

DUMBING DOWN THE SAINTS

A VIEW OF THE PULPIT FROM THE PEW

ISAIAH 42:22

“But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: They are for a prey, and none delivers; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore”

Harald Bredesen: Founding Board member of CBN & 700 Club.

Shaun Kearney does not have to go back to the original source he walks with Him. He is His confidante. That's why he's one of the most original men I have ever known. If you want to bless your people out of their socks, make them want to bring their friends, and get blessed yourself, Shaun Kearney is your man.

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FOREWORD

At the outset I would like say that there is beyond question many honest servants trying to take care of a flock of sheep. I have many wonderful friends who are people of integrity that pastor churches that I have ministered in. They have nothing but my highest respect and admiration. In many ways theirs is a difficult, lonely, and often thankless task. Gratitude is the most unfelt of all human emotions, but the Great Accountant is neither forgetful nor ungrateful. (Hebrews 6:10). And so to all those dear brothers and sisters actively serving, I pray that the Great Shepherd of the sheep will lead you into all truth as you seek to do His will more perfectly. It's a sad commentary on the modern church that what is covered in this book needed to be addressed at all. We do not tar everyone with the same brush nevertheless the present religious system has a case to answer without question.

The system which pastor's struggle with is an impossible one to work with. It would be like entering a forest with a hammer to cut down trees; a hopeless proposition to be sure. It's difficult, because the system has no scriptural foundation. It's demoralizing because it doesn't produce what they seek to achieve. Instead of their flocks becoming stronger they grow weaker. The result is that dissatisfied sheep begin to drift from temple to temple looking for reality, while others just wander away completely. It's building with wood, hay, and stubble on the wrong foundation. In spite of the fact that many good things happen within the system, the good eventually becomes the enemy of the best.

There are three things on my heart that I wish to draw to our attention. They are the messenger, his message, and his methods.

| | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| The man: | What he is. |
| The methods he uses: | What he does |
| The message he brings: | What he says. |

A man must be true to all three if his work is to endure. Every ministry gift is given for the edification of the body but instead many violate the body by stripping the wool off the backs of the Lord's sheep to feed themselves Acts 20:29. Reaping where they never sowed, these Balaam type ministries will stop at nothing if the price is right. It's a tragedy that conditions in some quarters have sunk so low. Every preacher is in some measure a Prophet, ordained to preach as God bids him regardless of the consequences. So when his conscience is troubled by questionable methods, he must make a choice, 'will I remain true to God and speak out, or capitulate and compromise'. Should he decide to compromise to keep his position, then at that point he ceases to be a mouthpiece for God. If he tries to keep a foot in each camp he will most surely fail. If he covets position above faithfulness to his calling, he is nothing but a religious Hireling.

**There is no greater problem in the church today
than personal ambition in the ministry.**

He may think he is being diplomatic and smart, but he's really just a slave to carnal desires; someone who will do whatever is necessary to hold on to his position. When our decisions are influenced by fear and unbelief, it's time to resign. You be the judge.

John 10:11-12. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep."

It is not the compensation for hire, which labels a man a hireling; ("for the labourer is worthy of his hire") as the scripture says, "muzzle not the ox that treads out the corn." The Lord has ordained "they that preach the Gospel should live by the gospel." Loving "the hire" more than "the work" is what makes a hireling. He is a hireling who would not work, were it not for the hire. If a man who only works for the hire is a thief and robber, then what is he who continually takes the hire and doesn't work at all? This was the case within the shepherding

movement where the leaders were awash with money taking all the tithes for themselves. (Ezekiel 34:1-3.) The hireling flees when the wolf comes. He loves the hire but doesn't care for the sheep. The wolf signifies any enemy who by fraud or force attacks a Christian's faith, liberty or life. The wolf seizes and scatters the flock. But a true shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep.

Proverbs 21:16. "He that wandereth from the way of understanding shall dwell in the congregation of the dead".

Division simply means two visions.

Division has always existed in the Church. The reasons for them are varied and have sometimes been quite necessary. The reformation is a positive example. The Reformation in the 16th-century brought about a great religious revolution in the Christian church. The Papacy received a wound from which it has never fully recovered. It ended the ecclesiastical supremacy of the pope in Western Christendom, and resulted in the establishment of the Protestant church. The Reformation completely altered the medieval way of life in Western Europe, and initiated the era of modern history. Although the movement dates from the early 16th century, when Martin Luther first defied the authority of the church, the conditions that led to his revolutionary stand had existed for hundreds of years. Continuous division has marked the history of the church since that time. It would be a gross injustice to claim that a spirit of competition and rivalry motivated the reformers to defy Rome. It was born of God, and as such we should take instruction from it. The path of the just is as a shining light that shines more and more.

We should never surrender the ideal for humanistic substitutes.

The last thing any of the reformers set out to do was to start a breakaway movement. They strived in most cases to bring about change to the system but because of Rome's absolute inflexibility they were given no choice but to leave. Some made the supreme sacrifice for their stand against the suppression of truth. Divisions and struggles

within a movement are often the result of the lust for power. It may be disguised as a struggle for purity of doctrine, when in fact it was a craving for control. Lastly there are diversities and differences that reflect cultural and ethnic backgrounds which are completely acceptable. One of the sad things about modern missions is the way the western church has exported its divisions to the third world. History seems to repeat itself, and we never seem to learn.

The Talmud is a body of Jewish civil and religious law, including commentaries on the Torah, or Pentateuch. Two compilations of the Talmud exist: The Palestinian Talmud sometimes called the Jerusalem Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud. The contents of the Palestinian Talmud were written by Palestinian scholars between the 3rd century AD and the beginning of the 5th century. The contents of the Babylonian Talmud, were written by scholars up to the beginning of the 6th century. The Talmud was continually being added to, revised and argued over, dividing Judaism into many sects with different practices. The Church has been no different.

The three greatest areas of division in the Church revolve around Church Government, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and Eschatology. The first is the most divisive and saddest of all. It seems men must formulate everything into a cast iron creed that excludes all from their fellowships unless they conform. After Paul and Barnabas reported to the Church in Jerusalem that God was visiting the Gentiles, a certain group of Pharisees immediately demanded that the Gentiles be circumcised and made to keep the Law of Moses and so the Apostles and Elders came together to consider the matter. Peter responded that it was clear God had made no difference between Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles, as he witnessed when he preached Christ to the household of Cornelius. They permitted the objector's freedom of speech, and answered their arguments by proving such bondage unscriptural and impractical for Gentiles. Then James made this extraordinary statement.

Acts 15:28-29.

“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”

But men never seem to be satisfied until they have complicated matters with unreasonable and unscriptural demands. James never set out by-laws or established rules for membership. God saw the Gentiles as being fit to be saved. They no doubt continued steadfastly in fellowship, prayer, the Apostles teachings and building relationships. It's seems all too simple, but it isn't, it's just God's uncomplicated way.

INTRODUCTION

1 Peter 4:7. “The end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober.” We live in perilous times. A sign of His soon return is that seducers would wax worse and worse. In the light of these warnings and many others from scripture, we need to be “workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” The natural man has a prejudice toward error, and is easily deceived. It’s been so since the fall. Therefore there’s a great need for sobriety as we approach the scriptures. To be sober is to be of a sound mind, watchful, on your guard, and prudent as opposed to being careless. Preserve your sanity, is what Peter is saying. Wine is typical of doctrine in scripture, and there is some very intoxicating teaching influencing many saints. A characteristic of wine is that it goes to people’s heads quickly. The over indulgent soon lose all sense of proportion and balance. An intoxicated man is an overconfident man. It is a fundamental requirement in expounding the Word of God, that we uphold the balance of truth.

Titus 2:3b “Teachers of good things.”

Teaching what is unadulterated, having strict regard for truth, accompanied by motives that are pure. A characteristic of sanity is to see things in their right perspective, to know what’s important and what’s not. It isn’t suddenly swept away by unbalanced enthusiasm. Fanaticism is distorted truth. Indifference is to be impervious to truth, without feeling, at times even callous. It is a fundamental requirement that we need to preserve the balance of truth, because there are two sides to everything. We readily admit there is a real danger in over-emphasizing one and ignoring the other. We have ample evidence in history that furnishes examples of this. We want to be available but not gullible. We need to be like the Bereans whom Paul commended because they searched the scriptures to see if what he said was true.

Acts 17:11 “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” A note of caution:

However strongly we may insist on the authority of scripture, correct doctrine should never be viewed as an end in itself, but rather a means to a greater end. That is the glory of the Father and to the praise of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:14. His intention is that we grow up into Christ and not allow ourselves to be carried about by every wind of doctrine, becoming prey to unscrupulous men, engaged in every form of trickery. Paul would not admonish us in this fashion if it were not possible to be deceived. Almost all-doctrinal error is truth perverted; wrongly divided; disproportionately held. When things get out of proportion, you are left with a caricature. That which was beautiful and fair, becomes unsightly and ugly. Beauty is basically a matter of proportion.

Proverbs 11:1. “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight.”

Galatians 6:2. “Bear ye one another's burdens” is the injunction of scripture, yet the same chapter insists, “every man shall bear his own burden.”

V 5 “Judge not lest ye be judged, yet he that is spiritual judges all things.” We are enjoined to “take no thought for tomorrow” yet the Lord Himself said that “if a man didn't provide for his own, he was worse than an infidel.”

Matthew 6:34. “Behold the goodness and the severity of the Lord.”

God is love, God is light, and God is a consuming fire. These references are not in contradiction, but compliment one another. The point of balance is critical as anyone who has learned to walk a tightrope would know. In reference to balance it is the duty of each servant of God to declare “the whole counsel of God.” Acts 20:2).

Some reading this book will think that it's one-sided, and that's true, because it seeks to deal with a side of truth that is ignored in many pulpits. What preachers need to declare is not what the people want to hear, but what they need. Those aspects of truth their people are unfamiliar with that are least manifest in their walk with Christ; truth that will enable them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Saviour. Let's not pretend that the fault rests solely with the people, for in most cases they have little say about what's served up to them week after week. Their only recourse, if they are starving, is to vote with their feet. This they have done by the millions over the past twenty years in the 20-21 Century Western Church. We are seeing religion play a lesser role of in the life of ordinary people. By religion, I think we fool ourselves if we exclude any movement; in particular those that maintain they are on "the cutting edge." The recent attempts to revive ourselves within the walls of our unsound minds by means of the Toronto blessing; Pensacola; Rodney Howard Browne and Todd Bentley experience has had little or will ever have any lasting impact on the church and much less still on society.

The fact that Christians are prepared to travel half way around the world, at great expense to attend these meetings shows how far people are prepared to go to get "a touch." That maybe fine, if you can afford it, preachers usually can. It points to the emptiness of the private lives of Christians, and how uninspiring the ministry they sit under must be. It's a fact that you will never rise any higher than the level of the ministry you sit under. It seems the Bible just isn't enough any more, so that some extra biblical activity is a must if you're going to survive. Another amazing thing is that preachers are always the vanguard of those that rush to these meetings to find God in a fresh way.

We live in a humanistic society, where the prevailing philosophy of existentialism has spilled over into every part of church life with disastrous consequences. In many Bible Colleges, ministers are required to complete a humanistic degree. It has infected almost everything that's taught and practiced, and has become well entrenched in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. It's fair to say

that many servants in these churches are concerned about the direction these trends have taken, but feel helpless to do anything about it, or because of peer pressure, they remain silent.

Isaiah 42:19.

“His watchmen are blind, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark.” We have super churches led by supercharged ministers, who have become role models for up and coming hopefuls. Superman is just a myth, but the problem is that neither he nor his people know that yet. Jesus Christ is presented as the need-meeter, who exists solely for our benefit. The order is material, physical and mental, while spiritual a poor last. Jesus will ‘meet every need’ they say, and that may be true, but He came to save us first and foremost. People attend in order “to get a touch” from God, via the preacher. Christians no longer see “sin” as being a problem, but instead view themselves as innocent victims of undeserved abuse. The constant search is on for a scapegoat when things are going wrong. The author of all our troubles is the devil and his agents. Saints should never be in want; pain and suffering are part of the curse and therefore anathema. High on the agenda is getting the victory over your antagonist, and having bad memories erased, instead of confronting them.

Libertarian thought pervades our theology. If the Bible doesn't explicitly forbid something, and it feels good, so long as you're not hurting anyone, then just go ahead and do it is the prevailing attitude. In charismatic circles, banners are displayed, and on occasions carried in procession as they march about inside the fortress, shouting out slogans in defiance of the Devil. They believe that in so doing the enemy is being put to flight, and great victories are being won in the heavenly realm. I met a brother who went up mountains overlooking an American city every Sunday morning, to bind the demons at ancient altars, where Indians once offered human sacrifices. The reason for this strange behaviour was to help churches have services free from demonic interference. He received plenty of encouragement from other pastors, and as far as I know is still doing it.

Renewal meetings, similar to performances given by hypnotists were common, where audiences watch the antics of a few people who are the centre of attention. We were told that the Holy Spirit is responsible for these bizarre antics. Pentecostals and Charismatics are always looking for a quick fix, the big miracle, or some dramatic far out experience in their lives. God in the ordinary affairs of every day life is lost sight of.

We love being pandered to. A friend of mine says “We would rather be exorcised than exercised,” and that’s precisely true, because it’s quicker, and I don’t have to do anything apart from passively presenting myself to the evangelist. We take refuge in prophecies, eagerly awaiting a personal visitation that will elevate us, and sweep millions into the kingdom. The result of this will be disappointed lethargic Christians who rarely witness.

What that means is, we have gone backwards numerically in spite of all the efforts of really great people, excellent programs, and revivals. People have become programmed into seeking for answers outside of themselves. Believing that what they need is always somewhere else, if they can’t find it where they are, they just move on to wherever they think its happening. While in Western Canada, during the height of Toronto’s popularity, I knew a group of Christians who made regular trips there to “Top up”, as they called it, when they began to feel a bit dry. That can be expensive, but then, people never give a second thought about indulging themselves, but are tight fisted when it comes to supporting others, such as single parents, widows and starving saints in third world countries. Exciting meetings with high-powered song services and fantastic programs are a must, if you want to keep your people from straying.

Romans 10:7-8. “Say not in thine heart who shall ascend into heaven to bring Christ down, the word of faith is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.”

Col 1:26-28. “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.”

Romans 1:16. The Gospel is power. It's God's power. It is power to save and deliver. It is available to all that believe. The just shall live by faith; not by feelings. This truth that launched the reformation has been lost sight of.

STAND FAST IN LIBERTY

Church life should be based on God's word and strength, not ours. It's so easy for us to organize God out of His own church! Our expertise and schemes can mean that God is no longer needed.

Acts 15:6-7 "The Apostles and Elders came together to consider the matter and when there had been much disputing, Peter responded."

They never silenced the opposition, but heard them out and responded accordingly. Why are we so fearful of allowing another point of view? In my experience, when the leaders of churches came together, they were times when every brother's contribution was important. No one person owned the floor. If someone wanted to share something they felt God wanted us to know, they were free to speak. But gradually that began to change. There was no schedule set up by an appointed leadership beforehand to tell us what we would and could do. Leaders were not voted in or out, it wasn't necessary, because they were easily recognized, by virtue of their unblemished character, and honoured for the ministry gift they exercised. Neither did we have to import outside voices to tell us what we should be doing, thereby limiting ourselves to someone else's mediocrity. We prayed together, wept together, strengthened one another, and opened our hearts to God and His Word. Ministers were not under any pressure to conform to tenets of a central committee. People were at liberty to come or to go. We watched out for each other, and helped one another in practical ways.

If you can't keep people by loving them, rules won't do it. We were a fellowship built on relationship, and not an autocratic organization held together by rules. If minister A had minister B in for special meetings, and minister C wasn't happy about that particular ministry for whatever reason, he was free to follow the dictates of his heart. As the shepherd of a flock he was at liberty to decline to have minister B however this was not a valid reason for A and C to break fellowship. You may well say 'we do that now' and this may be true over some issues, but eventually all have to say shibboleth (Judges 12:6) correctly, or suffer the inevitable consequence.

I am of the same opinion as John Newton, when he said, “In essentials I agree with them all, and in circumstantial details I differ no more than they differ among themselves, they all confess that they are fallible, and yet decide with an air of infallibility, and they all in turn expect me to unite with them if I have any regard to the authority and honour of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Head of the church. But the very consideration they propose restrains me from uniting with any of them.” I have frequently been asked, “do you intend to join us?” but once again, like Newton, I do not believe that I should honour the headship and kingly office of Christ by acknowledging Him as the Head **of a party and subdivision** of His people, to the exclusion of the rest.

“Every party uses fair words proclaiming their liberty and freedom, but when an explanation is made it always amounts to the same thing. They will give liberty to think **as they think** and to act **as they act**, which to me, who claims the same right of thinking for myself and of acting according to the dictates of my own conscience, is no liberty at all. I came therefore to this conclusion, that I would hold a friendly intercourse with them all, so far as they will allow me! But that I would stand fast in the liberty in which Christ has made me free, and call none of them master. If others sought to honour Him, by laying great stress on matters of doubtful disputation, my way of honouring Him, should be by endeavouring to show His kingdom **is not of this world**. Nor does it consist in pleading for forms and parties, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, and that neither circumcision is anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature, and the faith that worketh by love.”

How quickly we forget that the just shall live by faith. This has been the course this writer has diligently sought to follow since first coming to Christ. Yet I find it baffling, and even amusing, if it were not so sad, that some of those that I once walked this path with have fallen into the same sectarian trap as those they once criticized and called Babylonians. And now those of us, who have refused to submit to the “Saul system”, find ourselves having to explain why we do not wish to join any sectarian group, no matter how loudly they may boast of their broadmindedness and free spirit. We have found everywhere we have been, that the ecclesiastical

barriers are as impregnable today as they have always been. No church circle, or company of professing Christians is prepared to **really** welcome into their midst and extend the right hand of fellowship, (regardless of his reputation and credentials) to anyone who is unprepared to join and limit to their party, and pronounce all their shibboleths. In so far as these matters are concerned, “let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

Non conformity can be costly, but Christianity has always been a call to action regardless of the personal cost.

I value my Christian liberty far too highly, and consider it sufficient, being joined to the Lord, as a member of His many, membered, glorious body, and do not see the need to join anything more than this. Therefore I have no intention of locking myself up in some ecclesiastical prison, to be excluded from fellowship with my brothers and sisters scattered throughout the world. I flatly refuse to bow to their creeds as a condition for fellowship. And if this conviction, which I hold so dear, banishes me from their presence, then so be it. It’s better to be faithful than famous. In addition to this matter, I am yet to find sinless perfection in any one individual person here on this earth, so I don’t expect to find it in any group of individuals. No one party, or group, has all the light.

The yoke of religion imposed by the religious, is the burden Jesus came to take away.

Luther’s statement at Worms.

“My conscience is captive to the Word of God; to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe; here I stand, there is nothing else I can do; so help me God”.

Psalm 51:16. “Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.”

There are different degrees of God’s dealings with the soul. As we respond, He takes us from depth to depth. He will pursue this matter of integrity to the very depths of our being. It’s not enough just to go to meetings, to keep the outward ordinances; we must be true in the inward parts, not just the external, but deep inside. Why, because truth is an integral part of the

divine nature and character of God. What is true of the Father shall be true of His children, those that He has begotten, the true sons of God.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Slowly, but surely, the style of preaching in the church has changed over the past thirty years. The mediums of radio, and in particular television, have brought this about. It has been adapted to some measure by preachers in many other parts of the world, particularly in the more affluent countries. Consider that phenomenal “money machine” the Television Evangelist. They have become the high rollers of the religious world. As well known by sinners as they are by saints, they run their operations like any other business, but with one major difference. Real businesses earn their money while these people reap where they have never sown. Television evangelists rarely practice what they preach. They want to reap first and then sow your money. If that was the biblical order, then we should all quit our jobs, and start begging people to give us their money, so we can have a ministry doing what we want to do, all in Jesus name of course.

The unprofitable servant in Matthew 25 accused his master of reaping where he never sowed, which of course was a lie. At least he understood that one should not expect to reap where he has not sown. TV, in the eyes of some people has raised up begging to an acceptable and sophisticated level. It's become quite a respectable occupation. When asked what their occupation is they should respond “I'm a beggar.” In reality, it has cheapened Christianity and denied the explicit teachings of Jesus and His disciples. It has produced a generation of Christians who rarely witness, believing that because they are supporting a particular ministry, they are excused.

These Evangelists beg for money in regular fund raising telethons, urging the saints to pray that the government won't take away their tax exemption status; because they know full well their ministries would collapse overnight without it. It would be a great blessing if tax exemption for religious donations were abolished. Very quickly we would see what was born of God and those that are on nothing but an ego

trip, lavishing **your** money, with reckless abandon, on ostentatious projects as they build their empires.

They are the arrogant stars, and performers of the Christian stage. It's like watching "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." It's the Americanisation of Christianity. How many people they have fleeced and corrupted is any one's guess. It's certainly true that a fool and his money are soon parted, and these people have made fools out of millions.

I am personally aware of three Presenters for the biggest Christian TV program in the US, who have fallen from grace in the past few years. It was all hushed up because of the disastrous effect it would have had on the programs ratings and cash flow. Each one vanished without any explanation. New faces appeared overnight as if nothing had happened and it was business as usual. If the presenters of these programs have deep personal problems, are the lives of people behind the scenes any better? Paul tells us to know them that labour among you whose faith follow. 1 Thess 5:12.

**How can you really trust a Television ministry?
The answer is you can't. And you're a fool if you do.**

Inferring they have special access to God, we are encouraged to ask them to pray for us, (for a donation) and they will go to God on our behalf. To be fair, there are times when all of us need help, but what about my priestly ministry; doesn't God listen to my prayers? Don't I have access to the throne to receive mercy, and find grace to help in times of need? The inference is, God always hears them and so their prayers are more effectual. Living extravagantly on the offerings of the people they claim to serve, they are parasites on the body, preying on their victims in the name of the Lord. I am not saying it's blatant, but it isn't right. There's nothing wrong with having people dependent upon us for loving support. There will always be those who need

compassion and love, but they need Jesus in flesh and blood, in you and me, 1 John 4:3. That's what fellowship is for Acts 2:42.

The Electronic missionary:

The Electric church has made it all too easy. This whole business of religious broadcasting is as distasteful as it is distressful. We are transmitting a message of love, and it is costing us nothing to say, 'I love you' or 'God loves you', except the breath it takes to speak it into a microphone from an air-conditioned television studio. There is a powerful missionary movement that's been built up around the use of private satellites and cable television, based mainly in the USA. From high and lofty positions out there in space they preach the gospel to the people of Africa, Asia, Australasia and South America. In terms of personal cost, and giving of self it's bankrupt. It's a distortion of what Christianity is meant to be.

Unless I'm actually there, standing alongside you, and not just a voice coming to you from an electronic ghost, but a flesh and blood person who laughs, cries, hurts and goes hungry with you. Unless I'm exposed to all the same heartaches, pains, diseases and fears, sharing life's experiences together, it's not what Christianity is all about. This is the tragedy of the Church today. Everything's done so professionally and unsympathetically, without any real cost to those who preach it, or support it. It has bred vaccinated saints, with just enough religion, so as to be immune to getting it too bad. We live out our selfish existence with no intention of doing any more for the propagation of the gospel, than to give a buck or two when we feel moved, so someone else can go and do it for us.

Richard Halverson states in his book "The Living Body" that he had been invited to conduct a "Church growth seminar" for several hundred Pastors of a mainline evangelical denomination. He commenced by asking them, what came to mind when they thought of church growth. Not one out of that large number of ministers said, "Growing in grace and righteousness, and in the knowledge of Jesus

Christ.” They immediately thought about how they could grow their churches numerically. Increasing the membership and thereby the number who attended was their goal.

THE TONGUE OF THE LEARNED

Isaiah 50:4. “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakened morning by morning, he wakened mine ear to hear as the learned.” Every vocation has a language or jargon that's unique to its particular field as a means of communication. Their procedures must be adhered to and practiced with integrity within lawful boundaries. The apprentice must learn skills that will enable him to function in his chosen trade. Before he is allowed to practice unsupervised, he must demonstrate his competence by way of an examination.

Isaiah 29:12. “And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”

Who in their right mind would go to a blacksmith to have a tooth removed, or ask a doctor to build him a house; or allow a lawyer to perform an operation to remove his appendix? So why entrust the keeping of your immortal soul to the unqualified? The builder must be qualified, the dentist and surgeon must be competent. They have the lives of patients under their care to consider. The surgeon must be effective as well as efficient. No matter how efficient he is, if he amputated the wrong limb, how effective would that be? You can be extremely efficient, but hopelessly ineffective. A patient was rushed to hospital for emergency surgery. After consultation the surgeons went ahead and removed the patient's appendix. The operation went smoothly and was performed in a professional manner, however, despite this the man died. An autopsy revealed he had an obstruction in the bowel, not appendicitis. They were efficiently effective in killing the patient. No trial lawyer would be permitted to continue arguing a case that proffered his opinions and beliefs. The court adjudicates according to the Law not opinions. The judge will not tolerate incompetence in his court. Lawyers must present their arguments according to the statutes of the written law. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is what every trial endeavours to determine. The judge and jury are there for the sole purpose of rendering a decision, based on truth beyond reasonable doubt, so that justice may be administered.

However, when it comes to the pulpit, sad to say, this does not always apply.

COMPETENT TO TEACH

The importance of competence, on the part of a teacher, is emphasized by the fact, that the average elementary teacher that retires this year will have taught about 1000 American citizens, and the average high school teacher about 5000 persons. The effects of a 100 incompetent high school teachers by the time they retire would mean that fifty thousand students would have received an inadequate education. Many high school graduates are so functionally illiterate, that they can't fill in a job application form.

Matthew 7:24-29. “Therefore, whosoever hears these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Why would anyone want to spend time and energy, building with perishable materials, when Jesus called that foolish? Are you prepared to give your time and money to help a fool? Over the years we have seen preachers commit congregations to some of the most preposterous projects imaginable. Then, when it blew up in their face, they just moved on, leaving a mountain of debt for others to deal with. Horrendous debts have sent many Christian organizations into bankruptcy, while others have been teetering on the edge of insolvency for years. I know of pastors who have done this very thing and got away with it. They preach faith, and borrow recklessly off worldly institutions.

PROFICIENCY IN THE PULPIT

Without contradiction, we are inflicted with too many preachers who can only be described as hopelessly incompetent. Turned loose on gullible audiences, they preach nonsense. Lulling people into a false sense of security via existential mumbo jumbo, they ply their trade. The barometer by which success is measured is the size of their altar calls. Pastors who invite them into their churches think crowded altar calls are an infallible sign God is working through these quacks which of course is total nonsense.

The earth produces weeds just as readily as it produces wheat. It will grow whatever you sow. So long as pastors draw a crowd and membership increases, they are pretty well left to their own devices. Numbers are “the be all and end all” of everything. The subject matter is often poorly researched, the scriptural content incorrect, and the presentation usually disorganized, leaving us in confusion amid a mixture of truth and error. If the law of the land is so precise, and can be broken only with severe consequences, should the law of God be administered with any less diligence, particularly as we are not simply dealing with temporal issues, but eternal realities? We cannot be any less attentive surely? Have you ever asked yourself why the judge is addressed as “My Lord” or “Your Honour”? Or why everybody rises and then bows when the Judge enters the courtroom to take his place behind the bench? It’s out of respect for the Law! Many preachers take liberties that would have them held in contempt in a court of law. The law will not sanction incompetence. The offender would lose his license to practice. Why should it be any different for those who claim they are called of God to be instructors of His law? The Law of the Lord should be honoured, and respected.

The action of leaven is to puff up and turn sour. It only takes only one ounce of yeast to influence 3 lbs of flour. How much arsenic is needed to kill a person? Or how much cyanide does one need to inhale before he’s dead? Very little indeed I can assure you, because I have seen cyanide used to kill animals. We shall all be called upon to give an account for those things we have taught His people 1 Peter 5:1-5. We must never forget He is the Chief

Shepherd who one day will come for His sheep. On that day, every shepherd shall be required to give an account for sheep that were entrusted to his care.

GET IT IN WRITING

Matthew 4: 4. “It is written” were the first recorded words that Christ uttered after His anointing at Jordan.

Joshua 1:8. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shall have good success.”

Numbers 23:19. “God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

You can do business with the Lord.

Drawing up a contract for the purpose of doing business is standard practice nowadays. You do it when you're buying a house, renting a car, in fact for almost every large ticket item that is purchased on time payment. It's for the purpose of protecting the purchaser and the seller. If you were buying a business, or were exporting and importing, the first thing you would do is engage a lawyer to protect your interests. A contract would be drawn up, and then passed back and forth until both parties to the contract were satisfied that they were getting adequate protection. Then, and not before, both parties would sign it to make the transaction binding. If at some future point conflict should necessitate legal action, the first thing that the court would ask you to produce is a written contract? Without one you wouldn't have a case. If an incompetent drew up your contract, it still might be hopeless. It must be drawn up in a manner that has eliminated all ambiguities. That's why the Bible has been given to us. It's a contract drawn up by God for our total benefit. God does everything by contract.

THE ROOTS OF THE TREES

Acts 1:1. “Of all the things that Jesus began both to do and teach.”

The substitution of so called practical preaching, for doctrinal exposition, is the root cause of many evils now afflicting the church. It's the reason why there's so little depth. We have life with very little intelligence. Grasp of the fundamental truths of the word is weak, because so few have been established in the great doctrines of the faith. Subjectivity is rife. The emphasis on feelings is propagated in every aspect of life. Love has become a feeling and not an action that can be seen. We hide behind God's sovereignty as an excuse for neglecting our responsibilities. Grace has been abused and become a license for sin. Only a fool thinks ignorance is bliss. Often the target of preaching is to try and shake the dead leaves off the branches of people's lives, when if they were to minister to the roots, life giving sap would commence to rise, and the dead leaves would fall off.

Pentecostal and charismatic believers have become addicted to high powered altar calls, where pumped up preachers reach up into the ether to draw down the anointing upon the seeker. The casualty rate among preachers is high as any insurance company will tell you. Burned out, stressed out, and just plain washed up, because they never had what it takes to “make it” in the system. Around every large Pentecostal church there are numbers of “wannabes” and “wouldabeen” if they “coulda been” ex preachers. I'm not saying these people are bad or unsuccessful for that matter, but rather victims of a system that prizes numerical growth above all else. The minister is honoured according to the number of people he has in his church.

Five times Paul said, “I would not have you ignorant.”

The doctrine of the Divine inspiration of Scripture is paramount.

- Ignorance of justification. The doctrine of Sin and Grace.
- Ignorance of sanctification.
- Ignorance of identification.
- The doctrine of Christ. Hebrews 6: 1-7.
- The doctrine of Redemption and regeneration.
- The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

- The Second Coming of Christ, the hope of the Church.

Truth is foundational to our experience. You're only as free as you are full of truth and truthful. Few Christians can give a sound reason for the hope that lies within them. While the soul is not established in the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of Scripture, there can be no firm foundation upon which to build. Ignorance of doctrine has rendered the professing church powerless. Many times we have heard statements like "doctrine is not all that important," and "the letter kills but the Spirit brings life." The lack of grey matter between the ears of many preachers is pitifully obvious. Nobody in their right mind would ever some of those unintelligent remarks they do. These are ones who while unprepared, or unwilling to receive sound doctrine, readily accept and promote false doctrine. They are being referred to in some quarters as "the lunatic fringe." It would be a brave act indeed to take a relative or neighbour to a Pentecostal or Charismatic church, before checking it out first.

2 Tim 4:3-4. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Multiple personality disorder (MPD) is an example of spurious doctrine. This teaching is gaining ground world-wide. A variety of terms is used to describe it, such as "inters," "alters," and "fragmentation." The basic tenet is that the human spirit can be divided into numerous fragments as the result of trauma and abuse. Healing occurs when the fragments are merged together. They claim that early childhood trauma, particularly sexual abuse, causes the human spirit to fragment into multiple child personalities known as "inters." Counsellors say that they quite frequently encounter 20 or more "inters" in one counselee. The idea is to reconcile and merge the different fragments in the host. The procedure can be expensive and time consuming. Each fragment may have to repent, get saved, and be baptized before the patient is delivered. Time magazine reported a possible world record of 300 "inters" identified in one woman. People think they are receiving specialist knowledge when what they are actually being subjected to is hocus-pocus. This kind of approach by ministry was unheard of until the film "The Three Faces of

Eve” was released. Once again we see the church getting its inspiration from the world.

EVIDENCE BASED MEDICINE

In a mining village in a valley in Wales during the 1930's, a Welsh doctor by the name of Cochrane began to question the value of some of the treatment that was being given to miners suffering from tuberculosis. Lung diseases were rampant among them, taking many lives. Nothing that they were prescribing seemed to be making any real impact. Slowly at first, but gradually more and more, doctors began to join him in a quest for better treatment and care of those suffering from this scourge. Dr Cochrane began to question the value of medication they had been giving their patients by looking for evidence of its effectiveness. He was surprised by what he discovered. There is a big temptation to leave "well be alone," and not to tamper with the status quo. There's a reluctance to change time honoured practices, whether they work or not. For example, the practice of smothering third degree burns of pilots during the Battle of Britain with a jelly, to keep the air out, actually kept the heat in and thereby caused the burn to go deeper, worsening the condition.

Dr Cochrane enlisted when the Second World War broke out, and while on active service he was taken prisoner by the Germans. Among the hundreds of prisoners in the camps under his care he saw that in spite of having no access to traditional medicines, his patients on average recovered quicker than those he had observed at home who had access to everything thought imperative to good medical care and practice. He added that some patients with life threatening complaints recovered completely.

We shouldn't commence any treatment without some evidence of it's value.

The side effects of some traditional treatments such as radiation and chemotherapy weaken the immune system of some patients so seriously, that the attempted cure is worse than the ailment. We hear from time to time of success stories in the news, but they are rare. That's why they're news. What we never hear, except in a libel suit,

are the ones that are crippled by science. Let's be honest and acknowledge the fact that the history of medicine has been the history of trial and error. Some treatments that were standard yesterday are shunned today. Thalidomide given to pregnant women, and the hydrocarbon compound DDT used as an insecticide until a few years ago, had disastrous consequences. The analogy is plain to see by thoughtful individuals. Some cure-alls used by Pentecostal preachers are as dangerous as they are ridiculous. That's why churches carry malpractice insurance.

Seeing things for the first time.

Spectacular advances have been made in the field of medical science over the past 20 years. Doctors now have a more scientific approach to the treatment of disease via techniques that were not available in the past. With the advent of Ultrasound, Cat scans, Ecg, Mri, Eeg and other marvels of modern science, doctors and specialists are able to see and detect abnormalities in the human body that at one time were not possible. While results are very encouraging, it does have a down side according to a large and growing band of professionals in the field of medicine. In Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia, the Cochrane/Collaboration approach is gradually becoming more accepted. It is considered an invaluable asset when weighing up the risks associated with invasive clinical procedures used on patients, and in particular children.

The kinds of questions now being asked are; "What evidence do you have that this treatment has merit?" Some Specialists and Doctors are saying that we shouldn't open our mouths and swallow anything that we don't have some knowledge about. We have medical practitioners making assessments, and diagnosing via ultrasound, as they look at organs and parts of the human body they have never been able to observe before in this manner. Viewing parts of the anatomy in this way for the first time, they are describing what they genuinely think may be an abnormality, when in fact it's perfectly healthy. The patient is then sent to have clinical tests, and undergo unsafe and sometimes fatal tests. No one wants to stand in the way of progress,

but we do need to look at the safety and accuracy of some of these procedures, and whether all clinical tests are absolutely necessary. In Australia, as in other parts of the world, many patients who should never have been subjected to invasive and dangerous tests have suffered irreparable harm. Over the 40 yrs that I have been in ministry, I have had many people come to me for counsel and help. Over the last few years I can recollect a number of cases, both personally and related to me, where young mothers were advised to have an abortion because the foetus was abnormal. I have seen those same mothers ignore that advice, and eventually give birth to a normal healthy child.

I'm not saying this as a criticism of everything the medical profession does. We are all beholden to the doctors and nursing staff, for the magnificent work they do caring for the sick and dying. We are likewise indebted to those who are working in research and development. But the fact remains, the scientific approach to diagnosis and the clinical procedures carried out, as a direct result of that approach, are being critically appraised even as I write, in seminars world-wide. Why? Because of the tragic consequences caused through unnecessary invasive and risky clinical examinations. In particular some of the tests undergone by little children and infants, (who can't articulate) are quite unnecessary, harmful, and cruel. Some have even died. It would have been much wiser to have left them alone.

The urge to acquire assets for personal security regardless of the method is fundamental to all human experience.

DUMBING DOWN

The new age movement has for years been prescribing pre-digested information and simple explanations for things. We see it in the political arena as well. The current state of the church is not unlike politics. People want pre-digested opinion. They are content to have the pastor go to God on their behalf, as Moses did for Israel, and come down from the mount and tell them on Sunday what God requires of them. Whether anybody does anything about what they hear is another matter. The ministry in turn is safe in the knowledge that hardly anyone is going to bother to check out the message, even though what has been ministered may have little to do with anything of spiritual value. The extent of the average Christian's personal understanding of the Word doesn't go much further than questionable theology, found in paperbacks full of instant quick fix solutions that never worked for the author. If a student of the Word has the nerve to challenge the preacher, he is labelled "an uncommitted troublemaker." The preacher takes it as a personal affront. From that point in time the brother is a marked man. They will ignore him; isolate him; and eventually squeeze him out of fellowship.

"An uncommitted troublemaker" is the stock in trade description, given by preachers, to describe anybody who would dare to challenge them. Thus they console each other after their pride has been hurt. How can I say that? Because I was in the system for twenty-five years before I was delivered.

**The current state of the church is not unlike politics,
where people are being given pre-digested opinion.**

Commencing with a conclusion, and then trying to support it from the Word is a common and popular method used by many preachers. Taking "a position" and then looking for bible verses to support it is dishonest. If it had been researched thoroughly from the scriptures, they would realize how ridiculous they sound. We are not saying that it is blatant, but we are saying that they should be preaching the Word,

not pre-digested ideas. The end justifies the means could be their motto. It's part of the dumbing-down of people, generally via verbal diarrhoea from incompetent ministers.

In a large Pentecostal church some friends attended, the pastor told the congregation the **seed** in the parable of the 'sower' was **money**. (Mark 4:14 says, "The seed was the word.") I asked, "Did anyone challenge his statement?" They replied, "of course not." "Why," I inquired? "Because it's not permitted" they replied. The motivation that prompted that manipulative misquote was no doubt money. It was all for a good cause I'm sure, but this kind of allegorical preaching is not unusual, but rather the rule. Whatever you want to accomplish, just find a scripture you can use to help you put it across and go for it. It's an unwritten law in Pentecost that the faithful must accept all that comes from the pulpit without question. They have been taught that loyalty means never to question, criticize, or "doubt the Lord's anointed." "The Lord's anointed" is a title pastors refer to themselves by. It's another way of placing themselves beyond reproach by anyone other than their peers. This is the same spirit that has permeated the Catholic Church for centuries. As Catholics, we were either in awe or fear of our clergy. Our dictatorial leaders today want to be surrounded by "yes men." The only opinions they are interested in listening to are their own, echoed by their staff.

At least in politics it will be debated.

Acts 17:2. "And Paul, as was his manner, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures."

At least in the political arena a matter can be debated, but not so in the church. The rank and file must just sit there and endure all that is served up to them. This kind of doctrinal divergence is becoming more and more common, and the preachers are getting away with it. It has been said that we get the kind of leaders we deserve. The tragedy is that when the blind lead the blind they both fall in the ditch.

The goals of the leadership determine what will be ministered; its goal driven preaching. Is there a hidden agenda behind these lengthy exhortations to get us to part with our money just before the offering is taken up? The answer to that is, “of course there is.” It’s called greed. People have become conditioned to submit to almost anything, thus giving the pastor the freedom to preach whatever he chooses.

2 Timothy 4:3-4. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

One legacy of the Revival meetings in recent years is the large number of preachers who want to take up their own offerings as a condition to accepting an invitation to speak. Many pastors allow them to come in and fleece their flock. An example is Rodney Howard Browne who always took up his own offering.

SANCTIFIED SKEPTICISM

Are we learning anything that will build us up in our most holy faith, or are we living on junk food? I cherish my freedom dearly. I cherish yours as much or I wouldn't be sticking my neck out the way I am. Education is the great instrument of human development. It should be used for spiritual, as well as mental development. For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

Romans 12:1-3 “Becoming transformed by the renewing of our mind”. Information precedes transformation. Paul exhorts us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.

Are we just living on fast food at our favourite franchise?

Acts 22:27-28. “Then the chief captain came and said unto him, tell, me, art thou a Roman? He said, yea. And the chief captain answered, with a great sum obtained I this freedom; Paul replied, I was free born.”

- Paul knew where he was born.
- He knew what his rights were as a Roman citizen.
- He confessed them.

John 13:3-4. “Jesus **knowing** that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was **come** from God, and **went** to God; He rises from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.”

- Jesus knew some things.
- That He came from God.
- That was going back to God.
- Because He knew who He was He was comfortable serving others.

What you don't know CAN hurt you, yes it can.

It's through education that a child of poor parents can become a doctor, or a lawyer, or the President of a great nation. It's what we do with what we have been given that separates one person from another. If you were buying a business, you would want sound advice from professionals, such as an accountant to see if the business is viable, and a lawyer to check out the contract. Why be less diligent with your eternal soul? Sound Bible based teaching is without question the most needed, and yet the most neglected activity in the body of Christ today.

Romans 8:38-39. “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 Timothy 1:12 “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”.

Paul was convinced about, assured of and inspired by, satisfied with and encouraged over, enthused and influenced by what, and whom he knew. What made Paul so positive? He knew some things; how did he know? He found out! How? He proved them. So now he can say I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that what I believe is real. Christianity is a religion of absolutes. i.e. “you must be born again.”

Romans 14:5b. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”.

(Deuteronomy 8:3) "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. (NKJV)

We are in school whether we like it or not. Our schoolmaster is the Law. Its task is to bring us to Christ. From that point on the Holy Spirit takes charge to bring us to maturity. The object is to make us to learn some things even (if need be) if it takes an ash heap experience, like Job's, to do it.

He tried and tested Israel, and suffered them to hunger that He might **make** them to know. The pattern Son learned obedience by the things that He suffered, and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all that **obey** Him. (Hebrews 5:8-9.)

We can choose to learn by the instruction of other people's mistakes, or by our own, in the school of hard knocks. But let's not be one of those who never learn. "Ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth".

Christianity is a voyage, a journey, a pilgrimage, a race, and maturity comes by increments over time not just in one big leap. Growth is exactly what the word implies, gradual and steady. Journey is a common metaphor for living. It implies purpose and destination. The scriptures are the road map guiding us to our destination. May we study them and deem them more than our necessary food.

TRUTH OR TRADITION

A great problem in the terms of Christian doctrine is the tendency we have to fail to discern between the truth of the Word, and the traditions we develop around certain truths. Tradition is an unwritten body of belief, handed down from generation to generation. Traditions are not evil; however they present a problem to all denominations when they conflict with the Word. Their tradition then becomes their greatest stumbling block.

Mark 7:9. “And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition”.

Vs 13 “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition”.

The temptation to ignore the truth when confronted with it, in favour of our tradition, is very real. Tradition plays a much bigger roll than most of us realize, with regard to what we do and don't believe. What then follows is that our theology and methodology becomes shaped by our tradition, rather than by scripture.

Man can violate any law to his own satisfaction.

Luke 5:39. “No one after drinking the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. They say the old ways are best”.

We all have a passionate resistance to change. We don't object to other people changing, but please don't confuse me with the truth; just leave me alone. Visitation brings confrontation, so if we want God in our life, and our church, because we realise that things are not perfect, then God is going to challenge what we do. Everything that

God created, and all that is born of the Spirit is always moving into new phases of maturation, and man is to be no different. In other words, he was not placed in the garden to become static. God had a purpose for him as He has for everything. He had one for Adam, He had one for Israel, and He has one for you and I. God is not static and the man He created was not meant to be static. I cannot think of anything more self destructive or boring than a static existence. People say to us, “Don’t you get sick of what you’re doing, moving here and there all the time?” (And I think to myself, “Don’t you get sick of what you're doing?” Attending a church that lives in the past; always reflecting on a time when their movement was vibrant and fresh; polishing events and busily embalming memories of yesteryear). We tell them, “absolutely not. We love doing God’s will.” A living body is always moving into new phases of maturation. He is not here, He is risen, was the message to those who went to embalm the body of Jesus. Their intention was pure and noble. We all have memories we have embalmed, but we must keep moving on. If the life of the body is no longer there, then find out where the living body is and embrace it.

Most movements have supposed that because they have received something from the Lord, this gives them permission to formulate it into a rule for others, who, if they wish to join them, **must** accept that it is to control everything. They have succumbed to the temptation to distrust the Word of God and follow tradition, forgetting that we not only live by what God has said, but by what He is saying also. And we are not talking about anything extra Biblical.

The temptation is to dogmatically reject what we may not understand, rather than humbly pray about what we might learn. We don’t want to rock the boat. We would rather be left alone than confronted. How quickly people forget, that their own movement was born out of obedience to the truth and rejection of tradition. The temptations are many, and every Christian who wants to serve God with integrity, (and in particular preachers) are continually faced with them..

Visitation brings confrontation.

- Seeking a method that will serve our purpose, without seeking the Lord to find out how He wants us to serve Him.
- Feeling comforted in the weaknesses or failures of fellow servants, rather than prompted to pray for them.
- To reject dogmatically what we may not understand, instead of seeking what we may humbly learn.
- To make “position” the ground of our authority, rather than “being given it” as a stewardship from the Lord.

God is more concerned about value than volume.

The tendency to measure fruitfulness by numbers that attend, than by the standard of scripture, Christ like character Gal 5:22. Other issues do exist, like doctrinal error, but they are usually less of a problem than imagined. What can be a difficulty is to imagine that our doctrine will save us from fanaticism. Doctrines and creeds are safeguards against error, not fountains for life. They are hedges against heresy, not a basis for unity. They are there to help protect the flock. They are barriers, beyond which men wander at their own peril. Sadly, they also become walls through which truth never seems to be able to penetrate. These tenants are cast in iron. I do not know of a denomination that doesn't claim the scriptures as their only source of faith. Yet they are bound to creeds, influenced by some experience that gave birth to their movement, a hundred years or more ago. History shows that God has been restoring truth since the reformation. Hindsight proves that statement to be correct, and God hasn't finished yet.

Ephesians 4:15 “That we be no longer children but **growing up** into Him in all things.” We all have areas in ours lives where we need to grow.

THE GOSPEL OF ADDITION

In the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s America underwent, according to Gallop poll, a surge of religious revival of unparalleled historic proportions. 33% of all Americans over the age of 18 indicate they are evangelical or "born again" Christians. That translates into 60 million, or one in every three adults, who experienced a turning point in their lives as they made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. "This information should grip us with terror" says Patrick Morely in his book "Walking with Christ in the details of life." It means that the greatest revival in history has so far been impotent to change society. It's revival without reformation. It's revival, which left the country in spiritual ignorance. It's a change of belief without a change of corresponding behaviour. Other polls show that this dramatic spiritual conversion has not been followed by a moral conversion. Instead, during those decades, the moral will and character of America has fractured into thousands of diverse, dwarfish self-determined systems, of values and beliefs. The Gospel has evolved into a gospel of addition, without subtraction. "The Challenge" Christian weekly printed in New Zealand.

More and more, Christians are running to irrational things looking for reality in their lives

I think in hindsight, it's safe to say that the "Toronto blessing" and the "Rodney Howard Browne phenomena" has not been the "panacea" many at the time were claiming that it was, and others were hoping it would be. The same will said for the "Fantasy in Florida.

When your position is challenged don't be dishonest and dismiss the message by attacking the messenger.

Matthew 11:18-19. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children".

1 Corinthians 5:6. "A little leaven will leaven the whole lump".

Matthew 16:11, 12. “The leaven of the Pharisees is bad doctrine”.

GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism is an esoteric religious movement that flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, and presented a major challenge to orthodox Christianity. The word Gnostic draws its roots from the Greek word *gnosis* meaning: "an inner mystical knowledge". To its adherents, Gnosticism promised a secret knowledge of the divine realm. Most Gnostic sects professed Christianity, but their beliefs sharply diverged from the majority of Christians in the early church. As a religious movement, characterized by belief in intuitive spiritual knowledge, it was regarded as heresy by the early church, and should still be looked at in the same way. A young couple joyfully explained to me, that they have found out that each one's maternal grandmother, was Jewish. On the basis of this they are planning to move to Israel. Meanwhile they have joined a messianic assembly where they can study under teachers, who they believe, have a better grasp on truth, than non-Jewish teachers because of their ethos. When it was explained to them that the Gospel is a message of grace, not race, and that it was never God's intention that we should be exalting our national bias, they informed me that they were not prepared to discuss the issue. Besides, how could I possibly understand what they were experiencing because as Jews they had inner knowledge that was beyond my ability to comprehend? That's Gnosticism.

When Christianity aspires to more than ordinary excellence it often disgusts, offends, and leaves us with a painful sense of inferiority. This was never more evident than during the Toronto meetings, when it became common place to hear saints repeatedly recounting experiences of bizarre and abnormal behaviour. Apart from the odd quotation from those in charge, the Bible was rarely opened in renewal services that I attended. People were invited to come forward to receive an anointing. Those that were not manifesting the presence of the spirit, (shaking or jerking) were often asked to sit down, or just ignored, so they could concentrate on more receptive candidates. The inference was that if you were not exhibiting strange behaviour, then the Spirit of God wasn't moving in your life. Flesh loves to parade

itself, is puffed up, and is always drawing attention, whether its self effacing, self pity or just proud flesh, it's always obnoxious.

Temporal things often “exaggerate” themselves and are ever clamouring for immediate attention. They tend to draw us aside from spiritual reality.

Now feelings and experience are important, but so is rationality. I would be the first to admit, that it's hard to be grabbed by a great idea, without feeling something. It's true to say that our religion is not just an intellectual and moral experience. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, and joy, gladness and laughter are absolutely valid, because they are the direct result of righteousness. However, feelings can fluctuate wildly and they should never be used as a spiritual barometer. Paul doesn't belittle unusual spiritual experiences or explain them away. He simply wants to put them into proper perspective. He could boast of wonderful visions and revelation, yet he was reluctant about relating his spiritual experiences as seen in the following.

2 Corinthians 12:1-9 “This boasting is all so foolish, but let me go on and tell you about the visions I've had, and revelations from the Lord. Fourteen years ago I was taken to heaven for a visit. Don't ask me whether how I got there, whether I was in my body or just my spirit, I don't know; only God can answer that. But there I was anyway in paradise, and I heard things so amazing that they are beyond a man's ability to describe or put in words (anyway I am not allowed to tell them to others). That experience is really something worth boasting about, but I am not going to do it. I am going to boast only about how weak I am and how great God is to use such weakness for his glory. I have plenty to boast about and would be no fool in doing it, but I don't want anyone to think more highly of me than he should from what he can actually see in my life and my message.”

What can we learn from this? If God has done something wonderful in your life, and given you a spiritual high, that's great! Or

if nothing such as that has happened to you, great again. Perhaps it's because He knows, that you don't need Him to keep proving to you, that He loves you and cares about you. Some people need affirmation continually. I have seen the same people prayed for several times, in the same service, night after night, during renewal meetings and still they are not content. Notice how Paul spoke in the third person in those references, yet they undoubtedly refer to him.

MEASURING THE IMMEASURABLE

We are greatly impressed by numbers in this day and age. They seem to be the yardstick for everything we do. A man or ministry's work is judged by how many of this and that he has to show us. Where are the qualities that Jesus talked about that mark a kingdom man? How do you measure poverty of spirit, or purity of life? What value do we place upon a heart hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

Where in the Bible is success and size ever promoted as desirable goals?

How do you quantify love, submission and resignation, to the will of God. Or taking joyfully the spoiling of your goods? Graciously yielding and letting go, as opposed to fighting to hold on. Scattering to increase is foreign to modern Christians. Christ had power to lay down His life. We have power to take things up, but can't lay them down again.

While it would be foolish to despise the value of a good education, the fact remains that I am yet to see an IQ Test that can measure anything of spiritual value. To be clever with words, and have such a command of language that you can sway an audience, may be an admirable quality, but these things are not the only barometers by which an individual should be assessed. Unfortunately admission tests can never measure the characteristics that God prizes in us above all else. How do you measure integrity and faithfulness; sincerity and imagination; or honesty, purity, steadfastness, dependability, intuition, diplomacy, and initiative?

Integrity: The Bible says the integrity of the upright shall preserve him. When believing the right things becomes more important than doing the right things, we have lost our way.

Faithfulness: The opposite is slothfulness. The unfaithful are unprofitable. God looks at faithfulness, not potential.

Sincerity: Is to believe in what you're doing. There are two things without which you can't have faith, humility and sincerity.

Imagination is like vision. It's the ability to climb high above the demands of the present, to imagine a future not yet realized. It's prophetic in its essential essence. It's biblical at its roots.

Intuition: Is that blessed quality that comes to a life that's in union with Christ. It's caught by association, rather than taught.

Determination: Jesus said, "no man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom." The problem is that we have too many people with rear vision mirrors on their plows.

Diplomacy: Is the ability to communicate graciously, and with sensitivity. It costs you nothing to be courteous and polite. "You'll catch more bees with honey than you will with vinegar."

Initiative: Is that wonderful quality which sees what needs to be done, and does it without having to be told, reporting back when the task is finished. A person may have great talent, and tremendous potential, but if they lack these essential graces, they are already failures. The top rung of the ladder is crowded with talented, unhappy, empty people, who have little to offer. They stacked the deck to ensure their success, and when they played and won, they still weren't satisfied. "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" There are many ministers who have given, and are giving everything to achieve their goals. Some of the most ruthless people I have ever known, I met in Church.

Goodness and success rarely go together, it has always been so.

Matthew 6:32 33. We have a Father in Heaven who knows what we need to do all He has asked us to do. "All these things do the Gentiles seek after." Our seeking should not be for things but for Him and His will.

"The deceitfulness of riches choke the Word," Jesus said, "and make us unfruitful." Make it easy for yourself. Try trusting God.

CULTS UNLIMITED

In the 14th century, persecution of witches was common. For the next 200 years, thousands of witches were put to death. Salem, Mass. was the centre of a famous witch-hunt in 1692. The last execution for witchcraft was in Scotland in 1772. Because of this, witches went underground, and no one would admit to being one. Since the 1960's, witches have begun to pop up everywhere, and now covens are being formed all over the country. Their names are even listed in many telephone directories.

We are told there are over 22000 Christian denominations and sects worldwide and the number is rising. America has more than its share of sects and cults, most of whom claim to be based on the Word of God. A cult is a system of religious worship, pursuit of, devotion to, some person, thing or activity.

There is a respectful quiet in the hall, in a country town, in New South Wales, Australia. Tonight, the Archangel Michael has promised to make a channelled appearance. Without warning, a man dressed in white robes, through whom Archangel Michael supposedly will present himself, starts to make "woo-ooing" noises and flap his arms. It's too much for the children who giggle, and leave the room. But about two dozen adults are in raptures, as this man wanders, eyes closed, around the hall, supposedly channelling Eastern philosophy for the masses. This night, the performance is by donation, but for those who take their angel worship seriously, there are residential camps, where devotees are forbidden to converse, eat, or look at each other.

On television, and the internet, heated discussions are taking place about alien abductions, conspiracy theories, government suppression of information about everything from flying saucers to suppressed miracle tablets that cure everything from Tumours to Aids. In homes around the world of outwardly normal people, crystals are being

polished, pyramids pitched, wicca witchcraft rituals performed, aromatherapy oils heated, tarot cards spread, astrology charts consulted, numerology numbers crunched and miraculous health foods marketed.

Dial-a-psychic readings at \$6.99 a minute are a boom trade for clairvoyants, and the magazines that publish the advertisements. There are also yoga, chanting, vegetarian and vegan, colonic irrigation, breatharianism, and every variation of specialist belief and activity that one could imagine. Health, creation of wealth, and romance, along with escaping to another world of eternal bliss, seem to be the major draw-cards.

Over the past 25 years we have seen the rise (and eventually in most cases the fall) of many movements. The Unification Church, Scientology, Children of God, the Shepherding movement, the Cell movement, the House church movement, Dominion theology, the Faith movement, the Hyper prophetic movement, where for US\$140 per couple, multiplied 100s of people from Australia went to Malaysia and the Philippines to be incubated, and emerge after a few days as Prophets. The Laughing revival, the Open church, and Witness Lee. Add to this we are plagued by self appointed Apostles, and their programs such as Spiritual mapping; God's generals of intercession, learning how to take our Cities for God, generational curses, territorial spirits, it seems endless. Many have an element of truth to snare the unwary, mixed in with deception and lies.

How we propose to take our cities when we can't even keep our children on the straight and narrow is certainly a challenge to any thinking person. Has the Gospel lost its relevance? Do we need to have all these human strategies to save the world? Shouldn't we be getting back to basics? Fad after fad could be added to this list such as user friendly churches and purpose driven churches. God doesn't drive His people, but church programs do. Shepherds feed sheep; hirelings strip the wool off their backs, and then desert them. The above offer nothing more than man made solutions. They may look

good, feel good, and sound good, but in most cases they're the products of the carnal mind. Anyone looking at all this could be excused for feeling that God has lost the plot, and if we don't step in and do something, His purposes in the earth will fail. I cannot find anywhere in scripture where we are called to commit ourselves to a denomination, movement, committee, or individual, who has devised some program to save the world. Our commitment is to Christ, His will, our families, and the relationships we have in Christ.

Divine order is simply taking orders from Divinity.

There are some things that God has joined together, and anybody who puts them asunder, does so to his great peril. To fly in the face of the clear commands of scripture is foolhardy indeed. The consequences of doing so are serious to say the least. God personally joined the first man and woman in marriage. He has also joined some other things. The Word and the Spirit, the Law and the Prophets, the Head and the Body, Mercy and Truth, have all been "put together" by God.

A headless body has no intelligence and is without direction. The Word without the life of the Spirit is powerless and dead. And spirit without the Word is certainly not the Spirit of God, but another spirit. Whether it's human or satanic doesn't really matter. One is just as capable of destroying you as the other.

1 Thessalonians 5:12. "And we beseech you, brethren, to **know them** which labour among you." We have religion on tap via television. You can turn on your television set any time of the day or night and in a matter of minutes see someone telling you how to get your life in order; for a financial consideration of course. Programs featuring American Evangelists can now be seen in most parts of the world. These people have an insatiable need to promote themselves. Driven by colossal egos, addicted to their own self-importance, aided by more determination than a herd of stampeding buffalo, they promote themselves shamelessly. Behaving as if they are an asset to the cause of Christianity, they invade the more affluent nations with their tried

and proven methods for siphoning off money to extend their influence, and do their thing. Like many stars of secular television, the female ministers are now marketing diet and weight reduction programs, alongside their sermons. We have bizarre writings from the fertile imaginations of prophetic preachers, passed off as being inspired by God. A proliferation of prophets giving us their doom and gloom prophecies, predicting events, locations and dates, that have long past in regard to the destruction of California, and a great earthquake in Mammoth Lakes, to name just two. You start to realize that another spirit is motivating these people. It can't be God, because unlike men, He doesn't make mistakes.

The dividing line, is a very fine one indeed between speculation and prophecy; a shot in the dark and a word of knowledge; inspiration and speculation; faith and presumption. That's why we are told to judge the spirits whether they are of God or not. I have found that the purer the heart, the truer the gift. The motivation of the prophet is a key ingredient. Be aware that a well-intentioned human spirit is quite capable of spouting rubbish. Some of these people are undoubtedly trying to establish credibility and notoriety, via outlandish predictions. I have lost count of the number of times we have had to sit and listen, to the most pathetic verbal twaddle, passed off as prophecy, only to have the pastor give it his approval. The people think, that if the pastor "Okays it", then it must be from God. Many of these false prophecies have come from very high profile people, but don't be swayed by reputations. Judge what they say, especially when they add, "Thus saith the Lord". Many of the pioneer prophets are making the quantum leap to become an Apostle, or a Bishop as they seek to keep one step ahead of their clamouring disciples.

The wife of a well-known author, and publisher, of dubious visions, dressed up as the character "Dorothy" from the show, "The Wizard of Oz". She then waltz into the Sunday morning service singing "Somewhere over the Rainbow" as she held out a pair of little red shoes. The congregation was told that there was a message for the church in the story of the "Wizard of Oz".

FOUR COVENANTS

When covenant relationships are broken, the price is painful.

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| God and man. | Redemption. |
| Husband and Wife. | Marriage. |
| Children. | Our assignment. |
| Parents. | That it might go well with thee. |

The marriage covenant.

He will present to Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother: What cause, to cleave to his wife that they might become one? We need to recognise that Adam never had a father and mother in the manner that we have. This instruction was for all that would come from the union of the first married couple. There was to be no cleaving before you left your father and mother's house for the purpose of marriage. There's many a young person who left the covering of the parental home, for no valid reason other than to do their own thing, that have become naked and ashamed. He never intended that young girls should go out from under parental supervision, and get involved in improper activities. God never intended young men should wander like beasts of prey to hunt down the innocent. God never intended that homes should be ravaged and torn, and in the condition that we see them today.

I've been in counselling sessions where parents were so intimidated by their children that were driven to distraction, because of what their children might do next. You can talk about liberty and freedom and say as a parent, "I trust my children", but nowhere were we told to trust them, but to train them. There are literally 1000's of young people, whose parents trusted them, who are in premature graves, or toxic illicit relationships, because of dope and sex, and only God knows what. They are the product of situations where sin has torn up the family.

When Mother Teresa received her Nobel Prize she was asked “What can we do to promote world peace?” “Go home and love your families” she replied.

We are so concerned about giving our children what we never had when we were growing up, that we overcompensated, and then neglected to give them what we did have growing up, and in so doing we lost them.

Matthew 19:5-8. God performed the first marriage in Eden, forever setting His seal upon monogamy. “And said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder. They say unto him, why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: **but from the beginning it was not so.**”

Hebrews 11:7. “By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet (it had never rained upon the earth to this point in time) moved with fear, prepared an ark to the **saving of his house.**” That’s his family, eight all told.

Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman that is entered into before God. We leave to cleave to one another in an inseparable union. Furthermore, the man was to protect and provide for his spouse and their offspring. This was meant to involve much more than just food and shelter. The statistics on divorce and remarriage is the same among believers as the population at large. We have believers married, for the third and fourth time, pontificating on how the church should be run.

It is absolutely true, that what took place before we came to Christ is all in the past. The old has gone, the new has come. From the moment we came to Christ, the present and the future is what

concerns us. It is also true, that if the unbeliever wants to depart, they are free to do so. Serious problems arise when we break one covenant as a believer, to enter into another. While leaders are doing this with impunity, is it any wonder then that the people follow their example. A great cloud of witnesses surround us, but these men and women are not our role models. We run our race looking unto Jesus, who is the perfect example, the author and finisher of our faith.

Psalms 119:105. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” In many cases the lives of church leaders are like watching a soap opera. Some sins bear fruit for just a season, but marriage is not one of them. It has far reaching consequences. You may think that these things should not be addressed because they are too personal, but the Bible highlights failure as well as success for our serious considerations.

A Christian leader has God’s honour at stake. There’s less excuse for him when he falls, than any other man.

When people in high position fall from grace the consequences of that failure will follow them to the grave. It’s not a matter of forgiveness, for God forgives completely and our relationship with Him can be fully restored, but there is a flip side when those in authority sin publicly. Their spouses and children have to bear their shame, while the world scoffs at the double standard. Although God forgives and forgets, people don’t. The consequences of their sin will produce a harvest. That doesn’t seem fair and it isn’t, until you fully appreciate the magnitude of wilful sin, and remember the price that Jesus paid for our redemption.

A leading evangelist in California a few years ago had his second marriage annulled, (it has become popular because it sounds more acceptable than divorce) so he could marry for the third time. He has children by his first marriage. Should he still be in public ministry? If he does go back into public ministry, he must realize his past will be

brought up again and again, and his right to minister questioned. If that disturbs him, then he needs to “stay out of the pulpit”.

We should think carefully about taking seriously the predictions of covenant breakers, who claim to have a word from the Lord for the body of Christ. I don't take my guidance from these kinds of people and neither should you. And yet there are Christians, who believe these people have the inside scoop on the future. They devour books written by people whose lives are bankrupt. Christian Television continually promotes these ministers, and in so doing they are endorsing them publicly. They in turn seem to be addicted to having an audience. How can a man stand as Christ's Ambassador, when his life is inconsistent with the truth he claims to represent?

1 Timothy 5:19-21.

“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. **Them that sin, rebuke before all** that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, **doing nothing by partiality.**”

The standards for those in public ministry are higher than for any other person. These are serious and even hard things we have been considering, without doubt. Let me pose a question. Are the standards of the New Testament lower? Is the grace of God something we can use to gloss over moral lapses and indiscretions?

Romans 6:1-2. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

Hebrews 2:1-3. “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and **every** transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the

first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

It is often used as an excuse for failure “That if the Lord should mark iniquity then not one of us could stand” and that’s true. But the fact remains, God does mark iniquity, and all sin must be confessed and forsaken. According to a recent survey, happily married couples are healthier, live longer, have a lower mortality rate, than single separated, widowed, or divorced people. After the death of a spouse, the death of a family member, or a separation and divorce, marriage is the next most stressful decision we will ever make. Second time around it has a 50% less chance of surviving for divorcees. For each successive marriage, the percentage of failures is higher.

JIM JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

In November 1978 the largest mass suicide in history took place in the jungles of Guyana. Twenty-one years later all that remain of the madness of Jonestown are the memories. In the early 50's Jones was singled out at a conference in Detroit, where he received a prophetic rebuke stating if he did not turn from the direction he was heading, he would die a violent death, and take many people with him.

In early 1956, Jim Jones founded his People's Temple church in Indianapolis. His goal was simple. His church was guided by the principles of racial equality and harmony, principles that could get a person killed in America in the fifties. Within 12 months he had attracted a strong following, with more than half his congregation comprising African-Americans. In 1965 he uprooted the church and moved to California, with more than 400 people. He soon achieved immense success, being visited by powerful political figures. Eventually Jones became dissatisfied with the US calling the land of his birth "The Fascist States of America". In late 1976 he reached an agreement with the Guyana's government allowing for the settlement of his church in the small Central American country.

In 1977 Jones and a thousand of his followers moved to Guyana. Gradually his behaviour became bizarre. Jones screaming into loud speakers around the compound would awaken members before dawn. The drills had the desired effect. The residents feared everyone outside of Jonestown. Reported threats of mass suicide led Congressman Leo Ryan to go see if he could help. Accompanied by several journalists and People's Temple defectors, he flew to Jonestown. Afterwards, as he and his party were preparing to leave Jonestown, gunmen from the People's Temple killed them. Within hours, Jones gathered his congregation for one last communion in the pavilion. Members were instructed to drink poison. A toxic mixture of Kool-Aid and cyanide was given to adults. Members injected their children with the poison. In a few hours 913 were dead, including 276 children. Jones was found with a bullet in his head. Certainly Jonestown was an extreme case, but similar scenes were repeated at Waco Texas.

MIXTURE

Mixture the scourge of Christianity

Genesis 48:20.

“And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh”

Hosea 7:1, 8-11.

“When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria: for they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without. Ephraim, he hath **mixed himself** among the people; Ephraim is a **cake not turned**. **Strangers** have **devoured** his strength, and he **knew it not**: yea, **Grey hairs** are here and there upon him, **yet he knows not**. And the pride of Israel testifies to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim also is like a **silly dove** without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.”

Ephraim means doubly fruitful. He was the second of two sons born to Joseph in Egypt. He was given preference over the first born Manasseh. The second born Ephraim becomes the firstborn and inherits the double portion. The first born speaks to us of the natural carnal man, who cannot please God. We must be born again from above. The second born becomes the first born by the Spirit through the blood of Christ. Ephraim was blessed in the crossing of Jacob's hands. But in spite of all his potential, like many Christians, it was never realized. He was like a silly dove. Here Ephraim is far from fruitful although he is the line of blessing since Jacob laid his hands on him. “The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.” Psalms 78:9.

He was equipped with the most advanced and sophisticated weaponry of his time, and still he was reluctant to fight, but was rather

a coward. He was a Memorial Day soldier who loved to dress up and carry banners and wear medals but he couldn't be relied upon when the chips were down. Christianity has especially thrived under persecution, for at such times, it has no lukewarm professors. And so just because you are being used today, is no guarantee you will be used tomorrow. There are many, many, Christian preachers on the scrap heap. Four things are responsible for this decline.

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Decline | Failure |
| Mixture | Impurity |
| Half baked | Unbalanced |
| Dissipation | Disorderly |
| Grey Hairs | Wasted years |

These are things that the servant of the Lord must guard against, if he or she wants to be an overcomer, and to be used by God to be a blessing in the battle. Let's take them one at a time.

Mixture: Diverse Seed.

Don't just use a verse to hang **your** thoughts on. Preach the Word.

Deuteronomy 22:9. "Thou shall not sow thy **vineyard** with diverse seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed, which thou hast sown, **and the fruit of thy vineyard**, be defiled."

Leviticus 19:19. God is opposed to mixture. He wants us to be hot or cold; definitely not lukewarm. Mixture is indecisive, it will always produce these things; defilement, confusion and division. It only takes an ounce of leaven, to influence three pounds of flour. Just a sniff of cyanide kills instantly. Just because 95% of what someone prophesies sounds scriptural, people readily accept the poisoned 5%.

The Church is a vineyard, and at this moment it is being defiled with diverse seed. This has produced disunity, mistrust, division, fear, arrogance, conceit, legalism, stupidity, denominations, and the kingdoms of men. Many times after God moves, man counters and contaminates. The ministry of the word gives way to carnal reasoning, and what once was a visitation of the Spirit of God becomes a movement dominated by administrators, who conduct the Spirit of God right out the door.

All denominations are hybrids, a mixture of the word of God and the words of men. The original seed was the word of God. Just as oil and water will not mix, you cannot mix your words with His word. When you cross-pollinate two different species, the result is a hybrid. A hybrid is the offspring of two plants or animals of different genus. They may reproduce for a generation, but without exception they will eventually die out. The mule is a good example; it's impotent, sterile, and barren. It cannot reproduce. Within the hybrid is the seed of its own extinction. Every denomination stands mute testimony to this fact as they grow old and die spiritually. Every independent organization will suffer the same fate. Their ministers become administrators, the ministry of the word gives way to political expediency, and they are left with a form of godliness. Form without the force. The result is retarded saints attending lifeless churches.

Some groups of churches allowed the lunatic fringe, devoid of grey matter, to take over and become the cutting edge of their movement. In some places, that I am personally aware of, their congregations have completely disappeared. It has been pointed out that the ministries of Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Finney, George Whitfield and other revivalists, were accompanied by the same kind of manifestations as have been witnessed in the renewal, and that may be true. But they neglect to emphasise that they preached the word at great length, often for hours, calling on their hearers to repent in the strongest terms. Repentance was the primary focus of their ministry.

Acts 3:19-21.

The order is repent, (It's the first word of the gospel) and be converted, in order that your sins may be blotted out so that times of refreshing may come. Unfortunately many Christians feel that if something is supernatural, then it must come from God. John says, "try the spirits, test them," because Satan, the imitator is quite capable of producing supernatural signs and wonders. In fact it will be one of his most effective tools as he deceives multitudes in the last days.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11.

"Whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

There is only one way to know the truth, and that is to hear and OBEY it, because "His word is truth" and it is forever settled in heaven.

Deuteronomy 22:10-11 "Thou shall not plow with an ox and an ass together." The Ox speaks to us of "brokenness." What then are the characteristics of a broken man? He's meek and approachable and trembles at His word Isaiah 66:1.

Matthew 5:5 Meekness is not weakness but strength under discipline. We have to be broken in. Jesus could ride the Ass because it was tamed. The nature of an Ass is its stubborn and wilful.

Isaiah 1:3. "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib." Dumb animals with little intelligence, but they use all they have, and we have the audacity to call them stupid. It is unreasonable to expect to become proficient accidentally. When God in His goodness has granted unto us such an abundant means of instruction, how great is the guilt of voluntary ignorance. If a Christian is ignorant, he has chosen to be so. He has no excuse. We need to develop our spiritual man Romans 10:1-3.

Here is a list of the follies of Ephraim.

Ephraim joined Ishbosheth the son of King Saul in the first division of Israel while Judah followed David. 1 Sam 2:8-11.

They joined the revolt against David under Absalom 2 Sam 17:26.

They revolted with the ten tribes against David, in the matter of jealousy over bringing him back after Absalom's death 2 Sam 19:, 20. They were leaders in the final revolt against the house of David, in the second and last division of the Kingdom of Israel.

We need to be more discerning about what causes we serve, and who we become yoked to. As you can see, Ephraim was opposed to God's choice, David.

Half-baked: Lopsided: Unbalanced:

Ephraim was a half-baked cake (Hosea 7:8) on fire today; cold and complaining tomorrow. You couldn't rely on him to stand with the word. He's unfaithful and cowardly. He's unbalanced; he does some of the craziest things, and then tells you God told him to do it. We need to move back to the centre of our existence, Christ and the Cross.

If you don't take control of your life, someone else will.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies which words come from the one principal shepherd." God wants to nail us down with His word. Balance is critical. Don't become prisoner to the expectation of others.

Dissipation: Divinely ordered priorities.

Strangers had devoured his strength. A stranger is someone, or something, that is basically outside the family. Spiritually, it's something foreign to the will of God. There are certain things that belong to the family. "Let him that stole steal no more." We must get our priorities right. We don't live by knowledge from the tree of good and evil, but by divinely ordered priorities. The order is God first, your wife, your family, your employment and after that your ministry

service. Evil communications corrupt good manners. We must always be in control of our relationships. If friends are not Christians, they should be made aware of our stance; so that in times of trouble they know that they can turn to us. We must be open and transparent for the sake of the gospel at all times. Never hide your light under a bushel.

John 21:21-22.

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him...what is that to thee? Follow thou me.”

Hebrews 8:5b.

“See, saith he that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.”

There are pastors pouring all their strength into programs **that God gave to somebody else**, trying to make it work in their situation, when all the time God wants them to meet with Him in the Mount. Be an original, God made you one, don't be a copycat, emulating every new religious fad that comes to town. Go to God to find out what He wants you to do. “Enter into your closet and shut the door and your heavenly Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

Deuteronomy 22:11.

“Thou shall not wear a garment of diverse sorts, as of wool and linen together.”

Clothing is designed to cover our nakedness and keep us warm.

Cloak of “zeal”, speaks of enduement of power.

The Garment of “praise” for a spirit of heaviness.

The Linen robe of “righteousness”.

Wool speaks to us of human effort, sweating it out; strength of soul, will and emotions. It's the ability to get your point of view skilfully across. We sing, “I am weak but Thou art strong.” I have often pondered the accuracy of those words. Our unconsecrated strengths are our greatest weakness.

1 Samuel 8:7. “And the Lord said unto Samuel listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”

They rejected God as their King, and proceeded to appoint one of their own choice for themselves.

1 Samuel 8:9-19. “Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said this will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectioneries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king, which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, nay; but we will have a king over us.”

Hosea 13:10. “Where now is your king to save you? You said give me a king and princes.”

“I gave you a King in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath”

Not only did the people have to tithe to the priests, but they also had to pay an additional 10% tax to the government. This is the first

record of taxation. It's absolutely true that Pentecostal leaders are never satisfied with just 10%, but are continually looking for ways to increase the burden of religious tax.

Greyness. Old, stale, calcified, stiff and arthritic, set like concrete; thoroughly hardened. That's the history of every denomination, and don't think yours is any different. Instead of maintaining the freshness and inspiration of the Spirit, the stale stench of the flesh takes over. Greyness speaks of that time of life when our eyes grow dim, our hearing impaired and one realizes that time is running out.

2 Chronicles 20:20. "And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper."

The double check: The Law and the Prophets.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses everything is established: Objective is a matter of fact: And subjective is a matter of feeling. The prophets that declare the Law are subject to the Law. If they speak not according to this, it's because there is no truth in them. In other words they are liars and not to be feared but rather ignored. In the New Testament we have the law of the Spirit of life Romans 8:2 and the witness of the Spirit, which is the anointing 1 John 2:27.

God can prophetically give you something you never thought of, but usually it's out of prayer and the preparation of your heart before Him. Believe God, trust His Word, and you won't be deceived. Believe His Prophets for prosperity, and examine what they say. Don't swallow everything just because they add, "Thus saith the Lord" but carefully check it out. God can definitely speak to us through His prophets so be available, but be discerning, and don't be gullible. Always remember God will never contradict Himself, therefore a true prophecy will never contradict His Word.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3.

“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, **and he gives thee a sign or a wonder**, And the sign or the wonder **come to pass**, whereof he spoke unto thee, saying, Let us go after other god’s, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams: For the Lord your God wants to prove you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Most Pentecostals would give money to a miracle worker without hesitation believing its God’s will. They would even follow them to ?

A great calamity in the organised Church is that it has failed to prepare the people of God for suffering, and deception How could it when it is so deeply deceived itself.

Martin Luther warned. “I am much afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates to Hell, unless they diligently labour to explain the Holy Scriptures, and to engrave them upon the hearts of youth. I would never advise a parent to place his child where the scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution where men are not unceasingly occupied with Word of God must become corrupt.”

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

I was raised Roman Catholic from birth. We were taught that through baptism we became members of the body of Christ, and of His church. We were also taught that unless we were baptized, we could not enter heaven but were consigned to Limbo for eternity. This was the fate of unbaptised babies of Catholic parents. I was duly presented for baptism by my parents as an infant, and thus became a member of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Reaching the age of reason, (7 yrs) I made my first confession, and received the Blessed Eucharist for the first time. From that point I maintained my state of grace by receiving the sacraments and attending mass. Nothing else was necessary.

Kingdom living is more than occupying a pew with some casual acquaintances on Sunday mornings

It doesn't seem to be much different in evangelical, charismatic, post charismatic, or those that believe they are on the cutting edge. If you tithe, and attend church regularly, nobody is going to bother to inquire about the state of your spiritual walk with the Lord. If you are sick, the pastor in charge of visitation may call, if he's asked to. They will expect you to become involved in their programs from time to time, but if you can't, no matter, as long as you're attending and tithing, you're in good spiritual shape as far as they are concerned. I fail to see that the expectation of the leaders is any different to what was expected of me, when I was a practicing Catholic. Just as long as you roll up, sit up, sing up, shut up, and then pay up, you're okay.

More and more churches encourage membership under the guise that they need to know who is committed. This is the way they enlist labourers to work in the system. The pastor in particular wants your name on the roll so you can help to make his dreams come true. The new member must now submit to the leaders, whether he agrees with what they are doing or not. If you want to get ahead you must not make any waves, just get involved in their programs and pay up. The

only way up the corporate ladder is to serve “The man of God”. Not true you say. Oh yes it is, as fed up multiplied thousands will testify.

THE PATHWAY TO GREATNESS

Mark 10:35-45.

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou should do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, what would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, we can. And Jesus said unto them, ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, ye know that they, which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all, for even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and give his life a ransom for many.”

In the judgement of scripture, it is undeniably clear, that the love of position, admiration and praise, is basically corrupt. For it tends to exalt and inflate ourselves; to pride ourselves on our natural or acquired endowments; to assume credit and merit for our own qualities. It chooses self-esteem instead of ascribing all honour and glory where they are due. It's false, because it exalts that which we should demean. It's criminal, because it intrudes upon the domain of God. And we have all done it from time to time. Here are some things people believe is the way to greatness.

The Pulpit: There is no place where “**pulpit mania**” is more contagious than Pentecost. Pastors are in an elite class. So young

singles and couples make it a goal to go to Bible College, and become pastors. It may not be said so openly, but the message soon begins to sink in, that the only way to become anybody is to become a pastor. In Pentecost, as soon as some high profile individual is saved, he is adjudged clergy material. Paraded as a trophy of grace, although he may be a novice, he's promoted around the branches of the particular franchise attracting new members. I know of large churches, whose numbers are made up of people who had transferred there, primarily to go to Bible School in the hope of becoming a Pastor. Then when the pulpit they thought they were going to get, didn't eventuate, they just settled down and became another member, or casualty, depending on how they reacted to disappointment. The church is full of disillusioned believers, who never recover from this cruel hoax. I'm not opposed to Bible College education, but I am not in favour of the subtle inference, that you cannot serve God completely, unless you are in a full time position. The senior Pastor becomes the model to emulate. There is a "Pastor at all costs" mentality, where one starts to feel that he can only fulfil his dreams and aspirations through the pulpit. Of course some do make the grade, and then set about sacrificing the congregation, upon the altar of their dreams.

I once asked a young pastor with a small congregation what his goal was, without hesitation, he said it was to have a church of a 1000 people. No doubt he felt this was the way to get ahead. It would generate enough finance to enable him to do all that was on his heart. I was no different at his age.

Jeremiah 45:5 "Seeketh thou great things for thyself? Seek them not" was the word of the Lord to Baruch.

In "Death of a salesman" Miller says of Willie Loman; "**He's writing his name in a block of ice on a hot day.**" That really sums it all up. We forget that we are all too soon forgotten.

Where is the servant spirit found in Mark 10? It has been replaced by a total commitment to our own personal needs, and a complete lack of concern for the needs of the other person. I have observed over the

years, that those who have been pastors for a number of years eventually begin to dream of becoming an itinerant preacher.

This naturally is the next step up the corporate ladder. Statements like; “He’s being released to the body” in reality means, he is going to travel among the branches of his franchise. To these ministers, “the body” is their denomination or movement. Many choose for themselves the title of evangelist, or prophet, and in recent times we have been getting quite a few Apostles. I am not being facetious but stating the truth.

**Church has become a lucrative business nowadays.
That’s why many are installing Bank machines.**

The uppermost thing in the heart of God for all His people is ministry. All Christians are ministers. But not all are Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers. Every member of Christ’s body has a ministry function. (Romans12: 1-21)

Ambition: Is the desire for power, fame and honour. It means wanting to do something with your life. There’s nothing wrong with that. We should all want to make our lives count for God and our dependants.

It’s not Christian to drift aimlessly like flotsam and jetsam.

Jesus was ambitious to do His father’s will.

Hitler was ambitious to do his own will.

Everyone has this urge to improve his or her station in life.

However, the modern notion of success and excellence is a very suspect one indeed. It assumes you’re “okay” because you made it to the top, but if you didn’t, you’re not “okay”.

When your main preoccupation is to fulfil your ambitions, and reach your goals, to the point that you can’t hear the heart cry of your brother or sister who is in pain, then your zeal and motivation is questionable. Ambition is the desire to excel, but it should never be at

somebody else's expense. The great American dream; success, prestige, money, power and security, is self-pleasing and not the spirit of Christ. (Romans 15:3) "Christ never pleased Himself".

Position: "You don't know what you're asking!" "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give: but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared." We are naturally selfish. Serving others does not come spontaneously. To develop lasting and co-operative relationships we must be willing to serve. When recognition and honour comes our way, it is acceptable when it has not been solicited. It is given by God to comfort us, in the knowledge that our service has not gone unnoticed. It should be a stimulus to further service in the cause of Christ, and not for self-gratification. We had a businessman in our congregation who burst into tears, because he wasn't appointed an elder. He missed the whole point of Jesus ministry. He left and immediately joined a local Pentecostal church that quickly accommodated him. When the prophetic seminars were in full flight, I kept bumping into people who told me they had been to the school of the prophets and as such they were prophets now. I seemed to keep running across men wanting to be called 'pastor' who didn't have a congregation; prophets without a prophecy; and teachers that nobody wanted to listen to. In the true church of Jesus Christ there is no place for position hunters, there are only vacancies for servants.

The servant's prayer is "What wilt thou have me to do?"

The prodigal's prayer, "Make me as a hired servant."

DAMAGED RELATIONSHIPS

Every individual is involved in relationships of one kind or another. There are some relationships we should walk away from, and there are others that we cannot neglect, without great loss. Unresolved problems have started wars, wrecked families, and broken marriages. Our basic problem; we want our own way. It's the "exclusive consideration by a person of his own interests".

The power player: This person must win at all costs. He takes aggressive action to fulfil his goals first. He is focused on having his needs met. He dominates every relationship he's in to pursue his objective. It's called "Strong leadership". It has its roots in fear, and so he takes matters into his own hands to make sure he gets what he wants. He feels if he doesn't, he won't get it. Trusting God is totally foreign to him. He's a danger to himself and all those around him. The principle of yielding all to the grace of God, and trusting Him for the outcome, is foreign to him. That's far too risky a proposition for this man. A great failing of many ministers is they mistakenly believe that their people have been given to them by God, to assist them to build their ministry. Consumed with the goal of putting their work on the map, they forget that many of those under them have dreams also. Its power based Christianity, and it misses the mark. Failure to consider the interest of others, is the major cause of problems in all forms of personal relationships. Be willing to listen to the opinions of others, and avoid overemphasizing yourself. Relationships revolve around met needs. People need each other. No one is self-sufficient. Everyone has needs that can only be met through relationships with others.

**Historically man has always used others to serve his ends,
And he will do it by force if necessary.**

Matthew 6:33. "Seek ye first." Man's spiritual need is his greatest, for in it lays the key to every other need. God designed us to be physically and emotionally dependent upon others. The stronger our relationships are, the more our personal needs are met. Met needs

build relationships. In order for relationships to be mutually rewarding, the needs of all individuals involved must be met. As long as everyone's needs are met, the relationship grows stronger. Our goal must be to meet the needs within the relationship and how do we do that? By meeting the present need. We must communicate these needs, because relationships will deteriorate when they are not. It's the unspoken expectations that do the damage. Some expectations can be unfair, and that can be true of both parties. The failures to meet expectations that are unspoken eventually destroy relationships. The heartbeat of relationship is communication. There may be many good times and wonderful things take place, but many happy memories won't fill the void. Communication doesn't meet needs. It just brings them to the attention of the one that needs to meet them. Don't just focus on yourself. The enemy wants you and I to accuse God, and man, for our unfulfilled lives.

There has been is so much abuse of power in the church today that it has made all thinking Christians suspicious of all forms of spiritual authority.

DON'T MAKE ME THINK IT HURTS

What a strange attitude! No, it's more than that, it's stupid; yet how often we hear people say "I don't want to think about that right now." Or I'm not prepared to discuss that. Like the ostrich many just stick their head in the sand and won't entertain any thoughts contrary to their prejudice because they might challenge their position. So please don't confuse me with the truth because its so inconvenient.

In the film "**The Dead Poets Society**" the English teacher ("John Keating" played by Robin Williams) dramatically tells his students "**Carpe diem!**" - "Seize the day!" Every one of you will die, he warns. The critical question is: will you wait too long before you begin to live the truth? Be sure the life you came to live, does not remain un-lived. Mark Twain had no respect for people who only knew how to spell a word one way. In other words, take a risk now and again with God in His word. Just because you begin to question things, doesn't mean you're a rebel. It may mean that you have at last plucked up enough courage to begin to think for yourself.

To think or not to think, that's the question. To muse means, "to think". David the Psalmist said, "When I mused the fire burned, then spoke I with my mouth," and again in **Luke 3:15**. "The people mused wondering if John the Baptist was the Christ." To amuse, means not to think, or, "don't think". To be amused is to be entertained. It's a form of relaxation where someone else does your thinking for you. While it's true that God has given us all things richly to enjoy, remember the living body isn't a theatre or an entertainment centre, but a house of worship and prayer, where our minds can be engaged and informed by Scripture, our hearts touched by the Spirit, and our wills challenged.

"The great God of entertainment has taken hold of the minds of retarded saints of our day, and life is intolerable without some form of entertainment" (A.W.Tozer). Every age has its unique temptations that barricade the way to Christians coming to maturity. Sound doctrine is too uncomfortable to endure, it seems so legal. Besides, we know

what we like and what makes us feel good, and we don't want anything else, thank you.

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE?

In politics it's always easier to be in opposition than to be in government, occupying the seat of power; but a government, without opposition, is nothing less than a dictatorship. Granted it can be benevolent, but usually they are just the opposite. The axiom that power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely, has been affirmed down through history as a true one. Every form of tyrannical government has or will, eventually be overthrown.

From the moment that unjust authority is imposed, it must be enforced as it was in Nazi Germany. The Third Reich was to last a thousand years, but in fact it died in infancy. Communism lasted only 70 yrs in Russia. Like the Fascist States in Europe and South America, all were responsible for horrific abuses of human rights. Even today we still find millions of people trying to come to terms with the loss of loved ones who disappeared in the middle of the night, never to be heard of again. In spite of all this, we still have people who mistakenly believe, that legislation for righteousness is the answer. "Rules and regulations will not protect us or save us," regardless of what they claim.

After prohibition was introduced in the thirties in the United States, lawlessness and corruption infiltrated even the highest levels of govt, the likes of which had never been seen before. "**Long Walk to Freedom**" is the story of Nelson Mandela's fight against Apartheid, a diabolical system, supported by the Lutheran and Dutch Reformed churches of South Africa. In the Middle Ages thousands were tortured and burned at the stake by the Jesuit inquisitors of the Catholic Church. Protestants returned the complement later with interest. We could go on, but the point has been made.

Force is not the answer. What is the answer to this state of affairs; indifference? Certainly not! Thank God for every freedom fighter, and proclamation against tyranny and injustice throughout history. Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Wilberforce, Booth and Martin Luther King are but a few of a multitude of men and women who risked life and

limb standing against the hypocrisy of the days in which they lived. They were freedom fighters. **They were neither passive nor indifferent** to what was happening around them. Without exception, each of the great reformers registered their protests by leading movements that brought about change. That is an indisputable fact.

How did they stand up against the leaven of lies and deceit?

They did it by persuasion, speaking out against wrong doing through argument and debate; by friendly persuasion where possible and confrontation when necessary. Finally with pen and ink when there was no other way. “And Paul, as his manner was, went among them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” Acts 17:2.

Be available but don't be gullible.

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” Ephesians 4:14-15.

Christians should stop serving schemes, dreamed up by men, because they will be made to feel guilty if they don't. A high profile African evangelist proclaimed to the world a few of years ago, “God has told me that I am to put a Bible into every home in Europe”. I thought to myself “go ahead brother, but don't ask me to drop everything and become involved, unless God tells me too. And don't hold your breath because God's been talking to me about some things also.” But he needn't worry. He had plenty of takers, the kind of people that don't think but just **robotically** support these questionable projects with their precious time, and hard-earned cash, believing they're serving God. Some preachers feel God put here to get involved in their projects. Others think it's their God given task to marshal the masses to save the world. The discipleship movement felt they had a mandate to get the dumb Christians to heaven, by making every decision in life for them. They were authoritarian in the extreme. The leaders of this movement used and abused the lives of many

of their followers to the point that many never darken the door of a church now, because they feel they can't trust anyone.

During the First World War, French casualties after three years of fighting were one and a half million dead and seven million wounded. Finally, French troops had enough and mutinied. They refused to attack German positions any longer. In many instances they shot their officers. The situation was so grave that the politicians quickly gave in to their demands before the Germans found out. The mutineers said they would defend France, but they would no longer follow ridiculous orders, given by an "incompetent" high command. I say, "Three cheers for them".

Clergy and Laity:

Where did these terms come from, certainly not from the Bible, nor from the heart of God?. Yet there is within the church an established and accepted two-tier system of believers; namely participators and spectators. It is sad but nevertheless true, that onlookers eventually become criticizers, because really there's nothing much else to do.

If a brother wants to invite a few people around to his home to pray, pastors get up in arms if they didn't get their blessing first. They wouldn't object to them watching a video or playing cards, but they mustn't pray together, or study the Bible, that's far too dangerous. (And heaven forbid, but someone might do the unthinkable and prophesy). It's a form of oppression, where preachers play God, while the people kowtow to their superior wisdom and authority. Christ came to set us free from this kind of wicked interference by self appointed mediators.

Luke 4:18. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Paul encourages them to stand fast in their freedom in Galatians 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Legalistic religion is the worst possible kind of bondage.

2 Corinthians 3:17. “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

PRISONERS BEHIND STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Ecclesiastes 4:1-2. “So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.”

Hebrews 10:24-25. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”.

The four cardinal rules for a believer are fellowship, prayer, apostolic (doctrine) the Apostles just talked about what they had seen and heard of Jesus, the written word came much later; and breaking bread in all that this implies Acts 2:42.

However in most cases nowadays Christians are herded together for other than God intended. Life is lived out in a fortress was not the intention of the apostles. We find a dangerous interpretation has been applied to what was first intended. Now we have the situation that all activity must take place in a fortress, or its taboo. Everything must be under the control of the guardians of the protocol.

The implication is that nothing of any significance ever happens outside the walls of their building, but that's a lie. Control and manipulation is the name of the game. Fortress attendance is a must, because it's here that the dues are collected every Sunday. Fortress based programs can be destructive. They are deceptive, by inferring that commitment to these programs is serving the Lord. They rob you and your family of precious time, money and energy.

They major on minors, such as worship practice, dance, and drama, (what a joke it would be if it weren't so pathetic) and ignoring the study of the Word. This has produced spiritually retarded saints, prone to dependence.

Sunday morning in the fortress is a well-rehearsed performance, and it has to be as slick because time is of the essence.. There are 168 hours in a week. That means a lot of living has to be done in the real world. Fortress chiefs are always looking to see how much of that time they can take off the saints to energise ridiculous programs. They want to grow the attendance, in order to expand their cash flow. Increased membership means money, power, and prestige. It's akin to giving them a fix, so they can satisfy an addiction to build bigger than anyone else in their corporation, town, and country? Whoopee!.

THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

1 Peter 4:17-18. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

The prospect of a final and irrevocable judgement is both sobering, and distasteful, to all sensitive people. Understandably, most find this aspect of God so repugnant, that it has led many to reject or ignore the teachings of Christ. Yet, for those of us whose knowledge of God is not derived from syrupy speculations of how we think it ought to be, but from divine revelation as found in His word, there can be no denying, that judgement and hell are clearly affirmed in the teachings of Jesus and scripture. Not only sinners, but many Christians also, have warped sentimental notions about God and judgement, refusing to accept the Biblical revelation of the character of God.

The revealed character of God cuts across all our preferences. That’s why there is so little preaching on the crucified life. Have you ever considered the alternative to judgement? To be sure it would be a labyrinth of evil paths networking filth and wickedness; suffocating in its quantity, and dangerous in quality. All absolutes totally obscured in a morass of corrupt, vile, humanistic concepts. Evil men totally unrestrained, indulging themselves in all manner of foul behaviour as they fulfil their imaginations in unimaginable loathsome acts. All existence on earth would become, living hell.

2 Timothy 3:13. “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” Except those days should be shortened, no flesh would be saved. In the light of all that is happening around us we say, “Come quickly Lord Jesus.” But in saying it, realize that what you are asking is for God, in unrestrained judgement, to appear. What manner of people then ought we to be waiting for His appearing?

Matthew 24:42. “Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

SUMMATION

In closing it may seem that the situation looks bleak and there's not much we can do, but that isn't the case. We can do a lot to effect change. This is particularly true for true believers. We should not remain silent about our concerns. The church does not belong to any organization, it belongs to Jesus Christ. They may own some property but it stops there, the people are not theirs, they belong to Christ. This Church made up of "individual living stones" is not the personal property of some organisation or individual. Each and every stone is the personal property of Christ who paid for it with His blood. Beware preacher, for we must all give an account personally to Him with whom we have to deal with.

We can all begin by getting serious about our own personal walk with the Lord. Share your concerns with others, and start by gathering together in homes. Pray about challenging some of these ungodly carnal and manipulative practices. Stay where you are and be prepared if necessary to be kicked out. Exert pressure upon the leadership to mend their ways. Don't be afraid them It's what the reformers in every age have done. Be faithful to Christ, to the truth, and to one another. When leaders refuse to respond to your concerns cease giving them financial assistance, and under no circumstances support them or their carnal programs.

1 Corinthians 10:5-11. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." The days of kingdom building are numbered. Babylon has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Much of what we see of the visible church will not be there tomorrow. Many that are in leadership today will be removed if they do not repent. For some like Esau, it's too late.

James 5:8-9. "Be also patient: establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draws nigh. Grudge not one against other brethren lest ye be condemned: behold the Judge stands at the door." He's not walking up the garden path, but He's standing at the door of the Laodicean church, knocking. By persuasion and argument, speak the truth in love

with those that will listen, and allow God to take care of the consequences. The Body is built on relationships, not meetings.

MINISTRY PROFILE OF SHAUN T KEARNEY

After ministering extensively throughout Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America during 1967 the Lord led the Kearney's and their five children, (four sons and one daughter) to the North side of Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand. There they began to pioneer a church that was to have a significant impact on the whole church nationally and the community at large. In 1972 this growing body of believers known as "New Life Fellowship" miraculously acquired a tract of land where a Convention Centre and facilities for a Bible College and Christian Campground were established.

This beautiful location with its own private beach became the scene of many wonderful events accomplished by God. It was the venue for many conferences sponsored by the church for Christian leaders. Speakers from many parts of the world came there to minister to God's servants as they gathered from all over New Zealand, Australia, and from as far afield as India, South East Asia and the South Pacific. Ministers attended them from every mainline denomination to be challenged and blessed.

During Brother Kearney's six-year tenure as chairman of the Pentecostal Ministers' Fraternal in Auckland, a milestone was achieved. For the first time in the history of the Pentecostal movement, a conference for all the streams of Pentecost, both classical and independent, was held at the church's convention centre. Accepting an invitation from Brother Kearney Jack Hayford Pastor of "Church on the Way" came as the guest speaker. All the leaders in the nation, without exception attended. As they lived together for five glorious days, the Spirit of God broke down barriers, allayed suspicions, thus paving the way for the formation of the Associated Pentecostal Churches of New Zealand.

This association of churches and ministers went from strength to strength for a season until vested denominational interests' killed it.

In 1980 the Kearney's went to the US. They lived there until they moved to Australia in 1989. Since then Brother Kearney has spent much time travelling extensively in Asia, US, Canada, and Europe. In addition he has authored many books on the 'Unstructured Church life'.

A LIST OF AVAILABLE BOOKS

THE LORDS SUPPER

Do this in remembrance of me.

THE COUNTERFEIT CHURCH

An in-depth look at some practices that have no scriptural foundation, but are nothing more than traditions and customs

FROM ASHES TO BEAUTY

A message of blessed hope and abundant grace for all those suffering from the consequences of wrong decisions made in haste on life's journey.

THY KINGDOM COME

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom and we gave Him institutions

WHERE OH WHERE CAN WE GO

For all those that are looking for something better than what's on offer.

LET US GO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

Some things to consider before getting bogged down in a religious ghetto.

I LOVE THE CHURCH BUT I HATE WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO IT

The pastor's antics behind the pulpit is what holds most churches together.

THE REFORMATION 1600 YRS BEFORE MARTIN LUTHER'S

The one that came 1600 years before Martin Luther's.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK YOU'RE ALL YOU'VE GOT

For Christians who have a real desire not to become just another statistic.

PROPHETS PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETIC

This is an insight into an area of great importance to the church in this hour.

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