4 "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." 15:5 "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." 15:6

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." 15:7 "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." 15:8 "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." 15:9 "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." 15:10

The words of Jesus Christ, addressed to us in Chapter fifteen of John's Gospel carry within them profound revelations about the nature of our spiritual relationship with Christ and his **body** called **the church**. I am sure that most church going persons have heard sermons preached on the subject of "The Vine." The vine and branch is also a popular church icon for decor, wall hangings and such.

Jesus declares that he himself is the true vine (John 15.1.) It is also obvious that God is the husbandman (the grower) and that we are expected to bring forth certain kinds of fruit while in this intimate relationship to Christ. It is also evident that the nurturing power which comes out of the vine is the power of the Holy Spirit with its attributes of Character and Life. Within this figure, there are other

issues which touch upon abiding, fruit bearing, as well as warnings and cautions on judgment or destruction pictured in pruning and the burning of unfruitful branches.

Though the text is pertinent and provocative in its message pertaining to the spiritual life. *My purpose of introducing the text is for a different purpose. I would like to examine the question of what is or are the other vines, the not true vines.* There is a vine of secular knowledge, (The knowledge of Good and Evil), there is a vine of religion, and there is a vine of Christ Jesus who is in the Father and the Father in him. ([See discussion of the 3 paradigms of truth](#)) This is the abiding place where we can grow up into him and with others share in that same Holy branch.

I believe there is evidence to point to the existence of at least two false branches. Each bears fruit of its own kind. The spurious two are, the vine of religion and the vine of worldliness. Their fruit consists of worldly or humanistic attributes. or familiarity with the values and understanding of the world scientific, social or political systems. The True Vine of which Jesus speaks, bears fruit according to the Kingdom of God.

Thoughts about the True Vine

What is the true vine? Is the true vine the church? Is it partaking in church fellowship and sacraments and activities? Is this what is meant by abiding in Christ? The True Vine springs forth out of the Kingdom of the Heavens. The True Vine is both a person and a spiritual "place" though an invisible one. Christ is that Vine and we

become grafted into him. He is the sustaining life and virtue which flows forth to nurture every branch and every twig within the branch. The psalmist pens a similar metaphor in which he describes the tree growing by the river in Psalm 1 verse 3.

As we approach the end of this secular age the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. hallelujah, hallelujah. Even now we sense a quickening of the manifestation of things which are from the heavens. Earthly things begin to pass away in the light of Christ. Heaven is our home. Heaven begins to become more and more in manifestation. We see angels ascending and descending upon the son of man. The River of heaven's throne begins to flow fourth and out of our inner most beings the heavenly river is felt moving forth from us.

Abiding

"- he shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth in his season, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper" (paraphrase.) It is rooted in life and the life is God's life. If we could ask a fruit tree what it is like to bear fruit, the tree would probably admit that fruit bearing is done without thinking and without expending effort. Fruit just comes.

The Vine of Religion, An Untrue Vine

Most of these commentaries discuss religion as a principle hindrance to the growth of knowledge and Godliness. There are numerous applications and aspects to be explored. An untrue vine resembles the true vine. It appearances are similar so that one can easily confuse it with a true vine. It is not for example so different as a grape vine compared to an oak tree. Therefore there is the continuing possibility of being deceived or of confusing the two.

Anytime that deception is involved we recognize that the deceiver has been at work. The deceiver or Satan comes to lie, to distort or to distract us from the truth. Religion is a classic model of the deceiver's handy work. While purporting to speak God's mind and God's will we are sidetracked into applying our lives to something which is actually outside of a Spiritual life; Religion can be outside of Christ. Where the true vine brings for the kingdom of God, His approval and his righteousness, the untrue vine brings forth religiosity and self exaltation as it seeks the approval of human authority. Jesus spoke to the fig tree which had no fruit. In this story in the book of Mark the Lord may have been reminded of the fall from Glory when in Eden Adam was clothed with the cover of God's glory. When the glory departed so did innocence, so did the fellowship, so did dominion. Fig leaves were a poor substitute for the true fellowship with heaven's Glory. No wonder Jesus cursed the tree saying, "Let no one eat fruit of you forever hereafter."

In the model of the vine which Jesus speaks of, we see that fruit comes forth from it. The fruit of Christ's vine are spiritual fruits. Righteousness, peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit as well as the fruit of Jesus Christ's character that are described in Paul's letter to the Galatian
s Chapter 5 in verses 22 and 23,

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Gentleness, Goodness, Meekness, Patience, and Self Control.

There are fruits which issue forth from the religious vine as well. Some of the fruits may also display virtues or attributes of moral goodness, faithfulness and loyalty, but the key to this fruitfulness is from human will or human effort rather than God's ability and effort.

Let's look at some of the attributes of the Religious vine and contrast those attributes to the true vine:

The overseer or husband man of the true vine, is God the Father who prepared the Way for us to be reconciled to Him through his son, Jesus Christ. The authorship or husbandman of any false vine (religion) is Lucifer, a being who plants seeds of deception, Lucifer who masquerades as an angel of light. This deceiver, seductively cloaked in beauty and promise, presents his words in a way that seems good and plausible but he is leading us in a way contrary to the truth. The Religious Vine institutes **human leadership and authority**. In the vine of religion **human institutions** accredit or approve the **clergy/priesthood**. In the vine of religion religious leaders wear costumes designating **rank and authority**. In the vine of religion God is a **God of the past** not the present. In the vine of religion God is not here but somewhere **out there**. In the vine of religion **human performance** is rewarded In the vine of religion salvation is connected with **obligations or works**.

**The Worldly Vine
An Untrue Vine**

(The Leaven of Herod Mark 8:15)

The worldly vine acknowledges one key element **exaltation of the self**. The human ego always strives for recognition, greatness, and personal reward. I am somebody great. I did it with style. I did it my way. The worldly vine may not have any attributes of Godliness in fact competitiveness turns to ruthlessness and ruthlessness to any method to achieve one's ends.

Chapter 13

RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY

Rethinking Religious Language and Terminology

Terms and language of Christendom sometimes house wrong understandings. It is a good idea to revisit some of these and refresh our understandings:

Cross: The classical symbol of Christianity; a popular jewelry adornment.

consider this: *How Jesus Christ was "made sin" for us that we could be made righteous in Him. (Galatians 2:20;3:13; Colossians 2:14)*

Church: The meeting house for religious programs.

consider this: *The mystical body of believers who are born of the spirit and whose names are written in the "book of life." (John 3:3;Phillipians 4:3; Revelation 13.8)*

Temple: A building or edifice where rituals and sacrifices are conducted to elicit God's favor and blessings.

consider this:

The believer's own body is the temple. 'Do you not know that you are the temple.' (1Corinthians 3:16;6:19)

Christian: A member of any of several hundred sects or religious denominations.

consider this: *One whose life has been re-formed and renewed by the grace of God by virtue of believing in Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and messiah and receiving His Spirit.* (Ephesians 2:1-5)

Worship: A worship service; the order of worship in a church or in a religious program.

consider this: *Fellowship with the Spirit of God; speaking to and hearing from God; communion with the Father in heaven.* (John 4:23,4)

Priest: Those trained in religious rituals designed to bring God's favor and benefits upon the people.

consider this: *Each believer is called a priest unto God, communing with Him; ministering to Him, and ministering to others on His behalf.* (Revelation 1:6;5:10)

Disciples/Saints: The twelve original followers of Jesus, those who on rare occasion display unusual virtue or Godliness.

consider this: *Each believer is called to be disciple and a saint; these are general designations for all believers.* (John 8:31,2;Acts 9:13,32,41;26:10)

Minister (noun): The person who is placed in leadership to conduct worship services. Consider this: *That which a disciple does to share God love and promises to the world; as individuals need to experience the power and compassion of God. Minister (verb) the act of service generated by a heart of compassion. What God wants to do through His servants. The Lord sees "needs" in every life. God's heart toward us, is to bless, restore and make us free. These spiritual intents require the use of human vessels.* (Matt 20;26,7,8)

Ministry (noun): The profession of a pastor or person of the cloth. Ordained and credentialed professional who occupies a pulpit or is

given the oversight of a congregation consider this *Ministry (verb) the act of service generated by a heart of compassion. What God wants to do through His servants. The calling of each believer/disciples through the knowledge and power of the Spirit of God directing them from within.*

Preach: The minister's main oratory or address within the worship service.

Consider this: *Each believer bearing witness to unbelievers, giving account of the simple realities of God's promises in the Word; promises regarding redemption through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection; guided by the power of the Spirit; the authority of His name over powers of darkness and salvation from the wrath to come.* (Mark 16:15,16; Romans 10:14,15)

Christian Teaching: The minister's exposition of doctrines given from the pulpit as an expert and authority. Usually encompassed within a sermon. Consider this: *Each believer sharing insight of his or her own revelations of the reality of God, his Word, and experiences in the Kingdom of God.* consider this all truth and the foundation of truth is the Word of God. Personal revelations must not build doctrine. The Word is the guide and supercedes personal understandings.

Finally remember, that Christianity even constrained as Religion, weakened by its detriments, has provided a foundation of morals and a social framework for millions. Children are nurtured in homes where traditions of church life are practiced. For generations the values system of Christian teachings and beliefs have provided a framework of goodness and and a beneficial influence to the

nations.

But having said this it remains a tragic misfortune that the morality and the social foundations of Christianity are rapidly dissolving in the face of secularism and unbelief. The Spiritual truths of Christianity are steadily being exchanged for a system of secular values promoted in education and in the popular media. Eventually, fewer and fewer will be able to say I am a Christian believer or know what that means. Ideally, that meaning is the testimony that we have personally tasted of the Grace and goodness of God through Jesus Christ the Messiah.

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