

The
Sick
Bride

Lessons to Learn from
Yesterday's Church

By
Burley W. Moore

The Sick Bride

Lessons to Learn from Yesterday's Church

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Prelude

The complete title of this book could very easily be, ***“The Sick Bride, Lessons to Learn from Yesterday’s Church and a Look at Today’s State of Christendom.”*** In one aspect, this is one of the most difficult books that I’ve written. That’s because of the negative things that are written in the Word of God pertaining to the failures found in local churches. My greatest fear in writing this book is to sound condescending against the church. That is something that I do not want to do. However, I cannot even begin **“rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15)** without being honest and truthful in what it declares. Christ Himself, as you will discover, both commended and condemned local churches. I seek to prayerfully follow His example as given in the Scriptures.

That which I want to make perfectly clear is that I love the genuine and true church of Jesus Christ. I love the church because **“Christ also loved the church (Eph. 5:25)**. He loved her so much that He willingly suffered, bled, and died for her on the old rugged cross of Calvary. He loves her enough that he does not pamper her, but confronts her in her error just like a parent who loves their children enough to correct them.

I have no hatred whatsoever for the blood bought redeemed church of the Living God. However, that which I don’t love is what many local churches have become. Neither do I love the manner in which so many churches are tolerating the spiritual adultery taking place among professing believers. Sometimes, I get so disgusted with what I see occurring that I don’t like my own feelings. But then, I’m reminded of what Christ has to say regarding such things and I realize that I’m in the best of company.

During the time of Christ, Scripture records two different instances of Him cleansing the earthly temple found in Jerusalem. One at the beginning of His public ministry as recorded in **Jh. 2:13-17** and the other near the end as

found in **Matt. 21:12-16**. Both of these are similar and some have debated if they were both one and the same, but most likely two separate instances. Both of these texts show us the disgust of Jesus with what was going on in the **“temple.”** My brief comments will refer to the passage in the Gospel of John.

There is a big difference between the Jerusalem **“temple”** of the Old Testament and the **“temple”** of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the **“body”** of every Christian is the **“temple of the Holy Spirit”** (**I Cor. 6:19-20**). (see my book, **“The Tabernacle and Trinity of Man, Spirit & Soul & Body”**) Also, the New Testament refers to all believers as being the collective **“temple”** (**I Cor. 3:17, Eph. 2:19-22**) of the **“Holy Spirit.”** I’ve said all of that to make a simple comparison of how Jesus was so upset with the misuse of what He saw, that He **“made a scourge of small cords (whip) ... drove them all out of the temple ... and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables.”** Then, He said **“Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise.”** After turning the tables over with His bare hands and scattering **“money”** all over the place, I can hear Him saying, basically in plain English, **“get out of here.”**

I leave you with that picture of how the meek and mild Jesus became angry with what He saw taking place among the religious folk of His day. May that picture remain in your mind as we journey through the remainder of this book. The purpose for me writing is hopefully to expose our modern pathetic SICK state of Christendom in which we find ourselves. In so doing, I remind God’s **“remnant”** (**Rom. 11:5**) to do as Christ admonishes us and that is to remain **“faithful”** (**Rev. 2:10**) at all cost.

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and

dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it first begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”
(I Pet. 4:11-19)

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been sick? Of course, everyone gets sick at some time or another and to some degree or another. That's because we are all born under the curse of sin and will live under it until the day of death. Several consequences were involved in Adam's fall into sin, one of which made all of his posterity subject to illness of one type or another. Most of the time when we think of illness, our minds turn to the physical, but it could also include other areas of life.

I was born and raised in a home that knew all about physically maladies. My daddy had a spinal tumor removed prior to my birth that left him partially paralyzed from the waist down for the rest of his life. It's only by the Sovereign decree of God that I was ever conceived and born. It was in such a setting that I learned much by observing my parents deal with this serious state of sickness. My daddy was determined to let nothing stop him in making progress. He told me about lying in a hospital bed at Duke Hospital following his surgery and for weeks trying his best to move a toe. His operation was the thirteenth successful one every performed up to that point which made the medical journals of his day. After months in the hospital and eventually discharged, he was told that he would never walk again.

But God had other plans. Although, still partially paralyzed suffering both internal and external damage, he returned for a check-up months later walking into Duke Hospital on crutches. He was twenty-six years of age at the time of his first back surgery. He opened and operated several businesses through the years. But then, twenty-six years later, he began falling with his crutches and had a good idea what the problem was. He returned to Duke and sure enough, another tumor had formed above the old one. Surgery was required and this time it left him in a wheel chair. How did he respond? Did he sit around and feel

sorry for himself and say woe is me? No! Immediately he began researching hand controls for his car and the installation of ramps for both his house and business. He didn't retire until he was sixty-seven years of age. There is no doubt that he was a remarkable man who was an inspiration to all who knew him in the way he dealt with his problem. Many would call my daddy "handicap" but I never ever saw him in that light.

However, there is another side of the coin and that is my mother who stood by his side every step of the way all sixty-two years of their marriage. She eventually stepped in to help with the business, but she was always there to see that my daddy's every need was met and that he was well taken care of. My parents modeled an excellent example in their love for one another in sickness and in health. I grew up watching, observing, and learning from their example of how to face sickness and deal with it in grace. I grew up learning that **"They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick"** (Lk. 5:31) and that for the Christian, our **"body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own"** (I Cor. 6:19). Therefore, we ought to take care of our bodies and our health the best we can.

When we think of physical sickness, we know that it is no respecter of persons or ages. Even newborn babies get sick and some come close to death and yes, for some even death. My wife and I have been blessed with three children and all three battled allergies very early in life. I'll never forget when our second child, our first son, was born and was rushed from the hospital where he was born to another hospital in our city that had a pediatric intensive care unit. My wife was not able to touch him much less hold him for about ten days. Every day, I went to the intensive care unit and all I could do was stand outside the huge glass window and look at him in his incubator and pray for God's will to be done. In time, the Lord saw fit to spare his life.

I remember when I was a child having those common childhood illnesses and one left me very sick with a scarred lung to this day. As I grew, I developed common colds like everyone else from time to time. There was one occasion after Ann and I were married when I came down with the worst case of the flu that I ever had. My fever was so high that I even hallucinated about cowboys riding pink elephants. Then, in my senior years I received some news just before Christmas in 2015 that I had prostate cancer and had one of three choices to deal with it. I chose to have surgery and had it removed. By God's grace I've reached my five year mark this year with my PSA remaining non-detectable.

I praise the Lord for seeing me through all of my sicknesses as well as those of my wife. She has had her share of surgeries along with a melanoma that could have been serious. In these later years she's learned how to live with this beast that we call diabetes and by God's grace it has remained under control.

Like us, everyone reading this book can relate to some sickness or sicknesses in your life. Some have been more severe and serious than others, but regardless, it's no fun being sick. We know when Adam bit into the forbidden fruit, that he instantly died spiritually causing mankind to be separated from God and in need of being "**born again**" (**Jh. 3:3**) or else remain eternally separated from God. That's why Christ came to die on the cross to restore man to fellowship with God by faith in the substitutionary work of Christ. God has a people to whom He grants repentance and faith thus finding forgiveness and the hope of a home in Heaven upon death.

Up to this point, I've only referred to physical sickness, but let's look at the definition of the word SICK. It can be defined as something that is unwholesome, morbid, defective, unsound, disgusting, unhealthy, diseased, or corrupt. It may be applied to not only suffering from or being afflicted with a physical illness, but to matters of everyday life, such as the economy, political decisions,

issues of lifestyle choices, spiritual, and moral concerns. We can look around us and find all sorts of things that are sick. Such as the legalization of baby killing that we call abortion and a mother's right to choose. Both are SICK. Today, it seems like every way we turn we are having such things as transgender, homosexual, and lesbian issues crammed down our throats. All such blasphemy against God is SICK. On and on I could go, but I believe that you get the point.

To make things even worse, I do not delight in what I'm about to say, but it's the truth. Most local organized churches of our day or either flat our apostate and most of those that are not full-blown apostate are SICK. Apostasy refers to those who once had a pre-tense of following Christ, but proved by their actions that they never knew Him. There are denominations and local churches that fit that description. Then, we turn our attention to another scenario and find what appears to be a large number of organized churches suffering from spiritual sickness.

I want to establish from the very beginning of this book exactly what I'm referring to as a sick church. Therefore, lets understand that the word, SICK, may refer to more than physical illness. When I refer to a local group of people who call themselves a church and profess to follow Jesus Christ as being sick, let me explain my reasoning in doing so. I'm referring to them as being Scripturally unsound, biblically defective, morally distressed, in need of divine help because of their unhealthy spiritual state; therefore, unable to produce spiritual fruit pleasing to God. Much can be said about all that I've just mentioned and will hopefully deal with in the remainder of this book.

Thus far, I've referred to physical sickness within my immediate family while growing up as a child, but I was also introduced to a sick church at a very young age. My first encounter that I can recall with a sick church was during my early teens. The church of which my family were members turned against the pastor and fired him for no biblical reason. I'll never forget as a young person seeing

our pastor standing in front of the congregation with tears running down his face and asking the church to pray for him instead of talking about him. My parents always supported their pastors and in this case were especially close to this particular pastor and his family. His son and I were close friends and we spent time together. When this happened, I did not realize that it was just the beginning of my experience with a sick church and that I myself would someday be victimized in similar fashion. That particular congregation continued to exist for many years with one pastor after another. All they did was fuss and fight, making it difficult for all their pastors, until the church eventually went out of business. The only good that came out of that congregation was they ended up giving their building facilities to a new church plant.

Years later, I answered God's call to preach (see my book, ***My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats***) and discovered the SICK state of many local churches of our day. I had to deal with such matters as a transvestite deacon to all other sorts of evil. In fact, it breaks my heart to see the spiritual condition in which the vast majority of congregations find themselves. Many operate like a business and see members as dollar signs. As a result, most of what we have in local congregations is nothing more than "church members" who know nothing about regeneration. In fact, there are probably church members reading this book who have the foggiest idea of what I'm talking about when I speak of regeneration and transformation. That in itself is evidence of them being part of a SICK church.

I've said many times that there is so much of the world in the average church that you can hardly tell that the church is in the world. A.W. Tozer put it this way when he said, "the trouble is not that the church is in the world; rather the trouble comes from the fact that the world is in the church." Paul Washer described the state of the church by saying, "I want you to know that, when you take a look at American Christianity, it is based more upon a godless

culture than it is upon the Word of God.” It was Voddie Baucham who said, “the modern church is producing passionate people filled with empty heads who love the Jesus they don’t know very well.” That’s putting it mildly!

With this being said, I’ve now introduced you to the subject matter of this book. We’re going to be looking at some various New Testament churches that are recorded in Holy Scripture and what God had to say to them and to us today. That’s why it’s recorded in Holy Scripture. May the Lord help us to follow the example set by those whom He commended and refrain from becoming like those whom He rebuked, condemned, and gave a stern warning.

Chapter 1

The Bride of Christ

I want to begin this chapter by admitting that the term bride of Christ, doesn't appear in those exact words in Scripture. However, the meaning and implication are explicitly clear from various passages in the New Testament. Let me begin by taking you to the last Book in the Bible and the closing chapters in the Book of Revelation. In fact, we need to note that the proper title for the Book of Revelation is found in the **first two verses of Revelation, chapter one**, where it tells us that it is **"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him (John), to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."** Christ simply told the apostle John to write what God revealed to him and with that I take you to some of the closing chapters in the final Book in the Bible.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God."

(Rev. 19:7-9)

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

(Rev. 21:2)

**“And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.”
(Rev. 21:9)**

As you will notice, in the above verses, we find in the **KJV** the following phrases and terms: **“the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7,9)**, **“the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2)**, and **“the Lamb's wife” (Revelation 21:9)**. We need to note that the same human writer, John, penned the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, he identifies this **“Lamb”** as Jesus Christ. Therefore, it's unmistakable that Christ is the **“Lamb”** and His **“wife”** is the church, thus making her His **“bride.”**

**“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”
(Jh. 1:29)**
**“And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!”
(Jh. 1:36)**

Before proceeding any further at this point, I'd like to quote R.C. Sproul when he said, “The bride of Christ is soiled but will one day be presented spotless to the Father by the Son who bought her, who loves her, and who intercedes for her every day. If we love Christ, we must also love His bride. If we love Christ, we must love His church.”

Presently, the bride of Christ is invisible to the mortal eye and known only unto God. She is represented in this world by the visible church for all to see. Herein, we find a mixture of the true and false believers. There is a difference between the bride of Christ and an institutionalized church. Local churches ought to be a reflection of the bride, but often are not. Down through history not all local churches have housed the true bride and sometimes the bride herself has taken on the characteristics of her surroundings which is a disappointment to Christ. While upon earth the bride of Christ, which is the true church, may often appear sickly but she awaits her day of triumph in Heaven and eventual consummation when her Bridegroom comes again. The “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:6-9) is yet to come.

Currently, while still living in this world of sin, God is sanctifying His true church. In other words, I like to call it, God is presently ironing out our wrinkles of sin. When Christ comes again, then the church will be glorified with each member receiving a new body like unto that of our Risen Lord. What a glorious day that will be! Before I proceed any further, I want to make my view clear regarding the Holy Scriptures. It's not a mere book composed by mortal beings, but it is a God-breathed product of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God chose to pen the words were under the Sovereign control of the very Creator Himself. Many if not most of them did not fully understand what they were writing, but God moved upon them in a supernatural fashion and enabled to write about prophetic events that would take place hundreds and thousands of years in advance. I believe in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, and plenary Word of God. One of my favorite definitions of the Bible is that it's God's Printed Voice.

**“All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”
(II Tim. 3:16)**

It's true that God used mortal human beings to write a perfect Book because God was the One writing it through them. This in itself is a mystery. God breathed through human personality and style to give us His unpolluted Word. He even used different literary styles as we're about to see.

It's not unusual to find hyperboles, similes, metaphors and analogies in Holy Scripture. First, I call your attention to a hyperbole which can be an exaggerated statement that expresses something to the extreme, but not taken literally. One of many examples from Scripture is found in **Matt. 23:24** when Jesus said “**ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.**”

Secondly, a simile is a figure of speech that is used to compare one thing with another of a different kind. An example of such can be found in **I Pet. 1:24** where it says, “**all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass.**”

Thirdly, a metaphor is a figure of speech that can be representative or symbolic of something else. Some of the most popular ones are the “**I Am**” statements of Christ found in the Gospel of John when He said, “**I am the door of the sheep**” (Jh. 10:7,9), “**I am the bread of life**” (Jh. 6:35,41,48,51), “**I am the light of the world**” (Jh. 8:12), “**I am the resurrection and the life**” (Jh. 11:25), “**I am the good shepherd**” (Jh. 10:11, 14), “**I am the way, the truth, and the life**” (Jh. 14:6), “**I am the true vine**” (Jh. 15:1,5).

With all that being said, I now come to define and give an example from Scripture of an analogy. As you can tell, similes, metaphors, and analogies are all similar and can best be understood in the context in which it is used. Now,

I've saved analogy for the last because of the title of this book. An analogy is a comparison between two things for the purpose of explanation or clarification. You will not find a bridegroom without a bride nor a husband without a wife. In various Scriptures, Christ is likened to the bridegroom or husband and the church is likened to the bride or the wife. Therefore, we discover the biblical doctrine that we call ecclesiology, the study of the church, which Scripture refers to as the bride of Christ.

It's true that most people refer to the building in which they meet as the church or their church. However, the building is no more than a structure until the redeemed people of God gather therein. Herein, we discover another problem and that is how most people view the church. It doesn't belong to any mortal man. A board of trustees may have their names on the title deed to the property where they meet and assemble themselves together. But the real church is owned by Christ Himself because He has redeemed His bride with His precious blood shed on Calvary's cross. Christ makes it perfectly clear that the church does not belong to the elders or deacons or anyone else. Jesus said that it was **"my church"** and that He is the One Who must **"build"** it (**Matt. 16:18**).

Woe, wait a minute! Most have the mindset that we are to grab just anyone with breath and add them to the church role, have them repeat a prayer, get them under the water, and chalk up another "convert." The end result is making a person a **"two-fold child of hell"** (**Matt. 23:15**) knowing nothing whatsoever about being **"born again"** (**Jh. 3:3**). I wonder how many pastors have been criticized for not increasing the size of the congregation. I remember hearing someone say in one of the churches that I pastored that "we need more money people in our church." Talking about the sad SICK state of the local church of our day, is enough to make one nauseated.

Throughout this study, we must never forget that the church is not speaking of a building made by human hands, but the **"body"** (**Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 12:12-27, Eph.**

3:6, 4:15–16, 5:23, Col 1:18, 24) of Christ chosen and ordained by the Bridegroom for Himself. One of the most beautiful analogies in Holy Scripture is how the husband and wife marriage relationship is patterned after the relationship that Christ has with His church.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence *her* husband.”
(Ephesians 5:22–33)

The Greek word ekklesia (ek-klay-see-ah) simply refers to an assembly of people and is translated in Scripture to refer to the assembling of Christian believers who comprise the New Testament church. Herein we find what Scripture also refers to as the bride of Christ. We discover that God

often uses analogies to help us understand the meaning of a doctrinal subject, such as the doctrine of the church. Just as a husband and wife become **“one flesh”** in physical intimacy, Christ desires oneness with His church in spiritual intimacy as we repeatedly find the use of the word **“in”** from the **15th chapter of John**.

If you don't learn anything else from what I've said thus far, I hope you can learn the seriousness of being a part of the **“body”** of Christ which is His church. Local assemblies ought to see themselves as the gathering place for the church, the redeemed **“body”** of believers. The first requirement for membership in a local assembly ought to be a testimony of regeneration that bears **“the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-26)** which is evidence of being **“born again” (Jh. 3:6-7)** and having a **“new” nature (II Cor. 5:17)**.

Unfortunately, many congregations that call themselves churches today are nothing more than community centers, social clubs, religious organizations, and are so liberal they are no more than a **“synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9, 3:9)**. Many modern-day churches that claim to believe the Bible and be evangelical do not preach **“sound doctrine” (II Tim. 4:3)**. Therefore, a huge percentage and in most cases, entire congregations, rebel when they hear Truth. Such as, when it comes to the matter of church discipline. When is the last time that you heard of a church practicing it? Lost people are more than welcome to attend a church service and sit under the teaching of God's Word, but identification and membership with a Bible believing church is another matter. Most people go church-shopping like they go to a cafeteria line trying to find what THEY like and not necessarily what the SCRIPTURES teach that is spiritually nourishing to the soul.

We find ourselves in a sad state when trying to locate a local church that will preach and practice (ESV) **“the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27)**. Herein, we learn that the biblical church is NOT for ALL people, but for those who turn from their sin in repentance to follow Christ in

faith. Saved people ought to have a hunger for God's Truth and be satisfied with nothing else regardless of how much it may hurt. God's "**sheep,**" to which Christians are likened (**Jh. 10:1-18**), ought to want sheep food and not goat food. (see my book, "***My life as a Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats***")

Perhaps you've heard it said (tongue in cheek so to speak) that if you find a perfect church, then you had better not join it because in doing so, you'll make it imperfect. There is no such thing as a perfect local church because the very best is made up of imperfect people who have been justified by God's Grace and are currently being sanctified by God's Grace with the blessed prospect of someday being glorified after death by God's Grace.

Therefore, we don't need to set our expectations of finding one that is perfect, but one that has a desire and seeks to the best of their ability to follow God's Word in faith and practice. Now, we find a common problem. Most churches of today appear to be more interested in pleasing men rather than pleasing God and following His marching orders for the church. This includes all sorts of doctrine from church government to holy living to taking up our cross and following Christ (**Matt. 16:24**). The journey that we're about to take in this book will reveal that the problem is nothing new, but neither has it improved with the ages.

I remind you that the Greek word, ekklesia (ek-klay-see-ah), refers to a called-out group of people, a gathering, or congregation of people. Therefore, this Greek word can also refer to an Old Testament setting even though it was written in Hebrew. Such as, in the Book of Acts, where it refers to the "**church in the wilderness**" (**Acts 7:38**). The point that I want to make as we think about the bride of Christ is that God had a people that He called out unto Himself in salvation in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament describes believing Israel as the wife of God and believers in the New Testament church as the bride of Christ. One's wife is one's bride and vice versa. A fiancé is one thing, but a wife is another. God's

wife is His bride and His bride is His wife. Beautiful imagery is painted of this describing them in the glory and splendor of heaven together in the eternal city of the **“new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2)**.

In a figurative depiction of its wonder is found **“a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel” (Rev. 2:12)**. These **“twelve tribes”** are believed to represent the redeemed people who are identified with the true Israel of God in the Old Testament. Then, in **(Rev. 2:14)**, it says, **“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”** This is believed to represent the redeemed people in the New Testament church.

I want to remind you that it was **“Abraham”** in the Old Testament who **“looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10)**. In the Old Testament, a true Israelite was not one merely born into the nation of Israel as a Jew, but one who embraced by **“faith”** that Christ was coming through the lineage of David to be the sinner’s One and Only Savior from Sin.

God called **“Abraham”** out of a pagan land **(Gen. 11:31-12:9)** with he himself being nothing but a lost pagan **(Joshua 24:2-3)** not looking for the One and Only True God of Creation. By no merit of his own, God planted **“faith”** in the heart of **“Abraham” (Rom. 4)** and established a people through him, who would believe and propagate a people from whom Christ would come in the flesh. That’s why the Bible calls **“Abraham ... the father of us all”** who believe **(Rom. 4:16)**.

Burk Parsons says it this way, **“As new covenant believers, we have been justified by grace alone through faith alone because of the finished work of Christ alone. As an old covenant believer, Abraham, the father of Israel, was**

justified by grace alone through faith alone because of the future work of Christ alone. Abraham stood on the promised salvation of God in the Messiah who was to come just as we stand on the promised salvation of God in the Messiah who has come. True believers in the Old Testament were saved in the same way that true believers are saved in the New Testament— by faith, and by faith alone. Abraham believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness (**Gen. 15:6**). The Lord declared Abraham righteous because he believed, just as the Lord declares us righteous because we believe. Thus, adoption into God's family and eternal covenant community is achieved not through having the right family name, ethnicity, land of birth, or residence. Neither are men and women the children of Abraham and, therefore, the children of Israel because of Sabbath-keeping or unconditional support of all of Israel's practices and policies. True Israel is faithful Israel, and only faithful Israel inherits God's promises. And faithful Israelites are those circumcised in their hearts, those who have trusted in the Messiah. This is the way God has always fulfilled His purposes in saving His people (**Rom. 2:28–29**). True Israel is faithful Israel because they have faith in the only faithful Israelite who has ever lived—Jesus the Messiah. Only Jesus completely fulfilled all of the Father's righteous laws for Israel. As the only faithful Israelite, Jesus is an Israelite according to the flesh, and He enjoyed all the benefits that come from being born into the nation that possessed the oracles of God. As the faithful Israelite Jesus is the true Israel because He is the true Son of God (**Matt. 2:13–14**).

Chapter 2

Establishment of New Testament Churches

Let me make it perfectly clear before going any further that God has always had a people. As we discover in the Book of Acts, reference is made to the **“church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38)** in the KJV. Other versions often use the word **“congregation”** instead of **“church,”** but the Greek word in that verse is the same as found in **Matt 16:18** when Jesus said that He would **“build my church.”** It’s true that the translation must be taken in context, but I believe the word **“church”** gives a better picture of God’s redeemed people among the nation rather than the massive number of whom proved themselves unbelievers.

However, this Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see-ah) in Acts is referring to an Old Testament setting and is not used in the same context as we find in the New Testament. When New Testament believers met together, their gathering was patterned somewhat after the Jewish synagogue meetings during the time of Christ. For instance, it’s recorded of Jesus that He **“preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (Lk. 4:14-44).**

Following His baptism and temptation encounter **“of the devil (Lk. 4:1-13) for “40 days,”** Jesus returned to His hometown of **“Nazareth”** where **“he went into the synagogue on the sabbath, and stood up for to read.”** The Old Testament passage that He chose was most significant. It was from **Isaiah 61:1-2. “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;”**

It was after His baptism, which launched His public ministry and temptation **“of the devil,”** that He read this prophetic passage recorded by the Old Testament prophet which set the stage for His ministry during His first coming. It spoke of His mission of spiritual redemption, but also to His second coming in judgement of both the living and the dead. As you can tell from reading the entire **4th chapter of Luke,** when the Jews heard Him read these Scriptures and declare, **“This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,”** they were ready to kill Him. I’ve shared this lengthy passage below to remind us how the religious crowd of both Jesus’ day as well as our day has always **“hated” (Jh. 15:18)** Jesus. That applies to both the Old Testament synagogues and many New Testament churches as we’ll discover further in this book. The world has always rejected the Creator God and only Lord and Savior of sinners. When this happened in the synagogues of Jesus’ day and in the churches of today, it simply reveals the world infiltrating into these organized institutions.

“Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple,

and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.

And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when

the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way, And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, *thou* Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word *is* this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils

also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking *them* suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.”
(Lk. 4:2-44)

The “**temple**” and the “**synagogue**” were two different and separate entities. It’s not certain as to when the synagogues came about. They were places of Jewish gatherings in different communities where the people would meet for singing, praying, and the reading of the Old Testament Scriptures (the Torah-first five Books of Moses, and the Prophets). However, the “**temple**” was the only designated location by God for sacrifices to be offered by specified priests. It was in the “**temple**” where the “**veil**” that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies “**was rent in twain,**” (Mk. 15:38) upon the death of Christ on the Cross. This signified the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system and the use of the Old Testament priests because God’s sacrificial “**Lamb**” (Jh. 1:29) had come as predicted by the Old Testament. Christ has risen to be our interceding High Priest today for believers (Hebrews 7) and is seated at the “**right hand of God**” (Heb. 10:12).

God had His purpose for believers on both sides of the cross. New Testament churches were established to carry on the spiritual work of God upon earth as was begun in the Old Testament. There was a “**congregation**” of believers in the Old Testament and there were prophets who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, but the landscape of the church changed. That’s where the Book

of Acts gives us the history and establishing of local New Testament churches like we find today.

We'll begin this journey by going back and learning something about the beginning of the New Testament church as we find in the Book of Acts. To start with, most versions of the Bible will title it the Acts of the Apostles, but let's remember this title was not a part of the inspired manuscript. Therefore, I think a more correct title would be the Acts of the Holy Spirit which correctly references what the Holy Spirit did through the apostles in establishing the early church.

The apostles spread the Gospel predominately among the Jews and Paul was chosen by God to minister mostly to the Gentiles. Paul is known for his four missionary journeys, including his final one to Rome. It was while on these journeys that he planted new churches and would return to minister to them when possible. In various towns and communities' local churches were established as people were converted to Christ. In those early days of the local church there were no fancy buildings with stained glass windows, padded pews, or steeples. It was not unusual for them to meet outdoors, in catacombs, or in the homes of various individuals such as "**Phebe**" (**Rom. 16:1,27**) who might have hosted the house church of Cenchreae and "**Philemon**" (**Philemon 1:1-2**) in his home in Colossae.

Once again, we're reminded that the true church, the bride of Christ, is not a building made with hands. It's people who have been "**born again**" (saved, transformed, regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit) thus comprising the "**body of Christ**" (**I Cor. 1:17**) with Him being the Bridegroom. Also, we learn from the Book of Acts that Paul helped local churches to form their organizational structure consisting of church government along with members, elders, and deacons. The various letters that he wrote to different churches help us better understand more about how these two main officers (**I Tim. 3**) are to function.

A good portion of the New Testament writing was done by the apostle Paul that we often call his “**epistles**” (**II Pet. 3:16**), simply meaning letters. These were written to local churches many of which God used him to plant. In the Book of Acts, we see the establishment of “**elders**” (**Acts 14:23**) and choosing men to assist them in ministry (**Acts 6:1-8**). It’s believed that these men became the prototype of what we know today to be “**deacons**” (**Phil. 1:1**). (see my book on “**Godly Servants, A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses**”) Also, very early in the life of the local church, we see the establishing of church discipline as God Himself dealt with the sin of “**Ananias and Sapphira**” (**Acts 5:1-11**). That same subject appears in more detail later in Paul’s writings. He also gives instructions dealing with church government and the duties of “**elders**” and “**deacons**” along with qualifications for holding these offices.

Chapter 3

Churches of the Pauline Epistles

As we begin a brief look at the “**epistles**” (**II Cor. 3:1, II Pet. 3:16**) of Paul, allow me to make reference to the word itself. It simply means the writing of a letter. The KJV uses the word “**epistle**” (**I Cor. 5:9**) whereas other translations most often use the word “**letter**” (ESV). It’s a word that is found numerous times throughout the New Testament mostly in the plural form.

With that being said, we’re going to take a glimpse at what Paul had to say by way of letters to seven different churches, three different man, and one group of believers. All of these were church related and existed during his day. He communicated with them the old fashion way by handwriting a letter. He either wrote the “**letter**” himself or dictated it to someone who penned the words that he quoted. Once again, I remind you that these were received into the Canon of Scriptures as being “**inspired,**” or in other words, a “**God-breathed product of the Holy Spirit**” (**II Tim. 3:16**).

I call your attention to the fact that I’ll deal with this list of epistles, not necessarily in the order in which they were written, but in the order in which they are found in the Bible.

Letter to the Church at Rome

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome expressing his extreme desire to someday visit them personally and also bear a Gospel witness to the pagan city in which they lived. He writes to introduce himself so they can encourage and pray for him. All pastors need encouragement and especially from the congregation they serve. I believe it was Paul who later wrote in **Hebrews 13:17** for the church to **“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”** (Heb. 13:17).

It's sad to see pastors trying to serve the Lord in churches today and all he gets in return is criticism and rejection. God gave the prophet Samuel these words of encouragement when Israel was wanting a king to rule over them. **“And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”** (I Sam. 8:7).

It's not uncommon for the religious crowd to take out their frustrations on God's man since they cannot get their hands upon God. Remember how Israel murmured against God time and again and it began soon after their deliverance from Egypt. **“And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!”** (Num. 14:2). In the Book of Acts, we read of a dedicated Christian by the name of **“Barnabas.”** This was not his original name, but his surname given him by the apostles because it meant **“son of consolation or encouragement”** (Acts 4:36). He

eventually became one of Paul's associates in ministry. A local church cannot have too many people like "**Barnabas**," or in other words, too many encouragers. Pastors are grateful to God for those who encourage him when the ministry often gets very discouraging.

Paul did not write this epistle with the intent to correct any doctrinal error in the church, but to instill deep doctrinal truth that would sustain them in this difficult journey of life. In writing this particular portion of Scripture, we need to note that it has been correctly called a DOCTRINAL MASTERPIECE. This is not to diminish from the rest of the Word of God, which is filled with doctrinal truth, but to draw attention to the fact that the Book of Romans is filled with deep doctrinal teaching that makes it one of the most influential of all Paul's epistles. In other words, it is filled with doctrine taking us all the way from Justification through Sanctification to Glorification and all that is in-between.

It is jam-packed with doctrine pertaining to salvation and is often considered the deepest doctrinal Book in Scripture. For that reason, we often find great division in churches over this Book. It's hard for people to get false teaching that they've heard for many years out of their head and be open to the Truth of Holy Scripture. To illustrate, what I'm trying to say, I share with you that which was told me in one of my pastorates. A young man had grown up as a Jehovah's Witness, got saved, and joined the church that I pastored. One day he came to me and confessed that he was having a hard time UNLEARNING all the false doctrine that he had been taught. Personally, I can somewhat relate to that because I grew up in a typical shallow Baptist church of my day. After God called me to preach and I began studying the Word of God and doing expository preaching, I discovered that there were some doctrinal matters that I had been taught that did not measure up to the Scriptures. In my case, I'll have to admit that most of these did not relate to cardinal doctrines.

However, it was through personal study of Holy Scripture that God revealed to me the truth of reformed theology.

If a person is genuinely **“born again”** then he or she has nothing whatsoever to do with it. You didn’t “decide” to be born the first time nor who your parents would be. Even more-so does that apply to spiritual regeneration, the new birth (**Jh. 3:1-8**). How sad it is that so many mainline Protestant churches teach salvation by works when they tell lost sinners that they must pump up faith out of their depraved spirit so that God’s grace can save them. Romans makes all of this perfectly clear; therefore, it becomes a very divisive Book. All that I’m saying takes us back to the Reformation when Martin Luther discovered the Truth of Justification by Faith and nailed his 95 Thesis to the church doors of Whittenburg which caused his life to be threatened. The Book of Romans has been called the antidote for the false gospels regardless of the day and age one lives.

Today, we have filled church roles with people who have walked church aisles, prayed or in most cases repeated after someone else a pray, got dunked in a pool of water, and joined an assembly like they would a local civic organization. They walked down the aisle an unregenerate dry sinner and came up out of the baptistry an unregenerate wet sinner with no change whatsoever taking place in their spirit. Salvation is more than all of that. It is a change of nature from within that only the Holy Spirit can accomplish.

In my last pastorate, I had a lady who approached me one day and wanted to me baptize her children. She told me that they had not yet “prayed the prayer” which I assumed she was referring to what is commonly called “the sinner’s prayer.” Such a prayer that people use today is not found in Scripture. The nearest thing in the Bible that I can find to it is when the **“Publican”** cried out **“God be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk. 18:13)**.

The Book of Romans declares that it is a work of God from eternity past that He alone will fulfill in calling out a

people unto Himself. Romans is not the only Book in the Bible that proclaims this Truth, but it does proclaim it loud and clear. If the average church of today were to preach and practice the mighty doctrines found in the Book of Romans, they would find their numbers greatly reduced. Most like to play the numbers game rather than risk the loss of members and income. Pastors who hold to this mentality are either ignorant or deceived and accountable to God. If we don't have a biblical understanding of the Book of Romans, then we'll have a poor foundation upon which to learn Bible doctrine in general. Churches that do not hold a high view and regard for deep sound biblical truth are spiritually SICK.

Letters to the Church at Corinth

Paul wrote two separate letters “**unto the Church of God which is at Corinth**” (I Cor. 1:2, II Cor. 1:1) on two different occasions. It’s been debated by some as to which letter was written first, but for the sake of argument I’ll address them in the order they are found in the Bible. The first letter was addressed “**unto the church of God which is in Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours**” (I Cor. 1:2). To begin with, this lets us know that there were some saved people in this congregation. I mention it in particular because of what I’m about to say a little later. It also lets us know that what he had to say to these believers in Corinth is applicable of all Christians everywhere.

To begin with it needs to be understood how wicked the city of Corinth was in that day and time. It was filled with some of the most gross paganism and vice that can be imagined. A church was planted in Corinth and there were some genuine converts that were truly saved, but they had to learn how to break away from the spiritual degradation of their surroundings. The unbridled lust from which some of these people were saved had to be left behind because God calls His people to moral living.

At this point, we must be reminded that a person is not saved from sin and becomes a child of God by merely stopping bad habits. Quitting such things as smoking, drinking alcohol, lustful, and immoral living does not save us from the consequences of eternal torment. That would be a mere matter of personal works and we’re not saved by our “**works**” (Eph. 2:8-9), but by the “**finished**” (Jh. 19:30) work of Christ on the cross. However, Paul proceeds to tell us that when the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, saves our soul, indwells our spirit, and births us into the family of God, “**which is the church of the living**

God” (I Tim. 3:15), then we are called to holiness and to a plain of higher living that seeks to glorify and obey God.

**“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”
(I Pet. 1:13-16)**

It had been reported to Paul that all sorts of factions, immoralities, and lawsuits were being manifested in this church. Concerns over marriage, divorce, eating meat sacrificed to idols, and even matters of worship along with some doctrinal issues had developed. Being burdened by God for this assembly, Paul acted as God’s spokesman. As we proceed looking at the carnal mess this church was in, it sounds like the 21st century church. May God give us godly pastors who will have the same holy boldness as the apostle Paul to address and deal with such problems in light of Holy Scripture. I dare say, that the vast majority will not. They would rather have the approval of people, a salary check, the comfort of financial and material security than to **“fight the good fight of faith” (I Tim. 6:12)**. Pastors must deal with a variety of problems in godly wisdom while **“speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15)**. It’s been said that a pastor needs the heart of a dove, but the hide of a rhinoceros.

All sorts of immoral conduct prevailed in the church at Corinth. Every kind of lustful behavior was being carried out by many within this congregation. When Paul addressed the man, who was having sex with his stepmother, he made it clear that the church was to practice discipline on this member in hopes of him finding

repentance and restoration (**I Cor. 5:1-13**). From what we can tell, we like to think that is what happened. As gross and detestable as that sounds, we know that there were people who had been saved from all sorts of immoral backgrounds because Paul went on to write, **“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (homosexuals), nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:9-11).**

From the Book of Hebrews which we'll mention a little later in this chapter, we're taught about how God chastens His disobedient children (**Heb. 12:5-11**). I mention this to say that it's possible for Christians to commit acts of immorality, but it's impossible for Christians to do so without God's rod of chastisement being administered. With that being the case, such a Christian will hopefully be brought under conviction, repentance, and restoration. If not, they stand in danger of sinning the sin unto death (**I Jh. 5:16**).

From what we learn in this first letter there were severe problems of a carnal nature within this church. There are some in the church today who believe that a Christian can live a carnal lifestyle. However, while it is possible for a Christian to commit a carnal act and persist for a time in doing so, Scripture teaches that it's impossible for a true believer to live a prolonged life of carnality without escaping God's judgment (**I Jh. 5:16**). A Christian may have a lapse in carnality, but because of the indwelling Holy Spirit one of two things will happen. Either repent and get right with God or face possible death (**I Cor. 11:30**). What happens to a professing Christian will reveal if he or she has only made a profession or has the possession of the Holy Spirit. How does a **“church of the living God”** (I

Tim. 3:15) deal with such sin taking place among its members? The Bible tells us what should be done.

I've mentioned all of this to say that personally, I don't know how many people within the Corinthian church were saved because God alone knows. It's possible that some were saved and overcome with moral failure, but repented (as we believe the man did who had sex with his stepmother). It's also possible that it was like many of today's church members who were never saved to begin with. Scripture tells us that not everyone who hears the Gospel will believe and not all who make a profession will be genuine about it. Remember the rather lengthy discourse in the **13th chapter** of **Matthew** dealing with the Mysteries of the Kingdom and the **first 23 verses** telling us about the 4 different types of soil where the Word of God is shown. Only one out of the four ever took root and brought forth fruit.

Churches of our day are being bombarded with members living in sin, including outside the bonds of holy wedlock, but the leaders nor the congregation doing anything about it. Paul gave this Corinthian church strict orders to correct the problem or he would take care of it when he personally arrived. Today's modern-day church doesn't want to upset the apple cart, make waves, and address the problem, much less preach against such sins. They would rather sweep their problems under the rug, pretend that it doesn't exist, and lose their testimony than to please God. Churches and denominations of our day are battling over accepting homosexual members and not even giving a second thought to providing a baby shower to couples living in fornication outside the bonds of holy wedlock. This is SICK and church roles of today abound with immorality. It's a disgrace to any pastor who knowingly allows this to happen. If you are one of these pastors and refuse to stand against the rottenness of your congregation, then learn a lesson from the apostle Paul.

No, it's not our job to police our congregations and go looking for people that we can attack and discipline.

However, when we become aware of open sin among immoral members in the congregation where we serve, then we are accountable to God to obey His Word and deal with it biblically.

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians is considered the most personal and the least doctrinal of all the Pauline epistles with the exception of Philemon. It's interesting that we find in this epistle how Paul defends his life and ministry as well as his apostleship and authority against false teachers. This reminds us that Paul was bold enough to deal with severe problems and not back down from what God had him to write under divine inspiration. Likewise, my beloved preacher friend, be prepared for it to cost you personal attack when you stand for biblical morality in the pastorate where you serve. Be prepared to get attacked and criticized and to even pack your bags and be ready to vacate the parsonage and lose your pay check. Welcome to the world of the SICK church. Just remember that your reward is not found in this world, but on the other side when we stand before God and hear Him say "**well done thou good and faithful servant**" (Matt. 25:21).

Letter to the Churches of Galatia

So far in the two previous churches to whom Paul wrote, we saw a glimpse into the importance of “**sound doctrine**” which He stressed to the church at Rome. We saw that doctrine is important and it does make a difference. In fact, it makes a big difference on whether a church rises or falls. I believe it was R.C. Sproul who made the comment that everyone is a theologian. That’s true in the fact that everyone has some view about God, be it right or wrong. The only theological view that is of any value is the one taught in the Word of God. Personal opinion counts for nothing when it comes to what “**saith the Lord**” (**Rev. 1:8**). Therefore, a church should not allow just any and all sorts of doctrine be taught in their assembly.

The second church that we examined received two separate letters that addressed the carnality which was raising its ugly head in the congregation. Trouble and problems plagued the early New Testament church from the very beginning including lying, false doctrine, and immorality of all sorts.

Now, we come to the fourth letter on our list (with two different ones being written to Corinth) and that is the one Paul wrote “**unto the churches of Galatia**” (**Gal. 1:2**). As you will notice from this greeting, there was more than one church in the region. It combines problems with doctrine, behavior in the assembly, and failure to accept biblical teaching without personal addition. The reason Paul wrote to this church is because there was defection of the early converts from the teaching that was first taught to them. Exactly why this happened, we may not be fully certain, but they were led astray by others to say the least. This is one reason why a church ought to be extra careful who they select as teachers, leaders, and workers of any description and especially “**elders**” who ought to be the teachers within the church. (see my book, “**Godly Servants, A**

Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses”)

For those who have read some of my other books, you already know how I feel about the modern-day Sunday School class. You can call it a Bible class or a Sunday School class or whatever you want to call it, but if the Scriptures are not being taught in light of correct Bible doctrine, then all sorts of problems can be created and worst of all, false teaching. The vast majority of congregations today do not have sufficient individuals who are qualified to teach the Word of God because they are not knowledgeable to do so. I'll go so far as to say that multitudes of pastors in pulpits are not **“rooted and grounded” (Eph. 3:17)** in the **“love”** of God's Word.

In writing this letter **“unto the churches of Galatia,”** Paul defended the Gospel of God's free Grace to sinners. Jewish teachers had come into the church to refute the teaching of Paul. They taught a mixture of human works and what we would call today, legalism, which is man's contribution to satisfy God. Therefore, we find Paul proclaiming much of the same doctrine that is profoundly clear in the Book of Romans. The doctrine of Justification by faith alone apart from any mixture of man's contribution or personal opinion was Paul's response to these Judaizers. No mixture of man's works nor man's law-keeping can ever appease God.

Legalism is and always has been a problem in the church. Nathan Bingham has said that “legalism is, by definition, an attempt to add anything to the finished work of Christ.” It has worn different masks and taken on different issues down through the years, but it's always been the same legalism. Salvation is by God's Grace and God's Grace alone. Nothing that we do can cause God to love us more or less.

I remember the day when the length of a man's hair was a major problem among some denominations. If you wanted to please God, then your hair could not touch your ears if you were a man. Long hair belonged to women and

not to men. I remember in my early days of being a pastor when a gentleman in the congregation asked me about the passage saying it was a “**shame**” for a “**man**” to “**have long hair**” (**I Cor. 11:14-15**). He even asked if I would bring a message on that passage to examine its meaning. That’s one sermon I’ll never forget. I entitled it, “How Long is Long Hair?” Hopefully, the title will tell you how I addressed the subject from Scripture. Long hair is a relative term depending upon the individual involved. Personal opinion can be devastating to those who don’t know Bible doctrine.

Needless to say, dancing was another big issue among people in the Bible belt. Christians just didn’t dance regardless of what type of dancing it was or else you would be sinning. Other such concerns, dealt with women wearing pants, people drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, or any use of tobacco products was considered profane. Women wearing make-up, and if they did, how much was another question of concern that could be heard from the sacred pulpits of America. If all of that wasn’t enough, you might even get lambasted on Sunday for going to a movie on Saturday night. And, if that wasn’t enough, some preacher or well-meaning Christian just might rake you over the coals for going out to eat at a restaurant on Sunday or do any kind of shopping on Sunday.

I cannot find anywhere in Scripture where the drinking of alcohol is forbidden, but I can find the warnings against its misuse (**Prov. 23:3**). In fact, we learn that for the Christian, our “**body is the temple of the Holy Spirit**” and we are warned against the misuse of our “**temple**” (**I Cor. 3:16-17**). This covers a multitude of things from gluttony of either food or drink. It can even cover how we use our “**tongue**” and the misuse of it (**Jam. 3:1-12**). When it comes to how the woman grooms herself, she is warned against dressing like a “**harlot**” (**Prov. 7:10**) but to dress in “**modest apparel**” (**I Tim. 2:9**).

When we read and interpret such passages as the above, we must be careful to always take them in context and not make it say more or less than what it declares. By doing so, we can easily fall into the trap of legalism which is giving a human opinion that does not contain biblical truth. If we're not careful we can become legalistic regarding food and drink. Healthwise, we know that some food is better for us than others, but the bottom line in much of this is moderation, such as red meat, etc. There were dietary restrictions in the Old Testament, but spiritual lessons are learned that were lifted in the New Testament (**Acts 10:9-16**) and no longer imposed.

Views regarding the drinking of wine, including alcoholic beverages, have divided the church. There are churches that provide both wine and grape juice in the observance of the Lord's Supper because of the different convictions among Christians about partaking of anything with alcohol. Therefore, we must learn how to deal with these convictions without becoming legalistic. Instructions for doing so are given to us in the **8th chapter of First Corinthians** and the **14th chapter of Romans** pertaining to our response regarding Christian liberty and dealing with a less mature believer (**I Cor. 8, Rom. 14**).

Let me make one thing perfectly clear, I have my personal convictions about all of the above-mentioned concerns. I personally like short hair and so does my wife like wearing her hair short. I don't dance, drink, smoke, or hang around those who do because I don't like it, need it, nor enjoy being near people who blow their smoke all over me. I remember on one occasion when my wife and I made a pastoral visit in a home that reeked of cigarette smoke and our clothing stank to high heaven when we got in the car to come home. We shed all of our clothing as soon as we walked in the door of our house, put the smelly garments in the washing machine, and immediately took a shower to rid ourselves of the odor. We didn't say a word of rebuke to the household, but came home and dealt with the issue.

I've said all of that to say individuals have different preferences and habits. Some good and some not so good. But salvation is not based upon stopping the habit of smoking or stopping the indulgence of drinking alcohol. You can do nothing to merit God's Grace. It is free to any hell deserving sinner whom God chooses to call. I'm reminded of R.C. Sproul, one of the greatest theologians of all time. He smoked for the greater part of his life and God used him beyond measure. It wasn't good for his health and it was very apparent that it cost him dearly in the closing days of his life. Charles Spurgeon, known as the prince of preachers, suffered with severe bouts of depression throughout his life, smoked cigars for a good number of years, and liked to have moderate amounts of alcoholic beverages. If you'll go back and look at the lives of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, you'll also discover they were not teetotalers when it came to beverage alcohol. Even the great reformer, Martin Luther enjoyed his beer. Isn't it amazing whom God uses? Sinners saved by GRACE!

I'm not endorsing tobacco nor alcoholic beverages because I hate both, but even Christians have different convictions about the use of these items. My Grandfather was a drunk before he got saved and I never knew him prior to his conversion. But, from what my Mother told me, he was a mean drunk. It's often been said that the man takes a drink and then the drink takes the man. One sure way of making certain that never happens to you is never take your first drink of alcohol. Personally, I see alcohol as a drug (**I Tim. 5:23**) just like opioids are drugs for severe pain. There may be a time and place for the use of them, but not for "pleasure." Now, that's my opinion, but I have no biblical right to impose that upon others as long as they don't misuse it. For the Christian, his "**body is the temple of the Holy Spirit**" and there are more ways than one to misuse the "**body**" (**I Cor. 3:16, 6:19**).

Neither smoking or drinking are habits that have anything to do with a person going to heaven, but it might

very well have something to do with testimony and influence upon others. We're not saved by what we do or what we refrain from doing, but your example may have an effect upon others. If you are saved from the penalty of your sin, then it's because of God's Grace and God's Grace alone. For some reason (our own self-righteousness), we don't seem to think that our sin (which we all have) is as bad as someone else's sin (**Matt. 7:3**).

Having said all of the above and because of the tension among believers on the subjects to which I've referred, allow me to expand my comments and explanations a little further. Once again, my personal view is to refrain from using beverage alcohol, but we are not to preach personal opinion as divine truth because in so doing it becomes legalism. For illustration, I remind you of the first recorded miracle in Scripture that Jesus performed. It was the turning of "**water**" into "**wine**" at the marriage feast in "**Cana of Galilee**" (**Jh. 2:1-11**). It tells of the "**water**" that Jesus turned into "**wine**" to be the "**good wine**" or the better "**wine**." Christians have argued this passage of Scripture for years as to whether or not this was fermented or unfermented wine. The Bible does not spell it out explicitly and all I can do is point you to the Scriptures as to how fermented and unfermented wine is represented. Some have argued that there are two different Greek words for the two, but I can't find them. Wine is wine but we know that some was more fermented than others because of the lesson found in the "**wineskins**." **Matthew 9:14-17** lets us know that the longer wine stayed in the "**wineskins**" the stronger and more fermented it gets. At first, the new wine is sweet wine and no more than grape juice. The longer it stays in the "**wineskins**" the stronger it gets with more sting to the taste. In the case of Jesus turning the "**water**" into "**wine**," this was done instantly and it was the "**better wine**."

It's a matter of taste (opinion) as to what the "**better wine**" would be. Personally, I'm not going to tell Jesus how He performed His miracle and just what kind of "**wine**" this

was because He is God and I am NOT. You can research this matter of fermented and unfermented wine in Scripture and you'll find more "arguments" from one extreme to the other than "you can shake a stick at." Whatever "side" a person takes, they will make a case to suit themselves. Therefore, let the Scriptures speak and be careful and truthful when we express our interpretation, that we don't cross the line and become legalistic. There are some well-meaning Bible believing brethren reading this book who will have a "hissy-fit" over what I'm saying. That in and of itself only demonstrates the problem of legalism that I'm trying to illustrate in today's church.

We must learn how to differentiate between essential doctrine and non-essential doctrine or in other words cardinal doctrine from non-cardinal doctrine. If we fail to do this, then we can sometimes fall victim to legalism. Biblical cardinal doctrine will consist of doctrine that is considered a foundation of the Christian faith, such as, the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Birth, Original Sin, Salvation by Grace through Faith, Salvation by Christ Alone, The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, The Trinity, and the Second Coming of Christ. These are doctrines that cannot be negotiated when it comes to the Christian Faith even among various denominations.

I'm using all of the above as illustrations of how we can become legalistic by promoting personal opinion or simply adding to Scripture something that it doesn't say. We all have personal opinions and we all have the liberty to do certain things that are not clearly addressed in Scripture. Such matters are often referred to as matters of "**conscience**" (**I Cor. 10:23-33**). However, there are matters which are addressed and we need to learn how to properly use our freedom in Christ (**I Cor. 6:12**) because the price for misuse is high (**Heb. 12:5-11**).

My personal view of beverage alcohol is to avoid the use of it. I don't need it nor want it. I see it as a drug and my personal preference for a beverage is water. Some prefer coffee, tea, soda, etc. My fear is if I drink alcohol and

cause someone else to stumble and become addicted to it then I would be leading them onto a downward path. That's my personal conviction. If that is not yours then I can't play God and try to convict you of sin. That's the job of the Holy Spirit and if I read something into the drinking of wine that not's there, then I become a legalist. I cannot biblically tell you that it's a sin for you to drink a glass of wine or alcohol, but I can tell you on the authority of Scripture that it is a sin to get drunk (**Lk. 21:34, Rom. 13:13, I Cor. 5:11, Gal. 5:21**).

Let's not lose sight of that and stay focused on the Gospel and not get side-tracked into legalism. We have no business telling people they have to quit cussing, smoking, and drinking to become a Christian. That is "**works**" based theology and it's not biblical. I firmly believe that when a person is converted to Christ that the Holy Spirit will begin a new work in their lives and will gently lead us along the road in our sanctification. This means that God does not reveal all of our many areas of life that need changing at one time. As we grow "**in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (**II Pet. 3:18**), the Holy Spirit will gradually reveal things in our lives that ought not be there and mold us into the image of Christ. They will not all get ironed-out on this side of Glory.

That work of sanctification will not be completed until after death when God finishes His work of salvation in our glorification. Some Christians grow at a faster rate than others, but needless to say, we all ought to be growing in the Lord. The sad truth is that some remain "**babes**" (**I Cor. 2:1, I Pet.2:2**) all their lives and are never able to feast off the "**meat**" (**I Cor. 2:2**) of God's Word. The point I'm trying to make is that we have NO contribution to make whatsoever in our salvation. It is all of God's "**grace**" that He grants in regeneration whereby He bestows upon us "**faith**" (**Eph. 2:8-9**) to believe and repentance to turn from our depraved state to His cleansing and forgiveness.

If you have any idea of what the Bible teaches along these lines, then you know the point of what I'm trying to

get across. If you are going to read this and accuse me of endorsing sin, then you have missed the point and are terribly wrong. Every Christian is a work in progress. When we get saved, sin is not totally eradicated from our lives and will not be until we see Jesus face to face. One of the songs that I sang with the little children in my pastorates was, He's Still Working on Me. It's about sanctification in the life of a believer. What I'm trying to say is that legalism obeys the externals while man's heart is far removed from having any desire to honor and please God, nor the intent of His Law.

From **Mark 7:1-8**, we can see an example of legalism in the day of Christ and learn a lesson to beware. Those complainers were not addressing the matter of hygiene when they accused the disciples of Christ eating without washing their hands. They were talking about ritual observance, but at the same time there was nothing written in the Law of God about the everyday person washing their hands before eating a meal. These Pharisees made the Law say what they wanted it to say instead of what God clearly proclaimed. This ritual found in Scripture was imposed upon priests. As usual, these Pharisees were famous for adding human regulations to the Law of God, such as the number of steps that a person could walk on the Sabbath. They criticized Jesus healing on the Sabbath day (**Matt. 12:9-14**) and His disciples for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath Day (**Mk. 2:23-28**).

Today, these Pharisees and Sadducees are still found in the church. The devil specializes in making people in the organized church either lying liberals or flaming fanatics. Legalist are nitpickers over spiritual matters that are not essential to the Christian Faith. Satan delights in taking away a Christian's freedom in Christ by imposing man-made legalistic rules and regulations. If we're not grounded in the Truth of God, then it's easy to be overcome with the teachings of man that are disguised as the law of God. We must learn to "**rightly**" divide the "**Word of God**" (**II Tim. 2:15**) and be on guard against the attack of legalism within

the church that substitutes the law of man for the Law of God. Being a legalist is a bondage like unto that which the Christian was delivered prior to conversion. Is it better to stop going to movies and wearing lip stick or to refrain from gossip, pride and envy? Is it better to stop smoking or refrain from stealing and lying? Is it better to stop drinking wine or refrain from lust?

Everyone is going to have likes and dislikes different from others and we cannot base the law of God on our likes and dislikes because we are all sinners. Christ is the only ONE Who has perfectly lived up to the Law of God because He is the Law-Giver and Law-Keeper. Truth be told is that legalism is a form of idolatry because it substitute's our own law for the Law of God. The legalist is one who is boasting in his own righteousness and not the righteousness of Jesus Christ. To profess Christ and be a legalist is to be a hypocrite which is claiming to honor God with your lips while your heart is far from Him. Such people go through the act of "**worship**" while "**teaching for doctrine the commandments of men**" (Mk. 7:7).

If we are "**born again**" (Jh. 3:3) Bible believers, it ought to be our desire to please God and to obey His Laws. However, it is legalism to believe something different from what the Word of God teaches and make our opinions equivalent to God's commands. It is wrong acting like a Pharisee or Sadducee majoring on minors while at the same time ignoring the weightier matters of Holy Scripture. Obeying God's Law is good, but becoming side-tracked with matters that do not pertain to God's Law is dangerous and spiritually divisive.

Up to this point I've only pointed out, what I'll call trivial issues of legalism, that have confronted the church in the last 75 years. However, there are also doctrinal concerns such as the issue of "**circumcision**" that was present in the Galatian church of Paul's day. There are churches today that have made the issue of baptism a legalistic concern. For instance, there are some churches who do not accept baptismal immersion of individuals unless it was

done in an acceptable denominational church. Others don't believe anyone can be saved unless they are immersed in water. That's called baptismal regeneration which is heresy. When I refer to immersion, I'm speaking of water baptism. All sorts of views might be found regarding water baptism that have been turned into matters of legalism. For those like myself who hold to believer's baptism, we see it as a public profession of faith for those who trust Christ as Lord and Savior. It has nothing to do with salvation, but obedience to the Word of God in following the example of Christ (**Matt. 3:13-17**). If a person goes under the water a lost dry sinner, then he's coming up out of it a lost wet sinner. There is no saving grace in this ordinance.

I've labored long and hard on this matter of legalism because it has been a serious problem in the New Testament church from the beginning. In fact, it remains a major problem yet today. It has divided churches and individual Christians into enemy camps opposed to one another. But, worst of all, it has tampered with the Word of God and that is a serious offense in the sight of God with a serious warning (**Rev. 22:19**).

I've just mentioned some of the more modern-day examples of legalism, but when Paul confronted the matter in the church of Galatia, it had to do with "**circumcision**" as practiced by the Old Testament Jews. God instituted the rite of "**circumcision**" when He called Abraham (**Gen.17**) to be the Father of the Hebrew people. It was a mark upon every man and male child born showing that God had a plan for Israel which would produce a Child Who would be the Savior of sinners. Christ came and fulfilled the meaning of outward "**circumcision**" that He completed in the "**circumcision**" of the sinful "**heart**" in conversion (**Rom. 2:25-29**). Outward "**circumcision**" is still a good practice for hygiene and health benefits, but it has nothing to do with one's eternal salvation. When the sinner is "**born again**" then he will know what it means to have his sinful "**heart ... circumcised**" (the love of sin cut away from the inner core of his being) and by "**grace through faith**"

(Eph. 2:8-9) be delivered from the bondage of his sin. In other words, he will know true freedom in Christ. Not freedom to sin, but freedom from sin.

After the coming of Christ and His fulfillment of what the Old Testament rite represented, there was no longer any requirement for either Jew or Gentile to practice physical **“circumcision”** for spiritual purposes. I repeat once again, there is nothing wrong with male circumcision and is often considered good for health reasons, but it has nothing to do with salvation of the soul. Neither **“circumcision”** nor any other Old Testament ritual that prefigured the coming of Christ needs to be practiced on this side of the cross (including feast days, etc.) That’s because Christ alone is the fulfillment of the law. If you find yourself in one of these legalistic churches today, then I suggest that you examine yourself and seriously consider what God would have you do regarding finding another church that has been delivered from this error. Such legalism is SICK and is not healthy nor conducive to spiritual growth in the Lord.

Letter to the Church at Ephesus

It's generally believed that this letter was originally written to **“the saints which are at Ephesus” (Eph. 1:1)**, but was intended to be used as a circular letter to neighboring churches. I remind you that **“saints”** in the Bible are Christians, truly saved people, in whom God has done a work of justification and begun His work of sanctification. I like to refer to the three tenses of salvation this way. I have been saved from the penalty of sin (Justification). I am being saved from the power of sin (Sanctification). I shall be saved from the presence of sin (Glorification). A **“saint”** is a **“born again” (Jh. 3:7)** believer who has been set apart for God's glory and in whom the Holy Spirit is currently molding and maturing us into His image. That's just about as simple and plain as I can put it.

Paul planted the Church at Ephesus (**Acts 19**) where he ministered for **“three years” (Acts 20:31)**. But when he wrote this particular letter, it's believed that he did so from his prison cell in Rome like he did several of his letters to different churches. This letter is often considered to be the first of what we call his prison epistles. Unlike some of his letters to other churches, he did not address any heresy or specific problem in the church, but instead he tried to encourage them. He wrote about the nature of the church, reminding us that she is not an organization, but an organism. The church is the **“body of Christ” (Rom. 7:4)** and He challenges her to act like it.

This epistle, like the Book of Romans, is filled with deep rich spiritual doctrine. I'm going to have more to say about the church at Ephesus when we look at the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor by the apostle John. But for now, I want to give you a glimpse into some of the content of which Paul wrote.

I pointed out in chapter one of this book that **Ephesians 5:22–33** uses the analogy of **“husband”** and **“wife”** to

describe the relationship “**Christ**” has with His “**church.**” In marriage two bodies become “**one flesh**” as an act of holy matrimony. It just so happens that the word “**body**” shows up 8 different times as a metaphor to describe our union with Christ. I also pointed out the intimacy of the word “**in**” found numerous times in the Gospel of John (**Jh. 15:1-10, 17:21-26**) along with the word “**one.**”

Not only does Paul write in depth about the analogy of marriage, but about 90 times he uses the intimate preposition “**in**” to stress the believer’s union with Christ. Ephesians is filled with truths about our position “**in Christ.**” That position is only possible because of God’s “**grace**” that occurs about 13 times proclaiming loud and clear “**the gospel of the grace of God**” (**Acts 20:24**) toward hell deserving sinners.

At the time this letter was written, the town of Ephesus was a hotbed for paganism, just like many other cities in which New Testament churches were planted. It was famous for having the temple of Diana which was one of many reasons Paul exposed their spiritual darkness (**Eph. 5:8-14**) and taught the Christian’s involvement in warfare with spiritual wickedness (**Eph. 6:12**). His preaching caused problems with the town trade union involved in making images used in pagan worship (**Acts 19:17-41**).

All of this simply reminds us that the Christian is not living in a world that is a friend of Grace. We are going to find ourselves swimming upstream against the tide of this wicked ungodly world. Therefore, we need to be spiritually armed and realize that it is the Holy Spirit Who must do our fighting for us. We can only gain strength from Him and apply by “**faith**” the Word of God which is our “**sword**” (**Eph. 6:10-18**).

We’re not going to be able to properly use the “**sword**” if we’re not trained in doing so. It is at this point, where we discover a major problem in today’s church. Few people who attend a church service receive proper instruction from God’s Word. Many churches don’t think doctrine is important and all we have to do is love people and accept

them in church fellowship regardless of what they believe or how they live. I remember having a conversation with a man who is a member of a protestant church in our town who told me that he believed that a person who had never heard of Christ would not go to Hell. That same gentleman also told me that he believed in evolution. He is a very active member of his congregation that claims to be evangelical, but the entire assembly is filled with a hodge-podge of every kind of belief that you can think of.

Typically, what you will find in the average Protestant church of today are sermonettes for Christianettes which will never produce spiritual maturity. Besides, the vast majority of preaching that is heard is a steady diet of topical preaching which will not build a strong church. Entertainment and comedy have taken over the pulpit and turned it into a stage. If anything from the Bible is quoted or used in any way it's usually no more than three points and a poem filled with stories and illustrations. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you might even find a pastor that professes to be conservative who will tell a Bible story without application. Then, when it comes time for the invitation it's no more than easy believe-ism, having a person to repeat a prayer and sign them up to be dunked under some water. The end result is another number, but a soul with no saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

A church of that kind does not provide a congregation with what they need to live in a pagan world. Only SOUND SOLID EXPOSITORY PREACHING will equip the believer to confront the devil and do spiritual battle with his cohorts. We need a foundation upon which to build a life and ministry for the glory of God. That can only be found in the Word of God and learning how to draw our strength from it.

Soldiers have to train for warfare and that includes Christians soldiers. We receive our training primarily from the Word of God including both private Bible study and being taught from pastors in local churches who are faithful in declaring divine Truth. God has left us in the world as **“light” (Matt. 5:14-16)** in the midst of **“darkness” (I Jh.**

1:5-7) and if we're not serving that purpose then we are like **"salt"** that has **"lost his savour"** (**Matt. 5:13**) which is referring to our uselessness.

A major theme in the Book of Ephesians is the **"great mystery"** (**Eph. 5:23**) of the church. This has reference to both the local church and also the universal church (all genuine believers regardless of where they are found in the world who compose the bride of Christ). The word **"mystery"** is found five times in this epistle. It means something entirely different from that which you find in a mystery novel or a suspense thriller of a movie.

In Holy Scripture we discover that a **"mystery"** is a hidden truth that is revealed to the people of God. It's often held in secret until the time of God's choosing to reveal its complete meaning. So it is, with the glorious doctrine of ecclesiology as I introduced this word to you earlier in this book, referring to the study of the church. The New Testament church is not an organization, but an organism composed of not just people, but redeemed blood bought individuals. They are souls with their spirit filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit. (see my book, ***"The Tabernacle and Trinity of Man, Spirit & Soul & Body"***) Christians are people making up the bride of Christ having been indwelt and empowered with the Holy Spirit to represent Christ on earth and serve as His witnesses. The church of Jesus Christ has been called "an outpost in a dark world, looking for the day of final redemption." Christ views the church as His bride for which He is preparing to someday come and receive her unto Himself. That is a **"mystery"** that is not revealed to just anyone; therefore, cannot be understood by a lost soul.

Letter to the Church at Philippi

This letter is addressed very much like the one to Ephesus by saying, **“to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi” (Gal. 1:1)**. It’s believed that Paul planted the church at Philippi which became the first on European soil **(Acts 16)** which consisted mostly of Gentiles. Soon after its establishment, satanic opposition arose in the demonic possession of a fortune teller. It’s recorded that Paul cast the demon out of this slave girl **(Acts 16:13-15)** which angered her owners who benefited from her services. As a result, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned. Shortly thereafter they were miraculously set free by an earthquake resulting in a jailer’s conversion **(Acts 16:16-24)**. It’s generally believed that Paul returned to minister in this church on at least two other occasions **(Acts 20:1-6, II Cor. 2:13)**.

This church became a generous supporter of Paul, helping to finance his missionary travels. There are some churches today who resemble this attitude in wanting to help in the spreading of God’s Word through mission giving and evangelistic endeavors. Some are very mindful of trying to adequately take care of the pastor and his family financially while others see how little they can do. This latter bunch has the attitude, “God you keep him humble and we’ll keep him poor.” It’s not unusual for churches to see how much they can give to their denomination and remodeling of their facilities, but never give their pastor a salary increase. If so, it’s very little.

My thinking is that a local church ought to do the very best they can in the financial support of those in vocational pastoral ministry. Scripture addresses this matter by saying that a **“laborer is worthy of his hire” (Lk. 10:7)** and Paul wrote, don’t **“muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the laborer is worthy of his reward” (I Tim. 5:17-18)**. We can be certain that God blesses churches who see the importance of caring for God’s men in this way. For

those who don't, they have every right to feel shame and guilt. Every Christian ought to see their financial giving as grace giving in an act of worship unto the Lord.

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:”
(II Cor. 9:6-8)

We assume that Paul wrote this letter while in prison, but the location is only assumed to be that of Rome. In this short epistle we discover that this church faced persecution, endured the pressure placed upon them by false teachers, and had to endure conflicts and assaults within the church. As you can see, the early church did not have it easy; therefore, don't be surprised when you discover that it's not an easy road we're traveling to Heaven. The sad truth is that we can expect the world to hate us, but how sad to deal with conflict within the camp. Through it all, Paul writes to the church with the theme of joy and gratitude ringing loud and clear. That's the kind of testimony we ought to have even in the midst of internal conflict, attack, and dissension.

Having been in prison, Paul knew what difficult circumstances were all about. Likewise, he tried to relate to the Philippian believers that the negative circumstances of life should not pull us down. We can expect opposition just like they did, but through it all we can maintain the “joy” of the Lord. How can we do this? By remembering that God is at work in the believer's life even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Therefore, we need to learn how to keep our eyes on our God of the circumstances instead of the

circumstances. Don't forget, **“all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).**

We discover that **“joy”** is a reoccurring theme in the book of Philippians (**Phil. 1:4, 25, 2:2, 17-18, 4:1**). **“Joy” (Gal. 5:22)** is a **“fruit of the spirit”** that the world did not give us, but often tries to take away. Happiness and **“joy”** are similar, but yet two different emotions. There are many things that do not make us happy, but even through difficulty, conflict, sickness and suffering, the Christian can find **“joy unspeakable and full of glory” (I Pet. 1:8)**. That's because our **“joy”** is found in the eternal promises of God that regardless of what comes our way, He will **“never leave ... nor forsake” (Heb. 13:5)** us, making His **“grace ... sufficient”** and His **“strength... perfect in”** our **“weakness” (II Cor. 12:19)**.

I've found that churches can sometimes be filled with a bunch of nay-sayers. People who are always negative and always against whatever it is that comes along. They don't like the pastor for no other reason than the fact he is the pastor. These are tools of the devil who try to steal a believer's **“joy”** and make a pastor's life miserable. Be aware of such individuals, put up your guard, and don't let the devil entertain troubling SICK thoughts in your mind. Our goal should be to **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5)**.

Despite the fact that Paul wrote this letter from a prison cell, his heart was filled with **“joy.”** His major focus in this letter is on Christ in Whom a Christian's **“joy”** is found. Our goal as Christians ought to be like that of Paul which is to pursue Christlikeness, spiritual growth, serving our Lord, and maintaining His **“joy”** in our hearts until we see Him face to face. Don't ever forget that the **“the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10)**.

Letter to the Church at Colossae

In similar fashion, Paul addressed this letter, **“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae” (Col. 1:1)**. He wrote this letter because of two main doctrinal errors that he heard were evading their local assembly. I’ve already spoken in length about the invasion of legalism into the church, but the particular type that confronted this church may be called ascetic legalism. It describes people who practice self-discipline and abstinence to the extreme **(Col. 2:14-17)**.

The second doctrinal error that threatened them was mysticism **(Col. 2:18-23)**. Like any and all types of teaching that is contrary to **“sound doctrine” (II Tim. 4:3, Titus 2:1)**, we are admonished in Scripture to rebuke and reject it. This is exactly what Paul did by lifting high the Lord Jesus Christ Who alone is the answer to Biblical error. Jesus said that He was **“the way, the truth, and the life”** and that no man comes to the **“Father”** but by Him **(Jh. 14:6)**. There is no other Gospel that should be found in the Bible believing New Testament church. Therefore, beware, lest we be overcome by the opinions and traditions of men. Worldly philosophy has tried to infiltrate into the church since the very beginning and has done so today in a big way.

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:”
(Col. 2:8-11)

The church at Colossae was a mix of Jews and Gentiles with both making a contribution to the heresy that plagued it. In other words, elements of legalism and pagan mysticism were brought into the church by both groups. Here is a reminder that when people profess Christ and are received into a local church, we need to beware lest they bring their worldly ways with them. This has been a major problem in the church from the very beginning and remains so today. Christians should not allow pagan thought to influence the church. Paul's letter to the Colossian church refuted the heretical teaching that threatened them.

The world has all sorts of substitutes and distractions to take our minds and hearts away from Christ. As you've discovered in this book, I've repeated several times that there is so much of the world in the church that you can hardly tell that the church is in the world. The world is full of deceivers whom we have allowed to invade the church. Listen to the warning of Scripture regarding our response to such people.

“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”
(II Jh. 7)

Montanism was a heretical belief that derived its origin from pagan philosophy, but it was not the only problem in the early Christian church. Gnosticism was also a big problem and was the one found in the Colossian church. Its not easy to classify Gnosticism because Gnostic beliefs have the smell of many different religious blends. Personally, many cults of our day remind me somewhat of the Gnostics as they hid behind the disguise of Christianity. However, that can be said of people in the churches of our day who profess, but do not possess Christ. That which plagued the early Church was a concoction of Persian, Egyptian, Jewish, and Christian thoughts along with some

Greek philosophy. I need not have to tell you that there can be no such mix with the Christian Faith without adulterating it. All the way back to the Ten Commandments, God made it clear to His people that they were to have **“no other gods before”** Him (**Ex. 20:3**).

Don't make God fit into your mold! One thing that always “gets me” about so many theological arguments is how people try to fit God into their thinking. We can't tell God how He created the world, not even when He did it (**Job 38:4**). Neither can we tell God how He is going to bring this world to an end. He knows and has pre-ordained His program and needs no input from us. There are so many other similar issues which we claim to have the answers. Let's admit that we don't know it all, but our God does and all we need to do is rest and trust in Him as He fulfills **“his good pleasure”** (**Phil. 2:13**).

That which I'm trying to say is that we ought not to become argumentative over matters or issues of lesser importance lest we resemble these in the church at Colossae who were causing problems. We need to remember and act like we truly believe that God is Sovereign, the One and Only Creator God. That means not to “overthink” the Scriptures, but accept it in simple faith. That would change the way in which we respond to our **“brethren.”** It would provoke a loving response rather than one of arrogance. I've mentioned all of this because there are times we venture into spiritual areas where only God has the answers and we are to trust Him in faith to fulfill His program according to His Sovereign design. We don't need to get into the “deeper knowledge” mentality that was manifested in the church at Colossae. God has not revealed every detail of His Word to us on this side of Heaven. Therefore, we need to be satisfied to trust Him with the knowledge He has imparted in His Word. That means, add nothing to it nor erase anything from it.

Those who held to Gnostic thought made light of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. They did not place value on the human body as taught in Holy Scripture. Especially for the

Christian whose **“body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 6:19)**. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that anyone who denies that Jesus came in the **“flesh”** is not a true believer **(I Jh. 4:1-3)**. The value of the human body is seen in the fact that **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jh. 1:14)** and that **“Word”** was Christ **(Jh. 1:1-4)**. Upon His death He proved His deity in His glorious resurrection giving all born again believers the hope of our future resurrection at which time we’ll have a glorified body. For the Christian, the BEST is yet to come. It’s not our job to “figure out” how God has done or will do His work, but believe the Scriptures at face value and **“walk by faith” (II Cor. 5:7)**.

There is much that can be said about Gnosticism, but I want to address the subject briefly because it was a false teaching in the early churches. Whether or not we realize it, so does a derivative of it manifest itself in churches today. These Gnostic teachings emphasized personal spiritual knowledge over the orthodox teachings, traditions, and authority of the church. It wasn’t until the second century when the early church fathers denounced Gnostic teaching as heresy. It was and is somewhat difficult to label Gnosticism because it is not one single system of thought. The way I see and define Gnosticism is human reasoning above the acceptance of divine truth as revealed in the Word of God. Churches today are still following such blasphemous thoughts.

From my vantage point and in light of the subject of this book, I want to say that the same principles of the Gnostics can be seen today in how people view Christ personally and His teachings in the church. When people follow their own view of God or distort Holy Scripture, rather than comparing Scripture with Scripture, they basically come up with their own religious system. This can be seen in many religions of the world and even in the cults, as I’ve already mentioned, that have sprung up around the globe.

Even in the modern-day church, people can be guilty of succumbing to the lie of the devil when they attempt to strip

God of such things as His Deity, Authority, and Sovereignty. When one fails to recognize that God is Sovereign over ALL things, then they have committed a great heresy whether they realize it or not. God is either Sovereign or He is not God. He is either Sovereign over ALL things or He's not Sovereign at all. God cannot be partly Sovereign. I mention this one particular doctrine, because churches today will fight over it quicker than you can blink an eye. That's the way Satan works as he weasels his way into an assembly and strips it of its power, influence, and testimony. C.H. Spurgeon said, "no doctrine in the whole Word of God has more excited the hatred of mankind than the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God."

Letters to the Church of Thessalonica

In the Greek New Testament, this opening verse is translated, **“to the Thessalonians.”** Both of Paul’s first and second letters to the Thessalonian believers, are addressed, **“unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 1:1, II Thess. 1:1).** I’ll have more to say about how the preposition **“of”** (KJV) is used in reference to the saints in Thessalonica like it was in **“the church of the Laodiceans” (Rev. 3:14).** Some translations differ in this. The difference that I mainly want to call to your attention is the manner in which Paul said that these believers were **“in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”** I’m not trying to make a big issue out of this, except to say there is a point of truth to what I’m writing. There’s no doubt there were some true believers in this church who had an intimate spiritual relationship with God **“in the Lord Jesus Christ.”** There is a big difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Him personally. **“Saving” (Heb. 10:39) “faith” (Eph. 2:8)** is one thing while academic belief is another **(Jam. 2:19).**

Before beginning my remarks about this church in Thessalonica, which is generally believed to have been predominantly Gentile, let me remind you of something that I’ve already mentioned in this book. There is no such thing as a perfect church on this side of Heaven. Every believer is a spiritual work in progress. After telling us that **“for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”** in **Eph. 2:8-9**, verse **10** goes on to say that **“we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”** The Holy Spirit will be doing His work of sanctification in our lives as Christians as long as we have breath in our mortal bodies.

Only when the Lord takes us Home to Glory will that work be fully accomplished.

I've said all of that to say this about the church in Thessalonica. It's the only church mentioned in the Bible that is called an example or model church. The KJV uses the old archaic word **"ensamples"** and the ESV says **"example" (I Thess. 1:7)**. They were not perfect, but at the time Paul wrote to them this church was a good example for others to follow. They were not known for their facilities or programs for every age group. They were known for their **"work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess. 1:3)**. In other words, they were not famous for their annual Christmas pageants, Brunswick stew sales, spaghetti dinners, or free-give-away attractions that could be either money-makers or crowd-drawers. Their heart was in fulfilling the Great Commission and the declaration of Truth to the community.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage this church to stay the course in holding fast to the basic truths of the Gospel, to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to keep looking forward to the Lord's return. We are living in a world filled with discouragement. Living for and doing the work of our Lord has never been easy. Therefore, we desperately need encouragement to keep on keeping on and to keep our eyes on Jesus. One of the greatest encouragements given in this letter pertains to the return of our Lord.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede-ESV) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from

heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

(I Thess. 4:13-18)

As you can tell from previous chapters of this book, some of these themes are repetitive in the churches. It's so very easy for the "**devil**" (**I Pet. 5:8**) to get his foot into the church if we don't stay on guard. That's why churches can become apostate and many eventually even close their doors. They can become self-satisfied, self-centered, and self-indulging. I regret having to tell you, but it can happen to any church if it loses her Gospel focus. According to history, I'm afraid that eventually happened to the church in Thessalonica.

At my age I can look back over the past seventy-five years of my life and see numerous churches that have closed their doors. It seems like more are being added to the list every year. Some of these churches were once booming with overflow crowds in their "hay day." Some started with good intentions, but lost sight of their mission along the way. One thing that most had in common were internal "clicks" that wanted things their way instead of God's way. With that kind of selfish ambition, it's doomed to failure. If we don't keep the main thing the main thing in a Bible believing church, then her days of usefulness by the Lord are numbered. Evangelism and Discipleship must always remain priorities with a proper view of missions which begins in our own communities and reaches "**unto the uttermost part of the earth**" (**Acts 1:8**). It's our job to do the telling, but only God can do the saving and add "**to the church daily such as should be saved**" (**Acts 2:47b**).

The theme of eschatology (the study of last things or last days) is found in both of these Thessalonian epistles. Apparently, there had been some false teaching in this church along these lines and Paul attempted to correct it. The second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is a mighty truth in Scripture that ought to be included in the cardinal doctrines. However, man's view of when and how this is going to take place is another matter. There are people in churches today who think they have it all figured out from which false teaching may spring. There's nothing wrong for us to study the various views of Christ's second coming and even hold to those that have biblical basis. However, we should never demand that others hold to the exact same eschatological view as ours be it Pre-Millennial, Post-Millennial, Amillennial, or whatever else derivative you may find. There are actually more variations of these than you can "shake a stick at."

I like what one fella said about these views. He said that he was Pan-Millennial, meaning that it was all going to pan out the way God wanted it to. That's the best view yet. Believers within churches today who want to argue over this need to learn how to disagree agreeable. I'll have to admit that some of the above views are better than others. Some are in better alignment with the teaching of Scripture, but the bottom line is that nobody knows exactly how all of this is going to play out in God's eyes. Therefore, this is one problem that churches don't need to split over as long as they believe in the second coming of Christ. Jesus is coming again because the Word of God says so.

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11)

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also." (Jh. 14:2b-3)

Letters to Timothy

Most likely, Timothy was pastor of the church in Ephesus at the time these two epistles were written. Paul often sent young Timothy basically as his representative to minister in his place. Such was the case in this letter to Timothy. They expand the teaching regarding church order, soundness of faith, and ecclesiastical discipline. Instruction was also given as to the ministry in which pastor's and deacons were to be involved. Faithful pastors are admonished to be good under-shepherds of God's sheep and not bow to worldly pressure. They are warned of afflictions, disappointments, trials, and spiritual warfare. They are also admonished to bathe in the Word of God and never to forget that victory is not in this world, but our reward is on the other side.

As pastors try to wear many different hats (so to speak), it's easy to get our priorities confused. Nothing should ever distract us from being students of the Word of God so we can stay fresh and **"feed the flock of God" (I Pet. 5:2)**. Most people in the average congregation could care less if their spiritual appetites are fed. In fact, from what I see in the average church of today, there is very little spiritual appetite period. (see my book, ***"My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep and Herding Goats"***)

God has not called a pastor to serve as the CEO, boss, errand boy, nor hand-holder of the church. He needs to see himself as a lowly servant of our God Who reigns on High. He must have a divine summons from which he cannot escape, a burning in his bones to preach nothing less than the Word of God, and the love of people to preach the Truth. Education is good and helpful, but we're living in a day when the church is more interested in having a doctor in the pulpit than a humble servant who has been educated by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I'm not against education. In fact, I'm pro-education, but one's motive must be right in pursuing it. Some desire it for the mere purpose

of hanging a diploma on the wall, securing a larger pastorate, getting an increase in salary, and more prestige. I'm sure there are many with doctor's degrees today who are true and faithful proclaimers of God's Word with an honest hunger for it. However, education and degrees are no substitute for having God's call to preach and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

From what I'm seeing and hearing, it breaks my heart to discover how the majority of churches search for a pastor. To begin with, instead of turning to God in prayer, they go to the congregation and ask what kind of pastor they want. This is SICK. Instead of questioning the future prospect about his spiritual credentials, they want to know how much education he has. This is SICK. I've known many men who can bring a good solid expository message from the Holy Scriptures who have no academic degrees, while at the same time, men with seminary degrees as long as your arm can't preach their way out of a wet paper bag. Today's church has a mis-placed set of values and priorities when it comes to qualifications for a pastor. This is SICK.

If churches don't return to believing and practicing God's Word, all the situation is going to do in the modern-day church is get worse. Personally, I wonder how much worse it can get from what I see taking place. If you'll look at the qualifications laid out in the Books of First and Second Timothy, you'll not find one word mentioned about academic achievement, but men upon whom the Holy Spirit has called to ministry. We just don't hear much today about God-called preachers, but that is the only kind of pastor you want. I remind you that the original twelve apostles were, what we would call, "blue collar" working class men. (see my book, ***"The Twelve Disciples, Learning Discipleship From The Original Apostles"***) Paul was the most educated of the "apostles" with him referring to himself as, "**one born out of due time**" (I Cor. **15:8-9**). Although, he was not one of the original twelve, Scripture clearly tells us that he was made an "**apostle**" by

our Lord in his calling to salvation and service on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9:1-22**). This just goes to prove and reveal to us that God calls whom He chooses, regardless of age, race, education, talents, and personal appearance.

In selecting either a pastor (elder) or deacons (workers) in the church (see my book, ***“Godly Servants, A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses”***) we need to pay more attention to the Word of God instead of one’s church constitution and by-laws. Such documents may not be biblical and could very well be leading a church in the wrong direction. (see my book, ***“Church Government, Which Form Is Most Biblical?”***) God’s Word will always stand the test of time. Although culture, style, music, and appearance changes, Scripture will always be as up-to-day as our current news. This theme that we find in the two letters to Timothy is also found in the letter to Titus.

This letter also warns of false doctrine that seems to always be knocking to enter the church doors. This was also the case in Timothy’s pastorate at Ephesus. Paul had left him there to help the church deal with the false teaching they encountered. That which we need to pay special attention is the manner in which Paul dealt with troublemakers in the church. He named them! He did not try to cover up the wrong in the church nor those responsible. He called them out by name! Read carefully below what Paul wrote to Timothy regarding these who promoted mischief in the church at Ephesus.

“This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander;

whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

(I Tim. 1:18-20)

“But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do **gender strifes.**”

(II Tim. 2:16-23)

May God grant the leadership of today's church the wisdom, courage, and holy boldness to follow the example of Paul as he dealt with the wrongs in the churches. We need to see troublemakers and the teachers of false doctrine for what they are, “**workers of iniquity**” (Lk. 13:27) and tools of the “**devil**” (I Pet. 5:8). Pastor friend, as you step out in “**faith**” (I Jh. 5:4) to confront and do battle with Satan, don't ever forget that “**greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world**” (I Jh. 4:4).

It's very possible that Timothy was getting discouraged which prompted Paul to say some things that he did in the

second epistle. Things such as for Timothy to **“stir up the gift of God, which is in thee” (II Tim. 1:6)**. Paul reminded him that God does **“not”** give **“us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Tim. 1:7)**. He was furthermore reminded that being a pastor was never going to be easy, but in fact it could be more difficult than one could ever imagine. Paul continued admonishing him by saying, **“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (II Tim. 1:8)**. Except one be called and commissioned by God for such a task, who would want to ask for it? I don't know how much ill treatment Timothy was experiencing within the church, but it appears there were false teachers that he had to deal with. It's assumed Timothy himself had suffered at least one imprisonment in his lifetime.

Personally, I give testimony that the worst treatment that I've received for being a Christian, and a pastor in particular, has come from within the local institutionalized church. People in the world have often treated me with more respect than those in some of my pastorates. Such foul treatment came from people who professed to be saved, but lived like the devil. This is indication of a SICK church.

As a pastor we must preach the truth in love, which is not always an easy thing to do. Especially when those to whom you preach are goody-goody to your face while stabbing you in the back at the same time. Pastors who accept the call to an established church must realize that he's inheriting all the clutter and garbage that's never been dealt with in the past. Most of which has been swept under the rug waiting to come back out and haunt you. Wisdom to deal with such a SICK church can only come from the Lord.

Letter to Titus

It appears that Paul planted the church in Crete, but left Titus, whom we believe was a Gentile Christian, there to help in their organization. Like the letters to Timothy, this letter also deals with the matter of church organization and administration. Herein, we learn that it does not please the Lord for a church to conduct itself in a helter-skelter manner. In other words, God admonishes Christians individually, and this includes the church as a whole, to do things **“decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40)**.

Church government is important, but it's extremely important that it be biblical. (see my book, **“Church Government”**) The majority of people are only familiar with congregational government and prefer it because it gives them a voice in running the church. You will never find this type of government in Holy Scripture. There will be times when a congregation may and will need to take part in church decisions, but not regarding the general administration of the church. I firmly believe one reason so many churches have problems is because of the power struggles that are allowed and tolerated by this type of government.

Not only did Titus help this church get organized, but established in **“sound doctrine.”** This epistle affirms such great doctrines as God's Sovereign Election of believers **(1:1-2)**, God's Saving Grace **(2:11, 3:5)**, the Deity of Christ and His Second Coming **(2:13)**, the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ on the cross **(2:14)**, and the Regeneration of believers by the Holy Spirit **(3:5)**. As can be expected, when **“sound doctrine” (II Tim. 4:3)** is preached, Satan will raise his ugly head in attack.

As we have found, time and again, the influx of false teaching in these early churches, it's still a common occurrence. Once again, if such individuals are not confronted and stopped in their tracks, the church will suffer loss. The mentality in most churches today is that

they don't want to make anyone "mad" because they might leave the church. This only goes to show and prove the SICK unbiblical thinking of the average pastor and church member. If you're a Bible believing church, then don't leave a "welcome mat" for the devil at the door of your local assembly and don't be afraid to make it known that the devil and his crowd are not welcome.

A major reason why false teaching is flourishing in churches is because people therein don't know the truth of God's Word and can't detect error when they hear it. Therefore, Christians need to be armed in "**sound doctrine**" in order to defend the Gospel against counterfeits. Paul calls false teaching "**the doctrine of demons**" (I Tim. 4:1).

Don't let anyone ever tell you that "**doctrine**" is not important. Quite the contrary. It is vital in order for a church to remain spiritually healthy. John MacArthur said, "A sermon without doctrine does not build strong Christians." I've discovered many times when I preach the deep doctrinal truths of Scripture, either in churches or talking with an individual who professes Christ, they look at me like a calf looking at new gate and have the foggiest idea of what I'm talking about. That is a sad SICK commentary on the average church of our day.

Letter to Philemon

Although, this letter was written by Paul to “**Philemon**,” we can assume that it was shared with the church where “**Philemon**” was a member. It’s generally believed that “**Philemon**” was a Christian in the church at Colossae and the congregation met in his house. He had a slave by the name of “**Onesimus**” who had stolen from him and fled to Rome. While in Rome, the run-away slave came into contact with Paul and was converted to Christ. From what we can gather, Paul sent him back to “**Philemon**” along with this beautiful letter.

We may not be certain as to how much time elapsed or all the details involved in the departure and return of “**Onesimus**.” But it’s evident that Paul went to bat (so to speak) for him and appealed for “**Philemon**” to take him back and recognize him not just as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. Herein, we discover a wonderful story of how Christians should treat and respond to people who have done us wrong, especially fellow-believers. Also, it’s a lesson in restoration after having done a wrong to another person. It teaches how to treat people from different backgrounds and social ranks in society and how to stay focused on the mission of the church, which is the proclamation of the Gospel.

Although, the story-line is somewhat different, we cannot help but discover conflicts that will arise in our own immediate family as well as within our church family. How must we respond under such circumstances? How many times do we find churches dividing over conflicts rather than taking the problems to the Lord for His healing and reconciliation? Unfortunately, it’s more common to find people packing up, walking away, and leaving never to return rather than apologizing, repenting, and reconciling. The truth of the matter is that none of us has any business throwing stones at anyone else because we “**all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**” (Rom.

3:23). Salvation ought to make such a difference in our lives that we will want others to “**be at peace**” (**I Thess. 5:13**) with us and we at “**peace**” with them.

The Bible neither condemns nor approves of slavery. There have been various aspects of slavery throughout history, but the one thing in common is that the slave has always been subject to their master. Not only do we see how Paul dealt with the subject regarding “**Onesimus**” and “**Philemon**,” but he also wrote about how Christian slaves and Christian masters were to treat one another (**Eph. 6:5-9, Col. 3:22**). Also, a word of admonition is given in **Matt. 18:21-35**. No place in Scripture does the Bible tell the church to rule over the state nor does it give the state the right to dictate to the church. In fact, Scripture teaches that the Christian is to be subject to the laws of their land providing those laws do not violate Scripture (**Acts 5:28**). Jesus even taught to “**Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.**” (**Matt. 22:17-21**)

Christ did not come and call His followers to organize a rebellion against evil governments, even like the one in Rome, but to preach that the Suffering Servant (**Isa. 52:13-53:12**) has come to deliver sinners from darkness into His marvelous Kingdom of light. Following His arrest in the garden, Jesus didn't tell His disciples to march with picket signs to protest the unjust treatment of the “**Son of God**” (**Matt. 26:63**). He did not tell them to riot and rebel against the establishment, but to submit to God's Sovereign plan and let Him work it out according to “**his good pleasure**” (**Eph. 1:9, Phil. 2:17**). When the Jews were slaves in Egypt, God delivered them in His time after He raised up Moses as their human leader. The people simply followed God's leading and saw the Almighty do the fighting for them. Even at that, they ended up rebelling against God at Sinai and in the wilderness. How ungrateful they were, just like we often are when we take God for granted and when

citizens are not appreciative of their law enforcement officers, nor employees respectful of their employers.

Nowhere in the New Testament is there a direct word against human slavery; otherwise, the Gospel message would have lost its focus. This is not to say that we don't need to be concerned about the injustices of our society, but the way to change it is by changed lives in soul saving transformation. We're doing the same thing in the church that politicians are doing in the world. We're trying to fix all our problems. In the church we need to forsake politics and stop trying to do the job of the Holy Spirit, but trust the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do in and through us. Yes! God does use people as instruments in His Hand; however, the kind of change needed in our society is not accomplished by legislation, but by the Word of God working within hearts and lives. Christianity focused on preaching the Gospel and trusting the Holy Spirit to change the heart and disposition of people.

What has happened to the church today in relation to the thinking of the apostles? Much, to say the least. From the story found in this particular epistle to Philemon, its apparent that Paul encouraged him to treat his run-away slave, "**Onesimus**," with forgiveness and respect. Here is a slave who had stolen from his master and broken the law of Rome. He had done wrong and Paul did not try to cover for him; although, he loved him as a brother in Christ after his conversion. "**Onesimus**" was still accountable for the sin that he had committed toward his master. Therefore, Paul sent "**Onesimus**" back to "**Philemon**" to make things right. We can't make people love one another, but we can point people to the One who can.

This letter is also a good reminder that the church is not on earth for the purpose of embracing such issues promoted by the woke movement which is out of the pits of Hell. Much can be said about this liberal ideology, but for the sake of space and for those who are not familiar with this subject, I'll make my comments brief. You may ask, "why are you even addressing the subject?" My answer is

“because of the manner in which so many Christians, churches, and denominations are being caught up in it.”

The woke movement appears to have its roots back in the 1940's but reappeared in more recent years promoting issues dealing with social justice, inequality, prejudice, and even immigration. From my perspective, it even rubs shoulders with the critical race theory (CRT) which does nothing more than cause racial divisions rather than solve them. Actually, the woke movement covers such a broad range of topics that it's hard to pinpoint one certain area. It promotes a woke culture that covers the acceptance of everything from LGBTQ, sexual rights, civil rights, and BLM (black lives matter).

God did not establish the church to do the work of government nor did He establish the government to do the work of the church. They are both separate entities and both are ordained of God to carry out a particular designated work. It is God Who ordained the home, government, and the church with all three being unique in their function in the world. I remind you that when Jesus was arrested in the garden on the night before His crucifixion and Peter drew a sword to defend Him, Jesus told him to put it away (**Jh. 18:1-14**). Furthermore, Jesus told Peter that He could call “**more than twelve legions of angels**” (**Matt. 26:51-54**) to defend and rescue Him. This was not God's promised plan for His son because Jesus said, “**But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be done?**” Jesus had already told Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, that “**my kingdom is not of this world**” (**Jh. 18:36-37**).

If you want to know what Jesus thought of separation of church and state, just look at His example. The only way society is going to change is for sinful men and women to have a life changing soul saving encounter with Jesus Christ. For the Christian, the day is yet to come when Jesus will reign as “**King of kings and Lord of lords**” forever (**I Tim. 6:15, Rev. 19:16**). Until then, the church

has no business in accepting and following the pagan and wicked ideologies of this ungodly world.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”
(II Cor. 6:14-18)

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that Christians should not influence the community nor the society in which they live. Quite the contrary. Scripture tells us that Christians should be the “**salt**” and “**light**” (**Matt. 5:13-16**) in our tasteless and dark world of sin. The influence that we have upon others is reflected not only in what we believe and teach, but by the example found in daily living. We must recognize that we may change the laws of our land, but we cannot change human hearts. Only God can do that through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are to live, preach, and demonstrate the supernatural work of God's grace by the way we live. We cannot force anyone into the kingdom of God. Therefore, we need to recognize the line that we are not to cross in trying to do what only God can do and stop trying to play God. It's a full-time job trying to remain obedient in living a surrendered life of obedience to our Lord's commands. The church needs to be the church that God has designed her

to be and the state to be the state that God has designed it to be. May God give us the wisdom to know the difference and not embrace the world's philosophies and ideologies in order to be culturally acceptable.

It's not the job of the church to fix all the social ills of our society. There is no question that in some churches both slaves and slave owners attended the same church. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is what made a difference in how they treated one another. That was no doubt the case in the church at Rome as well as other churches during Paul's day. The main purpose of the church is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ whereby **"faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17)**. We are to oppose the sins of our society and unashamedly tell the fornicators, adulterers, sexual perverts, drunkards, murderers, child abusers, abortionist, rebel rousers, liars, thieves, robbers, and all the like that they need forgiveness in Christ Jesus Who came to die for our sins **(Rom. 2:23, 6:23, I Cor. 6:9-11, Rev. 21:8)**. We are **"all"** sinners in need of a Savior and Christ alone satisfied God's wrath against sin in His Substitutionary death for us on the cross.

When the sinful soul is converted to Christ then people of all different races will realize that spiritual equality in Christ does away with the abuse of people regardless of differences in gender, ethnic origin, or color of their skin **(Gal. 3:25-28)**. It's at this point where today's church must be extremely careful not to forsake our mission and try to promote political agenda like that of the state.

Let the church be the church that God has commissioned her to be for His Glory. Churches who are involved in the civil rights movement and wanting to rewrite the history books to pacify rebel rousers, simply demonstrate how they have fallen into the devil's trap of getting sidetracked from our Great Commission. Such a fall can be diagnosed as being spiritually SICK to the core. They become no more than political pawns who have fallen into the hands of the devil bent toward destruction. Only

the Just Judge of the universe can correct the injustices of this world and there is coming a day when He will!

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

(Rev. 20:11-15)

Letter to the Hebrews

The human writer of the Book of Hebrews is not revealed in Scripture; therefore, it's been speculated as to who the human penman could have been. Many people, including myself, think that most likely it was the apostle Paul. It doesn't really make any difference because we believe it bears the credentials of divine inspiration thus belonging to the Canon of Scripture. The title chosen for this book was because it appears that the primary group addressed were Hebrew Christians rejected by their fellow Jews.

The Book of Hebrews from the title itself lets us know the relationship that Christianity had to Judaism. It was the nation of Israel that God chose through which to send His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was born of a Jewish virgin and grew up in a Jewish home to fulfill the Old Testament promises of a coming Messiah. This letter written to Jewish believers magnifies the superiority of Christ over all things including the Old Testament pictures and portrayals of what it would be like once He came as our Suffering Savior.

One of many that I could point out is the High Priestly role of Christ today which is far superior to that of the high priest in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. That which I want to address concerns the matter of interracial members in the church. Scripture is very clear about Paul being called to take the Gospel to the "**Gentiles**" (**Rom. 11:13**). This means that the majority of people making up the New Testament church were Gentile believers, being called out from all over the world to the saving Grace of Jesus Christ (**Rev. 7:9**). When the New Testament church was being established, God gave Peter a vision that clearly revealed that the Gospel was to extend beyond the reach of the Jews (**Acts 10:1-48**).

That's why the church must not only be evangelical, but missionary minded in taking the message of God's

redeeming Grace to the ends of the earth. That's the Great Commission given to the early church and is to be adopted by Bible believing churches of today. **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19-20).** Furthermore, some of the final words of Christ to His church just prior to His ascension into Heaven were, **“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)**

As I've previously pointed out the dangers of legalism infiltrating into the ranks of the church, it repeatedly raised its ugly head in the various churches of the New Testament. Likewise, so is the case in the letter to the Hebrews. Many of the Jews wanted to bring some of the Old Testament thought back into common practice; although, Christ had come to fulfill the law. That which I want to point out is how converted people can very easily bring some of their pagan thought and practice into the church. God does not want us to be legalist, but neither does He want us to pattern ourselves after pagan culture. Therefore, we must always maintain our guard, stay focused on the Word of God, grow daily in Grace and in the knowledge of God's Word.

I remember talking with an individual who was very active in the church where he and his family attended. In fact, he held various positions in the church and even boasted about butting heads with the pastor. He indicated to me that he saw nothing wrong with lying and when his family got together, they tried to see who could tell the biggest lie. Pride oozed out of the very pores of his skin. I even had a man in one of my pastorates who told me that

we (in the church that I served) needed to do things like the world so we could draw a big crowd. If we're not careful we can fall victim to this kind of mentality in the church. We can bring our old self-life with worldly habits and ways into the church. Remember what I've already said in this book and now I repeat again. There is so much of the world in the church you can hardly tell that the church is even in the world.

Jesus Christ is Superior to anything this world has to offer. He does not provide a mere religion to follow, but a Savior Who saves us from the penalty of sin, makes us a new creation in Christ, and begins a work of transformation in us that He will complete in our resurrection. All of that is true if a person is genuinely "**born again.**" That means, truly regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are not perfect. We are not sinless on this side of Heaven, but when we do sin and fall short of pleasing God, the Holy Spirit will not let us be comfortable in our sin. We have filled our churches today with man-made converts and have adopted the ways of the world in the modern-day church. The average church of today has no more integrity than the dog-eat-dog cut-throat business establishment down the street. We don't need to be doing things like the religious world or commercial institutions. Our marching orders are to come from our Crucified, Risen, and Victorious Lord Who has a plan for His bride for all eternity.

There came a day when the Jews had to break away from many of their old traditions, because that which had pre-figured the coming of Christ was no longer necessary. The long-awaited Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, had come and fulfilled His mission in substitutionary atonement in sacrifice for the sins of His people. Therefore, it was time for the converted Jews to realize this. In so doing, many who professed faith in Christ were facing possible persecution at the time of writing this letter (**Rom. 10:32-39, 12:4**). The Christian walk has never been easy at any given point in history. We don't have any reason to believe

that it will improve before Christ comes again. This letter was written to encourage those who had trusted Christ to stay the course. We also, in the “**body of Christ,**” need to be encouraging one another during these days of opposition and apostasy to keep our eyes on Jesus. To do otherwise is a symptom of being spiritually SICK. If there has ever been a time in recent history when God’s people need one another, it is today.

“Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”
(Heb. 10:23-25)

Chapter 4

Letters to the Seven Churches Of Asia Minor

The inspired human penman of the Book of Revelation was the apostle John. It's best to understand that he merely composed with pen and ink the **“things that he saw”** (Rev. 1:2) in a vision while exiled on the **“isle of Patmos”** (Rev. 1:9). It's believed that he had ministered to all **“seven churches”** of Asia Minor and pastored the church in Ephesus. This is the same John who was called as one of the **“twelve apostles”** (Matt. 10:2-4) at the same time as his brother, James (Mk. 1:19-20). (see my book, *“The Twelve Disciples, Learning Discipleship From The Original Apostles”*) He is accredited to have also written the Gospel that bears his name, along with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John as well as Revelation. It was under the Roman Emperor Domitian that John was sent as a prisoner to Patmos at the age of ninety.

The salutation of John's letter is addressed to **“seven churches”** (Rev. 1:4a) all of which were existing and located in Asia Minor. Today, this area is known as the country of modern-day Turkey. These **“seven churches”** are referred to and are the same as the **“seven candlesticks”** (Rev. 1:20). Other translations call them **“lampstands”** (ESV). Either word simply refers to a light holder. The significance of this teaches that the local church is supposed to be a group of saved believers from which the **“light”** (Matt. 5:16) of God's presence shines.

John's own pastorate appears first on this list of **“seven churches.”** These churches were not the only ones in existence in this area, but they were chosen for a special reason. Even though these **“seven churches”** were in existence at the time of John's writing, the message contained therein is for churches of all time. They describe **“seven”** different types of churches that will exist down

through history. The problems in these “**seven churches**” are some of the same that have been passed down to institutionalized churches in all succeeding generations. As you will be able to see, most of these five churches had similar problems, but each had their own individual unique characteristics.

This means that similarities found in this writing will be found today and until Jesus comes again. We have no idea how long it took John to write these seven letters nor the entire Book of Revelation. It's believed that he spent approximately ten years imprisoned on this island from about 86 AD to 96 AD. With that being said, I want to point out that the KJV has given the title of this Book, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine.” However, the correct title is given by God Himself Who inspired John to do the writing. Therefore, the correct title is found in the opening verse of this Book. It's called “**The Revelation of Jesus Christ.**” It goes on to say “**which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw**” (Rev. 1:1). Other versions have more correctly titled the Book of Revelation as the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The primary purpose of these seven letters is to encourage the church, cause Christians to examine themselves, draw near to Christ, and to be aware of Satanic attack upon the church. Each of the seven letters end with the same closing admonition, “**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**” This in itself tells us that not everyone in a local church is going to be a redeemed sinner. Not everyone is going to be receptive to the Word of God. Christ knows there will be phonies to creep in and play the role of hypocrite. Even among the twelve disciples of Christ, “**Judas**” (Jh. 18:1-5, Jh. 17:12) was not a genuine believer. This doesn't mean that we should not strive to

have a converted membership, but it means that the best we can do, there will be some to play-act their way in because we cannot see the heart of man like our Lord. However, when a phony is discovered, the local body of believers ought to take action and that is where church discipline comes into focus.

Given enough time, such a person will show their true colors. Scripture gives us an example of the four different types of soil upon which the Word of God is sown in **Matt. 13:1-58**. With the passing of time, those who hear the Word of God will reveal if they have truly received it by “**faith**” (**Heb. 11:16**) or if they have only gone through the motions. Most churches cater to easy-believism and will add anyone with breath to their membership. When they show their true colors, so to speak, seldom does a church take disciplinary actions. Herein, is just one of the reasons why the church is in the SICK condition that it is today. Not everyone in the church has a spiritual “**ear**” to “**hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**”

Letter to the Church at Ephesus

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.
(Rev. 2:1-7)

A common declaration that is found in each of these seven letters is the fact that God says, **“I know thy works.”** Our God is Omnipotent and Omniscient, meaning all powerful and all knowing. Nothing nor nobody escapes the knowledge of God. In each of the seven letters, the **“angel”** of the particular **“church”** is addressed first. Back in chapter one, we are introduced to the word **“angel”** which in the Greek means messenger (**Rev. 1:20**). We're not exactly sure who this person was. It could have been a guardian **“angel”** that God had assigned over the church and if so, that could still be the case today. However, that seems unlikely, but not impossible. Therefore: it's most likely that the **“angel”** (messenger) of each individual

“church” refers to the local pastor who was to share the letter with the people. In each letter, an appeal is made to the congregation at the close of the letter by saying, **“he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”** Every one of these seven letters have that in common.

To help us better understand the surroundings of the city in which this church was located, let's take a brief look at what it was like. First of all, we must remember that we as Christians are living in a pagan world that is no friend of God's grace. We're living in a world that is at war with God. One of the most noted attractions of this town was the temple of Diana. It was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Therefore, Ephesus became best known as a place of sensual idolatry. The population of that day is believed to have been something like 250,000 people. It appears that Paul established the city's first New Testament church during his third missionary campaign (**Acts 19**) which just so happened to be one of his greatest ministries. Unfortunately, **“the church of Ephesus”** that was once a mighty godly witness for Christ eventually lost her influence. The name **“Ephesus”** turned out to be very fitting for this particular church because the name itself means to let go or relax and that's exactly what this church did spiritually.

In this letter, Christ reminds them that He is observing and analyzing the spiritual conditions of all the **“seven churches”** which includes **“the church of Ephesus.”** In this church, He finds six things for which to commend them. First, they were commended for their **“works”** and **“labor”** suggesting that they were very involved in Christian ministry and even energetically putting themselves into what they were doing. Secondly, they were commended for their **“patience”** as they endured their persecution and trials. Thirdly, they were commended for being intolerant of **“evil”** men who sought to promote their sinful ways of life. Fourthly, they were commended for their

spiritual discernment as they were able to perceive apostates from true **“apostles.”** Fifthly, they were commended for facing tough times and **“fainted not”** while continuing to be steadfast in their faith. Sixthly, they were commended for hating the **“deeds of the Nicolaitans.”**

“Nicolaitans” is a Greek word meaning to conquer, referring to people who brought ungodly division into the church. They appeared to be a group of troublemakers whom some speculate to have established a priestly order within the church thus placing people under an ecclesiastical system. Although, God does provide a church with leadership, He does not divide believers into classes. Others believe the **“Nicolaitans”** led the church into immorality and sensual temptations. In other words, they perverted the Gospel by replacing liberty with license. Whoever they were and whatever they did, they were false teachers acting like **“wolves”** in **“sheep’s clothing”** (**Matt. 7:15, Acts 20:29**).

On the surface, this church looked like a successful congregation just like multitudes today. Regardless of size, many of today’s small established churches or large bustling churches could very well fit the description of this congregation at **“Ephesus.”** However, we need to learn from this church that what we do for Christ does not count for much if our motive behind what we do is not pleasing to Him.

Following this list of commendations, Christ gives a complaint against them. He said, **“I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”**

Yes, this church was filled with hard workers who were busy as bees. No doubt, like a bunch of churches today that have “programs” galore and activities going all the time. They were busy, busy, busy! BUT there was a problem. There was a lack of **“love”** for the Lord in what

they did. That which they were doing, they were doing for the glory of themselves and not for the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't say they had no **"love"** for Christ, but they didn't **"love"** Him as they had originally. They had abandoned their **"first love"** while allowing other things within the church to distract them from Christ. It doesn't say they lost their salvation, but it appears they lost their blessing. Their **"love"** for Christ had grown cold and was no longer pure and genuine. Herein, we learn that Christ is more concerned about what we do WITH Him rather than what we do FOR Him. Christian **"work"** can never be a substitute for Christian **"love."** In order for our Christian labor to be acceptable to God, it must be a **"labor of love"** (**I Thess. 1:3, Heb. 6:10**). This church at Ephesus has been called a busy backslidden church.

Today, **"the church at Ephesus"** might very easily be identified among those congregations who call themselves sound, conservative, fundamental, evangelical, and Bible believing churches. This early church did not get off track doctrinally, but in her personal fellowship with Christ. In the sight of God, orthodoxy without **"love"** is unacceptable. It appears they took their eyes off the Lord and became preoccupied with themselves in pride. They were more interested in treating the church like a big piece of machinery that they wanted to keep oiled and operating to their satisfaction. Correct doctrine is important, but without genuine **"love"** for the Lord it will never be properly conveyed.

According to Scripture, the main motivation in Christian living must be **"love"** for the Lord Jesus Christ (**Jh. 21:15-17, II Cor. 5:14a**). Apparently, the Ephesian believers were seeking to bring glory to themselves rather than the Lord of Glory. If we're not careful, it's easy to focus attention on the likes and dislikes of people instead of Christ. To become a people-pleaser rather than a God-pleaser is detrimental to a church. Most churches have the mentality of "keep up with the Jones'." In other words, everybody else is doing "such in such" and it seems to be working for them. They

are drawing a crowd and appealing to their audience. They've turned their pulpit into a stage and appeal to the flesh. All sorts of things could fit the description to which I'm referring. If we're not careful, even Bible believing churches can fall into this trap. Bible preaching must be made applicable to our everyday practical living and not the other way around.

When Christ saw the condition of this church, He commanded them to do three things. First, He told them to **"remember"** what it was like when they once truly loved one another (**Eph. 1:15**) and when their work was motivated by **"love"** for Christ. Secondly, they were told to **"repent"** so they could return to their former state of commitment and surrender. Thirdly, they were to **"do"** what they had forgotten to practice in their basic rule of worship or else God was going to **"remove"** their **"candlestick."**

Unless a church wants Christ to have His rightful place in their midst, then it will cease to be a biblical church. The **"candlestick"** that is made reference to in these **"seven churches"** merely describes them as light-holders or lampstands. Christ is the **"light of the world"** (**Jh. 8:12**) and He commands His people to bear witness of His **"light"** (**Mat. 5:14**) by shining through us. If we don't fulfill that purpose, then the church loses its mission and God can remove the **"candlestick"** or in other words, remove a local church from existence. Unfortunately, that is what happened in the Ephesian church and God shut her down. Churches today who are like **"the church at Ephesus"** have one of two choices, revive or die.

First Peter 4:16-19 admonishes us, **"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer**

according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to *him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

The final words in this letter to the Ephesians are given in the form of a promise to anyone who **“overcometh.”** This refers to genuine believers (**I Jh. 5:4-5**). Regardless of what happens to the corporate structure of a local church, true believers are promised eternal access to the **“tree of life” (Rev. 22:2)** in the paradise of God. This passage simply reminds us that not everyone in a local church is necessarily a **“born again”** believer (**Jh. 3:3**).

The implication is that not everyone in a local church will have **“an ear”** to hear what the **“Spirit”** says. At this point, every pastor needs to examine his heart and ask, “What kind of church am I helping to establish?” Also, every Christian ought to analyze himself/herself to see if they are like the majority of the Ephesians. An Ephesian believer is one who was orthodox, but yet without **“love”** for Christ. If we truly and sincerely **“love” (Lk. 10:27)** the Lord our God, then we will want to obey Him without question, reluctance, hesitation, or argument. Remember that regardless of how fundamental and conservative we may be, we are like **“sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal”** if our **“love”** relationship with Christ is not right (**I Cor. 13:1**). To stray away from loving Christ makes us useless to Him and that is dangerous ground upon which to tread.

“And he (Jesus) answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”
(Lk. 10:27)

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have

known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”
(I Jh. 4:15-21)

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.”
(Jh. 15:12-17)

Letter to the Church in Smyrna

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”
(Rev. 2:8-11)

The city of Smyrna was a wealthy seaport and was known for its beauty and splendor during the time of John's writing. However, it was also recognized as the center of Christian persecution in Asia for over 200 years. It's believed that the laws against Christianity were heavily enforced within Smyrna. We also discover from this church as well as other persecutions against Christians that the church appears her purest in times of suffering.

Of all the seven letters the one written to **“the church in Smyrna”** was the shortest. It's interesting that the very name Smyrna characterized the believers found in this city. Smyrna means myrrh which was a particular element that was often associated with death. Believers manifested the significance of that name through their suffering for Christ. Myrrh spoke of a pleasant aroma released from an herb when it was crushed. Scripture tells us that when Jesus died, it was **“Nicodemus”** who **“brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes”** (Jh. 19:38-42) to use in His burial.

There were only two of the seven churches that went without complaint from our Lord and **“the church in Smyrna”** was one of them. The other, we’ll discover to be **“the church in Philadelphia.”** This **“church in Smyrna”** has become known to us as the suffering church or the poor persecuted church. Through the suffering of these believers, we are reminded of the personal suffering of Jesus Christ and the cost of following Him (**Matt. 16:24**). Today, there are some followers of Christ who are suffering and paying the ultimate price with their lives. But, the church in America basically knows nothing about suffering to that extent as of this writing; however, it could very well be on the horizon in the United States.

In this letter, Christ commended the spiritual strength of these believers in three different areas of suffering. First, they were suffering **“tribulation.”** During His earthly ministry, Jesus predicted that the world would hate, persecute, ostracize, and kill Christians (**Jh. 15:18-16:33**). This means that to be a true follower of Christ, one can expect to experience troubles and trials as we live for Him.

Secondly, they were suffering **“poverty.”** For whatever reason, perhaps because of spiritual oppression, these believers lost much of their material possessions including possibly their income. However, despite their poor financial state materially, Christ declared them to be wealthy spiritually. We must remember that the early church was composed of mostly the poorer class of people. This passage exposes those who proclaim the prosperity gospel found in the word of faith movement for the heresy from hell that it truly is. Just remember this when we come to the last of the seven churches and the contrast between **“the church in Smyrna”** and the church in **“Laodicea.”** Health, wealth, and worldly prosperity is no indication in and of itself that one is following the Lord. Christ Himself did not have a place to **“lay his head”** (**Lk. 9:58**) while making his abode in His earthly ministry. Like Christ, we as His followers are not at home in this world, but our home is literally out of this world. Jesus told the believers in

“**Smyrna**” they were “**rich**” in spiritual ways that this world cannot understand.

Thirdly, they were suffering attacks of “**blasphemy**,” or in other words, being slandered by the ungodly religious crowd with false accusations against them. The unbelieving Jews were the instruments of “**Satan**” in opposing the work of God. The biggest opposition to Christianity came from a religious element within the city referred to by God as the “**synagogue of Satan.**” The wording of this causes us to wonder if there were some Jews who were trying to get the congregation to hold onto the Old Testament Law, such as practicing circumcision.

In other words, could there have been an argument as to who the real Jew really was? In other words, could a Gentile become the real Jew in the sight of God through faith in Jesus Christ (**Rom. 2:28-29**)? Paul expounds on this very clearly in the Book of Galatians and also in Romans (**Rom. 9:4-8**). Let’s not forget that God’s chosen people are His redeemed people in both the Old and New Testaments. A Jew is not going to Heaven because he is born a Jew and a Gentile is not going to Hell because he is born a Gentile.

The only way to Heaven is by “**grace ... through faith**” (**Eph. 2:8**) on both sides of the cross. In the Old Testament, people were saved by believing that Christ was coming to do what God promised regarding a sinner’s redemption. In the New Testament we are saved by believing that Christ came and fulfilled the only way of redemption for sinful man. How sad it is for a house of worship to be turned over to the devil’s crowd. Jesus was born a Jew, but yet the Jews for the most part rejected Him (**Jh. 1:11**). A person full of religion, either Jew or Gentile, who does not trust Christ as Lord and Savior is in the “**synagogue of Satan.**”

The same type thing can happen to churches in our day who depart from Divine “**Truth**” (**Jh 8:44**). In the beginning of this book, I referred to such churches and professing Christians as apostate. Most church houses are full of

people who don't know Christ in transforming grace and make life hard for those who do.

As these believers in **“the church in Smyrna”** faced opposition and persecution, two commands were given from the Lord. First, Christ told them not to **“fear”** what they were about to **“suffer”** for His Names sake. God doesn't give us the **“spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind”** (II Tim. 1:7). Scripture teaches that **“fear”** is a tormenting thing and the **“perfect love”** that we know through Christ delivers us from **“fear”** (I Jh. 4:18). Our Lord is not only aware of our trouble, but of the instigator behind those troubles being **“the devil”** (Eph. 6:12). It is human instrumentality that **“the devil”** uses to make life difficult for Christians; therefore, we're not immune from the abuse of an ungodly world, but rather become targets of the world's hostility. In His Sovereignty, God sometimes permits believers to even be **“cast ... into prison.”** The mention of **“ten days”** is most likely a figurative expression, like a metaphor, referring to a limited period of time. In other words, we may have to suffer for a while down here on earth at the hands of wicked men, but it will not be forever. In comparison to eternity, it will seem like a short period of time.

The second command God gave these believers was for them to be **“faithful unto death.”** Jesus Himself set the example in obedience to this command (Phil. 2:8). It's interesting to especially notice the wording in this command. It does not say until death, but **“unto death.”** Christ certainly wants and expects us to be **“faithful”** until the day we die and go Home to be with our Lord. But the mere fact that He says **“unto death”** is referring to the type of death that many saints are going to die. In other words, this is not speaking of a natural death, but a martyr's death. Those who are **“faithful unto death”** are promised **“a crown of life”** which is a special reward for Christians who **“suffer”** martyrdom for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jam. 1:12).

Jesus never deceived the church by making them think that the Christian life was going to be a bed of roses. He warns us right up front, openly, and realistically that it was going to cost us if we truly follow in His footsteps (**Jh. 15:18-20**). Polycarp was one of the early church fathers who had been an overseer in **“the church in Smyrna.”** He refused to acknowledge the Roman emperor as god and was burned alive in 155 AD. Before death he said of Christ, “For 86 years have I served the Lord and He never wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King and Savior?” History records that he was bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body. Christians are encouraged to pay attention and draw strength from spiritual instruction. Although believers can be hurt by the first death (physical death), they will never be hurt by the **“second death” (Rev. 21:8)** which is **“the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone”** describing eternal suffering in Hell.

Not even physical death can separate a child of God from the **“love of God” (Rom. 8:35-39)**. Neither living nor dying for Jesus Christ is easy, but it pays rich eternal dividends. Man may be able to kill the body, but no man nor demon (**Jh. 10:28**) can take the soul of a saint. Remember, a saint is a **“born again” (Jh. 3:3)** believer who has been justified and is being sanctified, meaning set apart for spiritual growth in God’s keeping grace. Those who are born once will die twice, but those who are born twice (born again) will die once in the flesh. For that reason, the **“second death”** will have no harmful effect upon them.

The first death is physical, the **“second death”** is spiritual and refers to the final judgment before a lost soul is cast into eternal Hell. Down through the years, from the early days of the New Testament church until the present, **“Satan” (I Tim. 5:15)** has had his people to make life hard for God’s redeemed saints. Early on, we have heard about Christians being fed to the lions and burned at the stake. There even came a time in history when believers gathered

to worship in caves and catacombs with posted guards. Let me remind you at this point, that the early church didn't meet in magnificent buildings, but often in house-churches. They didn't have the comfort of central heating and air, padded pews, and carpet in a room designed by an architect. However, from the very beginning of the New Testament church there were dedicated Christians who laid down their lives in death rather than forsake their Lord.

For the most part, we're living in a day when the majority of folk in the average church only know of a pie-in-the-sky type of Christianity that cost nothing and is worth nothing. A "**Smyrna**" type of Christian is one who knows how to "**suffer**" for the sake of Jesus Christ and swim upstream against the tide of this wicked world at all cost. If the grace of God was good enough to sustain the suffering "**church in Smyrna**" then it's able to sustain us also. This letter is one of encouragement to believers to stay focused on Christ even when we stand alone in an ungodly world and suffer for it.

Letter to the Church in Pergamos

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*.”

(Rev. 2:12-17)

“The church in Pergamos” is known as a worldly compromising church. It existed in a religious city, but a city not focused on the One and Only true God. Likewise, the church located therein unfortunately took upon itself the same characteristic. The city was a wealthy pagan township known for its many heathen temples. One of the most famous temples was named after a pagan god of medicine called Asclepius. This idol took the form of a serpent. Its symbol was a staff entwined with a serpent which remains a mark of the medical profession to this day. A large health center was located in **“Pergamos”** that drew thousands of patients who indulged in the healing rituals of

their snake god. As you can imagine, much of this so-called medicine was satanic.

Another famous temple in “**Pergamos**” was a place to worship the emperor, Caesar Augustus, which was built there in 29 BC. It was built to memorialize the emperor and worship him as a god. At this point, it would do us well to pause and examine why we do what we do in the buildings of our local churches where we meet. For example, I know many churches like to practice the giving of memorials, such as pews or windows. Usually such gifts will have a small name plate attached to it signifying someone to whom it is given in memory or honor. Wait a minute! Since when does a building that we often refer to as the visible house of God exist to bring attention to mortal human beings? This type of thinking cannot help but remind me of the two times when Jesus cleansed the temple during His earthly life (**Jh. 2:11-12, Matt. 21:17-23**).

In the KJV the word “**Pergamos**” is used, but it’s often spelled and referred to as Pergamum. The name “**Pergamos**” means married or elevated. Anytime the church becomes like the world, she is guilty of spiritual adultery of which Scripture has much to say. The Book of Hosea is a picture of how God dealt with Israel in her unfaithfulness to Him. Our Lord is the “**same yesterday, today, and forever**” (**Heb. 13:8**). His cup of forgiveness, love, grace, and mercy never runs dry for those who repent.

It’s interesting to notice that this letter begins with Christ addressing Himself as “**he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.**” I remind you that Scripture defines the “**sword**” to be no other than the very “**word of God**” (**Eph. 6:17**). The written “**word of God**” reveals to us through the Holy Spirit the Living “**word of God**” (**Jh. 2:1,14**). One of my favorite definitions of Holy Scripture is that it’s God’s Printed Voice. If you want to know what God has to say, read the Bible. We most often communicate with one another by the use of words, either spoken, written, or signed (sign language). God has communicated

with man through the person of Jesus Christ. God's "**word**" is authoritative (**Matt. 7:29**) and powerful (**Heb. 4:12**). It discriminates between the false and the true. It exposes our sin while proclaiming the "**way**" (**Jh. 14:6**) to forgiveness.

This "**word of God**" is said to be "**sharp ... with two edges.**" It's so "**sharp**" that it divides people wherever they are found, in families, nations, and churches into two categories, the lost and the saved (**Matt. 10:34**). Those who believe and trust Christ as revealed in the "**word of God**" (**Rom. 10:17**) will know salvation, but those who disbelieve the teachings of Christ as found in the "**word**" will be condemned to eternal Hell.

I'm spending so much time on this subject because this "**word of God**" is "**quick**" (**Heb. 4:12**) meaning that it is eternally living, not old, outdated, or capable of passing away. Holy Scripture is the verbally inspired, inerrant infallible written "**word of God.**" It ought to be the number ONE textbook in every church thus making it a Bible believing Church.

The picture that Christ paints of His "**word**" represents it as something that must be taken seriously. Herein, lies a number one problem with many congregations today. It's not uncommon for sermons to no longer consist of expository preaching from God's "**word.**" Preachers are in pulpits that no longer believe it to be the supernatural revelation of God. This is a major problem in today's church that leaves it SICK UNTO DEATH. Many are in existence with their doors still open, but the stench of death is all over them as they reject the preaching and practicing of what "thus saith the Lord."

Before finding fault with the "**church in Pergamos,**" Christ commended them for their good "**works.**" We need to remember that at this time in history when John wrote this letter that the city of Pergamos was a morally dark place. It's called "**Satan's seat**" meaning that it was a strong-hold of demonic operation. It's believed that the oldest temple in Asia Minor that was devoted to emperor

worship was located there along with other idolatrous practices which made it one of the worst environments in that era. There are some who think “**Satan’s seat**” to be synonymous with the emperor’s throne in Rome, but one thing is for certain, at present “**Satan**” is not in Hell. He is running rampant upon earth and playing havoc in the visible church. He loves to attack the “**word of God**” and cause people to ignore and reject its mighty Truths.

The day is coming when Satan will be cast into Hell forever, but now he is roaming the earth seeking whom “**he may devour**” (I Pet. 5:8). It does appear that his headquarters at the present time are in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:2), with earthly centers of operation all over the face of the globe. One thing is for certain and that is to get his foot in the door of a local church. In some churches, he shows up every time the doors are open and wipes his feet on their welcome mat. There are other churches that let him know he’s a hated foe and never welcome. Which kind of church do you attend?

Despite the wicked surroundings that the “**church in Pergamos**” found themselves, God commended them for two strong qualities they exhibited. First, there were some believers in this church who did not deny their Christian “**faith**” although they were living in a very difficult place. Secondly, they remained sound in doctrine even if it meant becoming a “**martyr**” like “**Antipas**” whom some have speculated to be the pastor of this church. To me this congregation sounds like a mixed bag or like it was in the case of Israel departing Egypt, “**a mixed multitude**” (Ex. 12:38). In other words, a mixture of saved and lost within the congregation. This is certainly the case with many churches of today.

Unfortunately, Christ issued two complaints against this church. To begin with, they tolerated people within their fellowship who compromised with the world. “**Balaam**” was a false prophet in the Old Testament who got the Israelites to compromise with the Moabites, worship their idols, and intermarry with the heathen (Num. 22-25). In so

doing, they adopted the religious rites and immoral practices of the world (**Num. 31:16**). Apparently, there were some within the church who were trying to weaken the church as “**Balaam**” weakened Israel by getting them to compromise with evil and wink at immorality. It appears where some in the church had yielded to the sexual and social pressures of their society. They did not give a second thought to “**eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication.**” We must remember, that just because everybody else is doing it, doesn’t make it right for Christians. Here is a church that was orthodox in doctrine, but did not practice what she preached. Although, many made a profession of “**faith**” in Christ, they lived in sin.

Does this not paint a picture of many, so-called, conservative churches today who wink at the immoral lifestyles of members within the congregation. Couples living together outside the bounds of marriage, but yet the elders of the church take no action against it? There is a great division taking place in the churches of our land and even dividing denominations over the acceptance of members who practice such things as homosexuality and see nothing wrong with the transgender issue. Talking about SICK, many if not most churches of today are nauseatingly SICK in these aspects alone.

Not only did this church tolerate immorality, but it tolerated those who held to the “**doctrine of the Nicolaitans.**” Back in the Ephesian church, we were first introduced to this group of people who were trying to promote their “**deeds**” (**Rev. 2:6**). Within the “**church in Pergamos,**” their “**deeds**” had become accepted as “**doctrine**” (teaching) that was contrary to Bible Truth.

At this point, let’s not forget that our “**God is love**” (**I Jh. 4:8, 16**), but there are things that He can “**hate**” and the “**doctrine of the Nicolaitans**” is one of them. In fact, Scripture declares that “**the Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth**” (**Ps. 11:5**). Haven’t you heard it said that if a person hears a lie long enough that they will eventually

come to believe it as truth. Don't ever forget that the **"word of God"** is the plumb-line that we must drop beside every experience and teaching. If it doesn't measure up to the **"word of God"** then it must be rejected and not toyed with, not even for a second. Do you not have eyes to see how this has happened within churches down through history until full blown apostasy surfaces?

The solution to this problem was simple and direct. Christ told this church to **"repent or else."** If they failed to discipline wayward members, then God would judge **"them with the sword of"** His **"mouth."** The nature of God's discipline is not indicated in our text; however, it could have been physical death as it was in the case of **"Balaam"** (**Num. 31:8, I Jh. 5:16**). What does **"repent"** mean? It means to change your mind and to turn away. This church needed to change her views about sin and their sinful conditions.

In other words, **"the church in Pergamos"** was to clean up her act **"or else"** God was going to **"fight"** (declare war and do battle) with them. If a congregation refuses to correct erring members, then God promises to deal with the entire assembly. As spiritual leaders of a church, it's our responsibility to please God in what we do even if it makes everybody else angry. God's **"sword"** is able to sever any godless alliances that the church makes with the world in order to preserve a true remnant unto Himself.

There were some true believers in **"the church in Pergamos"** as we've already discovered and to them Christ gave three promises. First **"hidden manna"** (spiritual nourishment) would be given. This **"manna"** reminds us how God provided for the **"children of Israel"** during their wilderness wanderings (**Ex. 16:14-15**). The **"hidden manna"** referred to in our text is **"hidden"** to the lost because they know nothing about spiritual nourishment found only in Christ Who declared Himself to be the **"Bread of Life"** (**Jh. 6:32-35**). Also, this **"hidden manna"** cannot help but remind us of the **"manna"** that was found

in the Ark of the Covenant and preserved in the Holy of Holies (**Ex. 16:33-35, Heb. 9:4**) in the Old Testament Tabernacle.

Secondly, **“a white stone”** signifies a believer’s acquittal in Christ. The **“white stone”** was used in ancient legal courts as a sign of innocence and a black stone was used as a sign of guilt. It represents our complete pardon and justification before God through faith in Christ. If we are washed in the atoning blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, we’ll never have to worry about being blackballed in heaven.

Thirdly, **“a new name”** is given to every believer. Some speculate this to be the name of Christ that is inscribed upon the saints (Christians). Others believe this to be a new individual name given to every saint (Christian). It was common in the New Testament for people to get a new name (**Acts 13:9**) when they trusted Christ at which time, they also received a new nature (**II Cor. 5:17**). There are many things we don’t know about this **“new name”** and will not be known until we are clothed in a glorified body yet to come.

One thing we do know and that is **“the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26)**. Only by the grace of God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit can we be the **“salt”** and **“light” (Matt. 5:13-16)** that God would have us to be in a tasteless and dark world. Only those who have overcome the world through **“faith”** in Jesus Christ (**I Jh. 5:4**) will have an **“ear”** to hear what **“the Spirit saith to the churches.”**

A **“Pergamos”** type of church member is one who lives a very worldly life and has compromised their convictions with the devil. God’s warning to this type of person is one of discipline if they fail to **“repent” (Heb. 12:6)**. That which I want to leave you with as we conclude our study of **“the church in Pergamos”** is that doctrine is important. As you’ve already discovered, I’ve tried to drive this into our thinking repeatedly. Today, it’s not unusual to hear churches of all denominations saying that doctrine doesn’t matter.

That is a lie of the devil. How can you live right if you don't believe right? But, wait a minute. Does that mean you will automatically live right if you believe right? Unless we put our doctrine into shoe leather and live it out in daily conduct, then there will be no testimony to the world of our transformation. I've taught through the epistle of James several times. Each time, I'm reminded of the importance of **"works"** in the Christ life. We're not saved by our **"works"** (**Jam. 1-2**), but we prove our salvation by our **"works."** It's showing the **"fruit of the spirit"** (**Gal. 5:22-26**) in our daily walk with the Lord.

It's apparent there were people in **"the church at Pergamos"** who believed the essential doctrines of salvation by grace through faith which Christ commended. However, there were also others in the church who believed and promoted false doctrine. How and why did this ever happen? The only answer is that it was permitted to exist without taking disciplinary action against those who promoted it.

We have essential doctrines where there can be no compromise, such as the virgin birth, Christ's atonement on the cross for the penalty of our sin, the resurrection, His second coming, and other such major issues of the Christian faith. There are other non-essential doctrines that can be found in the church, such as church government, baptism, etc. where we can maintain fellowship with people who differ with us. In the case of **"the church in Pergamos"** they tolerated error and apparently didn't take action to remove false teachers from the church. Let us learn from their mistake and not be like **"the church in Pergamos"**. Rupert Meldenius said, "In essential things unity, in non-essential things, liberty; in all things, charity."

Apparently, this was a major problem in this church. There were some who held to the essential doctrines of the Christian faith and even died for it, while at the same time others within the church followed the false teaching of **"Balaam"** and the **"Nicolaitans."** When you think about it, one wonders how such a blend could exist in the same

church. However, that blend is found all around us today and it's not pleasing to God. Personally, I think most churches are so numbers hungry, they accept anyone with a warm body. In such a setting, we're reminded of the question posed by Amos, **"Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).**

Many, if not most churches, have a statement of faith of some kind listing beliefs to which they hold. Most are rather shallow and vague and some are more detailed. I strongly suggest that every church have an in-depth doctrinal statement that spells out the essentials of their belief in the Word of God. People are welcome to attend and learn the truths of God's Word in the assembly, but not allowed to join nor participate in the work unless they are in agreement with what the church believes. This is just one way such problems might be avoided or at least make an honest attempt to do so. The more detailed the doctrinal statement the better, but yet short enough not to make it a dictionary.

There are churches existing today made up with a concoction of people who believe in eternal security, those who believe one can lose his/her salvation, and some therein believe that God would never send anyone to Hell who hasn't heard the soul saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is a hodge-podge of beliefs that leads to spiritual disaster. There are even some who debate such things as the Trinity of God and just how far God's Sovereignty goes. Such subjects are needless even to think about in a true church of Jesus Christ that holds fast to the Word of God. It all boils down to **"rightly dividing the Word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).**

Letter to the Church in Thyatira

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

(Rev. 2:18-29)

“The church in Thyatira” received the longest of the seven letters sent in this series. Unfortunately, the pressures of this pagan society had spilled over into this church like it had done in other churches in other cities. Christ wanted them, as well as us, to be reminded that no pressure or power is worth compromising our Christian character. To fully appreciate what was going on in this church, we need to look at what was going on in the city itself.

There was an unusually well-organized system of trade guilds, better known in our day as unions, and its generally believed that it's from this city where the labor unions originated. It was hard for a tradesman to carry on business in this city if he wasn't a member of a trade guild. Membership in the union meant attendance at the guild banquets which in turn led to the problem of eating meat offered to **“idols.”** Also, it meant exposure to sexual permissiveness that has always been common in pagan society. These matters created a real problem of serious compromise for believers in **“Thyatira”** who had to earn a living without violating spiritual principles. All of this was a similar situation that Paul addressed in writing the **8th chapter of First Corinthians.**

It's interesting to notice how Christ identifies Himself as the **“Son of God,”** One **“who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire,”** and One Whose **“feet are like fine brass.”** Although, Christ was virgin conceived in the womb of Mary, He makes it clear that He is the divine **“Son of God”** with **“eyes”** that nothing escapes including that which must be judged. Christ alone possesses the Sovereign right of judgement over His creation. Herein, we see a loving threat to a compromising church. Yes! God is a loving Father to His children, but He's also One before Whom we should tremble when we sin.

We discover in these seven letters that when God condemns the sinful actions of a church, He usually first finds something for which to commend them. This church was doing some things right. They were workers and God's

people need to be doing God's work, but it needs to be done in the right way with the right motive that will honor Him. It's rather perplexing to see in these churches that we are studying, that despite the corruption which existed among the majority, there often appears a minority of true believers who prove their devotion and zeal for the Lord. We refer to such as a remnant of believers. There always has been a **"remnant"** (Rom. 11:5) and there always will be.

"The church in Thyatira" was commended in five areas. First, their good **"works"** for the Lord was recognized. At this point, we must understand that we are not saved by **"works"** (Eph. 2:8-9), but we do give evidence of our salvation by our **"works"** (Jam. 2:14-26). Secondly, they were recognized for their **"charity."** As you know, the KJV word, **"charity"** is love and most likely in this case refers to helping others in need, such as mercy ministries. Thirdly, they rendered **"service"** in a social ministry which ties in to their charitable spirit. Fourthly, there were a few who maintained a genuine **"faith;"** although, remaining in the minority. Fifthly, those who were genuine believers discovered that **"tribulation"** (Rom. 5:3) worketh **"patience."**

God, in His mercy and grace, is quick to commend our diligence, but also because He **"cannot lie"** (Tit. 1:2) and is always truthful (Jh. 14:6), He will not make excuses for our wrongdoing. Therefore, we can expect criticism and chastening from our Lord. Now comes the four areas wherein Christ is displeased with this church.

First, the problem within **"the church in Thyatira"** centered around one **"woman."** Some have speculated that this **"church"** permitted a **"woman"** to assume the position of pastor which is a clear violation of God's Word (I Tim. 2:11-15). We can easily agree that women have always played an important roll in the New Testament church, but Scripture does have limits on who serves as a pastor. Once again, we cannot be positive if this was the case, but we do know that whoever this **"woman"** was,

she was having an ungodly influence upon the assembly and had no business in the position she held. She convinced many within the church that it wasn't all that bad to indulge in pagan pleasures. The word "**seduce**" that we find in this passage refers to a fundamental departure from the Truth of God of which this "**woman**" was guilty of leading the church. The question arises as to why and how she had that kind of persuasion, influence, and leadership. God made it clear that although this "**woman**" claimed to be a "**prophetess**," she wasn't speaking on His behalf. Scripture says that she "**calleth herself**" and it does not say that she was called of God. In all likelihood "**Jezebel**" wasn't her real name, but merely symbolized the strong-willed Old Testament wicked character by that name (**I Kings 18-19,21**).

Let me ask you folks who have been part of a local church for any length of time, if you've ever known a "**Jezebel**" to sink her teeth into the assembly? Believe me when I tell you that I've dealt with a bunch of them. (see my book, "***My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats***") Not only do we find self-appointment women who want to usurp authority in a local church, but men also who are not even qualified to be an usher. This includes, sad to say, pastors in pulpits across America and around the world who do not have the divine call of God upon their lives.

The second area of Christ's complaint concerns how this false "**prophetess**" propagated conformity to worldly morals even to the point of "**fornication**." That which was tolerated in the pew at "**Pergamos**" was endorsed by "**the church in Thyatira**." Some have believed that this "**Jezebel**" encouraged membership and participation in the pagan trade guilds of the city which included advocating immorality and eating food "**sacrificed to idols**." This was most likely done as an expression of their freedom from legalism; however; it was no more than perversion of true Christian freedom in the Lord. Paul had to deal with this rather complicated subject in his writings to

the Corinthian church in the **tenth chapter of First Corinthians.**

The third criticism against this church was aimed at an influential group therein who supported the erroneous teaching of “**Jezebel.**” Christ warned “**them that commit adultery with her**” that they would be judged. One of the first things that an evil person wants to do in a local church is to create a following. What they don’t realize is they are all committing spiritual “**adultery**” in the house of God. Within “**the church in Thyatira**” the spiritual fiber deteriorated greatly as it submitted to the self-proclaimed authority of this vile and wicked “**woman.**” It happens every time this scenario plays out. Therefore, biblical Truth must be brought against the teachings of Satanic error whether it be doctrinal, moral, or whatever else. Not only do we see physical immorality taking place in this church, but spiritual immorality. Physical adultery is bad enough, but spiritual adultery against God is worse.

Fourthly, the next charge against this church was how their type of behavior and teaching produced a generation of false believers classified as “**her children.**” Yes, the spiritual life of a church is reflected in “**her children.**” Just look at the kind of “**children**” who come from a local church. The type of people who comprise a congregation will tell you much about the type of church it really is. Are people in the visible local church where you attend God-lovers or Sin-lovers?

In grace, God gave this wicked church-going crowd an opportunity to “**repent of their deeds.**” Refusal to “**repent**” would mean “**tribulation**” and “**death**” referring to torment in the “**second death**” (**Rev. 20:14**). “**Space to repent**” indicates how longsuffering God is and it doesn’t imply His approval of our sins in the withholding of His judgment. Just because God doesn’t strike us dead the very moment when we commit a vile sin doesn’t mean He approves and tolerates it. Our God is so patient and long-suffering with us that He will give us “**space (time) to**

repent” and if we don’t respond favorably then His judgment is inevitable.

As is the case in some churches of today, God had a faithful remnant in the “**Thyatira ... church.**” When it says “**unto the rest in Thyatira**” it refers to the godly believing remnant who did not follow the corruption of this church. Those who resisted the influence of this Satanic “**doctrine**” and kept themselves pure in Christ were charged to “**hold fast**” which implies faithfulness, steadfastness, determination, and integrity. “**Till I come**” most likely refers to the execution of judgment upon the ungodly when Christ returns in His second coming. Since there appeared to be no hope this church would “**repent,**” then the only thing the godly had to look forward to is the coming of the Lord Jesus. At such a time, believers will enjoy all the privileges provided in Christ. WHAT A DAY THAT WILL BE!

Even though there was a remnant in this church, the question remains, how could they allow this “**woman**” to gain such power and authority? Don’t forget that it’s been said, “evil will triumph when good men do nothing.” The few genuine believers found in “**Thyatira**” loved the Lord, but most of them refused to take a necessary stand for Christ. My, my, my have not I observed that scene play out time and time again in churches all over the place.

I witnessed it more than once in my pastorates. It seems like the devil’s crowd has all the brass and God’s people sit there like a bunch of weaklings and watch evil abound. I’ve found the average professing Christian to be a wimp when it comes to taking a stand for Christ. Gutless and spineless are two words that well describe most Christians when it comes to doing battle with the devil’s crowd within a church. “**The church in Thyatira**” was certainly a divided church, just like many churches of today. Most churches don’t consider doctrine important, but biblical doctrinal belief is crucial for both faith and practice if we are to please the Lord our God.

In closing his remarks to **“the church in Thyatira,”** John followed a similar pattern as before by giving a promise, **“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”**

Let this promise be a reminder to every believer that this life is just a preparation period for the life to come. As far as our future with Christ is concerned, the BEST IS YET TO COME! God has given eternal promises to all the overcomers (**I Jh. 5:3-4**) who have been washed in the blood of Calvary’s Lamb. Actually, we are not the overcomers, but it’s Christ Who is the real Overcomer and if our **“faith”** is in Him then we know what it’s like to be one that **“overcometh.”**

We need to keep in mind that all the promises given to the seven churches were given only to the true redeemed children of God, not just mere church members. Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, we’ll not have **“ears”** to **“hear”** what He says to the **“churches.”** While reading this book, are you **“getting”** what is being said or is it **“water off a duck’s back”** and like a **“ball bouncing off a wall?”** God’s promises involve His ruling authority in His spiritual Kingdom composed of His redeemed children and Christ, the **“morning star.”** If the local church where you attend and belong is not witnessing the shining forth of the **“morning star,”** then you’re in the wrong place.

A **“Thyatira”** type of church member can be described as one who is busily engaged in the social concerns of the church as well as in social outreach, but overlooks the spiritual condition of a man’s soul. They will have compromised convictions as they straddle the fence between the things of God and the things of the world.

There is definitely a place in the church for mercy ministry, but it must never take the pace of our spiritual priority in telling the lost of salvation in Christ alone. Once an individual Christian or a church collectively compromises their spiritual principles with the world, they lose their testimony for Christ and will be judged accordingly. May God help us not to be a compromising people, but people who are willing to **“hold fast”** to the Word of Truth.

Overall, a Thyatira type of church member would be one known for tolerating evil in the church. They will even explore **“the depths of Satan”** without giving any regard for the Holy character of God. In the early days of the New Testament church, Gnosticism became a major problem within local congregations. It was a collection of religious thought that emphasized personal knowledge over the orthodox teachings of Christianity. It was not one single system of thought, but was composed of a wide variety of unbiblical ideas that majored on experience rather than faith. It simply consisted of doctrine that was totally contrary to Holy Scripture and Satanic in origin.

Today, Agnosticism is recognized as a view that the existence of God, of the divine or the supernatural, is unknown or unknowable. This is nothing more than a branch off of Gnosticism with both remaining today in one form or another and reflected in false teaching. It's simply one of Satan's many falsehoods that opposes divine Truth.

Most likely you will not find self-proclaimed agnostics in a local church. However, worse than that, you will find people in the church who act like Gnostics by exalting themselves as self-proclaimed spiritual authorities, relying on experience instead of simple faith, thus taking on some form of Gnosticism. This is indication of a SICK church. As you can tell, Satanic attack against the people of God has been going on since the beginning. It will not end until God's program for time is fulfilled and Christ comes again. Lord Jesus, **“COME QUICKLY” (Rev. 22:20)**.

Letter to the Church in Sardis

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
(Rev. 3:1-6)

It's sad to say, but **“the church in Sardis”** is known as the dead deceiving church. Who wants to be a member of a church like that? Surprisingly enough, there are churches on every street corner filled with people who comprise that description. It had grown cold and indifferent to the things of God. **“The church in Sardis”** is one of the two **“seven churches”** that received NO COMPLIMENT from the Lord. The second of those churches was **“Laodicea”** which is the last of the **“seven”** that we'll study. Whatever the form was, Scripture says that it had **“a form of godliness”** but denied **“the power thereof” (II Tim. 3:5)**. Many churches today have a pretense of being a church which reminds us of **“the church in Sardis.”** If you think that Jesus never lowers the boom in being critical towards a church, then

pay close attention to this stinging rebuke given to **“the church in Sardis.”**

It had a reputation that they didn't live up to and became what I'll call a “has-been church.” It probably had a great name in the past, but no longer carried on a vital worthwhile ministry for Christ. A church is always in danger when it worships its past and becomes concerned with tradition more than biblical practice. Today, there are churches and individuals who have a reputation of being alive, but in the sight of God they are without real genuine spiritual life. I've seen numerous churches that want to live off their past accomplishments, but eventually failed to exist because those accomplishment were not of the Lord. Just because a congregation has a big building, large staff, and sizeable funds in the bank doesn't prove anything spiritually in and off itself.

Christ describes Himself to this church in two distinct ways. First, He calls attention to Himself as possessing the **“seven spirits of God” (Rev. 1:7)** which we believe refers to the completeness of the Holy Spirit. This seven-fold depiction of the Holy Spirit is reminding us that the only One Who can completely equip a Christian for their assigned task is the Holy Spirit. We cannot do the work of the ministry in our own strength without it becoming a total failure. The sooner we learn this the better! If you want to see a church that is good for nothing, then look at a church that is built upon the ingenuity of mortal people using worldly methods and human reasoning.

Secondly, we need to notice that Christ claims ownership of the **“seven stars.”** I remind you that **Rev. 1:20** identifies them to be **“the angles,”** meaning messengers or most likely the pastors. This is a profound statement that God considers His servants as belonging to Him. There is no human hierarchy over God's ministers because those who truly belong to Him are called by Him, empowered by Him; therefore, accountable to Him. By emphasizing the empowerment of the **“Spirit”** and the possession of His servant, Christ is declaring how His work

is to be accomplished on earth. Far too often we forget that **“church”** work (**I Tim. 3:1**) is God’s **“work”** and what we do, must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is when prayer plays such a vital role in the life of a church. Apart from God’s anointing power, we’ll not know how to function in the energy of the **“Spirit.”**

Having no real word of commendation, Christ registered three complaints against **“the church in Sardis.”** First, they had a hypocritical reputation. Outwardly, this church appeared to impress people with signs of religious vitality, but inwardly they were **“dead”** and lifeless of genuine godly spirituality. From what is said in this passage, we can quickly come to the conclusion that appearances can be deceiving. It’s nothing unusual to attend a church service today and see few if any Bibles in the hands of the congregants, not even people using their electronic devices to retrieve a copy of God’s Word. If you do see a Bible in such churches, it only appears cosmetically or superficially. We need to do more than believe and preach the Word of God, we must practice the Word of God in our daily living. The Word of God is a believer’s spiritual food for his/her soul. Without it we’ll spiritually wither away and have no strength to withstand satanic attack. One of the worst indictments against a church is for it to be one in **“name”** only.

The second complaint Christ levied against this church is that it was deteriorating. He put it this way, they were **“ready to die.”** That’s like saying they were on their last leg or about to take their last breath. How many churches do you know like that today? In the city where I live, numerous churches that were once some of the largest in town are now out of existence and more are being added to that list every year. Such a church is like a patient with a serious illness and the only way it can be restored to good health is a return to the Word of God. The great evangelist from by-gone days, Vance Havner, said that many churches are like an ailing lung with only a few cells doing all the breathing. Multitudes of churches remind me of a

little boy who saw a chicken flopping around with his head cut off and he remarked, “look at that chicken, he’s dead and don’t know it.”

Thirdly, it goes without saying that their **“works”** in this church were not **“perfect.”** It doesn’t say they had no **“works”** but they were **“not ... perfect before God.”** Without doubt what this means is that they were busy playing church with their programs and self-interest groups, but their **“works”** were selfishly motivated. Once again, self-centered and not God-centered. What does that sound like to you? It reminds me of the idolatry that we read about time and again in the pages of the Old Testament and how the Israelites kept falling into that pit. Samuel told Saul when he had disobeyed the command of God that **“to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (I Sam. 15:22)**. Attending church service is a good thing but only if we are yielded to God, seeking His will, and under sound teaching of the Word of God.

Intertwined in these complaints there are found five commands and a warning. The only way that this church could spiritually recover was to **“be watchful ... strengthen the things which remain ... remember ... hold fast ... and repent.”** Unless believers yield themselves in total obedience, they will fall prey to Satanic temptation. There is actually no such thing as partial obedience. Either a Christian is obedient or disobedient to the commands of God. We must constantly keep up our guard and build upon the spiritual foundation laid for us in the Holy Scriptures.

God’s warning to **“the church in Sardis”** implies His Sovereignty over it and that He could **“come upon”** them in judgment **“as a thief”** at an unexpectant time. We are to **“watch”** for our Lord’s return **(I Thess. 5:2, II Pet. 3:10)**, but live in such a way not to be punished, but **“caught up” (I Thess. 4:17)** to meet Him **“in the air.”** The city of Sardis became overly confident and as a result the watchmen went to sleep thus allowing the enemy to overtake it. Unfortunately, like is so often the case, this church followed

the basic characteristics of the city in which it existed. Anyone can make ready for a fixed hour, but believers must always be ready for an unexpected **“hour”** because it’s at such an **“hour”** when a **“thief”** shows up.

Three promises are given to the **“few”** genuine believers found in this church. First, the **“white”** raiment that clothes a true Christian speaks of the positional garment of imputed righteousness. The only way our sinful **“garments”** can be made **“white”** is in the **“blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14)**. This robe is the **“wedding garment” (Matt. 22:11-14)** that gives the believer’s access to the **“marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7-9)**. Not everyone with their **“name”** written on the role of an institutionalized church is one who **“overcometh.”** In **“the church in Sardis”** the Bible tells us there were only a **“few”** who had been truly converted to Christ. The **“few”** spoken of in this church were a believing remnant who were **“clothed in white raiment.”** As we look at this truth, we need to keep in mind that even in Old Testament Israel, it was only a remnant and not the corporate national body who were true followers of the Almighty God and looked for the coming Messiah.

The second promise that I want to point out is that the **“name”** of the overcomer would never be blotted **“out of the book of life.”** This statement is a promise not a threat simply because God promises all believers eternal security. All saints have a divine guarantee that they will never **“perish” (Jh.3:16)** and that nothing can separate us from the love of God **(Jh. 8:37-39)**. There are probably many books where God keeps His records, but the most important is the **“Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 13:8, 17:8, 20:12,15, 21:27)**. Those who do not have their **“name”** in this **“book of life”** will be cast into eternal **“Hell” (Rev. 20:15)**. A person can have his **“name”** on hundreds of different church roles, but unless his **“name”** is recorded in the **“book of life”** he’ll never get to heaven. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves if we know for certain that our **“name”** is written in the **“book of life.”** That can only be

done if we have been transformed by the power of God's grace, granted faith to believe, and repentance to turn from our sin to the Savior.

The third promise we find is that Christ will **"confess"** the **"name"** of every believer **"before"** the **"Father ... and his angels."** Those who are called by God to **"confess"** Christ, God will not refuse to **"confess"** in heaven (**Matt. 10:32**). This idea of confession implies recognition of Christ as personal Lord and Savior. If there is salvation from the penalty of sin, then it must be Lordship salvation. One cannot have Christ as Savior without knowing Him as Lord of life (**Acts 16:31**).

A Sardis type of church member is a person who makes a profession, goes through all the ceremonial, ritualistic, and traditional motions of worship, but remains spiritually lifeless and **"dead."** In other words, having a reputation of being a Christian, but falling short of having possession of a changed transformed life with a new nature. There are vast numbers of people in institutionalized local churches today who fit this description. Such people claim to know Christ by placing their trust in having walked a church aisle, responded to an invitation or altar call, prayed a prayer, said yes to a repeated prayer, joined a church, been baptized or sprinkled, or some other type of human response. As was the case in **"the church in Sardis"** there are very **"few"** who do such things that are really sincere about personally trusting, knowing, and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Genuine faith will cause a believer to bear spiritual fruit as evidence of a changed life (**Gal. 5:22-26**).

This church reminds us of those in the days of Isaiah when **"the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:"** (**Isa. 29:13**). During the time of Christ upon earth, He said to the Pharisees, **"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited**

sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Matt. 23:27-28)

If you find yourself in a “**dead**” church, what are you going to do about it? Most people will say that they’ve always been a member of this particular church and they’re just going to stay put. If you’re a genuine Christian, how can you be satisfied in such an environment? That’s like living in a funeral home surrounding yourself with corpses day after day or even worse living in a mausoleum. To be satisfied living in a morgue sounds rather SICK, doesn’t it?

If there is a spark of spiritual life left in your soul, then I suggest that you seek the Lord’s will concerning finding a local assembly (**Heb. 10:25**) that is preaching, without apology, the Word of God. Follow the admonition given in the second epistle of Peter, “**beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” (II Pet. 3:17-18).**

Letter to the Church in Philadelphia

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
(Rev. 3:7-13)

The city of Philadelphia was a very vital city in that day and the name itself is especially significant because it simply means brotherly love. **“The church in Philadelphia”** is known as a favored, faithful, loving church. It was the type of church to which you would like to belong. This was one of two churches out of the **“seven” (Rev. 1:11)** that received NO COMPLAINT from the Lord. We can conclude that this was a church of **“born again” (1 Pet. 1:23)** individuals with a desire to grow in the **“love of**

God” (I Jh. 5:3) and prevailed in fellowship with God and one another (**Jh. 13:34**). Because of her great missionary outreach, she is often called **“the church”** of the **“open door.”** In these early years, she remained true to the **“word”** of God and represents churches world-wide (regardless of their denominational labels) who are faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ gave a four-fold description of Himself. First, Christ declared Himself to be **“holy.”** He is the personified standard of moral excellence. At the time of His conception, Mary was informed of His holiness (**Lk. 1:35**). The word **“holy”** simply means set apart from all that is evil. If we are to walk in fellowship with Christ, we too must be set apart from the world by the Holy Spirit (**Lev. 20:7, Heb. 12:14, I Pet. 1:15-16**). In the case of Christ, He was pure, perfect, and sinless (**II Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15, I Pet. 2:22**).

Secondly, Christ declared Himself to be **“true.”** He is the very embodiment of **“truth” (Jh. 14:6)**. Thus being **“true”** in all of His actions and character. Christ is not like the gods of the world who only exists in the minds of the worshippers. Our God is real, genuine, and alive! Although death claimed Him, the grave could not hold Him. There is no double standard with the One true and Living God who proved Himself in His glorious resurrection from the grave. He is fully **“true”** in all that He says and does. He cannot lie nor is He capable of deception. If we expect to have communion with, He Who is **“true,”** then we must love the **“Truth”** and walk in the **“Truth” (I Jh. 5:20)**.

Thirdly, Christ declared Himself to possess the **“key of David.”** Our Lord is the divine incarnation of the Godhead. Because God became Man through the **“house and lineage of David” (Lk. 2:4)**, He is the only One Who can grant admission into the spiritual treasures of His eternal Kingdom (**Lk. 1:32-33**). In other words, He alone has the Sovereign right of authority as to who enters His **“kingdom.”** It was predicted from the Old Testament that He would be the possessor of this **“key” (Isa. 22:22)**.

Jesus said, **“my kingdom is not of this world” (Jh. 18:36)**. His **“kingdom”** is a spiritual kingdom that He came to fulfill by being born of Jewish lineage as prophecy declared. His virgin birth did not change the fact that He was born unto earthly parents as **“the Son of man” (Jh. 12:23)** who were commissioned to raise the **“Son of God” (Matt. 14:33)**.

Fourthly, Christ declared Himself to be the One Who **“openeth ... and shutteth”** doors. This is a beautiful declaration of His Majestic Sovereign control of all human happenings even as to those who enter His **“kingdom.”** It is the power of God alone that opens and closes the **“door” of “faith” (Eph. 2:8-9)** to the peoples of the earth **(Col. 4:3)**. Only God opens and closes the **“door”** of evangelical opportunity. Therefore, it is important for us to take advantage of the open doors of service and evangelism because we know not how long such doors will remain open.

As believers, we need to always be searching for God’s will in our lives so that we can discern between the open and closed doors. According to His own perfect timing and plans, Christ goes before His servants, opening and closing doors of opportunity. Please notice in this passage, that **“man”** cannot shut that which God opens. He is Sovereign. Man is not. The mission field of the world is not a matter of human power and ingenuity. The conversion of lost sinners is in the hands of God and in the Hands of God alone **(Jam. 1:18)**.

Having NO COMPLAINT against this church, Christ recognized their obedience and faithfulness unto Him. The Lord had given this church **“an open door”** of witness that **“no man can shut.”** It must have been a relatively small congregation of **“little strength”** numerically and humanly speaking. In other words, in the eyes of the world, they were small and meaningless, but in the eyes of God they were most important and significant. They remained true to the **“word”** and had **“not denied”** the **“name”** of Jesus. They might have been feeble, but they were faithful. Being

a genuine follower of Christ involves more than a mere profession of faith. Believing the **“word”** is good, but in order to please the Lord it must be **“kept.”** Keeping the **“word”** implies obedience to the revealed will of God. What this church was able to accomplish was due to the direct working of the Holy Spirit in her midst.

Apparently, these believers experienced opposition from the **“synagogue of Satan”** just like the **“church in Smyrna” (Rev. 2:9)**. We can rest assured that whenever God’s Truth is believed and practiced, the Devil will always stir up opposition. Those in the **“synagogue of Satan”** were a religious bunch of false professors who opposed the ministry of the **“word.”** It’s believed that many of them were **“Jews”** who tried to turn Christianity into a Jewish Sect by teaching that salvation was impossible apart from law keeping either from the Old Testament or self-imposed human regulations. In the case with the **“church in Philadelphia”** they didn’t cave in to this Satanic pressure, but withstood it and remained loyal to their God. As a result, the Lord promised that He would magnify Himself before their adversaries and that someday they would have to acknowledge Jesus Christ. If this acknowledgement doesn’t take place in this life, then it will occur in eternity **(Phil. 2:9-11)**.

A unique guarantee was given to these believers because of their faithful obedience to the **“word”** of God. They were promised total deliverance from the **“hour of temptation”** which was no doubt referring to the promise of victory when their faith was tried. Christ has assured His church that He will come again to deliver her **“from the wrath to come” (I Thess. 1:10)** which will ultimately be after death.

Until this life is over, Christ charges the church to **“hold fast”** and to anticipate the return of the Lord. When He says **“quickly”** it’s not necessarily speaking of an immediate return, but when He comes it will be suddenly. We need to expect His return any day, but realize that it will come at His appointed time **(Matt. 25:13)**. A real

sincere expectation of Christ's return will change the behavior of a believer's life for the better. Some if not most local churches think their main duty is to build an empire, carry out programs, grow numbers, and speak out on the social justice agenda. God tells us that our main duty is to **"hold ... fast"** defending the Truth of God's **"word"** until He comes again. The **"crown"** spoken of in this text refers to the crown of righteousness that will be given to those who live morally pure lives in the light of Christ's imminent coming (**II Tim. 4:8**). Scripture says **"no man"** can take away one's salvation (**Jh. 10:28-29**), but it is possible for unfaithful Christians to lose their rewards (**I Cor. 3:11-15**) due to disobedience.

Three promises are given to those who anxiously await Christ's return. First, the believer will be made a permanent **"pillar in the temple of ... God."** Pillars in pagan temples collapsed when earthquakes struck and the city of **"Philadelphia"** was earthquake prone. However, believers in Jesus Christ have an eternal stability that cannot be shaken by this world and that is what this **"pillar"** represents. The **"body of Christ"** (**I Cor. 12:27**) is the spiritual **"temple"** (**I Cor. 6:19**) made of **"lively stones"** (**I Pet. 2:5**) with Christ being the **"chief corner stone"** (**Eph. 2:20, I Pet. 2:6**). This is not talking about an earthly physical **"temple,"** but a spiritual **"temple"** that is eternal.

The second promise is that the believer will have eternal fellowship with God where **"he shall go no more out."** As long as we're in the flesh our fellowship with Christ can often be hindered. However, there is coming a day when we'll lay aside our body of flesh and our fellowship with Christ will never be interrupted again.

Thirdly, the believer will have inscribed upon him three names, being **"the name of my God ... the name of the city of my God ... my new name."** The purpose of this triple marking shows eternal identification with Christ and God's divine ownership over His bride. It represents a believer's security, fellowship, and intimacy with Christ. We've already seen from the **"church in Pergamos"** that

God has promised us a **“new name” (Rev. 2:17)**, but now we learn that it will be trifold in nature. When God writes His **“name”** upon us, then all creation will know that we are His and He is ours.

A **“Philadelphia”** type believer is one who is willing to suffer opposition and remain faithful to the **“word”** of God as he longs for the return of His blessed Lord. Unless an individual has a personal relationship with Christ, then a personal relationship with a local church will be in vain. God has never told His church to see how big she could be, but He does expect her to be faithful and obedient to His **“word.”**

Letter to the Church of the Laodiceans

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
(Rev. 3:14-22)

As we begin looking at this particular letter, it would help us to note something about the city of “**Laodicea**” (**Rev. 1:11**). It was dominated by a strong spirit of pride being known as a significant banking, trading, and manufacturing center, especially for the manufacture of wool. It was a place noted for its great wealth and commerce existing in a very affluent society. A medical school was located in this city that was known for its development of a salve for the eyes. The city water supply came from a hot mineral spring

some six miles outside of the town in Hierapolis. By the time the water reached “**Laodicea**” it had cooled down to air temperature and was “**lukewarm.**” Spiritually, the same thing happened to the church in this city. The professing believers had adapted to their materialistic culture and worldly environment as they became like their surroundings. Instead of the church influencing the city for the Lord, the city left its mark on the church.

Of all the “**seven churches**” (**Rev. 1:4**), the “**church of the Laodiceans**” reflected the physical and cultural influence of its city more than any of the others. That’s not to say none of the other churches possessed some characteristics of the city where they were located. But, the “**church of the Laodiceans**” did so more than the rest. Even the manner in which this letter was addressed tells us something about this church as translated in both the KJV and NKJV using the word “**of ... the Laodiceans.**” Other translations such as the ESV follow the same pattern as the other six letters using the word “**in ... Laodicea.**”

Before proceeding any further, let me make it perfectly clear my desire is to be true to the Greek rendering of this text. Therefore, I conclude that either the use of the word “**in**” or “**of**” is acceptable with “**in**” being preferable. However, I also believe the point I’m about to make is correct regarding the “**Laodiceans.**”

If you’ll notice all the other six letters were written to the church “**in**” a particular city or region. When it comes to this last letter on our list, it’s addressed to the church “**of the Laodiceans**” (KJV). It was a church “**of**” the people and not “**of**” Christ. It was THEIR church. It belonged to them and not to Christ. It was a church that had truly become “**conformed to this world**” (**Rom. 12:2**). Have any of you pastors ever pastored a church like that? Well, I have and they made it perfectly clear to me whose church it was. (see my book, “***My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God’s Sheep And Herding Goats***”) I ended up getting fired as the pastor because they bowed their knee to the liberal trends of the denomination rather than King Jesus.

They chose to pay homage to their human founders who laid the first bricks for their building rather than to Christ Who **“gave himself” (Eph. 5:25)** and spilled His **“blood” (Heb. 9:22)** on the cross for His church. Scripture teaches that Christ not only shed blood for His church, but is the very **“foundation” (I Cor. 3:11)** of it.

In this letter, Christ identified Himself in three ways. First, He calls Himself the **“Amen.”** This is the only time in Scripture where **“Amen”** is used as a proper name and it’s given to Jesus Christ. The word **“Amen”** merely means “true” or “so be it.” In other words, whatever Jesus says is true, His promises can be trusted, and His judgments will come to pass. All of God’s promises are fulfilled in Christ (**II Cor. 1:20**) and are recorded in His divinely inspired, inerrant, infallible, and plenary written Word (**II Tim. 3:16**). It was A.W. Pink that said, “Surrender the dogma of verbal inspiration and you are left like a rudderless ship on a stormy sea at the mercy of every wind that blows. Deny that the Bible is, without qualifications, the very Word of God, and you are left without any ultimate standard of measurement and without any supreme authority.”

Holy Scripture ought to be the only textbook of the church. That’s not saying Bible study material cannot be helpful nor that commentaries ought not be studied. God gave **“pastor-teachers” (Eph. 4:11)** of the Word to help us understand the Scriptures. But, when it comes to the declaration of Truth, it is the Bible that must be preached and not the words of mortal men. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. The best way to learn the Word of God is Verse by Verse and Book by Book. Therefore, when looking for a church home, the first thing you should be searching for is a pastor who will be an expositor of Holy Scripture. That way, you are most likely to sit in the congregation saying **“Amen.”**

Secondly, Christ calls Himself **“the faithful and true witness.”** Being the very incarnation of **“Truth” (Jh. 14:6)**, Christ can do nothing less than bare **“witness”** and speak that which is **“true.”** We can rest in full assurance that our

“God ... cannot lie” (Titus 1:2) and is completely trustworthy in all that He says and does. Therefore, what He was about to say to this particular church wasn’t going to be pleasant, but it was **“true.”** As I write this book, in no way whatsoever do I want to say anything condescending against the church of the Living God. When I come across things that sound negative, I’m reminded of how God inspired human writers, such as Paul and John, to say things that did not sound pleasant. Then, I remember times when I had to say things to our children they didn’t want to hear, but was for their benefit. The Word of God is full of such scenarios. We’ve already discovered numerous occasions when the Lord did this in the previous passages and we’re about to learn some hard things in this final letter.

Thirdly, Christ calls Himself **“the beginning of the creation of God.”** This does not mean that Christ was created simply because He is the Creator (**Gen. 1:1, Jh. 1:1**). He never had a **“beginning”** because as God He always existed in the Trinity as the Three in One (**Gen. 1:26a**). God is one in Essence, but three in Person, **“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19-20, II Cor. 13:14, Eph. 4:4-6, I Pet. 1:2)**. This identification tag in our text declares Christ to be the Sovereign eternal **“God”** of **“creation”** Who is not only the Originator, but Ruler of all things, including His church (**Col. 1:15-18**). This is simply a declaration that Christ is the Creator. Not only is He the Head of Creation, but He is the Head of the New Creation (**II Cor. 5:17**).

Along with the **“church in Sardis,”** this church at **“Laodicea”** receives no word of commendation. Instead, there were two major complaints issued by our Lord through the inspired hand of the apostle John. The first complaint was that the Laodicean church was **“lukewarm.”** Like the city’s water supply, this church adjusted to her surroundings and made no outstanding impact on their community for the glory of God.

Spiritually speaking, the same **“lukewarm”** water that was found in the city was also found in the church and God could not tolerate it. They were neither **“hot”** nor **“cold”** for the Lord Almighty. They had no zeal for Christ, but neither did they denounce Him with their mouth. A **“lukewarm”** person is one who adjusts his or her lifestyle to the environment in which they live. This makes us think of a chameleon that changes its colors. There are a lot of professing Christians just like that. According to Webster, **“lukewarm”** means tepid which refers in this case to an absence of enthusiasm or conviction. Some have referred to this **“lukewarm”** church as being moderate. In our day, people want to attend church moderately, pray moderately, give moderately, sin moderately, and refuse to be sold out for Christ. It's very apparent that they did not acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives. At this point, we must stand firm on Lordship Salvation. It's more than believing facts about the Bible or doing good works. Christ is either **“Lord”** of one's life or He's not **“Lord”** at all (**Acts 16:31**).

There is no doubt that **“Laodicea”** was a moderate church that took the middle of the road position of worldly compromise. There's never been a time in my lifespan when I've found so many within the local institutionalized church who wanted to remain neutral. Neutralism is wanting to bend over backwards to avoid issues and keep everybody happy.

This type of open-mindedness and broad-mindedness pleases people, but it disgusts our Lord. Fence straddling compromisers are nauseating to God. As a result of their **“lukewarm”** spiritual condition, Christ declared they made Him so SICK that He would **“spue”** them **“out of”** His **“mouth”** as translated in the KJV. The ESV says **“spit”** and the NKJV says **“vomit”** them **“out of”** His **“mouth.”** This has nothing to do with the loss of salvation, but the exposure of their true lost spiritual condition and how such hypocrisy is nauseating to Christ. There is coming a day

when Christ will “**vomit**” false professors of Christianity and false churches out of His “**mouth.**”

Christ’s second complaint against this church had to do with their spiritual deception. I call your attention between the difference in the words, “**sayest**” and “**knowest.**” Just because they professed to be in good standing with God didn’t mean they actually were. Their pride had got the best of them as we see them saying they “**have need of nothing.**” From their actions, it indicated they didn’t even recognize their need of God. These people saw themselves as affluent, self-sufficient, and religious, but in the eyes of God they were spiritually bankrupt. Financial wealth is not necessarily a mark of being right with God. Today, such things as the prosperity gospel, which is straight out of the pits of Hell, is being preached throughout Christendom and is deceiving many.

There are churches today that have large bank balances and think they are in good shape, but spiritually they are paupers in the sight of God. Churches need to stop comparing themselves with other churches and compare themselves with the perfect standard of God. A large membership, prominent people, huge attendance, elaborate buildings, Hollywood style preachers, paid singers and musicians do not represent in and of itself a spiritually minded church in the sight of God. It’s possible to have all these things and still be “**wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**” in the sight of “**God.**”

To this church, the Lord Jesus gave wise “**counsel.**” Christ recommended that they “**buy ... gold tried in the fire.**” This reference is to salvation that has been tried and proven by Christ alone. He was speaking to this banking community in terms they could understand. Redeem is a word that refers to paying a price in order to secure ownership. The atonement of Christ was to reconcile sinful man to Holy God through the price of redemption He paid on the cross with His shed “**blood**” (**Heb. 9:22**).

Unless a person has been washed in the precious blood of the Lamb, then he will come up short of heaven because

nothing else can stand the test of the fiery judgment. Religion nor religious ritual, church membership, philanthropy, nor any other human act of kindness can save your soul. Nothing but the atoning blood of Jesus Christ has eternal value. Pure **“gold”** is highly durable, but worldly wealth is of very limited value. This church, like many today, became just like the city in which they lived, money minded. Instead of having a positive influence upon their city, their sinful city had a negative influence upon them. Does this sound familiar?

To this church, Christ recommended that they **“buy ... white raiment.”** Once again, I remind you that only Christ can purchase a sinner’s redemption price. Our faith must be in what He has done for us on the cross. This **“white raiment”** speaks of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If we don’t receive the **“imputed ... righteousness”** of Christ, then we’ll never know righteousness any other way **(Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 4:22)**. We need to keep in mind that this city was investment conscious. By using the term **“buy,”** Jesus was telling them that they needed to be more concerned about investing in things eternal rather than things temporal **(Matt. 6:19-21)**.

To this church, Christ recommended that they **“anoint”** their **“eyes with eye salve”** which refers to the Holy Spirit Who alone gives spiritual illumination into the things of God. Lost sinners are blind, but not incurably blind if they receive treatment from the Holy Spirit Who reveals that we are lost in need of God’s forgiveness. Once again, we need to remember that this city was famous for its eye medication. However, Christ was telling them to be more concerned with the spiritual rather than the physical **(I Tim. 4:8)**.

In closing this seventh letter, the Lord Jesus gives the **“Laodiceans”** two commands, a warning, and a promise. These church folks lived in a very worldly environment just like those who received one of the other six letters. These in **“Laodicea”** had succumbed to the worldly pressure that surrounded them and allowed it to destroy any influence

they could have had for Christ. When Jesus said “**as many as I love**” is a reminder that God chastens genuine believers who go astray (**Heb. 12:6-8**). In fact, that is indication of sonship in the family of God. If a person professes to know Christ, but goes without chastisement when they sin, it tells of their false profession. If there are any true believers in a local church then they ought to be thankful for God to “**rebuke**” and “**chasten**” them individually even if the church as a whole will not hear Him. This letter was not only a letter of “**love**” but of “**rebuke**” with an invitation to renew fellowship with Christ through repentance. In the same manner in which Christ told the “**Laodiceans,**” He commands backsliders of today to “**be zealous and repent.**” Repentance for the Christian is not a one-time only experience at the time of salvation, but should be a continual experience in the Christian life as we examine ourselves and discover our faults and failures before God. “**Zealous**” means to be hot and Christ is telling them to get out of the middle of the road and get on fire for God.

After commanding backsliders to “**repent,**” Christ warns lost church members to get saved. There is no doubt that the majority in this congregation were unsaved and some think that the entire congregation was lost. Most likely the latter was the case. They were so worldly that Christ was on the outside knocking to get in. It was no longer the Lord’s church, but it had become the people’s church. What a sad picture to see Jesus knocking on the outside of this institutionalized local church.

The point of this description is that the church was void of His presence just like multitudes of churches today. Here is a church that was outwardly prosperous, but not aware that the presence of Jesus was missing. This, my friends, is an unfortunate description of most local churches in our day. Jesus was rejected and excluded from the nation into which He was born. He was crucified and excluded from the world that He created. He was ignored and excluded from the church that He ordained.

This type of church may continue to meet, sing, pass the offering plate, and even profess His name, but yet replace Him with mere routine and formality. Even though Christ may disown an institutionalized church as a whole, He still makes a plea for any individual with a hunger to “**sup**” with Him. Only the Holy Spirit can give one such a hunger for God. The only way for wayward believers to return to the Lord of Glory is to know revival. No unanimous vote of the congregation nor a man-appointed date on the calendar will ever bring revival. Wayward believers can return to fellowship with their God by confession of their sin (**I Jh. 1:9**). To everyone who “**overcometh**” the world “**by the blood of the Lamb**” (**Rev. 12:11**) is promised a place before the “**throne**” of God.

The church in “**Laodicea**” is known as the lukewarm Christ-less church. The name “**Laodicea**” means the rights or rule of the people. It was and is a church where the people are in charge and is very typical of most churches of today. We’ve never lived in a time when so many preachers are being fired, run out of the pulpits, and pastoral tenures so short. Let’s remember that the pastor is the mere under-shepherd. He’s not the boss and neither are the people. A congregation of true believers must recognize Jesus Christ as the “**chief shepherd**” (**I Pet. 5:4**) and “**head of the church**” (**Eph. 5:23**).

“**Laodicea**” shows the danger of a democratic church which no longer follows godly biblical leadership under the authority of God’s Word. (see my book, “**Church Government, Which Form Is Most Biblical?**”) There is no better term in the USA that could describe the present-day trend of the average church than “**Laodicea**.” We hear more about, such things as, civil rights, women’s rights, equal rights, and human rights coming for the churches of our land than we do the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our democratic government is rapidly becoming an age of socialism and anarchy or simply an age of everyone doing their own thing (**Judges 21:25b**). People

everywhere, even in the church, consider their own personal opinions and rights more valuable than the right of Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word to rule over them. This ultra-democratic age of ours has produced uncontrolled humanism even in the modern-day church.

Just like the church in “**Laodicea**” was affected by its environment, so has the 21st Century church been influenced by its contemporary society. The average church of today refuses to submit to the authority of Holy Scripture. We’re living in a time when sound expository Bible teachers are becoming fewer and fewer and everyone wants to do what is “**right in his own eyes.**” In our affluent society, we seem to have forgotten that the world is not going to be converted by money, but by the Spirit of the Living God. Most churches are operating in their own strength and relying upon their own human resources without giving any thought to the presence and power of Christ. For the most part, that which we see all around us are Christ-less congregations.

From my perspective, I’ve discovered that a person will come closer to finding a Bible believing and Bible practicing church among smaller congregations. I’ll certainly admit there are always exceptions to the rule. But the majority of congregations of all sizes appear to be apostate, having excommunicated “**the Lord of Glory**” (**I Cor. 2:8, Jam. 2:1**) from His church. Today, the city of “**Laodicea**” is nothing but a mass of ruins just like will be the case with any Christ-less church. Every true believer ought to get out of such a church or denomination and find one that will stand without apology for the Truth of God’s Word.

God has always had His remnant and He will do so until the end of time. That remnant may not be in every church, but somewhere throughout the world. In “**the church in Sardis**” there were a “**few**” genuine believers, but there doesn’t appear to be even a remnant in Laodicea. “**Seven**” times in the “**Seven**” letters, Christ tells His church to “**hear**” what the “**Spirit**” has to say. When a local church

stops listening and obeying the **“Spirit”** of God, she has turned away from Him. This is a very negative letter, but one that needs to be heeded. When Christ says **“behold I stand at the door and knock”** it’s clearly teaching that God is the One Who must take the initiative in both salvation and revival. Neither are about us, but God’s glory. It is especially interesting to notice this passage is referring to Christ being on the outside of a local church knocking to enter indicating He was no part of this congregation.

Were there any saved individuals in the **“church of the Laodiceans?”** It sounds like there were none. I don’t know, but God does because He alone knows who truly belongs to Him. He made it perfectly clear that the only way into His **“kingdom”** was His way and the only way to fellowship with Him was His way. **Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (Jh. 14:6).** His invitation has always been **“come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28)** and **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts. 16:31).**

Chapter 5

The Doctrine of the Church

“He (Jesus) asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
(Matt. 16:13b-19)

Introduction

Whenever we think about the **“church”** of Jesus Christ, usually our first thoughts are those of a structure made from wood, metal, brick, and mortar. However, the true **“church”** of our Lord Jesus Christ is not made from such material. It is comprised of people who have been **“born again”** (**Jh. 3:3**) by the transforming power of the **“Holy Spirit”** (**Jh. 3:8**). A person is joined to the **“church”** of Jesus Christ at the very moment of his/her conversion and should seek out a local assembly of which to be a part (**Heb. 10:25**). In the early days of the **“church,”** they met in people’s homes (**Rom. 16:5, Philemon 2**). It was later in church history where buildings for the purpose of worship were actually constructed. These early buildings were

patterned somewhat after the concept of a local Jewish synagogue as it existed during biblical times.

The visible **“church”** of Jesus Christ is simply a congregation of regenerated believers who ban together in the **“fellowship”** of **“the gospel”** and in the practice of their **“faith”** (**Acts 2:41-47**). The New Testament **“church”** is an assembly of people who observe the ordinances commanded by Christ and who are governed by His teachings. It is a **“body”** of Christian believers who exercise their spiritual gifts and privileges (**I Cor. 12**) under the leadership of God-called pastors (**I Tim. 3**). It is a congregation of individuals who are actively involved in carrying out the Great Commission (**Matt. 28:19-20**).

In our text is recorded an instance which Jesus spoke directly of His **“church.”** Only twice in the New Testament is it recorded that Jesus actually used the word, **“church.”** It’s a word that is used well over 100 times in the New Testament, most of which refers to an assembly of believers who have gathered in the name of Jesus Christ.

THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

In the Greek, the word for **“church”** is ekklesia (ek-klay-see-ah), which means, called-out ones. In a general sense, it speaks of a gathering of citizens in a public place (**Acts 7:38**). Biblically, it refers to a group of believers who have been called out of humanity by God’s **“grace”** (**Eph.2:8**) and set aside as belonging to the Lord. It’s a company of Christians as prescribed and ordained by God Himself (**Jh. 1:12-13**). The **“church”** of Jesus Christ is a **“blood ... bought ... body”** of believers who have been **“purchased”** by His death on the cross (**Acts 20:28**) and made the bride of Christ.

Therefore, those who make up the **“church”** of the Lord Jesus Christ are not their **“own,”** but the possession of Christ (**I Cor. 6:19-20**). All believers of all ages, regardless of race, gender, geography, culture, tradition,

denomination, or on either side of the cross, comprises the Lord's eternally true **"church"** (**Rev. 5:9-10**). In other words, God's elect composes the **"church"** of Jesus Christ (**Eph. 2:4-23**) and is referred to as His bride.

When we think of the word **"church,"** there are three different concepts that may come to mind. First, there is the local **"church"** which meets in the various villages, towns, and cities throughout different communities. Secondly, there is the universal militant **"church"** which refers to the total body of Christ all over the world who are still actively fighting the warfare of faith against the enemy of their souls. Thirdly, there is the triumphant **"church,"** consisting of all the redeemed who have died in the Lord and have already entered into His divine presence.

THE DESIGNER OF THE CHURCH

Christ makes it perfectly clear that He alone is the Founder and Designer of the **"church"** by calling her **"my church."** The Bible profoundly states that **"Christ"** is the **"head"** of His **"church"** (**Eph. 2:22-23, Col. 1:18-19**). We should identify with a local assembly, but no mortal person has the right to call it his/her **"church."** We, as Christians, ought to have a local congregation that we can call our church home from the standpoint of an institutionalized local setting. But, when a local church sincerely acknowledges Jesus Christ as **"head,"** there will be no place for power plays and no room for selfish control, only surrender to God's authority over His **"church."** When Jesus spoke to Peter, He was calling him by his new name, **"Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone"** (**Jh. 1:42**). In the Greek, the name for **"Peter"** is PETROS, which means a small rock, or in this case, a chip from the massive **"rock."** The word **"rock"** in the Greek is PETRA that spoke of the massive stone from which the small stone was taken. Christ is the **"foundation"** (**I Cor. 3:11**) **"rock"**

of the “**church**” upon which all the “**lively (living) stones**” (**I Pet. 2:5**) have come and been built upon.

Although every local church was designed to be autonomous, they were also to work together for the common good (**I Cor. 5:4-13, II Cor. 2:5-8, Gal. 6:1, II Thess. 3:6, 14-15**). A great biblical distinctive of a local church should be its autonomy. Many local congregations are controlled to some degree by a synod, convention, denomination, headquarters, or some individual. But a local church should treasure and practice the scriptural teaching of local autonomy. Such a position believes that a local church is free from outside interference and is under the authority of Christ alone and accountable only unto Him.

Even before Pentecost, we can see the coming together of the New Testament church as Jesus selected His twelve disciples and established the ordinance of baptism. On the eve of His crucifixion, as He ate His last Passover Meal with His disciples, He instituted the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Through the church, Christ stressed the propagation of the Gospel, the perpetuation of the ordinances, and the preparation of believers for Christian service.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH

The main purpose of the “**church**” is to worship God, study the Word, pray, and fellowship with those of like mind in the Lord (**Col. 1:28**). The “**church**” is to operate in the area of evangelism and missions as it proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. It is also to function in the role of discipleship as it teaches and leads the redeemed to “**grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**” (**II Pet. 3:18**). The “**church**” of the Lord Jesus Christ should not only be a proclaimer of the “**truth**” (**Jh. 14:6**), but a protector and defender of it. When one sees the “**church**” of Jesus

Christ, they ought to see a stabilizing force of godly influence in society. Unless it is bringing honor and glory to the name of Jesus, it is serving no useful purpose. If all we have is a **“form of godliness” (II Tim. 3:5)** and are not **“filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18)** of God, then all we do and say is in vain.

THE DURATION OF THE CHURCH

Although we’re living in a world of uncertainties, the future of the **“church”** is steadfast and sure. While the commission to evangelize (that is telling the story of Jesus and His redeeming grace to lost sinners) has been given to the **“church,”** the responsibility of adding to it is solely that of the Christ (**Acts 2:47**). It’s possible for us to talk someone into joining a local assembly, but only Christ can make them a member of His **“body” (Col. 1:18)** and claim them as His bride. Unregenerate church members have always been a thorn in the side of the **“church”** just like the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt was to Israel. Only genuine believers (the elect) are a part of the true church of Jesus Christ and therefore subjects for believer’s baptism and membership in a local assembly (**Acts 8:36-37**).

People who enter the baptismal waters in a lost condition will come out the same way. If someone is saved and acknowledges Christ after being no more than dunked in the baptistery, they ought to be biblically baptized when truly converted. Baptism doesn’t save anyone from the penalty of their sins, but it is an act of obedience to the command of Christ (**Matt. 28:19-20**) who set for us the example (**Matt. 3:13-17**) being Himself sinless (**II Cor. 5:21**).

While it’s true that the devil and all the forces of hell cannot **“prevail against”** the **“church,”** the word **“hell”** that is used in our text is not Gehenna, but hades. The word, Gehenna, translated **“hell”** in the KJV speaks of the

burning fires of eternal torment. The Greek word, hades, is also translated “**hell**” in the KJV and it speaks of either the grave or death. In our text, Jesus is declaring that the prison doors of death “**shall not**” overcome a genuine believer in Him. Death may claim the human body, but it cannot conquer the soul of a saint. That’s because Christ has already won for us the “**victory**” by His own glorious resurrection (**I Cor.15:55-57**). The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ guarantees for His “**church**” the same triumph over our death.

CONCLUSION

There is no other conclusion to reach except the fact that the “**church**” of “**born again**” believers belongs to Christ. He alone has the right to claim ownership of His “**church**” because He has paid the ultimate price with His atoning blood on the cross of Calvary. No pastor or any other elder nor deacon, no man nor woman, or anyone else regardless of age or credentials can claim authority over the bride of Christ.

A local New Testament “**church**” is the channel through which God has chosen to take the Gospel message of saving grace to the ends of the earth. It is not subject to the authority of any external body, but only to Christ. Every member of a local assembly is responsible for seeking God’s will individually and participate in the unifying of the body of Christ through surrender to the Holy Spirit. When one member of the “**body**” fails to function, as they ought, then the entire “**body**” will suffer.

There are several descriptions given in the New Testament that helps to depict the “**church**” of Jesus Christ. The “**church**” is called a “**body**” and is likened to the many “**members**” that comprises a human body (**I Cor. 12:12-27**). The “**church**” is spoken of as a “**holy priesthood,**” teaching us the priesthood of all New Testament believers with no distinction between the priest

and people as it was in the Old Testament (**I Pet. 2:5**). The “**church**” is referred to as “**a chosen people**” of God who proclaims loud and clear God’s Sovereignty in salvation (**I Pet. 2:9-10**). The “**church**” is said to be members of the “**household of God**” and “**of faith**” (**Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:19**). In the New Testament, the “**church**” is allegorized as the “**wife**” or “**bride**” of Christ (**Eph. 5:22-32, Rev. 19:7-9, 21:9, 22:17**). In the Old Testament, believers are referred to as God’s “**wife**” (**Isa. 54:5-6**) and also depicted as such by the prophet Hosea. The “**church**” is an expression of the “**kingdom**” (**Col. 1:13**) of God as Christ rules and reigns in the hearts of His “**elect**” (**I Pet. 1:2**) people.

Being the “**church**” of Jesus Christ, we ought to be practicing our privilege of prayer and seeking the Lord’s “**will**” (**I Jh.5:14-15**) in every individual and congregational decision we face. We ought to be students of the Word of God, learning, and growing in the Faith. We ought to be personally involved in Christian service and use whatever spiritual gifts God has given us. We ought to be teaching our children and grounding our families in the Christian Faith. We ought to be engaging in evangelism, missions, discipleship, witnessing, and outreach to the glory of God. We ought to be part of a local assembly, actively participating for not only our good, but also the well-being of our homes, and the benefit of the “**body**” of Christ.

Closing Thoughts

As we study the letters to the churches in the New Testament and especially the “**seven churches**” in the Book of Revelation, every pastor needs to ask himself, “What kind of church am I helping to establish?” Every church member needs to ask himself, “What kind of member and I?” Not all pastors are genuine under-shepherds because some are no more than an “**hireling**” (**Jh. 10:12-13**). Likewise, not all church members are transformed, regenerated believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not every Christian pastor is giving his all to the work of the ministry and not all believers are giving of their best to their Master. Are we out for ourselves, or are we devoted and surrendered to Christ as Lord of our Lives?

We learn from these “**seven churches**” in particular that until Jesus comes again, He is calling all churches to faithfulness. He commends their good, but condemns their evil. Worldliness and idolatry are marks of those outside the church, but sad to say, it often shows up in the church also. Most of this is due to false teachers and either false believers or weak believers. The beauty that we can find in this tragedy is that God will remain true to the genuine Christian while the Lord continues to admonish us to faithfulness. As we have found in these “**seven churches**” it is a mixed bag with some being worse than others. Yes, a church is a mere “**candlestick**” which can fade away, but believers therein can be spared if they will repent and return.

There is only one remedy for the SICK church. Jesus is the Great Physician both spiritually and physically. He alone is the answer to the forgiveness of sin and the hope of a home in Heaven. Outside of Christ, there is no regeneration and transformation. There is no other healing for our sin SICK souls. Upon conversion to Christ, our Lord wants and expects His people to be faithful to Him just as He expects husbands and wives to be faithful to one

another. He will always be faithful to His bride, but the sad part is that His bride is not always faithful to Him.

God has always had a people dating back all the way to the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned, God restored fellowship with them through the **“coats of skins” (Gen. 3:21)**. This referred to the blood that was shed in order to have animal skins, symbolizing the blood of Christ that would be shed on the cross in substitutionary atonement for our sins. Following this first couple came God’s relationship with **“Abel”** who was despised by his brother **“Cain”** that killed him **(Gen. 4:1-16)**. Replacing **“Abel”** in the promised lineage was **“Seth” (Gen. 4:25)**. Later came Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Boaz, and many others who consisted of God’s Old Testament elect.

God also chose the nation of Israel, beginning with **“Abraham”** as the people who would be given the oracles of God, the **“prophets” (Lk. 16:16)** who would speak to the people from God, and the **“priests” (Lev. 1:5)** who would speak to God for the people. It was through this nation that Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came as a sacrifice for our sins. However, Scripture tells us that the nation of Israel as a whole did not believe on Him. It says that **“he came unto his own and his own received him not” (Jh. 1:11)**. When He stood outside Pilates balcony, the Jews shouted, **“crucify him, crucify him” (Jh. 19:6)**. The majority of Jews rejected the Lord of Glory and as I’ve already pointed out, God used the apostle Paul to break the ice, so to speak, and take the Gospel to the Gentiles. That doesn’t mean no Gentile wasn’t converted in the Old Testament because some, other than Jews were, such as Ruth.

There were times when the Old Testament believers committed spiritual adultery by being unfaithful to God. Scripture even portrays Israel as being God’s wife whom He divorced and took back **(Jer. 3:1-11)**. The story of Hosea and Gomer is a perfect illustration of this and how spiritual adultery is committed against God just like physical adultery is committed in a marriage relationship.

At this point, we need to note that not all Israelites were true believers in the Old Testament nation of Israel. That's why Romans tells us that **"not all Israel ... are of Israel"** (**Rom. 9:6**). Not all Jews are true Jews when it comes to understanding the word **"Israel"** in the spiritual sense (**Rom. 2:28-29**). (for more detailed information, listen to my verse by verse audio study on Romans found at www.covenantofgraceministires.com)

The Bible makes it perfectly clear that not all physical descendants of **"Abraham"** are spiritual heirs of God's eternal promise. Being a true Jew, or simply being a genuine Israelite, was more than being born into the nation of **"Israel."** In God's sight, the real Israelite was one whose heart had been made right with God through the **"imputed ... righteousness"** of Jesus Christ (**Rom. 4:11-22**). Likewise, today not all who bear the title Christian, in or outside the institutionalized church, are saved from the penalty of their sins, but only those who have become new creatures (creation) **"in Christ"** (**II Cor. 5:17**). Many comprise the visible church who have made a false profession and have no possession of the Holy Spirit, thus not being saved (**Rom. 8:9**). There are others who are members of the visible church and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, thus being truly **"saved"** (**Acts 16:31**). But unfortunately, such genuine believers sometimes take their eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ, slide down the hill of holiness, backslide into sin, and commit spiritual adultery against their God. Numerous times throughout both the Old and New Testaments God warns His people against such behavior and the **"chastisement"** that He will send their way when it happens (**Prov. 3:11-12, Hosea 1:2-9, 3:1-5, 5:1-15, Heb. 12:5-11**).

The New Testament refers to the individual believer as a **"temple"** but it also refers to the church as a whole being the collective **"temple"** of the Holy Spirit. That's because every individual Christian is converted to Christ by the Holy Spirit who takes up residence within his **"spirit"** (**I Thess. 5:23**). (see my book, ***The Tabernacle & Trinity***)

of Man, Spirit & Soul & Body”) That which all Christians have in common is the indwelling Holy Spirit thus making all Christians the collective **“temple of the Holy Spirit.”** When a Christian follows after sin, they are sinning with the Holy Spirit indwelling their eternal **“spirit and soul,”** making them an adulterer or adulteress spiritually speaking in the sight of God. However, thanks be to God that His grace is not only willing to save us from our sin in salvation, but also in confession and repentance when we fail our Lord (**Matt. 26:33-35, Mk. 14:29-31, Lk. 22:33-34, Jh. 18:15-27, I Jh. 1:9**). As you can see, this **“temple”** is not talking about a church building or facility in which people meet. The church that is currently being built is not made with human hands, but by the transforming regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. The true church can only be seen with Jesus Christ as the **“head”** of His **“body”** and the true **“members”** of that **“body”** as the collective **“temple”** of the Holy Spirit (**Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 12:12–27, Eph. 3:6, 4:15–16, 5:23, Col. 1:18, 24**).

Many local churches today are no more than religious lodges, social clubs, and community centers filled with people who have never repented and come to Christ in faith. Scripture declares that **“few there be that find it”** (**Matt. 7:14**). Saying prayers, walking aisles, getting baptized, joining a local church will never save a person from the penalty of their sins. These things may have their place, but without regeneration they are meaningless.

It’s been estimated that there are about one billion Protestant churches in the world. Out of that vast number, only God knows how many are composed of His bride. According to Scripture, very few! It’s been debated as to whether both the Old Testament saints or New Testament saints compose the bride of Christ or do both make up the bride. Most Bible students have no problem saying that New Testament believers are the bride. But listen to what R.C Sproul calls to our attention. He said, “When God redeemed Israel from Egypt, He not only adopted her but He purchased her as His bride. In both the Old and New

Testaments, the people of God are called the bride of God. Isaiah declared, **“For your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5a).** Just look at it this way, when we get to heaven in that eternal New Jerusalem, don't you think Adam, Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and all the Old Testament saints will be there? I don't have all the answers, but I'm prone to agree with what R.C. Sproul said and that believers on both sides of the cross will compose the bride of Christ. Besides, it really doesn't make any difference what we believe along these lines, because God knows His bride and who isn't. We have no right dictating to Him how His divine and eternal plan will play out. His bride is His people and His church is His church whether it be the **“church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:8)** or the **“candlesticks” (Rev. 1:12-13)** in the New Testament or both. The most important concern is whether or not YOU belong to Christ as His bride.

We're living in a sin SICK world that has infiltrated into the ranks of Christendom. Many visible churches of our day are filled with people who know the lingo, but have never had a change of nature for the glory of God. This is a sad and SICK commentary on the modern-day church. The only remedy is to call upon He Who is known as the Great Physician, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other source of recovery than that which is found in Him. If you are sin SICK having never repented and trusted Christ for forgiveness, then I plead with you to do so today. If you are a Christian who has slid down the hill of holiness and living out of fellowship with God, then I plead with you to **“repent”** and **“return”** longing for a spirit of revival in your soul.

Most local churches today are SICK unto death, but the bride of Christ, though ailing, suffering, battered, and bruised, is anxiously awaiting the return of her Bridegroom at which time all her blemishes will be gone! She will then know the glory of perfection for which she has longed when Christ consummates His Kingdom in the **“marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:6-9).**

FOR THOSE LOST IN NEED OF SALVATION

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:”

I Cor. 15:1-4

John 3:16 has often been called the gospel in a nutshell, but so is I Cor. 15:1-4. The word, gospel, means good news and the best news anyone will ever hear is that of Jesus Christ in the story of redemption. Christ died on the cross to suffer the torment that we deserved in Hell. He became our Substitute in doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. He appeased the righteous wrath of God against our sin. Then, He proved His deity by dying a cruel sacrificial death and coming out of the grave on the third day. Many religious leaders have died, such as Mohammad, Buda, and many others, but they never came back from the dead. Christ arose so He could come into the hearts of His people and preform His work of saving grace.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Romans 3:23

Every person has displeased God, no matter the bigness or littleness of the sin. Adam only ate a forbidden piece of fruit while King David committed adultery and murder. Both found forgiveness along with the dying thief on the cross beside Jesus. The first step is confessing that

you are a sinner, that your sin has separated you from Holy God, and that you need God's forgiveness.

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Luke 13:3

One must be truly sorrowful for their sin and desire to turn from their old deliberate, sinful, and corrupt way of living. Not just sorry you got caught, but remorseful for breaking the heart of God. We cannot turn from sin in our own strength, but in God's. In conversion, Christ changes us and gives us a new nature with and a desire to walk in newness of life. As long as we are in fleshly bodies, we'll never be perfect, but our daily goal is to resist the flesh, separate ourselves from sin, and grow spiritually in Christ.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

God's love is so strong that He gave the best Heaven had to offer. He gave Himself in the human flesh of His only begotten Son to die in your place on the cross. The only way to escape perishing in the torments of Hell and have eternal life is by believing that Christ died the death that you rightly deserved.

“The wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

Just as a person receives wages from his employer, you will someday receive wages from your Creator as to how you responded to Christ. Those who reject Him will discover an eternity of suffering the consequences. We are all going to physically die because of the curse of sin upon the human race, but the Christian will know God's gift of eternal life and the joy of a home in heaven with our Lord.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Eph. 2:8-9

You will not go to Heaven because you're good nor will you go to Hell because you're bad. Salvation is a gift from God. It cannot be earned. You must respond by faith to God's free gift of grace. It's totally impossible for anyone to be good enough to ever merit Heaven because we are all like sheep that have gone astray. Having been born into sin and inheriting our depravity, we cannot please God apart from exercising the "faith" that He provides.

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

Romans 10:9-11

“Saved” is a perfectly good biblical word. It's talking about being saved from God's wrath against sin. You cannot save yourself from it. I cannot save you from it. Only God can save you from such wrath. He came to earth to do for you what no mortal man can do for you. You're not saved by praying prayers, doing good works, giving money, walking a church aisle, or by joining a local church. However, every Christian needs to be part of a local assembly that teaches the Word of God whereby they can mature in the faith (**Heb. 10:25**). There is no such thing as secret discipleship. Your commitment to Christ will be obvious. Genuine conversion will be evident. Heart belief is a surrender that produces a noticeable difference. To be truly saved is to be “born again” which will make one unashamed.

**“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden
and I will give you rest.”**

Matt. 11:28

Until we find spiritual rest in Christ there will never be spiritual peace that will cause one to look forward to death at which time we'll be released from our body of corruption and sin. The peace that God gives the Christian today is merely a foretaste of that which is to come when we enter into His eternal presence with our “spirit and soul.” It's a blessed thing for God to give you a disgust over your sin, a hunger in your heart to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and to discover spiritual rest in Him.

**FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SAVED BUT
GONE ASTRAY AND OUT OF FELLOWSHIP
WITH GOD**

**“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him,
Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me
as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came
to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his
father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell
on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto
him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy
sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But
the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best
robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and
shoes on *his* feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and
kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son
was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.
And they began to be merry.”**

(Lk. 15:18-24)

**“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may
be full. This then is the message which we have heard**

of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”
(I Jh. 1:4-10)

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”
(Heb. 12:5-11)

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

BACK IN THE 1860'S, SAMUEL JOHN STONE WROTE THE BEAUTIFUL HYMN ENTITLED, "THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION" THAT REMAINS A FAVORITE WITHIN THE CHURCH. THIS HYMN DESCRIBES THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST, WHO IS HER ONE AND ONLY "FOUNDATION." THIS HYMN REPRESENTS THE CHURCH AS THE COLLECTIVE BODY OF BORN AGAIN BELIEVIERS ON THIS EARTH UNITED BY CHRIST ALONE. PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THESE LYRICS AND REJOICE IN THE PRICE THAT HAS BEEN PAID FOR THE BRIDE OF CHRIST.

1 The church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; she is His new creation, by water and the Word; from heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride; with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.

2 Elect from ev'ry nation, yet one o'er all the earth, her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth; one holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food, and to one hope she presses, with ev'ry grace ended.

3 Tho' with a scornful wonder, men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed, yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?" And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

4 The church shall never perish! Her dear Lord, to defend, to guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end; tho' there be those that hate her and false sons in her pale, against the foe or traitor she ever shall prevail.

5 'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war, she waits the consummation of peace for evermore; till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest, and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

6 Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won. O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we, like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with Thee.