

The Narrow Way Series

CHRIST: HEAD OF HIS CHURCH

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CHRIST IS ALL

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain
Phil.1:21

Christianity is no moral reformation. It is a new creation. Existing raw materials have not been employed. Nothing in the natural realm is contributory. Our God does not utilize what is at hand to fashion something new. He did not do so in the beginning. He does not do so now.

What is seen was not made out of things which are visible -Heb.11:3. All was brought into being by His Word. He spoke and it came to pass. He commanded and it stood forth. Substance and reality result from omnipotence.

And creative power is as surely required to bring forth spiritual life. Darkness is upon the face of the deep of our hearts [Gen.1:2]. Sin has rendered us more formless and void than the first ancient ocean.

But the Spirit of God is moving over this vast waste as He did then. Order can yet arise out of chaos. Light may still diffuse darkness. And the God of heaven is still in the business of making men in His own image. But it is His work to do so.

Residual in dust is not to be found the image of heaven. We are of earth. It was into this that the breath of God exhaled. Then life animated the clay and the image of God was seen. "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground" -Gen.2:7. This body, fashioned as it was by God, was not yet in His image.

It was merely the shell; a tangible dwelling. It was an earthly tent to house the Divine. It remained a lifeless form until imbued with life from above. And the clay had no hand in it. That dust, named Adam, could not arise from where he lay. He had neither power nor will to do so. He was nothing but dust apart from the breath of God.

Only the Lord of heaven can create something out of nothing; And we are not that creator. Life comes from above. The image of God in man was a creative act in Eden. It is ever as much so in the church. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" -Eph.2:10. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, all things are become new" -2 Cor.5:17.

The old was discarded. It had no value. It will not be discovered as annexed into the new. An amalgam of human contrivance and Divine creation will never be forged. Only in the fantasy of an alchemist can the flesh bring forth spirit. They are mutually exclusive realms. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" -Jn.3:6.

No quantum leap can transfer from one domain to the next. Many attempt it. All fail. Modify, adorn, or discipline it as you may, we remain flesh. And "the flesh profits nothing" -Jn.6:63. It is this that condemns all efforts at the outset.

Undisputed as this is from the lips of our Lord Jesus, endeavors have not been abandoned. Religionists doggedly continue their pursuits undeterred either by the Scriptures or their manifest failures. Israelites were masters at this. "Jews outwardly in the flesh" -Rom.2:28 was their signal identity and zenith of attainment.

But modifying the external did not alter the internal. The flesh adjusted could not affect the spirit within. Circumcision did not reach their hearts.

And this is the crux of the dilemma. An external religious act in the flesh does nothing to transform one's heart. To this, the religion of circumcision aptly testifies.

Circumcision is a religious act performed by the hand of man. It modifies the flesh. It excises a portion while leaving the whole intact. We end up surviving the religious event. The assembly of the circumcised fancy themselves as distinguished from the commonplace. They are different from those abiding in their natural condition; and it was their own doing that made them so.

As such, self has cause to congratulate. An air of superiority swells its conceits. "They desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh" -Gal.6:13. But the flesh has nothing to boast of. In it "dwells no good thing" -Rom.7:18. Cutting off certain aspects of it yet leaves nothing good remaining. It must be removed altogether.

A cross accomplishes this effectively and finally. No known survivors have endured its treatment. The cross puts to death all that we are in the flesh. All that offends, which is all that we are, is brought to an end. A cross terminates the totality of our life and breath. Here, the flesh is finished.

It is God's remedy. It silences pride. Only madmen boast that they have been counted worthy of crucifixion. But boast in the cross we may, yes, we must [Gal.6:14]. For it is the only solution to what we are in the flesh. No amount of modification to it can change its basic nature. It is for this reason that all religions of man abysmally fail. "For in Christ Jesus, neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" -Gal.6:15.

Circumcision is nothing, for it does not change what we are by nature. "Nothing good" and "profitless" are all that the flesh may claim. Thus, it must be eliminated; and so, the cross.

The cross leaves nothing with which to work in the natural realm. It cancels any conceivable contribution of its victim. Christianity is a new creation. Life must come from another realm. It is not self-generated. Its origin is not discovered in the recipient.

The root supports the stem, not vice versa. Vital sap courses from source to the sustained, and not otherwise. It is the vine that supplies each branch, but not contrariwise. For what is a branch apart from the vine? What has it to boast of? Certainly nothing arising from its own beauty, strength, or utility. All glory is in its root. From there the life sap saturates its fragile stem.

The branch originates nothing. Its only purpose is to bear fruit. Yet this is wholly dependent upon the living flow which permeates its every fiber. It must abide in the vine or it withers, dies, and is cast into the fire [Jn.15:6]. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in Him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" -Jn.15:5. There is no other source, for fruit is the outward effect of inward life.

Consider well this question: Do the efforts of the branch account for its fruit? The answer hardly need be stated. "Apart from Me you can do nothing;" nothing to glorify God or benefit man. Fruitless is the branch apart from Him. Actually, it is dead.

"Goodness, righteousness, and truth" -Eph.5:9 cannot possibly bud from dried twigs. It is the life within that is everything. This is so with any living organism. The component parts only function as they are animated internally.

A hand can do nothing apart from the head. It is from "the Head, Christ...[that] the entire body...grows with a growth which is from God" - Eph.4:15; Col.2:19. All development or impulse to action comes from the head. The hand initiates nothing as do none of the members. The head governs all. Life is not localized in particular portions of the body only. It infuses each irrespective of function.

None can boast. It is not of their doing that differences exist or that they have life at all. Theirs was not the choice whether to be part of the body or not. This, the Creator determined.

It is not the son who selects his parents. This was settled at conception; and that apart from consultation with the embryo to be. All that his essential constitution will be was determined without his input or approval. In the natural realm, we are all products of others' desires, decisions, and actions. In the spiritual, we have no more part in this than did the babe in arms.

He gives the right to become children of God. None of His children were born of their own fleshly will or that of others. All were "born of God" -Jn.1:13. It is His life that is imparted to His children. This, they did not generate. It came from above. "To live is Christ" - Phil.1:21. Everything springs from this fount.

Paul clearly tells us that "we are not adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" -2 Cor.3:5. We are the genesis of nothing; nothing adequate, that is.

But our competency to bring forth the corrupted and profitless, however, is unrivaled. And whatever is true, right, pure, or good cannot be validly ascribed to us. Do not be deceived. "Every good and perfect gift is from above" -Jas.1:16,17.

But we have deceived ourselves. We believe that the finite can transcend to the infinite. We imagine that the decayed may resuscitate into liveliness, that the things below manufacture things above.

Ours is a mechanistic religion. We are achievers. We set goals but do not seek God. We follow formulas but not Christ. Answers we have but not wisdom. Rules we can generate but not godliness. Procedures abound to "resolve" difficulties, but we do not know our God. We are "full" of the spiritual while yet remaining carnal.

There is no remedy for our malady but God's beloved Son. No formula exists to improve our condition but Christ Himself. No power to transform our deviant nature can be found apart from the Lord Jesus. No power to transform our deviant nature can be found apart from the Lord Jesus. No amount of resolve, religion, or reform will make it so.

The life that is being spoken of does not spring from ourselves. It is "in Him." It is His very life, for Christ "is our life" -Col.3:4. The question is; are we "found in Him" -Phi1.3:9? As seconds slip into hours and these into the days of our fleeting existence, how are we found?

When the snapshots of our daily routines are reviewed, how do they find us? Has it been "in Him," lovingly trusting the Lord Jesus? Have they discovered His life coursing in and through ours?

Are the movements of our lives evidencing the Head's governing of our faculties? And what fruit abides as a testimony to its living source? What will these photos record?

"Ah, here's a nice one. Look at me singing in the church service." "Oh, that one didn't turn out very well. It looks like I was really upset about something." "This is better. You see how I put my tithe in the offering?" "Oh, no! I think we'll just skip over this one. I can't believe that there's a picture of that!"

"Oh look, this one's funny. I -was gossiping with my friend about that useless choir member." "Hey, Hey, here's a typical shot of me, just relaxing in front of the television with my closed Bible in the background."

That's right, in the background. It's been that way for long.

Nothing is omitted in the record. The snapshots are voluminous. All is documented as it is, in fact.

The books contain it all. The photos are there from cradle to graveside. What do they show? What is their story?

Is it a tale of being "found in Him, not having a righteousness of [your] own" -Phil.3:9? Or is it a saga of self, paltry substitutes, and fleshly failing efforts?

The books are being filled. And there are no rehearsals or studio poses.

"To live is Christ"

DEVOTION TO CHRIST

One thing is needful

Luke 10:42

Devotion to Christ is the outmoded relic of yesteryear's religion. We are satisfied with this situation. Like the five thousand of old, if we may merely eat of His loaves, we are content. Indeed, receiving from His hand is our chief delight, but He is not.

Our belly has become our god. Success, prosperity, and fulfillment are the ignoble objects of our waning devotion. We will sacrifice, in measure, to obtain His benefits, using Christ Himself as the means to our own selfish ends. It is imagined that He will help us perform our will; that He will hasten to fulfill our decrees. And when He has done His part, we toss Him aside, forgotten, as we bask in what we have used Him to obtain.

Formerly the church had sung, "Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest; now Thee alone I seek, give what is best." Now it chants, "Abraham's blessings are mine." We are no different than the church of Laodicea who thought themselves to be rich, increased in goods, with need of nothing. It sickens Christ still.

We struggle in order to gain for self. Answers are demanded while wisdom is despised. Solutions are eagerly sought but the Savior is not. Provision is pursued with no thought for treasure in heaven. And if God can assist us in our quest, we are willing to use Him to get what we want. But the great men of both covenants were not so engaged.

Moses said to the Lord: "Let me know Your ways that I may know You" -Ex.33:13. Paul exclaimed: "That I may know Him" -Phil.3:10. In fact, this is what eternal life is made of. It is the Lord Jesus Himself who said so. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" -Jn. 17:3.

We gauge eternal life by our confession, He, by our communion. We are unlike our God. We neither know Him nor are particularly concerned to do so. Many other things occupy us.

A distraction is that which interferes with our concentration. Concentration is focused thought and attention. When distracted, the object of our devotion is set aside for that which is of lesser significance. Yet we are willing to entertain the interruptions that so readily clamor for our recognition.

Distractions may not be positively evil; they may in fact be good. Serving the Lord is nothing to be shunned. But Martha was "distracted with much service" -Lk.10:40.

Service to the Lord became an encumbrance. It diverted her heart from its true and worthy focus. Doing something for God replaced communion with Him. Martha was willing to tolerate distraction, Mary was not. Martha spoke, Mary listened.

The Marthas of the world wish their voice to prevail. They will presume to command the Lord and expect Him to comply. "She came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me'" -Lk.10:40.

Martha imagines that her Lord is just like she is, but He is not. He is unknown by her. His heart remained veiled to her hurried footstep. "Worried and bothered about so many things" -Lk.10:41 was the true assessment of her service. Irritated insistence upon her own way testified to her lack of devotion to the Lord Jesus.

The coming day of Judgment will reveal many things done poorly. For some, it will show a few things done well. Fewer still will have a testimony of having done the one necessary thing in all of life. "One thing is necessary" -Lk.10:42. Here is a definitive statement of what is essential. This must be done; all else is optional and, at best, secondary.

We do not live this way. Devotion to Christ is not the compelling passion of our souls, yet it is the only truly necessary thing. Nothing else truly matters. But we have not opted for this. We have chosen the foolish part which shall be taken away from us. "Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" -Lk.10:42.

It will abide with her throughout everlasting day. She will carry this into eternity. Devotion to Christ is the only portion that a mortal soul will not have taken from him when he leaves this earth. It is eternal life. Knowing the only true God is necessary; nothing else in all of life falls into this category.

The categories are but two; necessary and unnecessary. Devotion to the Lord Jesus is all one will find in the first category. Everything else in life will be found in the second.

This is a shattering reality to any honest heart. To this busy and superficial generation, it will only significantly trouble them when standing naked before the God they have not known. Devotion to the Lord Jesus cannot begin then. Eternal life, knowing God, can only have its origin here on earth. It is the exclusively necessary thing now in this life.

This is not religious fiction. Christ Jesus who spoke it knows whereof He speaks. The final verdict on all of life's activities is that one thing has been necessary all along.

You have been told. The Lord Jesus has said it Himself. Search through the vast array of activities, distractions, and delusions that comprise your life. What have you found there that qualifies as necessary?

All is vanity. If nothing essential and hence truly worthwhile is discovered, all is loss. The tragedy of an irrelevant and wasted existence will overwhelm you in a single horrifying instant. In a blinding flash of clarity you will realize that one thing has been necessary all along.

But retrospect will not save us. Devotion to the Lord Jesus is a matter for the moment, and every moment thereafter, here upon earth.

Friend, you are worried and bothered about many things. They will be taken from you. They have no lasting value. They can neither rescue you at the Judgment nor satisfy you in the present. One thing is necessary.

Disturbed as we may be by this, few of us will do anything about it. We may guiltily redouble our efforts to attend church, but we will not become devoted to Christ Himself. We may vow to pray more often, but this will soon fall by the wayside. We remain undevoted to the Lord Jesus.

There are two main reasons for this. First, we do not believe that He is worthy. Secondly, we do not believe that we are as evil as we are. These are the roots of the matter.

The Lord Jesus sees us; He is watching. He knows not only what we do but why we do it. He gazes into our very hearts. "He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing" -Mk.12:41. All is open and laid bare before His all-searching eye. He saw their acts of devotion; He also saw what no one else did, He saw who was truly devoted.

"Many rich people were putting in large sums...out of their abundance...A poor widow...put in all she owned, all her living" -Mk.12:41-44. He knew the coins of each. He knew what remained in the purse, and what didn't. The rich reserved portions for self, the widow abandoned all for the Lord.

How much is He worth? This is the fundamental question when assessing devotion. Of what value is the Lord Jesus to us? The worthiness of the object dictates the terms of the investment. And money is surely not the point of the discussion, for the Lord Jesus said: "This poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury" -Mk.12:43.

No calculator can quantify the devotion of a heart that is wholly abandoned unto Him. Nor can one count up the inestimable value of Christ Jesus the Lord, "precious in the sight of God" -1 Pet.2:4. Grasping the

immeasurable greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ will determine the greatness of our devotion. Without this, even thirty shekels of silver can be imagined to be a “magnificent price at which I was valued by them” -Zech.11:13.

The rich in the Temple fared better than this in their own estimation. Even so, combined, theirs could not equal two mites. To the widow, the Lord was worth all. Her life was of no account in her mind. That she would entrust to Him who was worth all. He would attend to all her needs.

This is the secret and the mystery of devotion. The Lord is worth all. Nothing is to be withheld; nothing remains clutched to the bosom of self. Who is the Lord Jesus Christ to you? Of what value is He? Is He worthy of a total and complete devotion in an abandonment of self?

You answer, "Yes"? Have you told Him so? Have you brought your two mites? Has everything passed from your hand into His? He is still sitting and observing. He is seated now in the true temple which the Lord built, and not man. He sees beyond the surface, He sees your heart.

One thing is necessary. The Lord Jesus has a question for you: “But who do you say that I am?” - Mt.16:15. You must answer this by your life, and not only with your lips.

Our devotion is sickly because our thoughts of the Lord are beggarly while our esteem for self is highly inflated. We love little because we have been forgiven little. We are not that bad in our own estimation. We have some sins to be sure, but the extent is minimal we imagine. And so, we remain loveless and devotionless.

“Which of them will love him more? Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged correctly...he who is forgiven little, loves little’” -Lk.7:42,43,47. The estimation of our own guilt determines our response to the Lord Jesus. Simon was actually no better off than the harlot, except in his own deluded conceits.

It is not that one must wallow in horrible crimes in order to be devoted to the Lord Jesus. What is needed is a clear perception of the nature and reality of our own sinfulness. The woman wept in acute bitterness over her wretchedness. The Pharisee reclined with Jesus thinking to himself that all was well with him. She was painfully conscious of her condition; he remained in delusion and darkness. The woman judged herself, the Pharisee judged her and the Lord Jesus both, but not himself.

He imagined that he needed nothing. The truth is that he was a hypocritical son of hell [Mt.23:15]. Actually, he was a blind fool full of self-indulgence [Mt.23:17, 25]. If he would see himself clearly he would know that he was a whitewashed tomb full of all uncleanness and soon to be damned [Mt.23:27, 33].

But he did not think of himself in this manner. He therefore did not weep. He did not kiss the feet of the Lord Jesus. Neither was he forgiven; neither did he love. He thought much of himself and little of the Lord. He was devoted to his religion and his place therein, but he was not devoted to God.

Tearless saints lack devotion to the Lord Jesus. When have you last wept over the abysmal blight of who you truly are in the corrupt depths of your inner self? Do you kiss His feet as the sinner you are, or recline at His head in self-generated acceptability?

You may not congratulate yourself that you are not like others. You are, and worse. Doubting this, you shall never be justified or cleansed from your desperate evil [Lk.18:9-14]. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” -Ps.51:17.

According to the dictionary, contrite means "broken down with sorrow for sin; humbly and thoroughly penitent." What does it mean to you? Judas kissed the Lord, but not His feet. He felt remorse, but shed no tear. He had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. He had the appearance of a disciple, but was not. “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way” -Ps.2:12.

Tears and kisses are not optional. One abides a Simon, or worse yet, a Judas, in their absence. There is no forgiveness apart from them. You will love but little, if at all.

One thing is necessary. Devotion to Christ is not an added element to our existing religion; it is the one indispensable foundation for all that is built upon it. Lacking this, our religion is a vapor and delusion.

Those who venture all for the Lord Jesus will not be understood by the devotionless multitude; they will not be by fellow disciples either. The lack of practicality of such "extremism" will draw the disapproval of the unconsecrated. It always does. “The disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, ‘Why this waste? For this might have been sold for a high price and given to the poor’” -Mt.26:8,9.

They were very expedient, conservatively calculating. The sum of their calculations was that man takes precedence over God, that needs preempt worship, and that ministry eclipses communion. “Jesus said, ‘Let her alone’” -Jn.12:7. There is something that transcends service and charity. It is the one necessary thing He prizes.

“The Father seeks such to be His worshipers” -Jn.4:23. He is seeking not for better servants, but for worshipers, for lovers, for tear-stained cheeks, for lips pressed to nail-scarred feet, for costly vials emptied upon a thorn-crowned head. He is seeking for those who will pour out every precious thing in their possession upon the Son of God; to do so because He is worthy due to the excellence of His glory.

This is the essence of gospel response. It is what the Lord has been seeking even from before time immemorial. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love" -Eph.1:4. Holy, in love; isn't this what it means to know God? Is this not what eternal life is, and ever will be?

But those who are forgiven little love little. Those who reserve for self do not value Christ. Those who are occupied with activities do not choose the good part. And those who focus upon the ever-present poor will always ask: "Why this waste?"

Why, indeed? Because there is nothing better that one can do. There is nothing else that is truly required. Those who love little call it waste. He who loves His own to the uttermost calls it necessary.

"Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her" -Mt.26:13. What she did is what the gospel demands.

The conclusion of Paul's gospel is to "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice" -Rom.12:1. This is what she did. All that she had, she gave. What it cost her was of no concern. What others thought did not turn her away: He was worthy. This is what filled her heart, which in turn filled the house with the "fragrance of Christ unto God" -2 Cor.2:15.

Kept to herself, the ointment did no good to any; neither to her, the poor, nor the Lord Jesus. Kept to yourself, of what benefit are you? One may well ask of you, "Why this waste?" Why are you wasting on self that which ought to be entirely poured out upon the person of Christ? What is He worth to you?

Others have gone to great lengths for lesser gain. The queen of Sheba traversed from afar to hear, firsthand, the wisdom of Solomon. She saw him and spoke to him of all that was upon her heart. She perceived the wisdom of his words and the splendor of his house. She sat at meat with him and tasted of his table. His servants were blessed and their amenities fine.

When she gazed upon his ascent to the house of God, "there was no more spirit in her" -1 Kings 10:5. She was overwhelmed. She confessed that she did not believe the word she had heard in her own land. She had thought less of Solomon than he was worthy of. When her eyes were opened, the realization rushed upon her that "the half was not told me" -1 Kings 10:7. So great was he, so magnificent, grand in wisdom, and glorious in riches; there was none his equal.

Her mouth could contain it no longer. Praise peeled from her lips. Riches poured from her hands. Spices; rare, fragrant, exhilarating aromas wafted their delights throughout the house of Solomon. "Never again did such abundance of spices come in as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon" -1 Kings 10:10. Solomon was glorified. He was delighted. And the queen was blessed from his abundance [1 Kings 10:13].

Brethren, "behold, something greater than Solomon is here" -Mt.12:42. The Lord Jesus exceeds Solomon as the sun does a match, as the sea a dewdrop. He is greater and He is here. You have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear. His Word has reached you in your land. But what of you; have you arisen to come to Him, to seek His face, to hear His wisdom?

When you see Him as He is, when you perceive the glories of His house and the blessedness of His servants, as you gaze into His face and feast at His table, and behold His ascent to His Father's house, there will remain in you no more spirit.

You will confess that you have not believed the Word you heard in your own land. You will realize that you have thought Him to be far less worthy than you had ever imagined. You will abhor yourself in dust and ashes. Then your tongue will be loosed in praise and your hand will relax its grip on all you have clutched to your bosom. Gladly all will be given.

The insignificance, foolishness, and pride of your heart will be seen in the light of His glory. And you will bring forth spices uncountable. You will become devoted to the Lord Jesus. You will have tasted of the one necessary thing. He will be glorified and pleased. You will be blessed from His bounty.

But you must arise and come. You will not be devoted to Him staying where you are. You must come to where your tears will cascade upon Him, where your lips will meet His feet. He cannot be anointed from afar. His Word will not be heard amidst the bustle of your activities. You must come to His feet, both to hear and to weep. It is there that you shall discover the one necessary thing.

Some of you will come; some of you will not. It is because of this that I must tell you one other thing about the Queen of Sheba. She will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here" -Mt.12:42.

She was compelled by the greatness of that king of peace to seek him earnestly. At all costs and with glad sacrifice she came to see his face, hear his wisdom, and behold his glory. It was a great expenditure for a lesser reward.

She will condemn this generation. Her very life will bear solemn testimony to the wickedness of hearts in not arising and seeking the Lord Jesus Christ.

This queen will be there, as will you, at the Judgment. The King will ask you, "Do you see this woman who came from the ends of the earth? How far have you come in pursuit of the one necessary thing in life, devotion to My Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?"

Many will be speechless on that day, but not the Queen of the South.

She will turn and ask, "Why this waste?"

One thing is necessary

CHRIST THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

His name will be called Wonderful Counselor
Isa.9:6

There is but one source for true counsel. In the Lord Jesus are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” -Col.2:3. Wisdom scavenged from other sources is not treasure. It is void of value. All that is truly worth having is found in Him. He is the One possessing what we do not.

If wisdom and counsel are to be ours, we must go to the everlasting source. And in Him alone can counsel of worth be granted. But it cannot be attained. Eyes of earth cannot gaze into heaven; natural ears hear nothing spiritual.

Such wisdom is not of recent origin; true counsel has always been. Before earth's earliest ages the Lord declared: “Counsel is mine and sound wisdom. I was established from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was” -Prov.8:14,23. What He establishes abides. The ways of the Lord do not evolve; they do not mature or improve.

His counsel is unchanging without variance from age to age. “Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven” -Ps.119:89. It is the Word of God that constitutes His counsel. “Thy testimonies also are my delight; they are the men of my counsel” -Ps.119:24.

They do not merely pass on good advice. The counsel of the Lord is not an optional suggestion for an improved quality of life. It is not a challenge to higher aspirations, but rather is the exclusive remedy from destruction and the only means of obtaining life and favor from God. “With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me into glory” -Ps.73:24.

But it must be followed. The directives are to be taken according to prescription. Remedies remaining on the shelf are of no help at all. Guidance unheeded results in arrival at other destinations. One will certainly lose one's way, become disoriented, and, finally, be lost altogether.

Counsel from God is not designed to soothe distressed emotions. It rather commands, rebukes, trains, and liberates. It sets our feet upon the straight and narrow. Glory will be reached only if our steps proceed upon that path. One cannot ignore this counsel and expect to be admitted at heaven's gate. “For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me injures himself; all who hate me love death” -Prov.8:35,36.

Our great need for counsel lies in the corruption of our own hearts. The Lord Jesus said it well: “If you then, being evil...” -Lk.11:13. Evil, this is the final analysis. Only the Lord Jesus grasps the depravity into which we are plunged. His is the only counsel that avails to rid us of our malignancy. It is unrivaled and penetrates to the deepest source of our woes.

There is only one Wonderful Counselor. There are no substitutes, accept none others. Listen to what He says, do it, cling to Him. Confide in Him, seek His counsel diligently. Abide in it by the strength of His might. “Apply your mind to My knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge?” -Prov.22:17,18,20.

Indeed He has. Here exclusively is excellence of counsel to be found. “Thy testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors” -Ps.119:24. Listen to Paul. Consult with Isaiah. Hearken unto Moses. Learn from Peter and the some forty other authors of God's Word. It is the voice of the Wonderful Counselor that will surely be heard therein. These “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” -2 Pet.1:21.

The Scriptures are not their own notions. They do not contain yet another option amidst the Babel of therapeutic fare. They are the undeviating directions from of old, from the days of eternity. And the Lord is more than willing to counsel the naive and to instruct the foolish, if we are willing to “turn to [His] reproof” -Prov.1:23. But turn we must.

To refuse or to “neglect [His] counsel” -Prov.1:25, leaves one with nothing but to “eat of the fruit of [our] own way” -Prov.1:3. These are morsels of death, sweet to the palate but wormwood to the soul. The truth from on high is just the opposite, bitter to natural taste, but health to the heart.

Yet men prefer the immediate of the sweet. Its bitter aftertaste is combated by downing yet more sugared solutions. But they do not last, nor do they resolve the ailment. The gall and bile of man-generated counsels continue to resurge their poison. Placebos may be made of sugar, but not remedies.

The prescriptions of men are not those of God. They do not even approximate them. Man's counsel is rooted in the pride of independence from the revelation of heaven. As such, the advisors of earth perceive and prescribe from faulty equipment. Maladies wrongly diagnosed will be given irrelevant treatments, or worse. The correctives are more often lethal as the true condition goes undetected.

Apart from this Wonderful Counselor, man can only begin from himself. He assesses according to his own perspective. But the lens through which he sees is distorted. Rather, it is treacherous. **The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?** -Jer.17:9.

The heart of man is deluded, yet it is all that man has to evaluate life. The conclusions he draws then can only be in error. Mathematics is not the subject of this analysis. Common sense observations such as, "If you go out in the rain, you will get wet," are not addressed.

The allegation is that man is incapable of rightly diagnosing and resolving his deepest difficulties of life. The question put to the heart of man stands: "Who can know it?" And the answer is so obvious that it need not be stated.

"I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways" -Jer.17:10. When the Lord searches the heart He finds deceit and wickedness. Truth and uprightness are not discovered; devious distorted evils are. The conclusion is inescapable; man is no competent analyst.

If one would believe the Bible, modern psychoanalysis must be disbelieved. The converse is also true. The counsel of man and that of God are mutually exclusive antagonists. They cannot be wedded. And fornicating with the psycho-mistresses of Freud, Jung, and other deluded psychiatrists is forbidden wickedness.

Psychoanalysis is a field of chaos. There exist some 10,000 conflicting "therapeutic" approaches. Apparently the Scriptures are correct: the heart of man cannot be known by man. Several years ago, Newsweek Magazine's cover article was entitled, "The Curse of Self-Esteem." The leading "experts" were asked a simple question: "What is self-esteem?" Not one of their answers coincided with the others. By their own admission, they do not know what they are talking about. Yet the myth of self-esteem perpetuates and is more entrenched than ever, though indefinable even by its so-called "experts."

The Scriptures have much to say regarding the counsel of man. The revelation is sobering and chilling. The first mention of counsel in the Bible contains in seed form all that followed thereafter. "Now listen to my voice; I shall give you counsel and God will be with you" -Ex.18:19. Here was a man, a priest of Midian unschooled in the ways of the Lord, acting as advisor. This counselor, as well as his modern counterparts, presumed to speak for God. "My voice" became synonymous with "God being with you." But it was not, then or now.

The essence of man's counsel is this: The paltry opinions of men supplant the truth of God. The Lord's counsel is absolute verity, the other, total deception. It is raw pride. Analysts are not prophets and the "science" of psychiatry is no savior. No liaison is forged between the Word of God and the pronouncements of men. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord" -Isa.55:8.

Since Eden, an alien orientation has governed the mind of man. His thoughts are corrupt and warped, rendering his counsel useless. "The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations. The counsel of the Lord stands forever" -Ps.33:9-11. He sets it aside because it is a delusion. It stands opposed to His Word as a masquerading substitute.

As it was in the days of David, so it is today, only more so. The declarations of men preempt the revelation of God. "The counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired of the Word of God" -2 Sam. 16:23. "As if" is the key phrase. It wasn't then, nor is it ever. God Himself thwarted his counsel (2 Sam.17: 14) as He does that of all his successors.

Man's counsel can never be on par with the Word of God. Our inflated conceit may account it to be so, but it is deceit. Yet pride alone does not motivate the quest for advice from sources other than the Wonderful Counselor. Men seek others to approve their self-chosen paths.

The Scriptures reveal that men consistently solicit counsel according to their own lusts. Advisors who condone the propensity of the heart eagerly receive a hearing. It was so with Rehoboam who "forsook the counsel of the elders which they had counseled him, and he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men" -I Kings 12:13,14.

The wisdom of the aged was spurned for the folly of youth. Theirs appealed to his desires. He wanted to show who was chief, to be accounted as a big-man. What they said found ready acceptance with the evil longing purposed in his heart.

His counterpart, Jeroboam, "took counsel and made two golden calves" -I Kings 12:28. Scheming considerations had already been "devised in his own heart" -I Kings 12:33. The course was set before he uttered the first query of his "counselors." All that remained was their rubber-stamping of his pre-determined lust. "The

sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin" -I Kings 15:30, originated in the perverted design of his own heart. He then sought counselors who would sanction his horrid scheme.

Witness Ahaziah, the son of the wicked wretch, Athaliah: "His mother was his counselor to do wickedly. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab, for they were his counselors after the death of his father to his destruction" -2 Chron.22:3, 4. He was no innocent victim of his upbringing.

Ahaziah welcomed the counsel he received to do evil. It suited his desires admirably. And the evil which he loved came upon him because of it. But it issued in his everlasting ruin. The conclusion of the matter was this: "The destruction of Ahaziah was from God" -2 Chron.22:7.

See yet another king. Amaziah surrounded himself with those who told him just what he wished to hear. They were his "yes-men," the psychological and political "experts" of the day. Yet they were surely counselors to his demise. Under their influence, the king flung the words of God to the ground. He hated reproof. Royal deceivers were commissioned in their stead.

God's prophet was threatened with death because he spoke contrary to kingly lusts. A sovereign outburst resulted: "The king said to him, 'Have we appointed you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?' Then the prophet stopped and said, 'I know that God has planned to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not listened to my counsel'" -2 Chron.25:16.

This is what it comes to; death to evil or the slaying of one's own conscience. Compromise is unknown on either hand. They are enemies. Ultimately, when stripped of its dainty apparel, the stark reality of man's counsel is revealed. Exposed in all its shame is the naked hatred of the ways of God.

The final desperate assault of earth's kings is to cast off the ways of God. Overthrow of restraint is their aim and extinguishing the light is their hope. "They take counsel against the Lord and against His anointed" - Ps.2:2, 3. But it is a suicidal mission. He who sits in the heavens will laugh them to scorn. His king will shatter them as thousands of scattered shards [Ps.2:4-9].

The remedy? "Kiss the Son lest He become angry, and you perish in the way" -Ps.2:12. You must embrace the Wonderful Counselor. There are no alternatives; no, not for men, nor for the people of God.

Yet we have not done so, the church in particular. We are not noted for our wisdom. The church has sold her birthright for a mess of psychological pottage. We are a people "perishing in counsel, and there is no understanding in [us]" -Deut.32:28. In the very house of God is where "wicked counsel" -Ezek.11:1,2 is to be found.

Pharisees are its proponents. No shameful association is shunned by them in pursuit of their madness. Even Herodians are fit bedfellows for seditious deeds and perverse proposals [Mk.3:6]. It is here, in the house of God, that we discover that pride and lust alone do not motivate the pursuit for proposals of folly.

Men hate God. They despise any impediments to their maddened course.

They would rather strike with the fist than bow the knee. Barabbas will be chosen over Christ. And under the counsel of their leaders, "Hosannas" become cries of "Crucify." The Deliverer is accounted a deceiver [Mt.27:63], the Savior, a Samaritan [Jn.8:48], and He who is Divine, a demon [Jn.8:48].

At the prompting of religious men, the Wonderful Counselor is murdered by the hands of the godless. "No king but Caesar" -Jn.19:15 is the verdict of priestly deliberations. "His citizens hated Him and sent a message after Him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us'" -Lk.19:14.

Yes, it is His citizens; the lawful subjects of His sovereignty, who spurn Him. Flattered and seduced, the church wantonly embraces the adulterers of psychoanalysis and worldly counsels.

The Wonderful Counselor is despised. Her lust is poured out upon other lovers, and arrogance colors it all. This is the way of the church.

"This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wickedness'" -Prov.30:20.

But she has. The church has. And we shall surely reap what we have sown.

STUMBLING BLOCK OF THE CROSS

A Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense
1 Pet.2:8

Man, by nature, hates the cross. Interwoven into every fiber of his being is the continuous thread of self-preservation. This is what occupies his waking existence from the cradle to the grave. "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" -Eph.5:29. We seek the ease of the soft, the simple, and the sweatless.

We coddle, adorn, and tantalize ourselves until our dying breath. "Good luck," "Take it easy," and "Enjoy yourself" are the watchwords of each self-occupied generation. So infused is this notion of self first, that any suggestion of suffering or death meets with immediate and instinctive reproof. We will spare self at all costs.

It is unimaginable to the natural mind that a cross could ever be the will of God for anyone. Yet it is; it was for Jesus Himself though Peter could not conceive that it could be so. He even rebuked the Lord for such a "misguided" concept. But Jesus rebuffed him and all who hold such a deceived idea. "He rebuked Peter, and said, 'Get behind me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man'" -Mk.8:33.

Avoidance of the cross is at the prompting of the devil. It is the way of God to put to death self, the flesh, and all that we are by nature. It is the way of man, in concert with the evil one, to save, preserve, and rescue the same. To a vast host of would-be followers, the Lord Jesus turned and said to them: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" -Lk.14:25,26.

Hatred of the downward pull of every natural association is mandatory for every disciple. One cannot properly be called a disciple, a follower, who compromises under the influence of the things of man - the pressure of those closest to us. This is a closeness measured according to the flesh.

The requisite for a true disciple is to reject, in the strongest possible manner, any tendency, suggestion, or directive to stray from the narrow path of life. A disciple must hate his own opinion, perspective, and inclination. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool" -Prov.28:26.

It is thus that the stumbling block is encountered. Hatred of self and love of self cannot co-exist. Inbred in each is the destruction of the other. No treaty of toleration can be drafted between the two. The cross deals death blows to the self-centered of every generation.

Esteem of one's self has never waned in the human race since the first sin. Unmasked, self-esteem and self-acceptance are nothing more than pride.

But for a disciple, there is nothing to boast in, "except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" -Gal.6:14. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" -Lk.14:27.

Crosses were reserved for the worst of humanity's off-scouring. In the delusion of pride, virtually everyone can congratulate himself that he is not as bad as the soon-to-be crucified evil doer who had been judged as wicked by his contemporaries. He was unfit to live by their estimation; a criminal whose very existence was a polluting scourge on society that must be eliminated by the extremist measure, the death of a cross.

Through the concourse of life he was paraded bearing his own cross. He was attended along the way with the cruelest of mockeries, abuse, and insults. As he wound his way through the familiar lanes of his native town, all who had known him spat in his face, hurled refuse upon him, and railed their curses at him. They turned out to gloat at the spectacle of his final agonized breath.

And thus he expired; unpitied, rejected, scorned, hated, and tortured. All that he was in himself came to an abrupt and violent end: the cross put him to death. He became like his Lord, he became a disciple; there are no other kinds.

We dislike this immensely. We would rather be spared this treatment at the hands of men and of God. How much better, we think, to be respected, pleasant, and "normal." Surely then we shall have a platform of common ground to influence our fellows to be favorably inclined toward our religion. But this will not make us disciples.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" - Mk.8:34,35.

This is the stumbling block of the cross. We wish to spare our lives; the Lord desires to crucify them. We want to preserve ourselves; the Lord says we must deny ourselves. We esteem ourselves highly; God declares that self is nothing more than condemned criminal activity.

The devil whispers in our ear, "God forbid, this shall never happen to you." The Lord Jesus rebukes this preservation of self and says: "Get behind Me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man" -Mk.8:33. So pervasive is our love of self and esteem of our abilities that we want by all means to find some other explanation for the Lord's words. But there is none.

Lk.14:28-35 tells us why; our resources are woefully inadequate. None of us has what is required to insure fruitfulness in the coming day or to secure victory over the enemy of our souls. The Lord Jesus is not directing us to look within ourselves and assess our own will power, commitment, and sincerity. He is not looking for people who will pledge their own loyalty out of a determined self-effort.

Self-help is not God's help. God does not help those who help themselves; those who think so become the ridiculed fools described who "began to build and [were] not able to finish" -Lk.14:30.

The point of counting the cost is simply this, when we honestly evaluate what we possess to contribute toward being a disciple, it falls far short of the requirements. Actually, it is a positive hindrance, a liability which is outstanding against us; a stumbling block. What we have to contribute is so far worthless that the Lord's conclusion sweeps it all away as so much refuse.

"So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up/forsake/say "farewell" to all that he has/all his own possessions/all the resources from himself" -Lk.14:33. The possessions He refers to are not "things," they are what we account as valuable as contributing toward being His disciples. They are our perceived assets of religious devotion, morality, and strength of resolve. You cannot be His disciple while you are relying upon what you possess, expecting to donate that to the cause of becoming what you ought to be.

You rather must hate it. You must see it as that which is condemned by God Himself as being fit only for a cross. You cannot be His disciple unless you give up all the resources you treasure as dear.

"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to consider anything as out from ourselves, but our sufficiency is out from God" -2 Cor.3:5. "And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" -1 Cor.4:7. "A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven" -Jn.3:27.

A real disciple embraces the cross as putting to death within himself that which is at total enmity against God. A true disciple abandons self, his attainments, and esteem, and flees to his only hope of life and godliness, the Lord Jesus Himself. Anything else is worthless.

"Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out" -Lk.14:34,35.

Salt is always salty; it never can lose its saltiness. This is how it is recognized. If it isn't salty, it isn't salt. The very nature and composition of it makes it so. The only thing that would hide its saltiness would be the introduction of such a volume of other elements that its presence goes undetected. But even then it hasn't lost its savor, it has merely been overcome by other things so that its flavor is "lost" in the mixture.

The nature of salt is salty. The nature of a disciple is an abandonment of self-confidence. If it isn't salty, it isn't salt. If reliance upon one's own resources is characteristic, you are not a disciple. In neither case of "salt" nor of a "disciple" are they of any value, they are thrown out.

Paul threw his out. Listen to him say: "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more" -Phil.3:4. All of his heritage, his scholastic achievements, his stringent religious practices, the polished facade of righteousness, and his consuming zeal are summed up in his own words: "[I] count them but rubbish/filth/ dung/ in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" -Phi1.3:8,9.

He did not view anything he possessed as being an asset; as contributory to any right standing with God. Whatever could be conceived of as in his favor, a credit to his account, a resource, a valued commodity, was actually the opposite. It was a "loss" -Phil.3:7; it stood against him. All of his perceived gain was actually a debit, a liability, an impoverishment, and an outstanding obligation.

Thus are the flesh, self, and what we esteem ourselves to be. They are against us. They lead to our everlasting ruin, and many are deceived thereby. Peter warns us to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul" -1 Pet.2:11. And it is not limited to the coarser and flagrantly reprehensible activities that he is speaking of. Many are slain by the battle-ax of religion, morality, and self-effort.

The best that we are, our noblest efforts and sincerest desires, are "as filthy rags" -Isa.64:6. Yet we somehow hold on to a vain hope that this is not the case. Though the Scripture declares, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" -Rom.3:12, we do not

believe it. We imagine that, nevertheless, there surely must be something of worth, some vestige of goodness about us, which we can offer to God that will meet with His approval.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil” -Jer.13:23. We are born into this world evil, with an irreversible and uninterrupted propensity to wickedness. These are disturbing thoughts for any placing confidence in fleshly achievement.

Equally troubling is this: “For while we were yet without strength/helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” -Rom.5:6. Here is a twofold devastating verdict; we are both powerless and we are corrupt. What complete folly to imagine the helpless helping themselves.

The helpless help no one. The powerless lack the least ability to do what is required. Furthermore, they lack the very quality which would commend them to God.

Men are ungodly. Though we have been made in the image of God, our likeness to God has long since been effaced. We are not like Him who made us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” -Rom.6:23. This being the case, is it not astounding “that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again” -Gal.4:9? Why do we not rather cast ourselves wholly upon the mercy of God?

Reliance upon self, in any degree, is a base, powerless, and impoverished slavery. Adding religious scruples to it only worsens our predicament. Will clinging to a shadow in the presence of the reality commend you to God [Col.2:17]? Or what of careful observance of religious festivals, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath-keeping “in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men” -Col.2:16-22?

The answer is plain. “These are matters which have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement, and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” -Col.2:23. The flesh cannot conquer the flesh. It cannot improve itself one bit for, “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing” -Rom.7:18.

These are sobering realities. Some of the strongest language in the Scriptures is reserved for those placing confidence in the flesh; words like “accursed” -Gal.1:8,9, “false brethren” -Gal.2:4, “fools” Gal.3:1, “bewitched” -Gal.3:1, “worthless” -Gal.4:9, “slavery” -Gal.5:1, and “leaven” -Gal.5:9.

Those not denying self “have been severed from Christ” -Gal.5:4. These have “fallen from grace” -Gal.5:4, and discover to their everlasting ruin that “Christ will be of no benefit to [them]” -Gal.5:2.

If you have Christ, what need do you have of self? This thing of salvation is no cooperative endeavor; it is not, “Just do your best and God will make up the rest.” “I do not reject/nullify/frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain/needlessly” -Gal.2:21. But the Lord Jesus has not died in vain. The fact of His crucifixion settles the question of right standing with God once and forever.

All self-effort, epitomized by law-keeping, is what sets aside the cross as meaningless. And it is the cross that sets aside, rather, puts to death under the severest judgment, all that man is in himself. Of what avail are your codes and rules, promises and formulas, steps and systems, or ceremonies and routines, when you are helpless and corrupt criminals fit only for crucifixion?

How shall an external token act of religious devotion such as circumcision do one thing to effect the needed radical transformation of an uncircumcised heart? One may boast in this devoted act with a fair degree of show, all the while the heart is full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Circumcision aptly represents man's confidence in himself. It is an act which he can perform with his own hands that modifies himself outwardly; an external religious deed that distinguishes himself from his fellows. It is a form of godliness, but does nothing to effect the power thereof; one that affords a good showing in the flesh, but provides no cure for it. It is a source of smug complacency and self-congratulation, centered in one's self-generated attainment. But circumcision and the cross are always mutually exclusive adversaries.

Self is always opposed to the cross and the cross is ever the death of self. The conclusion is this: “That One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” -2 Cor.5:15.

“If I still preach circumcision...then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished” -Gal.5:11. Confidence in self effectually nullifies the cross. And it is the cross that executes self with its 1,001 tentacles of self-confident reliance, “in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” -Rom.6:2-6.

“He who has died is freed from sin” -Rom.6:7. He who “lives” is yet “dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of [his] flesh” -Col.2:13. Which will it be, the circumcision of man performed by your own hand, or “the circumcision of Christ...a circumcision made without hands” -Col.2:11? One is the activity of self, which has “no value against fleshly indulgence” -Col.2:23; the other is the internal supernatural work of God which puts an end to that which holds us in bondage.

This is the proverbial choice of walking by "faith and not by sight" -2 Cor.5:7, by "grace...not of works, that no one should boast" -Eph.2:8,9. It is that of trusting "in the Lord with all your heart and lean[ing] not on your own understanding" -Prov.3:5,6. Jeremiah puts it this way: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength...blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord" -Jer.17:5, 6.

A stroll through the local "Christian" bookstore provides ample evidence that the church of this generation has stumbled over the stumbling stone. The stumbling block is Christ and Him crucified. Strange, isn't it, that Christ would be a stumbling block to those laying claim to His name? Yet He is.

This generation needs Him not. We have opted for a vast array of substitutes instead. The gospel, **the** "power of God unto salvation" -Rom.1:16, has nicely been set aside by our fleshly alternatives. We have stumbled over Christ and Him crucified. The cross is a reproach unto us, but we think there is little reproachable in ourselves. Self is exalted, Christ is degraded, while we esteem ourselves and dishonor the Lord Jesus.

We have "stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed'" -Rom.9:32, 33.

He who relies upon self will not only be disappointed, but be scattered like dust [Mt.21:44].

And blessed is he who does not stumble over Me
Mt.11:6

THE GREAT HOUSE

But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware,
And some to honor and some to dishonor
2 Tim.2:20

There exist a multitude of "churches" of which "I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" -Phi1.3:18,19. They worship in the spirit of this age, boasting in their disgrace, and putting all their confidence in the flesh. They are incurably religious but incurably godless as well.

Where can they be found? They may be found in anyone of a thousand different "churches." Their labels may appear distinctive, but the ingredients are the same old thing: human wisdom and ceremony with an absentee Christ.

They love the rule of man but not that of God. The Lord Jesus has become the figurehead of their association. He is merely the emotional rallying point of their allegiance. But He is not their living Head, who actually guides, directs, and controls their activities. He is not their exclusive mediator between God and man. Other "shepherds" feed them in pastures of their choosing, but not upon bread from heaven.

There, man has effectually taken His place as Lord, Master, and King. The pronouncements of men are bowed to and obeyed. Other lovers have allured and claimed their affections. Outwardly their organizations and members may appear as unlike as day and night, both in doctrine and practice. Yet there exists among them a unanimous agreement on the central pillar of their "faith."

It requires conformity. It is urged by the fundamentalist as being Biblical. The ecumenist promotes its efficient practicality. Orthodox insist upon compliance based on long-standing traditions. Pentecostals appeal to it as the self-evident way of God in the church. Cultists demand obedience to it as a non-optional essential.

None tolerate deviation from their "authority." This persuasion is a dark cloak, a thinly veiled shroud of "godliness" under which countless untold evils have been perpetuated in the name of religion. This evil is contrary to the Lord Jesus being the Head and Lord of His church. It renders the people of God subservient, impotent, and passive. By it the church is stripped of God-given responsibilities and privileges.

This consensus is called hierarchy. It is that formally designated or informally recognized class of individuals who occupy an "office" or position of authority over the people of God. These "rulers" presume to reserve final say over the lives of men, their equals, as if this were their God-given right and duty. They lord their

decisions over “their” church by taking to themselves an authority and rule which the Scriptures nowhere grant them.

The manipulative club whereby their churches are beaten into subjection is taken from one verse: “obey them that have the rule over you” -Heb.13:17, KJV. And so their members prostrate at their feet in dread of incurring their displeasure; but they do not fear God.

How like Israel in I Samuel 8 these churches are! Longing to be like the world, they willingly rush after their self-chosen shepherds. Where they might be led they know not, to pastures fresh or unto the slaughter. Like so many silly sheep, they dutifully bleat after these hirelings and walk in their paths. They long after a champion, anyone, to deliver them from unwanted responsibilities, and ultimately from God Himself. It does not matter to them who it is, nor that it provokes the King of Glory Himself [Hos.13:9-11].

“We want another lord! We will subject ourselves! Enslave us! Ravage our families! We will pay him to do it!” [I Sam.8:11-20]. “But give us a pastor, a bishop, a prophet, a priest, or a pope! Let us have a president and founder, a ruler, a doctor, a reverend, a minister! Any will do, as long as it is not God Himself!”

“And they said to him...‘Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.’ And Samuel prayed to the Lord...and the Lord said to Samuel...‘They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them’” -I Sam.8:5-7.

How like Corinth these are! They bear with the foolish gladly. “For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face” -2 Cor.11:19, 20. And this is precisely what the lofty lords throughout Christendom do. In their mad rush to be like the nations, church rulers have done exactly what the Lord Jesus explicitly forbids.

They have exalted themselves over the people of God in the name of being “benefactors” -Lk.22:25. Yet “benefactor” is nothing more than a vainly whitewashed attempt to mask the obvious. Actually they esteem themselves to be “great men” -Mt.20:25, “rulers” -Mk.10:42, and “kings” -Lk.22:25. And what is their benefiting “service” to the people of God? They “lord it over them” and “exercise authority over them” -Mt.20:25; Mk.10:42; Lk.22:25.

“But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘It is not so among you’” -Mt.20:26. His leaders are “slaves” -Mt.20:27 and “servants” -Lk.22:26, not lords. Yet why do we discover rulers in the church lording their authority over the flock of God? We can only conclude that this is a disobedient practice which dishonors God and oppresses the church.

Christ's true leaders lead others to their Lord and Master, Jesus. They do not twist the Word of God to draw away disciples after themselves [Acts 20:30]. We cannot serve two masters. If these so-called leaders are lording it over the church of God, they are putting themselves in the place of Christ. It is both a dangerous place to be and a dangerous path to follow.

He is the Lord; leaders are the slaves, and slaves obey their Master. They are “lorded over” by the Owner and Sovereign, but they do not lord it over fellow servants. Christ's leaders lead by godly example and the persuasive power of truth, not by appeal to their authority, intimidation, or force.

For a leader to be otherwise than a slave is the essence of the deeds of the Nicolaitans. These are the deeds that the Lord Jesus says, “I hate” -Rev.2:6. The word “Nicolaitan” means, “I conquer the common people.”

Conquering the common people is what the rulers of the Gentiles do [Mk.10:42]. It is what the rulers of the churches do and what the Lord Jesus hates; but it is not what is done in the church which He Himself builds.

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” -Mt.28:20. And He has not delegated His authority to would-be “christs” within the church. “It is not so among you” [Lk.22:26].

See for yourself. A concordance reveals that the 95 usages of the word “authority” in the NT never once describes one believer as having authority over another. The only authority that a slave has is to obey the specific command of his Lord. He has authority to do the will of his Master, nothing more.

This is what is described in Mark 13:34. There, the Lord Jesus compares Himself to a man away on a journey, leaving his house and giving authority to his slaves, to each one his work. A slave has authority to do the work commanded by his Lord, and the Lord has never commanded any to take His place as Lord by exercising authority over fellow servants.

In the only two instances in which “authority” is applied to a believer, it merely re-echoes the theme of Mk.13:34. Paul's authority was to “build up” -2 Cor.10:8; 13:10 the people of God. That was the work he was given to do by the Lord, but never that of ruling over them.

The apostle to the Gentiles says in no uncertain terms that he has no right or desire to exercise authority over anyone: “Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy” -2 Cor.1:24.

The apostle to the Jews says the same: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder...shepherd the flock of God among you...nor yet as lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" -1 Pet.5:1-3.

Note it well. Paul is a worker with them, not over them. Peter is a fellow elder, not a ruling one. If the apostle to the Gentiles does not allow lording it over Gentiles, and the apostle to the Jews forbids exercising authority over Jews, then who is left to rule over? No one. Neither is there place found for "rulers" in the true church.

Check a concordance and see for yourself. There is not a single word for "ruler" throughout the entire NT that is ever applied to an apostle, leader, pastor, overseer, elder, deacon, priest, or to any believer at all; a rather arresting fact. All of these words for "rulers" are titles of civil magistrates, officers, and military personnel. They do not describe Christians or church leaders at all.

Neither is there a single instance in which one believer is ever called upon or commanded to "obey" another within the body of Christ. Search again and see for yourself. The "head" does not command the "leg;" it is the Head of the body who rules both. No member of the body has authority over or rules another; that is the prerogative and function of the Head, Christ Jesus, alone.

Which brings us back to the bludgeon of the would-be lords of Christendom: "Obey them that have the rule over you" -Heb.13:17 KJV. Let us examine this verse very well.

First, the word "obey" used in this verse is not the customary NT word for obedience to one in authority. That usual word is used to describe the obedience of a subject to a king, a child to his parent, or the true church to the Lord Jesus. In all of those associations, there is a decided and proper superior/subordinate relationship.

However, the word rendered "obey" here in its 53 usage's in the NT, has the central concept of "to persuade." When used in a command, it has the meaning "be persuaded by." It emphasizes a different motivation for complying with the directive.

The first word demands obedience simply because someone is in a position of ruling or authority. The word used in this verse appeals to spiritual reasonableness as the motive for obeying and following the leaders. God is commanding believers to be spiritually persuaded, not to blindly obey men claiming to be "lords."

Secondly, the phrase "them that have the rule over you" may not be clearly understood to the modern reader. This phrase is taken from the KJV which was translated nearly 400 years ago now. Nearly all current English versions use the word "leader" to replace the phrase "them that have the rule over you." This can be seen in translations such as the NIV, NASB, Good News, New Century, ESV, New Translation, and others.

It is the identical word the Lord Jesus used for His leader in Lk.22:26. He is a leader, not a lord. Christ's leaders are servants, not rulers. They guide by example, not by exercising authority as the world does.

What is the church commanded to do in Heb.13:17? "Be persuaded by your leaders and submit." They follow and obey because of the convincing godly example and true teaching evidenced before them. This is precisely what believers are commanded to do with respect to their leaders. "Remember your leaders" [yes, it's the identical word as in v.17 and in Lk.22:26] "who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith" -Heb.13:7.

This is leadership: Speaking the Word of God in truth coming from a life that is conformed to it. It is this that persuades the believers to follow their leaders. This is what has impact upon the hearers as it is truly teaching "with authority, and not as their scribes" -Mt. 7:29.

In the passages found in I Tim.3:4,5; 5:17 and I Thess.5:12, yet another word is translated by "rule" in the KJV. However, this word has many meanings besides merely "rule." Its wide range of definitions include: "lead, direct, attend to with care and diligence, manage, conduct, care for, give aid, show concern about, and rule." As you examine these passages noted above, which of these definitions makes the most sense? See for yourself. You will discover that "rule" is not what these verses are directing leaders to do at all.

We do, however, find in the NT a man who ruled in the church. He was a wicked man. He did not accept the Word of God; rather he oppressed the brethren who wished to follow the Scriptures. Those who would not obey his rule were thrown out of the church [3 Jn.9,10]. The root cause of his evil exercise of authority was that he "loved to be first among them" -3 Jn.9. He shows what all rulers in churches do.

Only Christ as "Head of the body, the church, [is] to have first place in everything" -Col.1:18. There cannot be two heads in the church; two cannot both have the first place. Christ must be pushed aside from His rightful place to make room for Diotrophes and the church rulers following in his steps. This is the heart of the matter.

What have we done? Something has gone radically and tragically wrong. What excuse can we lay before the Lord Jesus for allowing man to effectually usurp Him as Head, Shepherd, and Bridegroom of His church?

What explanation is there for the development of the ceremonies and carnal noise of Christendom's "worship services"?

Where can these things be found in the NT? Why then do we continue to defend and practice them since they have no Biblical basis? If their origin is not from the Word of God, then they have arisen from foul and corrupted sources. Why are they not abandoned immediately?

The NT knows nothing of routines of tinkling bells, swishing robes, flickering candles, and mumbled mysterious liturgies. Neither is there to be found a predictable and well-oiled ceremony performed by "rulers" for the benefit of passive congregations. No evidence is observed in the NT to sanction the frenzied noise and chaotic uproar of the typical Pentecostal gathering. Our failure and refusal to live and meet together in a manner that glorifies the Lord according to His Word merely unmasks the bankrupt state of God's professed people.

We "heap to ourselves teachers having itching ears" -2 Tim.4:3 who become to us substitute "christs." We cling like parasites to external acts of "worship." We rely on countless "aids" to inspire, stimulate, and create an atmosphere of the "presence" of God about us.

Keyboards, choirs, and "worship teams" arouse sluggish saints to chant religious choruses. Majestic and ornate crosses tower before our adoring eyes. Drums drive to a fever pitch enthusiastic anticipation of our spiritually uplifting experience. "Worship" leaders announce or shout prayer-points through their microphones into our too willing ears.

O, how we love our church! How we love our tradition! How we pride ourselves in being found within the fold of the Reverend Doctor So-and-so!

Our pathetic and sickening addiction to such fleshly devices is all too evident. Strip us of these things and we will sit in appalled bewilderment as to what is to be done to worship our God. We have become the willing servants of man-made routines and fleshly practices. We are paralyzed by such inventions and have made ourselves incapable of actually worshipping in Spirit and Truth.

Essential to idolatry is the manufacture of an external tangible form in order to make the unseen deity "real." It is imagined that it is merely a "help" or an "aid" to better conceptualize one's god. Or so it is claimed. But remove the "aid" to worship, and the worshipper is at a loss as to what to do for his god to be worshipped.

We have been duped. We, the priests of the Living God, have been the willing victims of a subtle death.

The church has allowed itself to be artificially bound and gagged by the cumbersome and predictable invented ceremonies of religious overlords. The proof of this lies in our stupefied impotence to actually corporately worship the Lord Jesus apart from this vast array of unscriptural incentives.

Instinctively we know this is true, in practice we affirm week after week that we are helpless to worship apart from them. We deceive ourselves by attempts to assure our hearts that these formats, rulers, and "aids" to worship are not essential. They are, we say, genuine and beneficial supports to further our worship.

The deception lies in the fact that, if removed, our "worship" vanishes with them. Thus, if the "worship" disappears when the "helps" are gone, then the "worship" is actually totally dependent upon them. This is a great delusion on a grand scale; worse yet, it is idolatry.

What excuse will we offer for replacing the simple mandate, "Do this in remembrance of Me" -Lk.22:19 with that which is, at best, optional? Why has this meeting of simple worship been transformed beyond recognition and buried under uncountable years of dusty traditions of men? Why is the priesthood of all believers content to sit in dumb passive silence observing the performance of a higher caste of clerical overlords?

What is wrong with us that we cannot worship without prayer-points and directives being announced from our praise and worship leaders? Is He not capable as Head of the body to direct its activities? Isn't the voice of the Good Shepherd sufficient to guide His flock into the pastures of His Word apart from "rulers" in the church? Does not His heart of affection alone arouse a response of love from His bride? Doesn't He as Lord have the only legitimate right to prescribe and command His servants' worship? Isn't He present in the midst of even two or three of His people?

The answer from the true church is, "Yea and Amen." Those that would answer otherwise can readily be encountered this coming Sunday. They're everywhere.

"You look for much, but behold, it comes to little;
When you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?' declares the Lord of Hosts,
'Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you
runs to his own house'"

Hag.1:9

“No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment
and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new,
and the piece from the new will not match the old”
Lk.5:36

“Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, and repent
and do the first works; or else I am coming to you,
and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent”
Rev.2:5

TRUE UNITY

He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit
I Cor.6:17

Unity has nothing to do with conformity; it has everything to do with the life of the Lord Jesus being manifest in mortal flesh [2 Cor.4:11].

True unity is found only in the Father and the Son [Jn.14:9-11] and in those indwelt by Him [Jn.17:21]. It is a supernatural reality whose origin and maintenance is in God Himself. And this oneness can never be fabricated by external artifice.

Unity among true Christians has always been. It exists today despite clamoring to the contrary. To claim otherwise is crass unbelief. It is actually an indictment against the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is the One building His church and no power or device of hell can prevail against it.

Either our Lord's prayer of John 17 has been answered or it has not. If it has, then unity exists. If it has not, then His petition [as if this were possible] was contrary to the will of the Father, for we know that: “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” -I Jn.5:14.

Did the Father "hear" the request of the Lord Jesus? It is inconceivable that He did not. “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me” -Jn.11:41,42.

It is unthinkable that unity has not been and is not now the present reality of all true believers. The prayer of our Lord Jesus makes this evident. “Holy Father, keep them in Your name that they may be one even as We are” -Jn.17:11.

Unity is a spiritual consequence in response to the prayer of the Lord Jesus. It is established by God Himself and can be maintained only by Him. All are preserved for God, by God. As such, they are “not of the world” -Jn.17:14, their origin and home is from above; they are a heavenly people.

The manners and customs of their homeland are foreign to those of this world. The law of their land governs their every action, not the ways of earth-dwellers among whom they live. They are like their Lord: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” -Jn.17:16. Herein is the key to unity.

Unity consists of possessing the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is having the same other-worldliness, righteousness, truth, and godliness that characterized Him. It is what constitutes one a Christian. In this they are all one with full agreement. To be otherwise is to be something else besides Christian which destroys unity thereby. One cannot be demonstrably unlike the Lord Jesus and still lay valid claim to being one with Him; He does not participate in such hypocrisy.

He resides only in those who love Him with all their hearts; who demonstrate such love by obedience to His Word. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word” -Jn.14:23. Love evidenced by obedience to the truth is what sets apart the Christian and issues in unity.

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth” -Jn.17:17. The ones who belong to God keep His Word [Jn.17:6]. They are kept from the defilement of the world by the Father Himself [Jn.17:11]. They are one in their obedience to the Word of God which sets them apart and renders them hateful to the world [Jn.17: 14].

Truth is foundational to all genuine unity. Minimize, ignore, or abandon this and all basis of unity is destroyed. If the Word of God is not our foundation, we have departed from our only reference point. We can

then no longer distinguish a saint from a false apostle, the temple of God from idols, or light from darkness itself. Opinion then dictates and consensus dominates; truth and sanctity do not.

The Word of God is absolutely essential to unity, and unless our words echo those of the Lord Jesus, other people cannot become one with the Father and the Son. "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one" -Jn.17:20,21. The words of the Father have been given by the Lord Jesus to believers [Jn.17:6,8,14]. These same words are then called "their word" [Jn.17:20].

It has come to them. They have embraced the Word, understood it, and kept it; it has performed its work in them. They are transformed thereby; it has become theirs. Therefore, they speak as one with the Father and the Son.

For each believer to manifest the truth, holiness, and love of God is what constitutes unity. As the world observes Christians they behold the manifold excellence of God's character in each saint. The common glory of God is unity manifest to the world [Jn.17:21,22].

Unity has nothing to do with conformity. "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" -Rom. 12:4,5. True unity is simply being possessors of a common life. We are not told to *become* one, we *are* one.

The uniqueness of the body is the unity of the one life manifest through the widely divergent members. No member lives and acts unto itself. All are governed by the directives of the Head. Herein is the profound key to a unity which is intensely spiritual at its core.

Submission to one another is in response to the direction and purposes of the Head. The members do not dictate to the others what they are to do. It is the Head who governs who shall submit to whom.

Life in the Lord Jesus, both individually and corporately, is a radically spiritual reality. No member has the prerogative to act independently of the life, will, and authority of the Head; to do so is the ruin of unity. Distinctions of Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female are no hindrance to their access to the Father, "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" -Gal.3:28.

All are being renovated into the spiritual image of the Lord Jesus Christ apart from any fleshly considerations [Col.3:10,11]. The mighty, the noble, the religiously "privileged" have no preference before the God who chooses the weak, base, and despised of the world to confound the "wise" [I Cor.1:26-29].

God has made "one new man" -Col.3:9,10, "one commonwealth" -Eph.2:19, "one temple" -Eph.2:19-22. There is "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father" -Eph.4:4-6. This is a unity which must be kept diligently [Eph.4:3]. And the necessary element to do so is "love, which is the perfect bond of unity" -Col.3:14.

The love which perfectly unites Christians is obedience to the Word of God. "He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word. He who does not love Me does not keep My Words" -Jn.14:21,23,24. Obedience to the Word of God [love] is the perfect bond of unity, and it is only by this that "we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments" -I Jn.5:2.

Keeping the Word of God obediently is the only valid expression of union with the Living God. It is the only real evidence of unity with the true people of God themselves.

Sheep straying off paths of righteousness by heeding the "voice of strangers" -Jn.10:5 destroy the unity of the flock thereby; that is, if the sheep hearing and following the Good Shepherd would follow them. But they will not, for "they know His voice" -Jn.10:4 and follow Him.

Uniformity has nothing to do with unity. Those who cry the loudest about establishing unity in the church merely betray their own lack of obedience to the Word of God.

Unity among true Christians has always been. All real believers have consistently loved God by obeying His Word, and they have displayed their love towards one another by keeping His commandments.

Who was it that was united to the God of Glory, more than 2.5 million Israelites, or Joshua and Caleb [see Num.14:1-11]? Though there was a virtual absolute consensus of opinion among the tribes of Israel, there was no unity because there was no obedience to the Word of God.

Their bodies "fell in the wilderness" -Heb.3:16,17 while Caleb "followed the Lord [his] God fully" -Josh.14:8,9. Unanimous agreement among the professed people of God does not constitute unity, being sanctified in the truth does.

There was agreement among the 400 "prophets" of God in the days of Jehoshaphat. "Behold, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king, so please let your word be like one of them and speak favorably" -2 Chron.18:12. Micaiah diligently maintained the unity of the Spirit by utterly refusing this

compromising rubbish. "But Micaiah said, 'As the Lord lives, what my God says, that I will speak'" -2 Chron.18:13.

The Spirit unites us to glorify God by being separated unto Himself from the corruption and compromises of our age. We are to hear, keep, and speak the truth of God's Word; this, Micaiah did. Conformity/Uniformity urges association upon the basis of the lowest common denominator.

To achieve this ideal of "oneness," the doctrine of the Word must be cast aside while keeping only the bare "essentials." And so we are implored to join together with any who claim to be Christian regardless of their beliefs or practices. We are exhorted to join in associations with all that "name the name of Christ."

We are told that we find our basis of unity in a united opposition to the moral evils and troubles of this age. We ought to join hands with everyone who protests abortion and pornography, who bewails the problems of the modern family, who stands against homosexuality, corruption, and things like these.

The united front we present is thought to be the oneness that the Lord Jesus longed for in John 17. Somehow we think it is up to us to create the oneness He was pleading for there. But He was asking the Father, not us.

Only God can answer prayer and create life out of death. It is only the Spirit of God that can bring unity out of chaos. No amount of dialogue, associations, conferences, publications, or creeds can ever create, establish, or maintain unity.

They can, however, gain significant mileage toward erecting a monolith of ecumenical conformity. And what a lofty edifice it is becoming. Literally millions are swelling its ranks as its tower steadily rises heavenward. Enthusiasm is running high among all who share the common concern of making a name for themselves; for the reputation and image of unity being gained throughout the known world.

They are in agreement; they are all talking the same language. The spirit of cooperation animates them as the structure ascends brick upon brick. And the Lord said, "Behold, the people are one" -Gen.11:6. Indeed, their efforts have become proverbial.

AS BRICK FOR STONE
AND SLIME FOR MORTAR,
SO MAN'S CHURCH WILL NOT STAND.
FOR WHAT IS BRICK
BUT A MAN-MADE FORM?
AND WHAT IS SLIME
EXCEPT TOLERANCE?

Ecumenical slime bonds strangely diverse and unlikely companions together in a semblance of oneness. They willingly set aside differences for their common objective.

It is this Babylonish unity that breaks down long-standing enmity between opposing factions. "Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day" -Lk.23:12; the very day they delivered Jesus over to be crucified.

Unity has nothing to do with conformity.

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy
Lk.12:1

Religion is a mask for hatred of God.

The ways of the Lord are judged according to their own with no thought of His ever judging theirs. Quickly they find fault and slowly, if ever, do they hear rebuke. "Healthy," needing nothing from the Great Physician, they are progressively devoured by the cancer of Cain.

Cain was the first Pharisee [Gen.4:1-11]. Hating, rejecting the way of righteousness, a self-conceived substitute was offered in its stead. A bloody execution upon sin and self he would have none of, and with brazen face the fruit of his own cursed toil was laid in haughty confidence before the God of Heaven.

Yet when the Lord cast aside his tainted fruit as worthless, his hardened heart forged war. Reproof was spurned. His neck stiffened against the God whose ways he despised. His fist clenched against the righteous and struck with murderous rage. He loathed in the depths of his rancid soul the sacrifice that the Lord approved of [Heb.11:4], and slaughtered him who brought it [Gen.4:8].

"Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother" -I Jn.3:12. Then with insolent disdain, he mocked Omniscience by his sullen lying reply as to Abel's whereabouts [Gen.4:9]. He was a true child of his father, the devil, who is "a murderer ...a liar" -Jn.8:44.

The Pharisees follow in his train. Rejecting the way of righteousness "and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" -Rom.10:3. Pharisees are "the separated ones." But they are not separated unto God at all. The only separation they know is a self-imposed isolation into the squalor of their own darkened hearts' chambers.

What was handed down from ancient lore dictates their every carefully rehearsed step. And their steps, like their forefather, Cain, led them to kill "those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One" -Acts 7:52. Their religion led them to betray and murder the Son of God whose blood "speaks better than the blood of Abel" -Heb.12:24.

"They do all their deeds to be noticed by men" -Mt.23:5, "to be seen by men" -Mt.6:5; "to be honored by men" -Mt.6:2, and to "receive glory from one another" -Jn.5:44. "They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" -Jn.12:43.

See them nod the acknowledgment for the respectful greetings encountered in the concourse of life. "Hail, Pastor, Reverend, Doctor, Rabbi" [Mt.23:7]. Gaze at them solemnly seated above their fellows at the head of their halls of weekly ceremony [Mt.23:6]. Listen as trumpets acclaim their deeds of beneficence. Watch as their hoarded coins clink impressively into coffers which eventually filter down into their awaiting left hand [Mt.6:2-4].

Hear their lofty swelling oratory to the skies; a magnificent volume of multiplied words unheard by heaven [Mt.6:5-7]. Observe them, morose and downcast, denying bodily demands in order to feed the cravings of insatiable pride parading as humility [Mt.6:16-18].

Learn from them seated in Moses' chair. Learn the peril of knowing what God says without doing it [Mt.23:2,3]. Learn well the damnation upon knowing where to seek the Lord Jesus without arising, finding, and worshipping Him [Mt.2:1-11]. Count with exactitude their tithes of dill [Mt.23:23].

Scrutinize closely gnats that have been purged [Mt.23:24]. Admire expanded encasements of Scriptures brandished before approving eyes [Mt.23:5]. Stand reverently with them before honored memorials of the dead [Mt.23:27].

Rather, weep with broken heart for the devoured widow [Mt.23:14]. Grieve for multitudes enrolled and seduced by them, now sons of hell [Mt.23:15]. Gasp in amazement as the camels of greed, arrogance, and hypocrisy are devoured by their ravenous gaping appetite [Mt.23:24]. Shudder in disgust over the vermin-infested stench of their decomposed heart of death [Mt.23:27].

Shrink in horror at the tombs of the righteous from every generation murdered by their forefathers. And appalled and aghast, witness them fill up the measure of their guilt as spikes are driven into the outstretched arms of the Son of God Himself [Mt.23:29-37]. Witness the sure end of all religion.

"Behold, your king!" They therefore cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar'" -Jn.19:14,15.

Solemn; in zeal for "Jehovah," they slaughtered Jesus -Jehovah's salvation. Of these the Lord Jesus said, "outwardly [you] appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" -Mt.23:28.

Hypocrisy is a masquerade, a clever dramatization. A role is assumed and performed with impressive persuasion to the admiration of onlookers. The character portrayed by the Pharisee is that of "Man of God." The role is studied minutely; long hours of laborious concentration to perfect the part issue in its well-rehearsed performance.

It is a calculated show: The costumes are donned, facial expressions are carefully studied, accents are adopted, and lines are memorized. Props are employed to lend credence to the act. All is a synchronized flowing sequence of convincing portrayal. But it is just that, an act; it is not what they truly are.

With a ceremonious swish of sanctity in a flurry of tasseled blue [Mt.23:5], they exit the church's stage until the next curtain call. There, unmasked, in private counsel with fellow pretenders, their deeds of darkness are forged. "Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said" -Mt.22:15.

"The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? If we let Him go on like this...the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation'...So from that day on they planned together to kill Him" -Jn.11:47,48,53.

No unhallowed union is spared by these supposed separated fools in formulating their hateful schemes. "And the Pharisees went out and immediately began taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" -Lk.3:6.

Ah, but now, the temple, the synagogue, and the market place are calling; The show must go on. There are trumpets to be blown, mint to be tithed, fasts to endure, prayers to recite, Scriptures to be shuffled, seats to ascend, greetings to acknowledge, ceremonies to perform, hands to be washed, and Christs to be crucified.

We must honor God with our lips though our hearts are far from Him [Mk.7:6]. We must worship God in the utter vanity of our own opinion [Mk.7:7]. We are constrained to be as eyes to the blind so they too can plunge headlong into our pit [Mt.15:14].

Oh yes, and the key of knowledge; the door must be barricaded and guarded fast lest any should enter therein [Lk.11:52]. And, certainly, prayers; we believe they should be long, very long [Mt.23:14], and when at all possible on the street corner or synagogue [Mt.6:5]; and by all means with wholehearted thanks that we are unlike other men [Lk.18:11].

Indeed, sacrifices must go on! How else could we continue to finger the Mammon of unrighteousness [Lk.16:13-15]! And where shall tithes and offerings be placed if not in our den of thieves [Mt.21:12,13]! What other source of revenue is there to fund the deeds of a Judas unless it be the shekel of the sanctuary [Mt.26:14,15]! We must love our money [Lk.16:14,15]! We have to exalt ourselves! Our opinions must prevail! And of course we actually despise the Lord of Glory!

You see, we are hypocrites. All is a masquerade. The lord of light governs our every move [2 Cor.11:14]. Surely this is no cause to marvel, is it? "It is not surprising if his [Satan's] ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness" [2 Cor.11:15]. But, then again, ours has been an unrivaled performance for centuries now. You probably thought that it was real all this while, but it isn't. It is leaven.

Leaven is hidden within. It is alive and it feeds upon its host. It progressively transforms the whole by its internal mixture. Leaven puffs up; it fills the mass with empty air. It adds lightness to what is weighty and makes palatable what is distasteful. Unchecked, it inflates to enormous proportions.

It is corruption. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Clean out the old leaven...Let us therefore celebrate with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" -1 Cor.5:6-8.

Pharisees are neither sincere nor true. Behind their mask they peddle "the precepts of men" -Mk.7:7. Be warned against their influence, their pretensions, and their doctrine. "But beware of the leaven...of the teaching of the Pharisees" -Mt.16:11. Their instruction injects leaven into the hearts of the unsuspecting. Beware! Unarrested, it will certainly transform you into "twice as much a son of hell" -Mt.23:15 as the Pharisee who recruited you.

Leaven's effect is visible from without. Though it has permeated the whole, it betrays its presence by what it does on the exterior. Visible, outward, and tangible are the hallmarks and preoccupation of Pharisees. Everything revolves around the external; a pageant could not be otherwise. Having not the inward reality of a "broken and contrite heart" -Ps.51:17, they can do nothing else but emphasize the external act.

"Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" -Lk.6:2, is the rallying cry of their wretched hearts. Censure, condemnation, and self-justification formulate their "ministry": "The Pharisees' disciples often fast and offer prayers...but yours eat and drink" -Lk.6:33.

Without joy, void of compassion, the slightest affront to their self-generated scruples launches an assault upon any who dare to transgress: "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet...And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus" -Jn.5:10,16.

There is joy in the presence of God over one sinner who repents [Lk.15:7,10], but the heart of the Pharisee, as a deadened stone, is unmoved in its malice: "And the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, 'There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day'" -Lk.13:14.

The Lord of the Sabbath [Mk.2:27,28] steadfastly refused to stoop to the bankrupt rebukes of these petty scrupulous fools. Their tangled maze of requirements sprang from the polluted cisterns of their own depraved hearts, and not from that blessed Spirit of Light.

"Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?" -Mk.7:5 is their exclusive touchstone of reality. All is arraigned, tried, and convicted in the supreme court of self, with lord Tradition presiding. In that tribunal, their intricately inscribed volumes "nicely set aside the commandment of God" - Mk.7:9. Their burdensome weight of multiplied codes "invalidates the Word of God by your tradition which you have handed down" -Mk 7:13. They teach "as doctrines the precepts of men" -Mk.7:7.

Pharisees receive nothing from above; they merely reshuffle useless fare received from fellow scribal mongers. Their doctrine is "safe," but it cannot save. It is ever-so-balanced, but not piercing to the conviction of soul and spirit; having the approval of men, but not that of Heaven.

It is leaven, and leaven corrupts. Their teaching permeates the heart and transforms the lives of those infected. To be seen before men and not by the Father in secret becomes the motivation in life; pleasing lord Pharisee now is the governing principle of the heart.

"Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" -Jn.12:42,43.

They did not glorify God out of fear of men. They dared not transgress the determination of the "reputed pillars" -Ga1.2:9 lest they incur their wrath and thereby lose their standing before them.

You see, the Pharisee is our benefactor; he will lead us into "truth." Apart from him we could never wend our way through the bewildering maze of "divine" necessities heaped upon us. He is our ruler; he knows the requirements and knows the penalties for deviation from them. He also administers the punishments. We must comply; if we do not, lord Pharisee has determined it to be transgression against God.

Certainly we must bow to the pronouncements of men. The accepted behavior must be practiced. Of necessity, externalism is our focus. The ceremonies of our church must be performed and of course our hearts are not actually right with God.

You see, we are hypocrites, all is a masquerade. The leaven of the Pharisees has done its work.

With smiling handshake amid multiplied pleasantries, they exit the scene of their weekly church performance until the next curtain call. There, unmasked, in the privacy of their own parlors, their deeds of darkness are found. "Then He said to me, 'Son of man, do you see what [they] are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, "The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land"' -Ezek.8:12.

There devotees bask for hours in the ghastly bluish tones of their televisions. All manner of garbage, unfit for swine, much less the Throne, is eagerly ingested by these undiscerning and unconsecrated fools. There dainty delicious morsels of gossip fill their bellies [Prov.18:8]. It is here that the fires of hell smolder in defiled tongues that lash out flames of cruelty, bitterness, and rage [Jas.3:6]. And on these beds lustful passions are poured out upon any willing passer-by [Ezek.16:25].

But, oh yes, the key of knowledge; the Bible is indeed a magnificent piece to be displayed for our weekly enactment, but of little value otherwise. But don't be alarmed, our chief Pharisee will unlock its mysteries to us. And, certainly, prayers; we believe they should be short, very short, and by all means at meal-time only.

Ah, but now, the sanctuary is calling; the show must go on. There are costumes to don, seats to occupy, ministers to flatter, hallelujahs to shout, tithes to bring, sermons to endure, greetings to lavish, ceremonies to perform, conviction to resist, and fanatics to be spurned.

"Those troublesome narrow-minded do-gooders! They're forever preaching on this, that, and the other. Why, one of them publicly told my father and mother that they were lying hypocrites! It makes my blood boil just to think of it! I could just kill him! The nerve of that high-minded fanatical extremist, anyway; who does he think he is?"

"What? You mean you didn't hear about it? I thought everybody knew about it by now."

"Yeah, some guy named Peter."

"My parents? Their names were Ananias and Sapphira" (Acts 5:1-11).

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees

UNDER THREE THINGS THE CHURCH SHUDDERS,
YEA, UNDER FOUR IT CANNOT STAND:
UNDER A PHARISEE WHEN PLACED IN AUTHORITY,
AND UNDER A TONGUE OF LOVE LACKING ITS DEED;
UNDER HEARTS WEIGHTED WITH SIN UNFORSAKEN YET HID,
AND UNDER MAN'S TRADITION PARADING AS TRUTH

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did
Acts 9:36

Innumerable are the blessings from the faithful services of Christian women. Truly the godly woman contributes significantly in the "adorn[ing of] the doctrine of God our Savior" -Tit.2:10. From the beginning she was fashioned for a distinctive purpose. "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him'" -Gen.2:18. And again, "For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" -I Cor.11:9. Woman was created to assist the man as his companion. She helps him to fulfill what God has given him to do. Her contribution is therefore complimentary to his purpose and works.

Helpers, by definition, are not initiators. They do not take the prominent role. They are not leaders. They occupy a support position and lend aid to those they are associated with. Helpers rarely appear in the public eye but typically carry on their works behind the scenes. Her God-given realm is not public but in private; she is a follower, not the leader. He guides and directs, she responds. He has prominence, she, retirement. The man influences his world, the woman, her home. This order from creation establishes the scope of her ministry in the church.

Several NT passages outline this: "But women will be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint" -I Tim.2:15. "I want the younger women to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach" -I Tim.5:14. "Older women are to be teaching what is good, so that they may teach the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored" -Tit.2:4,5.

These verses summarize the primary arena of the Christian woman's ministry. It is to her husband and family; it is at home. It will save her from intruding into ministry reserved by God for the man. It will save her from neglecting her own God-given duties. Mature spiritual women are to train the younger women in their godly domestic responsibilities. Practical spirituality is the emphasis of their instruction.

These godly qualities will determine whether she has been faithful to the Lord or not. The elderly Christian widow will be evaluated as to whether she has been "faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble, devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds, and continu[ing] night and day to pray and ask God for help" -I Tim.5:9,10,5.

It was these helpful works of service that Phoebe was known for [Rom.16:1,2]. Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and many others did good deeds by "minister[ing] unto Him of their substance" -Lk.8:2,3. Dorcas "was always

doing good and helping the poor” by making “robes and other clothing” -Acts 9:36,39. Lydia opened her home in hospitality to Paul and those with him [Acts 16:15,40].

These are the things that the Christian woman of God is to do for His honor and glory. The home is her domain from which she extends her deeds of kindness to those outside as well.

Yet there may be occasions when she assists her husband to expound the Scriptures in private to one of God's servants. But the man and wife did not do this from the pulpit or in the public gathering. “They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” -Acts 18:26.

Spiritual women have a testimony to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. One repentant infamous woman testified to various ones in her village resulting in the conversion of many [Jn.4:39-42]. Euodia and Syntyche were “women which labored with me in the gospel” -Phil.4:3.

They assisted in their appropriate capacities as ordained by the Lord in His Word. They served the saints but did not lead them; they testified of the gospel to individuals, but were not the teachers in the church itself. The Scriptures are quite clear regarding this as the following translations of I Tim.2:11,12 demonstrate.

“Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” -KJV.

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” -NIV.

“A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” -NASB.

“Women should learn in silence and all humility. I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet” -Good News.

Paul's express purpose to Timothy in this letter is stated in the next chapter: “I am writing these things to you...so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God” -I Tim.3:14,15.

These are no isolated and unique directives to resolve an immediate situation encountered by Timothy alone. They contain universal truths and the command of God to all Christians and churches wherever and whenever they may be found. Paul's teaching did not vary from place to place. He spoke the same truths, as he says, “just as I teach everywhere in every church” -I Cor.4:17. “It is what I direct in all the churches” -I Cor.7:17.

And these things are not his personal advice or prejudice, but are the Lord's commandment. “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's commandment. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored” -I Cor.14:37,38.

So then, what we are told in I Tim.2:11,12 is the Lord's command for the church throughout the world. In the church, the women are to listen, not speak. They are to learn but not instruct, to submit and not exercise authority. The compelling reason cited by Paul is contained in the next verse: “For Adam was first created, then Eve” -I Tim.2:13.

From creation the woman's role has been supportive as a helper, not initiating as a leader. We have already seen in what capacities she is to teach, to other women and her children. But here we learn that she is not to be the teacher of men; she is not to exercise authority by leading and directing the brethren.

This is the consistent teaching of the Word of God respecting women in ministry: “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” -I Cor.14:33-35.

“To speak” means much more than not disturbing the gathering by distracting interruptions of talking and whispering during meetings. Certainly this ought not to be done. Even common courtesy would inform us of that. Paul tells us what he means by “speaking;” he says it 23 times in this chapter. It means to speak by way of instructing the brethren as I Cor.14:6 summarizes.

There he identifies the speaking he is referring to as “revelation or of knowledge or of prophesy or of teaching.” It is this that the women are to remain silent about in the assembly. They are not allowed to instruct the church. Being “silent” means ceasing from instruction as verses 28 and 30 clearly inform us. Being “silent” and “not speaking” refer to one and the same thing.

The woman is not allowed to teach or exercise authority over a man. Since the primary work of the overseer is being “able to teach” -I Tim.3:2 and “exhort[ing] in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” - Tit.1:9, women are unqualified for this ministry. An overseer certainly publicly leads and instructs the people of God which, as we have already seen, is outside the realm of her God-given capacities for service.

Women bishops, reverends, pastors, elders, and general overseers are contradictions in terms. The English translations are in agreement: “An overseer/bishop/church leader *must* be above reproach, the husband

of one wife” -I Tim.3:2 [emphasis added]. If the overseer must be above reproach, it is a qualification that is not optional; it has to be so or he is disqualified for such ministry.

Yet the same Scripture that says he must be above reproach equally demands that he must be the husband of one wife. No woman who is the husband of one wife can be found. Women are not husbands; it is a contradiction in terms. We therefore will never legitimately encounter women in this type of ministry. Call it what you will, a woman can never be an overseer/bishop /pastor/elder/reverend according to the Word of God. It is not her God-given sphere of service.

To claim that men and women have received the same Holy Spirit and therefore can have the same ministries is an argument disproved by the Word of God. The fact that all believers possess the same Holy Spirit does in no way indicate that each has the same spiritual gift or capacity for ministry: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord” -I Cor.12:4,5.

The Lord does not distribute the ministry of overseer to women, though He is the same Lord of both male and female. Though “there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” -Gal.3:28, this does not mean that all ministries given by Him are without regard for gender.

The Rev [Mrs.] Peter did not preach on the day of Pentecost. The apostle John's wife did not raise the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. You will discover no parallel to our modern practice of "ordaining" women to public ministry in the pages of the NT.

Which gospel preacher in the NT was a woman? Which apostle was a woman? Which overseer was a woman? Which church in the Scriptures had a woman pastor? Which of the NT books were written by a woman for the church's instruction? The answer is none.

And the fact that your daughters will have the Spirit poured out upon them in the last days and will prophesy [Acts 2:17], in no way alters what the Scriptures say about the realm of the woman's ministry. Joel does not say that your daughters will become ministers of churches or that they will become ordained overseers of congregations and ministries.

He says that they will prophesy; but Joel does not indicate where or when or to whom they will do this. Any who presume that this means that women will become leaders in the church merely deceive themselves. Philip had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses [Acts 21:9], yet when it came time for the prophetic word to be spoken, the Lord sent a prophet, a man, to speak forth His Word in that assembly [Acts 21:10,11]. His daughters carried on their prophetic ministry in another sphere, but not in the church in accordance with what the Scriptures command us.

We mustn't imagine that an isolated exception establishes a general precedent. Yes, without dispute, God spoke through Deborah [Jud.4&5], but it was shameful. It was not normal. The Lord allowed that to be done as a rebuke to the wayward rebellion of His people Israel. The glory went to a woman and Barak was put to shame. Barak ought to have taken the lead, instead he followed a woman and was publicly disgraced.

This exceptional instance of God speaking through Deborah did not qualify her or any woman to be a pastor. No basis for ordaining women as overseers can be derived from her history. In fact, in the pages of the Scriptures God has spoken through many abnormal means.

God spoke through Neco, the idolatrous Pharaoh of Egypt, and used him to rebuke Josiah, the king of Judah [2 Chron.35:2-22]. The murderous king Saul was overcome by the Spirit of God and prophesied all day and throughout the night [I Sam.19:18-24]. Caiaphas, the wicked high priest who ordered the crucifixion of Christ, also prophesied [Jn.11:49-53].

Does the fact that God spoke through these unlikely vessels qualify them to become pastors and leaders in the church? That should be obvious; I don't think we would like Pastor Pharaoh, Overseer Saul, or the Rev. Canon Caiaphas to be senior ministers over our churches.

And we should not forget that God spoke through a donkey and used that dumb beast to shamefully rebuke the madness of Balaam [2 Pet.2:15,16]. Yet the fact that God used this animal does not justify ordaining donkeys over God's people; neither are women to be appointed as leaders in the church.

The Lord has given women a different work to do than He has to men. Sisters are to represent the church's submission to Christ: “As the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything” -Eph.5:24. The Lord has afforded the Christian woman a unique way to display this submission. It is in the woman covering her head [I Cor.11:1-16].

This serves as an acted-out parable of the church's relationship to the Lord Jesus. It shows that the church takes the place of retirement and Christ that of preeminence. In this illustration, the man represents Christ and the woman portrays the church.

The church does not instruct Christ; His Word speaks to her. She does not lead Him. The church does not have authority over the Lord Jesus. Christ does not obey the directives of the church represented by the woman.

Covering her head tells all that the church glorifies her Head, the Lord Jesus, not herself. Her glory is veiled, His is seen. This is why it is shameful for the woman to have her head uncovered. To do so exposes the glory of man, a thing which ought to be unseen. "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man" -I Cor.11:7.

The man represents Christ, the glory of God, in the church. The woman represents the church, the glory of man. In the church, the glory of the Lord and His Word are to be seen and heard. Man is not to be exalted; man's words are not to prevail. The woman's covered head shows the proper place the church has in submission to the Lord in obedience to His Word which brings glory to Him and not to us. This is the spiritual significance of the woman's head covering as taught in I Cor.11:1-16.

Her long hair is "her glory" -I Cor.11:15, naturally, as created by God. Spiritually, in the new creation, her natural glory is to be veiled. It is not what she is by nature that is her glory. Christ, the glory of God, is all that believers can boast of. His honor is all that the church wishes to display before men and angels.

Her hair is not the one and the same covering both in the natural realm as well as in the spiritual. There are two coverings, one by birth in the natural and one by choice in the spiritual. To attempt to make her hair the covering in both realms makes havoc of the Scriptures.

If her hair is the only covering spoken of [I Cor.11:15], then we must read verse 6 as follows: "If a woman does not cover her head [i.e. have hair on her head], let her also have her hair cut off..." But if she has no hair on her head, what then is there to cut off or shave? This cannot possibly be the meaning.

What she is naturally, however glorious, is to be covered by her decision to wear a headcovering. She is showing that the church's single desire is for the glory of Christ to be seen. She willingly submits to this, humbles herself, and takes the place of retirement so that He might be exalted before all. It is a great ministry she has to perform which reveals profound truths.

And angels are watching. "Therefore the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels" -I Cor.11:10. There is no place found for man to glory before Christ Jesus or the elect angels. And the church is no place for this to be seen either [see Appendix].

The Christian woman in ministry prays night and day. She submits to, and lovingly helps her husband. Her children are loved and brought up in the ways of the Lord. The teaching of kindness and truth is upon her lips to the blessing of her fellow sisters.

Mercy, good deeds to help the needy, and giving to benefit the saints occupy her waking hours. She testifies privately of the grace of life from which she has partaken. Her domain is the home where she delights to serve. And her gentle quiet spirit, precious in God's sight [I Pet.3:4], is well content to abide where God has allotted her portion.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord,
she shall be praised
Prov.31:30

APPENDIX

BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS

THEREFORE THE WOMAN OUGHT TO HAVE [A SYMBOL OF] AUTHORITY ON HER HEAD
BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS
I Cor.11:10

WHY?

1. Because the greatest of the angels continually cover themselves in the presence of God [Isa.6:2].

2. Because the angels do not seek for or display their own glory in the presence of God. They are ever giving glory, honor, and thanks to the Lord [Rev.4 &5].
3. Because, Satan, a rebellious angel, spoke his own thoughts and sought his own glory against the Most High [Isa.14:12-14].
4. Because through the church the wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. It is an everlasting rebuke to the devil and his angels that once wretched, rebellious, and defiled people now live utterly to the glory of God. Satan and demons once lived solely for that purpose but now are unclean rebellious spirits [Eph.3: 10].
5. Because angels “long to look into” -1 Pet.1:12 the significance of the gospel. As the women cover their heads, the angels see that the church purchased by Christ is intent that He alone be glorified.
6. Because the angels serve the Lord and perform His will within their allotted sphere [Ps.103:20,21; Heb.1:14]. The church is to do the same within her allotted sphere.
7. Because some angels did not “keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” -Jude 6. The church is to abide in her proper place, with the women keeping theirs and not intruding into that of the man.
8. Because we are solemnly charged in the presence of the elect angels to keep the things commanded in the Scriptures [I Tim.5:21].
9. Because angels give report to God of the conditions they observe as part of their assigned responsibilities [see Gen. 18:20-22; 19:1f; Zech.1:8-11; 6:1-7; Rev.1:20; Rev.2&3]. In the church, do they observe the thoughts and ways of man being honored, or those of God?
10. Because, unknown to the Christians, angels may be present among them [Heb.13:2]. Do we want them to see Christ glorified or man?

SUMMARY

The holy-angels are looking to see if those redeemed by the gospel are suited for the presence of God as they are. Is the church in complete subjection to Christ? Does she seek only to make His glory known? Does she proclaim His glory and Word alone or does she shamefully allow her own thoughts and agenda to be promoted while receiving glory from men for doing so?

They seek to see if men, crowned with glory and honor yet lower than themselves [Ps.8:5; Heb.2:7], choose to cover and conceal their own glory [I Cor.11:15] which is represented in the church by the woman [I Cor.11:7].

Will the church not cover herself when angels, who are greater in glory, might and power [2 Pet.2:11], cover themselves in the presence of Him whose glory fills heaven and earth [Isa.6:1-3]?

THE GOSPEL OF TECHNOLOGY

You seek Me, not because you saw signs,
But because you ate of the loaves and were filled
Jn.6:26

We have wed in an unequal yoke technology and the gospel. Mistakenly we believe that technology will be a suitable "helpmeet" for our evangelistic efforts; but the gospel needs no help, and certainly no unhallowed union such as this.

By technology, for the purposes of this discussion, is meant machinery, medicine, materials, and methods which are integrally connected with the preaching of the gospel. These are enticements which are used to attract people to come and hear our message. They are the bait to allure the fish to bite our concealed gospel hook.

This approach will be referred to as the Gospel of Technology [GOT], while the simple preaching of the Word of God will be called the True Gospel [TG].

The Lord Jesus exposed the basic flaw in GOT. "You seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" -Jn.6:26, 27.

The heart of man is fixed upon its own self-advantage; it is looking to gain for self but not to deny self. GOT appeals to the former while TG insists on the latter. Thus the two emphases are antagonistic one toward the other. Observe. If we utilize a film-show to attract a crowd to hear the gospel, we have allured them for an unworthy motive. They will come, not for the sake of TG, but to partake of the GOT event.

Should we dispense medicines in our clinic in order to draw an audience for our preaching, they will endure the sermon in order to obtain GOT. If we give away foods or clothing to those attending our evangelistic campaigns, there will be record attendance.

No rural farmer will refuse bountiful hybrid seeds and improved fertilizers in exchange for the small price of hearing our evangelical discourse. Few parents object to the benefits of modern education for their children even if the new religious message must be counteracted afterwards at home. The same can be said for employing musicians, entertainers, celebrities, sporting events, etc. to entice listeners to assemble.

We may even generate "followers" by employing GOT in our missionary endeavors. Jesus Himself had such followers as we have seen in the John 6 passage above. But He, at least, knew they were not genuine repentant believers; they were still governed by self.

Once introduced, GOT is virtually impossible to uproot. Technology has inbred into it its own obsolescence. Once obtained, it instills an insatiable desire for more and improved versions and additions. No amount of GOT can satisfy the flesh.

GOT appeals to the very unworthy motives that TG is designed to eradicate, and since the heart of man is bent upon self, GOT is preferred over TG. Eventually, GOT devours TG and all one is left with is technology while the message of TG is marginalized or abandoned altogether.

GOT can never be distributed equitably. Those possessing it never have enough resources to distribute to all in a given locale. Thus, some benefit while others are deprived. With TG, the only ones who are deprived are those who reject it. With GOT, some will be deprived simply because there is not enough to go around.

Those not receiving GOT as others have, are not happy with merely TG. It is viewed as a meager substitute, not a complete "gospel" like others have received. Thus the question of partiality is raised in the minds of those left out.

GOT is typically dependent upon money from the cities or from abroad. The local Christian in the village, therefore, is handicapped in his preaching to neighboring villages since he does not have the means to obtain GOT. And if he comes preaching TG only, the next village will ignore, refuse, or despise his message since it is not the GOT which he, the preacher, initially received from the non-indigenous preachers and suppliers of GOT.

Those benefiting from GOT will, to various degrees, be healthier, smarter, and more prosperous than their neighbors. They will therefore have a measure of social and economic superiority over their fellows. This places a carnal stumbling block before those without GOT and generates resentment towards those who have it. It finally hardens the hearts further against TG.

“Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness” -Isa.26:10. Though we bring GOT, they will not learn TG. GOT is actually little more than mutual manipulation. The preacher tolerates GOT as a means of presenting TG and the listeners tolerate TG in order to obtain GOT. Both smile and deceive the other.

Social welfare must be purely a work of charity and Christian compassion alone, isolated from TG, and as an end in itself. To make GOT a means to the end of TG, ultimately destroys TG altogether. May we look beyond the immediate before us to consider the far-reaching effects of our missionary endeavors. Let us present TG, the power of God for salvation, with the same single-minded focus of the Apostle Paul. He and all preachers of TG have “determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified” -I Cor.2:2.

CULTURE AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Our citizenship is in heaven
Phil.3:20

All culture is the enemy of the kingdom of heaven. Diversified world cultures can all be traced to the dispersion of Babel's tower. A monolithic idolatrous world-view was responsible for its erection and for the uniformity discovered among them. Prior to that event, culture was one [Gen.11:1-6]. When scattered, this basic idolatrous orientation was transported with them wherever they migrated. It is noteworthy that all global cultures at their historical root are idolatrous, Judaism not excepted [Josh.24:2,3].

In addition, another cultural presupposition has traversed throughout the continents following the days of Nimrod. This second instilled principle is stratification of rule culminating in a king. It is that basic hierarchical totalitarianism spawned from Nimrod's Babylon during his reign of terror and darkness. This highly centralized rule is evidenced culturally by the ubiquitous chiefs and kings among tribal peoples as well as in the reigning dynasties of various world empires.

The net effect of these phenomena is this; the gods, in conjunction with authoritarian rulers, determine the role of the individuals within their societies. In other words, culture determines the significance and place of the individuals within it, and not vice versa. This is epitomized in the caste system of India prior to Western influence.

Antedating recorded history for centuries, the same mores and modes of worship have been preserved through oral tradition passed on from pontiffs, priests, and prophets to their initiates. It is this long-standing consensus which supplies significant incentive for all to conform to its expected behavior. The strength of these pressures is real and varies in their intensity from group to group, but is present in all.

To all such, the gospel comes as a foreign intruding element and as a harbinger of another cultural tradition which forges no alliance with native practices. This is a fundamental cause for persecution of the believer who, inevitably, is called upon to abandon local norms in order to obey the demands of the kingdom of heaven.

Furthermore, the believing individual now becomes a voice, other than and independent of the traditional hierarchy, calling the society to modify or cast off the ways of the ancestors. Thus, he incurs the wrath of rulers, family, and neighbors alike - Rulers, because he is governed by another King, Jesus, and their authority is called into question; Family, because they are exposed to shame by their "black sheep" who is not honoring the traditions of home and habitation; and Neighbors, because the fabric of their society is being challenged and even unraveled by the "rebel."

Idolatrous beliefs and authoritarian dominance have only been called into question but rarely by any culture as a whole. Apart from the direct intervention of God in the Jewish nation, no other society has abandoned these two pillars of culture inherited from Babel except one.

It was attempted by the Greeks in the 8th century B.C. and following. Then, sporadically for a brief space, democracy was introduced and experimented with, only to return to Nimrod's system under Alexander,

surnamed the Great. The Greek gods were unsuccessfully called into question by some of their philosophers and a type of humanism was promoted in its stead. This too succumbed to popular prejudice, returning to their idolatrous roots.

What Greeks failed to achieve, America succeeded in doing. There are several contributing factors to the American phenomenon which need to be considered in order to understand the far-reaching effects this society has had upon modern man, traditional cultures world-wide, and upon our concept of the kingdom of heaven itself.

First, the idolatrous roots of their forefathers had been abandoned for some hundred or more years prior to the establishing of America. The emigrants were from a Christian heritage and orientation, whether they were actually personally Christian in behavior or not. The impact of this was tremendous.

Historically, this was the first culture to emerge from a Christian worldview rather than paganism. It was not a transformed culture as Europe became through the efforts of Christian missionaries. By Christian, for the purposes of this discussion, is meant any group that espoused the God of the Bible revealed in Jesus Christ as the reference point of their religion. It is thus a cultural and historical definition of Christian, distinct from the spiritual and evangelical one which born-again believers are more accustomed to.

From the outset, a basic Christian perspective of man and society formulated their thinking about the interrelationships in this new land which eventuated in their novel form of government. The radical difference this made in their views of societal rule cannot be underestimated.

Secondly, their points of origin on the Continent were not homogenous. Diversity of language and customs became mingled in the early colonies. This necessitated a measure of tolerance toward individual peculiarities of behavior. This also must be given proper recognition in analyzing the development of this society.

It was a decided breach from the prior historicity of cultures. Uniformity to long established traditions had characterized all societal predecessors. This one was forced to develop a mutually agreeable consensus from divergent practices due to the necessity of their close proximity. It thus impelled them to set aside personal preference and abandon ancestral traditions for the sake of the common good.

Thirdly, their reasons for emigration were essentially the same. They sought relief and refuge from what they considered to be tyrannous practices in their countries of origin. In short, they were seeking asylum from their native governmental procedures, whether religious or political. They were dissatisfied with the ruling status quo, the monarchies and ecclesiastical overlords of the European nations.

A final factor was the prominence accorded to the individual rather than the society itself. No cultural heritage awaited the immigrants upon arrival on American shores. Settlers discovered no native American civilization which dictated their place therein. No such constraints existed in colonial America.

Thus a nation emerged where the individual formulated the values of the society rather than the individual having a prior determined role within it. This was a decided cultural anomaly which has had disruptive effects upon traditions across the globe.

This was the foment of Americanism; a Christian world-view, tolerance for the common good, discontentment with abuses of monarchical rule, and the individual determining societal norms rather than vice versa. These were the elements which culminated in the Declaration of Independence.

It completely severed all ties with classical cultural norms. It was indeed a revolution, one whose ideology would alter behavior and thinking worldwide. Idols were abandoned and monarchy was rejected in this bold break with centuries' old convention handed down from Nimrod.

But it is not world history or anthropology that occupies us in this brief analysis. It is the background and effects of cultural pre-suppositions upon the thinking of men in contrast to that of the kingdom of heaven that interests us.

We have observed one great cultural pattern as a global phenomenon; idolatry and monarchy stemming from Babel's dispersion. Americanism stands as an isolated and unique departure from man's homogenous cultural landscape. Because of its profound influence on both world affairs and church propagation, Americanism must occupy a little more of our consideration prior to turning to the kingdom of heaven itself.

Revolt from a rightful sovereign accurately describes their solution to perceived colonial oppression. This is both the historical stain and cause for the expected eventual demise of the democracy of America. Rebellion was accounted to be liberty and unfettered self-will as freedom. It was a fundamental flaw at their inception which vainly ennobled this vice.

Democracy and true Christianity are incompatible ideologies. This is not to say that there cannot be genuine Christians in democratic societies. There can be genuine Christians found within any cultural tradition. The point is that, as ideologies, democracy and true Christianity are poles apart. The great error in Americanism was the attempted wedlock between Christianity and democracy. It cannot be done; one will consume the other.

At the core of American democracy is the concept of individual human rights. This is not a Christian principle at all. Rights are obligatory based upon law. However, no blessings ever come from God to man on the principle of law of any kind. Mercy cannot be obligated; demands cannot be pressed upon grace.

Rights and love are not synonymous. Love springs from the heart of the giver to neighbor and enemy alike regardless of their merits. Demands spring from the heart of recipients who insist on receiving their just and lawful due based on their own perceived merits. True Christianity is prompted by love; democracy is erected upon rights and the gulf between them cannot be traversed.

At its center, true Christianity has the spoken will of God contained in the Word of God. Democracy, however, puts the will of the people at that center. God's will and man's will necessarily will be found to be at odds; the Word of God and the declarations of men will not be discovered to be sounding the same note.

Independence formed the significant agenda to foster an historical revolution, whereas submission and obedience permeate true Christianity. America's sedition, wanton destruction of property, and violent taking of lives cannot be harmonized with scriptural Christianity's honoring the king and golden rule.

Yet the notion naively continues that Americanism and Christianity are a compatible alliance. But possessing an elementary Christian world-view is far from actually being accounted truly Christian; neither can a method of government formulated by those with this orientation be considered as having Divine approval. So, we are brought to the crux of our inquiry into culture and the kingdom of heaven; the rule of God and that of man.

In the kingdom of heaven are to be discovered two key elements. First is that there is a King, the God of heaven. Secondly, God, the King, has subjects, His obedient believers. This, in essence, is what comprises the kingdom of heaven - a King and His subjects.

A king performs two essential functions; from him proceeds the law governing his kingdom and, secondly, is the protection of the populace from all of their and his enemies. The subjects simply honor their ruling sovereign by performing his will according to the word of the king. This is what constitutes the kingdom of heaven in its fundamental aspects.

For this reason the gospel of the kingdom of God was described as an invasion upon native cultures. The gods and kings descending from Babel are set at naught and the prevailing cultural expectations are replaced with biblical mandates from the King of heaven. As well, the independence, self-will, and unholy tolerance of diversity found in Americanism are abolished by the coming of the kingdom of God to a people.

Customs in this kingdom of heaven are other than those encountered among men. Speech is governed by a different spirit and employed unto another end than that of earth. Dress is simple and modest, free from ostentation or improper exposure.

Treasures and indulgence are disdained while appetites do not impel their actions. Flattery, coercion, nor threats of pain move them to stray from their course. Neither bribery nor sanctions divert their way. Titles, promotion, and prominence are things despised in their eyes.

Aliens they are and "strangers" describes them well. Expatriates residing on earth briefly until returned to their home land are what they are. For a season they sojourn in the foreign environment of this world, though conducting themselves as cultures apart. These are the ones whose "citizenship is in heaven" -Phi.1.3:20. Born and bred from above, "partakers of a heavenly calling" -Heb.3:1, they are subjects of the kingdom of God, with a new King and altered practices.

God determines both His culture and those dwelling in it. An unchanging law established from ages immemorial governs this kingdom; the Word of the King contained in the Scriptures which defines the nature and parameters of acceptable behavior within the heavenly society.

Heaven's kingdom replaces gods with the Lord of Glory and an earthly king with the Majesty on High. America's majority rule and independent self-will are superseded by the Word of God and norms of godly submission therein. God's kingdom differs, then, significantly from cultures of earth and resolves the constant tension existing in man's societies between oppression, freedom, and autonomy.

Man cannot long endure either oppression or anarchy. Oppression fosters revolt while anarchy is more intolerable still. Men will choose even tyranny to uncertainty and chaos, but in neither case is the individual free. In oppressive regimes, individual freedom is defined and curbed by the elite. The individual is free to do only what has been determined by others, which is not freedom at all. Conversely, the autonomous individual has no freedom to interact in his society as he has become an outlaw from it. This is the "freedom" of the fish escaped from the confines of his watery environment.

Americanism attempted to resolve this tension by equating liberty with autonomy; freedom, with imposing self-will and rule. But rebellion can never be synonymous with liberty in terms of the kingdom of heaven. Self-will and revolt are not components of God's kingdom. Fish out of water only survive but briefly.

Within the kingdom of heaven there is government without tyranny and liberty without autonomy. The society and individuals within it both have their respective places without infringing upon the realm of the other. The society speaks to the individuals and the individual can speak to the society.

Individuals can be required to conform to the cultural ideal of the society without it becoming totalitarian by such insistence. By definition, the individual within the kingdom of God is a subject of the King and therefore accountable to obey the Word of God which is the cultural ideal of that kingdom.

On the other hand, the society itself can be called upon by even a single individual to amend its ways to conform to the law of the King, His Word; and the individual can do so without becoming an autonomous outlaw of that kingdom. Both the society and the individual are subject to the King and His Word which governs both. Waywardness on the part of either is to be rectified by recourse to the Scriptures. Neither the status quo of the society nor the novelty of the individual are to be given heed to.

Historically, grave problems have always arisen when the ideal of the kingdom of heaven [i.e. the Word of God] is no longer the basis of appeal to address departure from that ideal by the individual or the society alike. Then, either the autonomous cry of Jeroboam, "To your tents, O Israel," prevails or the oppressive traditions of the Pharisees, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?" is enforced.

In neither case is the society nor the individual preserved. Both perish when the Word of the King no longer is the reference point. Repentance from our native culture or from any borrowed cultural values must take place within the heart of every true child of God or we are no different than the world that we are claiming to be saved from.

LOVE NOT THE WORLD

I Jn.2:15

Lot is the high priest of a Christianity gone mad. He had the form of godliness but denied the power thereof. Lot's motivation of life surged from his own deceived and excuse-making heart. Striving with his brothers and inclined towards the sensuous is how he appears in the biblical story. An earthly focus rendered him powerless-against the enemy while deluding him as to his influence on the world. It deceived him as to the world's influence upon himself. Finally, he was overcome by his self-chosen ways and sank in the shameful degradation of his own deception. He is an abiding monument to the sure end of all who love the world.

Moral chameleons are the Lots of this world. His name means "a wrapper," and how nicely he took on the proportions of whatever he was around. Three times we are told that "Lot went with Abram" -Gen.12:4; 13:1,5. He was with him but wasn't like him: Abraham walked with God, Lot walked with Abraham. An immense difference existed between them.

Lot was an opportunist while Abraham was obedient. The God of Glory appeared to Abraham, calling him to abandon all and follow Him [Acts 7:2]. No such revelation attended Lot. The only visitation to him was that of angels whom he contradicted and resisted [Gen.19:18].

Righteous Lot did not walk with God. He at first walked with Abraham; he then walked by himself. In the end he walked with Sodomites. Each one he chose and each one left its indelible impress upon his life. He was content for strife to exist with his brethren, for his eye was upon his own things. This, Abraham could not endure, for his eye was fixed upon honoring the God of Glory [Gen.13:5-10].

Lot was willing to fight his brother [Gen.13:7,8], but was powerless against the enemy [Gen.14:12]. Flocks and herds were counted a greater prize than the love of the brethren. No reconciliation was sought by his self-centered heart. The governing impulse of his life was covetousness [Gen.13:10]. His was an unholy mixture of the things of God with the things of earth. The garden of the Lord and the land of Egypt appeared as one and the same to his clouded vision [Gen.13:10].

Fools who have no altar roam on endless quests for greener pastures [Gen.13:10,11]. They gaze, they long after, and then choose for themselves without even a glance heavenward [Gen.13:11]. The Living God is not the reference point of their double minded self-will. Unstable, with their backs to the light, they adjust themselves in close proximity to the likes of Sodom [Gen.13:12,13]. Life becomes a gradual but ever-increasing downward decline. One compromise leads to another while deception does its deathly work.

For the worldly, the justifying demand becomes, "What's wrong with that?" "Don't I have liberty?" arises as its rationalizing plea. And the worldling always imagines that he is the exception to the rule; that he can sin while heaven winks at his misdeeds.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" -Gal.6:7. And then again: "Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals" -I Cor.15:33. Lot was deceived on both accounts. He continued to plant seeds which would spring up to his own demise. His morals decayed through his own corrupted choices and evil associations.

The deception was in thinking that the first step is actually a small matter. But what begins as a step soon quickens to a gait which eventually breaks into a run. "My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your feet from their path: for their feet run to evil" -Prov.1:15,16. It is the deluded longing of the heart that prompts the first step.

Worldliness begins in the heart. Its tap root is self: self-gain, self-satisfaction, self-advancement, self-esteem, self-improvement, self-sufficiency, self-congratulation. Lot's desire to secure the "best" for self [Gen.13:10,11] led to gravitating towards questionable companions [Gen.13:12]. His final resting place was amidst what was totally abhorrent to the Lord [Gen.13:13; 14:12]. It is here that we discover that the lush green plains of our longings also sustain Sodomites.

Truly, the victory which overcomes the world is our faith [I Jn.5:4]. But Lot is a sobering testimony that the converse of this is also true; the love of the world overcomes our faith. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" -I Jn.2:15; and this is what Lot loved.

In Sodom he discovered himself to be defenseless against the enemy and stripped of wealth and sustenance [Gen.14:11,12]. He was powerless to wield the sword against the onslaught of his foreign conqueror. It is impossible to dwell in the devil's environment and not be "held captive by him to do his will" -2 Tim.2:26.

Only he who dwells apart as separated unto the Lord can effect deliverance for brethren ensnared in the world. Abraham was thus able to rescue Lot because Abraham walks with God. He knows how to smite with the Spirit's sword against all the schemes of the enemy [Gen.14:14-16]. The secret of his power is that he abides in God, not in Sodom.

But as the proverbial swine, though saved as he was, Lot returned to Sodom's sty. Only now he did so as a man of influence and prominence. He sat in the gate as her judge [Gen.19:1]. Lot became involved in community affairs as a man-pleasing politician. It is not possible to seek to please men and God at the same time; one cannot serve two masters. Self-promoted civil servants serve no one but themselves.

He was not godly. His conscience was defiled; it tormented him day after day [2 Pet.2:7,8]. He shrank from condemning evil for fear of losing his position of influence and his imagined "testimony." His appeal was for the blatantly wicked to abandon those deeds for moral crimes of a lesser degree [Gen.19:7,8].

He did not fear the Lord which is to "hate evil" -Prov.8:13. To his deluded compromising mind, only the obviously abhorrent evils were to be condemned, the remaining were judged acceptable. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" -I Cor.5:6. But Lot did not know and the corruption of compromise was rapidly overtaking him.

Sodom was in Lot long before Lot was in Sodom. He longed after affluence and the leisure it affords [Gen.13:10]. His pride and self-seeking eclipsed denying himself for the betterment of others [Gen.13:7-11]. "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me" -Ezek.16:49,50.

The love of self, the love of money, and pleasure was what Sodom was made of. It is also what characterizes Lot and the Christianity gone mad of which he is the head [2 Tim.3:1-5]. It is a delusion to imagine having a testimony to the world when the principles and motives of our hearts are no different than those of the world itself.

Lot had no testimony; he was despised as a hypocrite by its residents [Gen.19:9] regardless of his fawning upon them as "brothers" -Gen.19:7. His announcement of impending doom was received as an amusing charade by his own family [Gen.19:14]. He had no testimony of obedience to the angels who had to seize his hand, compelling him to flee the condemned jewel of his heart [Gen.19:16]. And what was the testimony that he left for the people of God? That legacy of enmity against the Lord was named Moab and Ammon [Gen. 19:36-38].

The verse which capsulated his life proceeded from his own lips: "Oh, no, my lords!" -Gen.19:18. Hesitating [Gen.19:16], he substituted his own perspective for what was clearly commanded, and appealed to grace as the basis to do so [Gen.19:19,20]. We can imagine what his epitaph read: "Lot of Zoar." Zoar means small [Gen.19:22]. It is what he had chosen all through his life.

His faith was small, as was his consecration. He had little testimony to the world and little influence for good on his own family. Small was Lot's wisdom and minute was his reward. He had little power against the enemy and scarcely any blessing to the people of God. Even less was his discernment of the evil sway Sodom had upon his own heart.

Yet you have instructed your family quite well, Mr. Lot. Your wife certainly learned from you the "acceptability" of substituting one's own will for the clear command of God. "My dear husband, have we not 'found favor in His sight' -Gen.19:19? Doesn't God's mercy cover all, that we may do as we please, even as you chose Zoar instead of obeying the angels' command [Gen.19:19,20]?"

"Thus, my dearest Lot, if you need not heed His voice, neither must I heed Him by not gazing back upon my well-beloved Sodom [Gen.19:17]. After all, are we not under His grace? I, like you, darling, can do as I desire. Surely He will forgive and adjust His demands to accommodate my own."

And what of your lovely virgin girls, Lot? They learned all too well that the end justifies the means, that virginity may be sacrificed in order to prevent a "greater" evil.

"Daddy, didn't you offer us to the impassioned animals of Sodom? Didn't you say they could do with us as they pleased in order to keep your guests from their ravaging [Gen.19:8]? Why should we not violate ourselves, even with you, our father, in order to prevent the 'greater evil' of abiding childless?" [Gen.19:31-36].

Ah, how well they learned! They understood the inner workings of your heart and the principles of your life. They knew your values and the truths you spurned despite your religious veneer. It is a crooked and perverted generation that cries: "My God, we of Israel know Thee!" -Hos.8:2, all the while that the world is loved and the flesh is indulged to its own demise.

Who had a testimony before the Lord? Who influenced the world for the kingdom of God? Was it he who dwelt therein as a man of prominence dutifully legislating equity and morality, or was it the man of God who was totally separated unto the Lord apart from Sodom and its filth?

It was Abraham who knew how to wield the sword of the Spirit in victory over the enemy's captivity. It is Abraham who lifts up his hand to God Most High and refuses even a shoestrapping from the king of that evil place [Gen.14:22,23].

Why was Lot delivered? Because Abraham stood yet before the Lord [Gen.18:22] even while Lot sat still in Sodom's gate. God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow -Gen.19:29. It was his pleading not to "sweep away the righteous with the wicked" -Gen.18:23,25 that was remembered and answered to the rescue of Lot.

Abraham's life of separation unto God influenced Lot [Gen.12:4]. His power with the sword effected Lot's initial deliverance from the bondage of Sodom. His prayer, lastly and profoundly, was the means of Lot's salvation from judgment fires. Separation unto God from the world is the only means of influencing it for the Lord.

Lot's final episode summarizes in a pathetic, disgusting, yet fitting way the path he chose throughout his days [Gen.19:30-38]. His recurring trait was an insatiable craving for stimulants to the flesh. The stimulants were consciously indulged; the results of so doing, however, were not perceived until the sure end of all such indulgence raised its dreadful head.

The disaster of associating with Sodom was not seen until overtaken by an enemy tyrant. The folly of returning there as a civil servant only became apparent when the smoke of the valley ascended as a furnace. The wickedness of repudiating the Lord's Word for a Zoar of one's own choosing was only exposed as Moab and Ammon flashed their steel against the people of God [2 Chron.20:1].

His distortion of perspective and warping of values were only realized some long while afterward. The stupefying draught of worldliness leads to the grossest of improprieties as did Lot's drunken scandal. Only when awakened from its grip does one realize what transpired under its influence. It is months, and perhaps years, later that the evil seed implanted manifests itself as the wickedness that it is. The culmination of worldliness is enmity with the Lord and opposition to all godliness.

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore is minded to be the friend of the world is the enemy of God" -Jas.4:4. Love of the world is the prostitution of all true religion.

Lot sowed love of self, love of money, and love of pleasure rather than love of God. When we sow the same, we reap of its corrupted fruit; some 30, some 60, and some 100-fold; and the harvest always exceeds the planting.

The Lord says that true religion is “to keep oneself unspotted from the world” -Jas.1:27. Yet in a Christianity gone mad, the stain of the world has colored the very fabric of our soul though we don external robes of righteousness to hide our uncleanness.

Our happily superficial religion testifies to our worldliness. We nod our heads in concern over the heinous crimes of our day while never judging their root causes in our own hearts. We are like Lot; He did not hearken to the voice of the Lord in His Word. His own alternative to scriptural obedience was considered acceptable by him; Lot loved the world and its ways.

But it is not merely Lot and his descendants who love the world. The children of scribes and Pharisees do likewise. Outwardly they appear quite dissimilar. One would never find a Pharisee in Sodom or in drunken shame, yet the principles governing their hearts are one and the same.

Lot was the libertine, the Pharisee was the conservative. Both served self and walked by sight rather than by faith. The name "Pharisee" means "separated one," yet the Pharisees were not separated unto the Lord any more than Lot was: Both were separated unto their own lust and “walked according to the course of this world ...indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind” -Eph.2:2,3.

Both donned a mantle of respectability among their contemporaries. The gate was Lot's arena of exhibition while the temple itself was the stage for pharisaical pageantry. Both presumed to pontificate to their fellows from lofty positions of "superiority." Yet the texts of their sermons were drawn from the polluted cisterns of their own fabrication. Neither one urged men to repent of their wickedness to serve the Living God in sincerity and truth; neither did they do so themselves.

A man-made morality was the best that either had to offer. The epithet “a sinful and adulterous generation” can justly be applied to both Sodom and Jerusalem. Both were of the world; indeed, Jerusalem is that spiritual Sodom where our Lord was crucified [Rev.11:8].

Worldliness is not defined by a catalog of do's and don'ts. Externalism can never cure or excise worldliness; it is a matter of the inner sanctum of the heart. Being worldly is an orientation, a frame of reference; through its filter of values and presuppositions all else is assessed.

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” -1 Jn.2:16. It is the outlook, the drives, and thought system within the heart of man that comprises all that is in the world.

Setting one's mind upon earthly things is the essence of worldliness. It is being conformed to its ideals and viewpoint rather than being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” -Rom.12:2. To befriend the world is adopting a manner of life which renders one an enemy of God [Jas.4:4].

Worldliness constitutes one to be both a stumbling block and ensnared by Satan [Mt.16:23]. By it we are held in bondage by weak and worthless elemental things [Gal.4:3,9] “rather than according to Christ” -Co1.2:8. The horrid reality is that the course of the world is governed by the evil one in whose power the whole world lies [1 Jn.5:19].

Christ Jesus said of His disciples: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” -Jn.17:16. His followers are other than the world even as Abraham was. In order to influence the inhabitants of earth for God, one must be unlike them both in principle and conduct.

To be otherwise is to lose all effectiveness, doing no good for others and rendering the disciple useless. These considerations lend added significance to our Lord's calling His people, “the salt of the earth” -Mt.5:13.

Salt is of value in the preservation of food. It retards decay. It prevents corruption by influencing what it is in contact with without losing its own essence. That is, unless the salt itself has become corrupted; then it is good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men - similar to Lot in Sodom.

Salt is good if it is not found in the shape of a pillar.

Remember Lot's wife
Lk.17:32